

Culture Of Poverty Among The Poor Malays In Seri Medan Subdistrict Of Batu Pahat, Johor

Budaya Kemiskinan Dalam Kalangan Masyarakat Melayu Miskin di Mukim Seri Medan, Batu Pahat, Johor

Aini Khairiah Samani¹, Suriati Ghazali²
^{1 2} *School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia*
Email: airy_86@yahoo.com

Abstract

In recent years, cultural factors have been revisited in the poverty research agenda. The culture of poverty is claimed to be one of the main factors leading to the poor being trapped in poverty. The objective of this paper is to explore the culture of poverty that caused the poor to remain living under the poverty line in Malaysia. The study was conducted on 313 poor Malay household heads at Seri Medan, Batu Pahat, Johor. The data of the poor was obtained using the e-Kasih information system (heads of household in Seri Medan) at Batu Pahat District Office. Questionnaire survey and interviews were then conducted on related poor head of households. The findings show that the culture of poverty had the highest mean score of 3.17 compared to other poverty contributing factors. This study contributes to the knowledge on the culture of poverty that are found amongst the poor community of Malaysia, thus strengthening the claim of the culture of poverty as the primary causal factor behind an individual or group's persistency to live below the poverty line.

Keywords: poverty, culture of poverty, behavior, Malay, Malaysia..

Abstrak

Beberapa tahun kebelakangan ini, faktor budaya dilihat mendapat perhatian kembali dalam agenda kajian kemiskinan. Budaya kemiskinan merupakan salah satu faktor utama yang mendorong golongan miskin terperangkap dalam belunggu kemiskinan. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji faktor-faktor budaya kemiskinan yang menyebabkan mereka kekal hidup dalam kemiskinan di Malaysia. Kajian ini dijalankan terhadap 313 Ketua Isi Rumah (KIR) Melayu miskin yang diperoleh berdasarkan maklumat Sistem e-Kasih (Ketua Isi Rumah) di Mukim Seri Medan, Batu Pahat, Johor. Kajian soal selidik dan temu bual dijalankan terhadap ketua isi rumah golongan miskin. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa jumlah rekod budaya kemiskinan, iaitu mencatat min skor tertinggi sebanyak 3.17 berbanding faktor-faktor lain. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada pengetahuan tentang budaya kemiskinan yang terdapat dalam masyarakat Melayu miskin, sekaligus menguatkan dakwaan bahawa budaya kemiskinan sebagai faktor penyebab utama di sebalik kegigihan individu atau kumpulan untuk hidup pada garis kemiskinan.

Kata Kunci: kemiskinan, budaya kemiskinan, sikap, Melayu, Malaysia

Introduction

Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon and no one static definition could be used to define poverty (Siwar et al., 2016; Mohd et al., 2016). It covers various aspects such as economic growth as well as the human and social behaviour (Azlinda et al., 2010; Siwar et al., 2016). Therefore, the poverty issue could not be solved completely despite various efforts and strategies taken to eradicate poverty. Poverty has trapped the poor into a vicious cycle of low income, education level as well as poor health status (Shepherd, 2007). Poverty may be looked upon in various dimensions with different factors, and it cannot be understood by acknowledging only one factor (Dawood & Khoo, 2017).

Incidence of poverty is increasing throughout the world day by day (Schech & Haggis, 2002). UN Research Institute for Social Development estimated that the number of poor people living on less than USD 1 per day increased from almost 1.197 billion in 1987 to 1.214 billion in 1998 (Ukpere &

Slabbert, 2009). Currently, nearly 3 billion of the world population has an income of less than USD 2 per day (Rena, 2007; Mohd et al., 2016)

In Malaysia, poverty has been conceptualized as economic or income poverty (Siwar et al., 2016) and measured by the Poverty Line Index (PLI) which was officially formulated in 1977 using the 1973 Household Expenditure Survey (HES). A household will be considered as poor if its income falls below PLI. In 2014, the PLI per capita of Peninsular Malaysia was revised to RM 240 and RM 200 for urban and rural areas, respectively (Unit Perancang Ekonomi, 2014).

Johor is one of the fastest growing states in Malaysia. In 2012, the percentage of poverty in Johor is only about 0.9%, while Kelantan has the highest percentage of poverty, 2.7% (Unit Perancang Ekonomi, 2014). Batu Pahat is one of districts in Johor. It has been identified as a district with the highest rate of poverty in Johor. The rate of poverty is 6.9% (Jabatan Perangkaan, 2010). Seri Medan is one of rural areas in Batu Pahat and has 315 of poor heads of household (KIR). The number of poor KIR in Seri Medan is higher compared to other rural areas/subdistrict in Batu Pahat such as Chaah Baru, which has 229 KIR.

Literature Review

According Siwar and Piei (1998), the concept of poverty encompasses various dimensions and it was rarely described in one dimension only (Davids & Gouws, 2013; Mohd et al., 2016). Islam (2001) defines poverty as the combination of low purchasing power, limited level of ability, highest level of vulnerability and not having power. He stressed that this situation caused the poor to set their mind to the thought that the chance for them to move out of poverty is difficult, and it continues throughout the next generation. Siwar (2001) also stated that poverty involves various dimensions such as economic, socio-cultural, educational, health, temporal, spatial, gender and environment.

Over the past two decades, scholars from various disciplines such as economy, anthropology, politics and development science have been brought to attention in regards to conducting research on the culture of poverty (Rao & Walton, 2004). Sen (2004) found that this culture influences the poor (see also Kumar, 2010). Therefore, the culture of poverty has to be understood in order to understand why people respond to poverty in such way and to investigate the myth about 'culture of poverty' as coined by Lewis (1959).

Culture of Poverty

The culture of poverty approach has been introduced by Oscar Lewis in the 1950s. Lewis found that the culture of poverty is a set of ideas with a uniform trait and values inherited by the poor, to the next generations (Lewis, 1959; Bradshaw, 2006). Lewis characterized that the poor eternally live in poverty due to the culture of poverty factors lived by the poor themselves, as a result of having to adjust and react to their poor lives (Lewis, 1959; Dora, 2000). Consequently, as the culture of poverty has successfully penetrated the thought of the poor, it became an obstacle for them to achieve economic, social and cultural development (Mohammadpur et al, 2012). Omar (2010) highlighted that Lewis and other scholars during his time has also concluded that the poor remain poor due to the culture of poverty, which involve an attitude of not having any initiative, motivation, innovation, slow-to-act and sluggish in facing any changes, and surrendering to the hands of fate.

Poverty in Malaysia since the 1970s has always been associated with the Malay community, especially in rural areas, since the 1970s (Malaysia, 1971). Pramanik (2007) stated that even more than four decades after the independence; poverty is basically a Malay problem. Most researchers found that poverty is caused by various factors, including poor health status, low income, education, and skill level, unemployment, unsafe housing conditions, job insecurity, negative attitudes and conservative thinking, in which all of these being said to have become a Malay culture (Hassan & Salleh, 1998). Past researchers stigmatized that the Malays become poor due to the culture attributes and retrogressive customs (Maxwell, 1884; Skeat, 1900; Wilkinson & Winstead 1908). Dora (2000) highlighted previous researchers' writings, which concluded that poverty among the Malays is caused by personality, values and culture of the Malays themselves and they are said to have negative attitudes that hinder the total eradication of poverty. The Malays were labeled as lazy by colonists due to the hate feelings towards Malays because of their refusal to enrich the owner of colonial farm (Syed

Hussein Alatas, 1991). They also were labelled as spendthrift, trusting luck and fortune, and have poor motivation to succeed. An excessively humble attitude resulted in a rapid decline of the Malays in the competition to win the chance of having a better life. Munshi Abdullah (1965) also criticized the Malays as “slow to act” (lazy) in which the men are not actively engaged in the economic activities in comparison to women. In addition, there are accusations which stated that the Malays are poor due to religious factor and the concept of 'providence and destiny' in Islam, which has caused them to be seen as slow-moving and leaving things to fate (Dora, 2000). This resulted in the underestimation from other races, which then form a negative impression on the Malays. Contrary to the previous opinion, Ungku Aziz (1964) emphasized that poverty among the Malays is instead caused by neglect, low income and oppression. The similar opinion was also given by Gibbons (1988), which stated that the poor stay poor not because they are slow-moving but have instead fall victim to the economic and social system. In relation to these arguments, this study therefore was conducted in order to understand the culture of poverty among the Malay poor in Seri Medan Subdistrict of Batu Pahat, Johor.

Research Methodology

Data collection was carried out in October 2013 to March 2014. A total of 313 Heads of Household (HoH) of the poor Malay in Sri Medan were selected as respondents based on the information system of the e-Kasih obtained from the District Office of Batu Pahat, Johor. Questionnaires were handed to all respondents to determine whether they are poor due to the culture of poverty factors. Perceptions on the culture of poverty were asked to indicate whether the respondents 'agree or disagree' with 27 statements about 'poor people are poor because...'. The responses were based on the Likert scale which ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with the higher values indicating a greater importance to the culture of poverty.

Data analysis was done in two steps, first using factor analysis to reduce the 27 items (factor of poverty) and second, basic descriptive statistic by comparing the mean based on the highest loading values. We have chosen only 4 items with value loading above 0.8: which are (1) I am very easy to give up (2) I was destined to live in poverty (3) I am comfortable to live in poverty and (4) I am not sure to be able to change my fate. By comparing the means of the indices, we are able to understand the culture of poverty. Moreover, the respondents' score on each index is calculated as the mean of their response to all of the items in the particular index. In addition, informal interviews were also conducted in order to get a better understanding on the culture of poverty from the perspectives of the respondents (Ghazali, 1999).

Research Findings: The Influencing Factors of The Culture Of Poverty

A total of 27 items will represent the culture of poverty. These are factors which caused the poor to remain in poverty. Exploratory Factor Analysis method (EFA) is a technique of reducing the number of variables that indicate the latent constructs and the underlying structure of a set of variables (Chua, 2009). EFA test was conducted on the 27 items by using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation to confirm the 27 items studied. Varimax method was used to minimize the number of items to a smaller number. Therefore, factor analysis was conducted following three main steps: (1) identify correlations between factors (2) extracting the factors and (3) factors play (Chua, 2009). Table 1 shows the result of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Barlett's test.

Table 1 The Result of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin dan Barlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.856
	Approx. Chi-Square	13762.754
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	1891
	Sig.	.000

Before analyzing the factors, two tests were carried out in advance, which are the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Barlett's test (Chua, 2009). KMO test helps us to identify whether or not the items are suitable. Barlett's test is used to determine whether or not the correlation between the items is reasonable. Therefore, based on Table 1, the KMO test result showed the value of 0.856, which exceeded 0.50 and that indicated the adequacy of the sampling while Barlett's test result was significant (chi square = 1891, $p < 0.05$) from which it showed that the correlation between these items are reasonable to further analyze the factors.

Table 2 Factor analysis on the perception of the cause of poverty: Value loading

Reason why people are poor (item culture of poverty)	Value loading
	0.828
1) I am easy to give up	0.820
2) I was destined to live in poverty	0.810
3) I am comfortable to live in poverty	0.804
4) I am not sure to be able to change my fate	0.769
5) I don't have passion to develop myself	0.727
6) I am satisfied with my current living status	0.690
7) I just have to wait for relief without trying to eradicate poverty	0.683
8) I live in poverty because I have low level of education.	0.682
9) Poverty facilitates me to get attention and relief.	0.592
10) My poverty was inherited from the previous generation.	0.585
11) I am expecting financial aid rather than training skills.	0.512
12) I've inherited my poverty to my children	0.433
13) Poverty eradication is entirely the government's responsibility.	

Next, Varimax rotation method was conducted on the 27 items in order to generate meaningful orthogonal (uncorrelated) factors, which can be interpreted more accurately (Hussain et al., 2011). According to Hair et al. (2006), the rotation on these factors will improve the data because it reduced the similarities that exist in the un-rotated factors. The items that met the minimum requirements were placed in the table of Rotated Component Matrix, and only 12 items were qualified as culture of poverty factors, and indeed, they reflected these factors. The 13th item which is eradicating poverty is the government's responsibility had been removed entirely from the list because the loading factor is less than 0.50 (Hair *et.al*, 2006).

We found that there were four items that has a loading factor of more than 0.8, in which the item 'I am easy to give up' loaded the highest (0.828) and is fundamental to the culture of poverty factor, followed by 'I was destined to live in poverty' (0.820). Next, 'I am comfortable to live in poverty'

loaded 0.810 and 'I am not sure to be able to change my fate' loaded 0.804. The results above showed that these four items in the culture of poverty factors, are suitable to be used in determining the culture of poverty factors among the poor community in Sri Medan. A study conducted by Davids and Gouws (2013) found that a fatalistic factor such as 'lack of luck' loaded highest on the underlying factor (0.893). In our study we suggest 'I was destined to live in poverty' is almost closely related to having a 'lack of luck'.

Table 3 displays the acquired information for better understanding of the poverty factors that led to the existence of the culture of poverty. The data are presented in percentage and mean score.

Table 3 Percentage and Mean score for Culture of Poverty

Bil	Item Questions	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Mean Score
		1	2	3	4	5	
1.	I am easy to give up	1.3 %	11.5 %	19.2 %	37.4 %	30.7 %	3.85
2.	I was destined to live in poverty	1.6 %	9.9 %	31.6 %	26.5 %	30.4 %	3.74
3.	I am comfortable to live in poverty	1.3 %	20.4 %	26.2%	23.3 %	28.8 %	3.58
4.	I am not sure to be able to change my fate	0.3 %	8.6 %	22.4 %	40.2 %	28.4 %	3.88

"I am easy to give up" as the culture of poverty

This study found that 68.1% of respondents agreed with the statement 'I am easy to give up' that caused them to fail in moving out of poverty, and that they are just waiting for assistance from the government. This is because of all the efforts made by them in order to get out of poverty did not bring any positive impact to their lives. Eventually they become less motivated and can easily feel despair. Two statements below proof their despair.

...kerja teruk-teruk macam mana pun bukannya boleh jadi kaya, macam ini jugalah, lebih baik duduk goyang kaki...(No matter how hard we work, we cannot be rich, and we'll still remain the same, so it's better doing nothing...(Respondent Z, male 53).

...nak buat apa pun rasa tak bersemangat bila hidup dalam kemiskinan ini dengan serba serbi gagal..akak jadi penat dik.. (Living in poverty, made me unmotivated to do anything.. Everything was a failure, it makes me feel tired of trying...(Respondent W, female, 55).

"I was destined to live in poverty" as the culture of poverty

56.9% of respondents said that they are destined to live in poverty meanwhile only 11.5% said they did not accept the destiny that led them live in poverty. Destiny seems to have been instilled into their minds to the extent they were seen as 'lazy' to strive and just surrender to the destiny ordained by Allah. Shin's (2006) study on the culture of poverty in Korea found that the poor have low aspiration and only rely on God for the future. This assertion is supported by some respondents, as they said:

...memang dari lahir, buka-buka mata dah hidup dalam kemiskinan, jadi terima je la nak buat macam mana ini semua kerja Allah... (From the moment we were born, and the moment we open our eyes, we already live in poverty, so we just accept the fate destined by Allah) (Responden A, male, 44).

...malas dahla, penat dah aku, macam ini juga. Dari aku sakit hati baik aku terima kenyataan memang sampai kiamat pun aku tetap miskin... (I give up, I had enough, it will still be like this. Rather than living in depression, it is better for me to just accept the fact that I will remain poor forever) (Responden D, male, 53).

Therefore, the only way for the poor to 'forget' the fact they live in poverty, especially for the males, is by drinking coffee while yarning and chit chatting at the stalls from evening until late night. This situation was also found by Dora (2000), in which the Malays prefer to hang out without doing any activity that can generate income.

“I am comfortable to live in poverty” as the culture of poverty

Half of the respondents (53.1%) said that they are comfortable living in poverty, while 21.7% did not. The majority said that after many years living in poverty, they are used to the 'needy' situation, and some of them stated that living in poverty made it easier for them to get attention as well as amenities, which makes them feel comfortable to continue on living in poverty.

...makcik redha hidup miskin ni, asalkan cukup pakai dengan makan, cukuplah. Harta dunia kalau kita makin kejar bukan bawa ke kubur pun nak. (I am pleased living in poverty, as long as there's food and clothing, that's enough. Even if we strive for the money, we're not bringing it all to our grave (Respondent F, female, 46).

...pakcik dah selesa duduk di PPRT ni, senang banyak bantuan pakcik dapat. Jadi, buat apa pakcik nak susahkan diri keluarkan peluh untuk cari duit. (I am comfortable enough living in this PPRT.. it is easier for me to get assistance. So why do I have to struggle in getting money... (Respondent N, male, 64).

“I am not sure to be able to change my fate” as the culture of poverty

A total of 68.6% of respondents said that they were not sure to be able to change their fate. They realize that they are not able to compete in aspects such as education and getting a job to the point where they feel that it is much safer living in poor conditions without having to make any activity that can generate income.

..kalau dah miskin, miskin jugakla sampi ke mati. Susah nak keluar daripada kemiskinan ni..aku pelajaran pun tiada, tanah lagi la tak ada..macam mana aku nak keluar daripada kemiskinan.. (If we are poor, we will be poor until we die. It is hard for me to move out of poverty, I don't have education, and even the property, so how can I move out of poverty...(Respondent L, male, 60).

...dah cuba dik macam-macam semuanya gagal, akak dah tak da upaya nak keluar daripada kemiskinan ni dik..susah orang tak kan faham..sebab bukan dekat tempat dia (I had tried many things, but everything failed, I don't have the courage to move out of this poverty, it is difficult and other people will never understand, because they are not in our shoes...Respondent K, female, 38).

From this study we conclude that failure to compete with the increasingly demanding necessities around them have caused the poor to remain living in poverty. Their failure has been 'absorbed' into their minds, which then created a culture of poverty that can be understood from their attitudes of giving up. Being poor, it is difficult for them to compete for better chances outside their circle, which consequently made them remain trapped in poverty. Negative attitudes such as giving up that is easily found within the Malays continue to be regarded as a major factor on the reason they live in poverty, supporting previous works by Lewis (1959), Sen (2004), Omar (2010), Mohammadpur et al. (2012) and Dora (2000). This study also proves that poverty has trapped the poor into a vicious cycle as suggested by Shepherd (2007).

Conclusion

This study concludes that knowledge on the culture of poverty is important in understanding the life of the poor, and thus enabled the responsible bodies to develop effective strategies to overcome poverty. Ignorance to the factors of the culture of poverty will cause failure in the effectiveness of poverty eradication program. Thus, poverty can be overcome by successfully breaking the culture of poverty that has long been in the vicious circle of the poor. It is suggested that boosting confidence, motivation and enthusiasm through various poverty-eradicating program may be able to help the poor to be competent in improving their lives.

This study also proposed the need for each poor settlement to be provided with counseling center to adapt positive elements and change the minds of those who have been in the 'comfortable' zone of 'being poor', so as to enable them to move out of poverty. This study contributes to the knowledge on the culture of poverty that are found amongst the poor community of Malaysia, thus strengthening the claim of the culture of poverty as the primary causal factor behind an individual or group's persistency to live below the poverty line.

Acknowledgment

We would like to thank our respondents who have cooperated during the study on poverty among the Malays in Seri Medan. We also would like to thank Universiti Sains Malaysia for funding this research via Research University Team Grant (101/PHUMANITI/856002) titled Spatial Inequalities: Framing Phenomena Formulating Policies.

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