



Research Paper

PARENTS' PERCEPTION ON TYPES AND QUALITY OF CHILDCARE IN MALAYSIA

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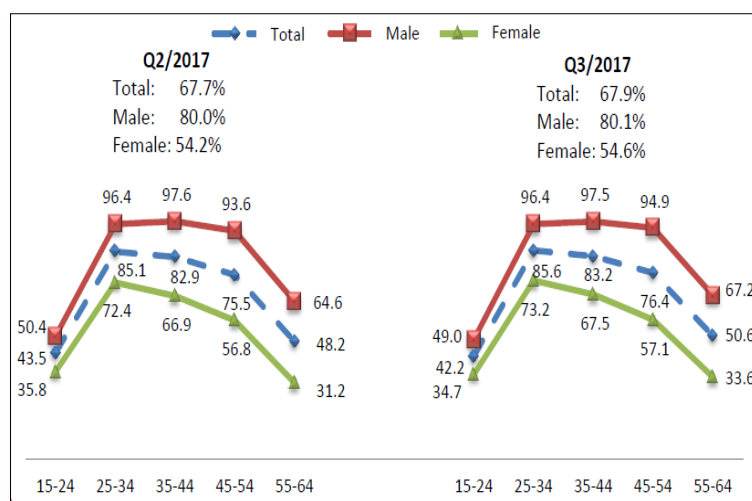
Abstract

Background: As Malaysia is progressively moving towards becoming a developed nation and looking to boost its female workforce participation, the provision of high-quality child care centre becomes a priority. This change has impacted the role of women in the family and created an escalating demand for alternative care of young children. **Objective:** This study tries to identify the demographic factors influence the parent's perceptions on type of child care in Malaysia and to determine the important factors contributing to parents' choice of child care centre **Method:** Chi-square analysis and logistic analysis was done in this study. **Results:** The results show that demographic profile like age, highest level of education and household income significantly affect parent's perceptions on type of child care. Using logistic analysis, it was found that four independent variables namely childcare-parents' interactions, safety and health features, physical environment, and cost have significant influence on the parent's perceptions on types of child care in Malaysia. **Conclusion:** This study suggests that parents should encourage provider to register with the government and undergo necessary training.

Keywords: Parents' Perception, Types and Quality, Childcare, Malaysia

1. INTRODUCTION

World Bank Country Director for Malaysia said Malaysia has the opportunity to accelerate its transformation into a high income economy if more women were in the labour force (Jayabalan, 2013). Therefore, the increasing role and participation of women in this country is highly anticipated. Figure 1.1 shows female labour force participation rate rose 0.4 percentage points to 54.6 per cent in the third quarter of 2017. Female participation in the labour market for prime age 25–34 years (73.2%), 35–44 years (67.5%) and 45–54 years (57.1%) were higher against female LFPR at the national level (54.6%). According to Department of Statistic (2012) by looking at the tertiary level enrolment, female students generally outnumbered the male students in most universities in Malaysia.



Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (2017)

Figure 1.1: Labour force participation rate by sex and age group, Malaysia, second quarter (Q2) & third quarter (Q3) 2017

In the early years of the nation's development, the extended family could still be depended on to fill the need for child care services. However, while women were encouraged to return to the workforce or offered training to update their skills, Hayes (2002) suggests the state had no plans in place to increase childcare services to meet their needs, asserting that the response was uncoordinated, reactive and fragmented. Availability, costs and quality childcare were identified as key issues in the context of the major social and economic changes taking place (UNCRC, 2005). Lack of good quality, affordable childcare was identified as the primary reason many women could not return to the workforce (Canavan, 2000).

Table 1.1:

Number of Registered Child Care Centre, Child Care Provider and Number of Children by State, 2016

Negeri State	Pendaftaran (diluluskan) Registration (approved)	Pengecualian Exemption	Bil. Pengasuh No. of Caregivers	Bil. Kanak-kanak / No. of Children		
				0-3	3-4	4-6
Johor	317	3	1,034	2,519	2,121	433
Kedah	295	-	1,109	2,664	2,064	259
Kelantan	208	-	576	1,462	909	138
Melaka	109	-	618	1,695	892	373
Negeri Sembilan	201	1	680	2,008	831	539
Pahang	326	-	1,015	3,304	1,853	384
Perak	355	2	1,459	3,147	2,696	738
Perlis	51	-	163	508	268	68
Pulau Pinang	159	1	889	1,986	2,494	0
Sabah	285	6	1,541	3,320	3,749	485
Sarawak	160	-	718	1,704	1,407	199
Selangor	1,258	5	4,972	10,342	8,143	3,249
Terengganu	283	-	1,049	2,866	1,621	191
WP Kuala Lumpur	398	12	1,962	5,439	4,562	484
WP Labuan	26	2	130	257	284	69
Jumlah / Total	4,431	32	17,915	43,221	33,894	7,609
		4,463			84,724	

Table 1.1 shows only 4,431 child care centres have been registered with the Social Welfare Department and these are mainly run by private individuals and

workplace-based care providers. This is a small number vis-à-vis the growing numbers of children who need the places. As Malaysia is progressively moving towards becoming a developed nation by 2020 and looking to boost its female workforce participation, the provision of high-quality child care centres is becoming a priority.

Problem statement:

According to The Star Online not every family can afford the living expenses with just one breadwinner because these expenses are rising (Andrew, 2017). Data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia about median salaries and wages earned by Malaysians in 2017 prove that the lower-income families struggle to depend on one breadwinner, especially with a median salary of RM1, 100 to RM2, 055. The main reason parents send their kids to childcare centres is because of the trade-off between taking time away from work to take care of the kids and working longer to get enough income. So, not all can afford the registered childcare centre and even if they could afford it, not all of them can find one with flexible hours.

According to Deputy Women, Family and Community Development Minister Hannah Yeoh, a total of 199 cases of abuse, neglect and negligence involving children under the care of childminders, has been reported nationwide from January to May this year, 2018 (Malay Mail, 2018). Therefore, Senator Datuk Isa Ab Hamid proposed efforts to address cases of abuse and negligence at childcare centres, possibility of making it mandatory for childminders those taking care of more than four children are required to register with the Department of Social Welfare (JKM) for regulatory purposes.

JKM statistics stated that from June 2015 to June 2017, there were 581 cases of child abuse by babysitters. Most abuse cases involve unregistered and inexperienced caretakers. President of the Association of Registered Childcare Providers Malaysia, Shamsinah Che Shariff said that unlicensed centres and unskilled babysitters are among the factors of babies' death in childcare centres. The Minister of WFCD Datuk Seri Rohani Abdul Karim said most cases involved babysitters who did not attend the compulsory course. One of the reasons for the operation of child care centres without a registration certificate is difficulties faced by the operators to comply with the standard operating procedures (SOP) set by the ministry, especially on security features (Rohani,2018)

Hence there are two issues, the choice of type of child care and the quality of child care. Parents' are in dilemma whether they should choose a registered child care which might be safer but it is very expensive and unaffordable. Also, parents' face with the issue of how to choose a child care which has a good quality and safe for their children.

Objective and research question of the study:

This study aims to identify the demographic factors influence the parent's perceptions on type of child care in Malaysia and to determine the important factors contributing to parents' choice of child care centre

Thus, this study seeks to answer the research questions; which demographic factors influence parent's perceptions on type of child care provider in Malaysia?, and what are the important factors contributing to a parents' choice of child care centre?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The previous research have proven that the children in child care centre has powerful effects on their survival, growth, and development by Doherty, Forer, Lero, Goelman and LaGrange, (2006), Iram, U. and Butt M.S, (2004), Liu, W.P., Yeung, A.S. and Farmer, S. (2001). In addition, Iram, U. and Butt M.S. (2014), said that the brain of children development is impacted by early environment children which it can encourage or hinder learning new skill from adolescence process. It is because the children's development is influenced by their children experience that why the families are becoming selective to choose the child care centre.

In addition to quality component, staff characteristics referred to a profile of individual caregivers as well as child care programs and included caregiver training and education, child-to-caregiver ratio, and turnover rate. This component was identified by all stakeholder groups as a key quality component and was common throughout discussions. Staff characteristics were considered imperative for various reasons (Bowman, Donovan & Susan, 2000). Participants expressed the believe that trained and educated caregivers are more likely to follow developmentally appropriate practices, to provide a stimulating curriculum, and to be aware of individual differences and special needs of children and families. Having a low child-to-caregiver ratio was believed to increase attentiveness to each child, facilitate attachment, and ease safety concerns of parents (Adrew, 2008). Similarly, low turnover facilitates secure caregiver-child relationships, reassures parents, promotes consistency in practices, and eases the director's burden (Amanda, Stacy & Deborah, 2007).

There is also some evidence, better educated ELC staff with appropriate training are more likely to improve children's cognitive outcomes through larger vocabularies, increased ability to solve problems and increased ability to develop targeted lesson plans. However, qualifications alone do not affect children's outcomes. Having staff that are adequately trained and supported to create a better pedagogic environment can also make a difference to children's outcomes. Multiple kinds of literature affirm the importance of training and education of child minders in determining the quality of childcare settings (Munton et al., 2002). Overall evaluation of the child care quality shows significant association between quality and formal education of child care providers (Barros et al., 2016; Cryer et al., 1999; Phillipsen et al., 1997). It is asserted that stimulating, warm and supportive child care provider may be found from those who have undergone formal education or/and specialised training (Cryer et al., 1999)

The issues that were discussed in regard to the communication and rapport component generally involved positive working relationships and the positive emotional climate that exists in a high-quality child care environment (Karuppiah, 2015).Communication and rapport was described as existing in multiple relationships: among staff, directors, and owners; between parents and caregivers, parents and

directors, and parents and owners; and between caregiver and child. Thus, it was a multifaceted quality component, but one that appeared to be foundational to the stakeholders (Bergen, Reid & Torelli, 2009). The rationale provided for the importance of communication and rapport included the belief that teamwork is more effective than independent work; that supportiveness and respect improve job satisfaction and ultimately retention of staff; and that mentoring and leadership facilitate growth and success (Berthelsen, Brownle & Karuppiah, 2011).

Physical environment also plays a role in maintaining quality child care. It is claimed that child care settings must always ensure the high quality of health and safety aspect besides of other supplementary criteria such as space allocated for each child and the availability of toys and materials which suit the age of the children and so on (Ceglowski & Davis, 2004). As far as Malaysia is concerned, it is asserted that the legislations, policies and guidelines on early childhood care and education give more priority to cognitive, social and emotional development rather than the physically designed environment in child care centres. The existing guidelines on the physical environment of child care centres in Malaysia are inadequate as they are not described in detail. Therefore it is suggested that more research on the physical environment should be conducted (Azhari, Qamaruzaman, Bajunid, & Hassan, 2015).

Most parents want to ensure that their children have good early child care, but many are unable to afford the cost. Nearly half of working families and mothers who are able to find child care rely on family members, including their own parents or even relatives. The rest of the population relies on private child care providers. Parents often struggle to find quality care for a low price. Family incomes cannot support the current cost of child care, let alone provide the resources needed for their child's education. Relying on family income to stimulate programs will not work; it will only serve the families who have the money to put towards the program. An approach such as that, limits participation of good programs to families with lower incomes (Willer, 2000).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is a quantitative approach by using questionnaires. The numbers of target respondents which are required to answer the questionnaire are 160 respondents. The sampling technique used is the purposive sampling technique under non probability sampling. The target population in the study are the parents who have child below 6 years old and send to child care centre in the 3 states, which are; Selangor, Penang, Perak, Malacca, Kedah, Sarawak and Johor.

Chi-square analysis was used in this study to recognize whether the demographic factors had an effect towards child care type and quality in Malaysia. In addition, this analysis also shows which demographic factor had a significant effect towards child care type in Malaysia.

Besides that, logistic regression has also been used in this study. It is used to describe the data and to show the relationship between one dependent binary variable and one or more nominal, ordinal, interval or ratio-level independent variables. Logistic regression analysis has been chosen in this study rather than multiple regression analysis because it is appropriate for this study.

Table 3.1:
Summary of respondent (N=160)

Demographic variable	Category	Number of Respondents (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	121	76
	Male	39	24
Age (in years)	20 and below	13	8
	21-30	71	44
	31-40	57	36
	41-50	19	12
Ethnicity	Malay	131	82
	Indian	12	8
	Others	10	6
	Chinese	7	4
Higher Education Level	Bachelor's degree	59	37
	SPM/O Level/ MCE	45	28
	Postgraduate	29	18
	STPM/A-Level/HSC/Diploma	27	17
Sector Employed	Private	79	49
	Government	52	33
	Self-employed	29	18
Average Household Income	RM1,000 – RM2,000	10	6
	RM2,001 – RM4,000	46	29
	RM4,001 – RM6,000	39	24
	RM6,001 – RM8,000	32	20
	RM8,001 – RM10,000	15	10
	More than RM10,001	18	11

From table 4.3, most 76% (N=121) of the respondents are female. This is because female respondents were willing to participate in this study. Most of the respondents 44% (N=71) come from the age group 21-30 years old. In terms of races or ethnicity, most 82.9% (N=131) of total respondents are Malays whereas only 8% (N=12) are India followed by others 6% (N=10) and Chinese 4% (N=7)

Most of the respondents are well-educated people. This can be seen when the majority of them have a degree and higher level of education level. The higher participations are people with degree qualification, which are 37% (N=59) of respondents. Private sector respondents are the most willing part in this study which contributes 49% (N=79). Most of the respondents have average household income RM2,001 – RM4,000, there are 28.8% (N=46), the lowest number of respondents are 3.8% (N=6) with high level income group RM10,001– RM12,000

4. FINDINGS

The factors under observation in this section analysed using Chi-Square analysis. In this analysis, we are going to look into whether there is existent of the relationship between demographic factors and type of child care centre in Malaysia.

Table 4.1:
Results of Chi-Square Test

Variable	Category	Type of Child Care Centre				Significant level
		Registered		Unregistered		
		N	%	N	%	
Gender	Male	18	46	21	54	0.596
	Female	50	41	71	59	
Age (in years)	20 and below	2	15	11	85	0.021**
	21-30	25	35	46	65	
	31-40	30	53	27	47	
	41-50	11	58	8	42	
Ethnicity	Malay	57	44	74	56	0.532
	Indian	3	25	9	75	
	Chinese	4	57	3	43	
	Others	4	40	6	60	
Highest Education Level	SPM/O Level/ MCE	9	20	36	80	0.000***
	STPM/A-Level/HSC/Diploma	8	30	19	70	
	Bachelor's degree	34	58	25	42	
	Postgraduate	17	59	12	41	
Sector Employed	Government	23	44	29	56	.944
	Self-employed	11	38	18	62	
	Private	34	43	45	57	
Average Household Income	RM1,000– RM2,000	2	20	8	80	0.000***
	RM2,001– RM4,000	8	17	38	83	
	RM4,001– RM6,000	9	23	30	77	
	RM6,001– RM8,000	22	69	10	31	
	RM8,001–RM10,000	12	80	3	20	
	More than RM10,001	15	83	3	17	

Table 4.6 shows that among 7 demographic factors, only 3 factors are significant. The significant demographic variables are age, highest education level and average household income which show a significant effect to the types of child care centre. The value of Pearson Chi-Square test must be below than 0.05 to consider it as significant.

The p-value for age is below than 0.05 which is 0.021. It means that age influence type of child care in Malaysia. Parent in the group of 21 years old and below choose unregistered child care centre and parents in a group age 41-50 years old choose register child care centre. It was confirmed the study by David (1999) that the higher age prefer register child care centre.

The value of Pearson Chi-Square test for highest level of education is 0.000 which indicates that the education level of parents have a significant effect to the types of child care centre. SPM/O Level/MCE respondents are the most respondents that choose unregistered child care centre among all highest education level while the registered child care centre is the most choosing by bachelor's degree parents' education level. It was also confirmed by Whalley (2001) the higher levels of education respondents prefer registered child care centre.

Besides, average household income has a significant effect to the types of childcare centre. The parents' income with RM2, 001-RM4, 000 is choosing unregistered child care centre among other group of income while for most of the parents' income group more than RM10,001 choosing register child care centre. It was also confirmed by Ellen (2007) that higher the income, better child care centre will choose by parents.

According to Chi-Square result, there are three demographic factors that are significant to determine parent's perceptions on type of child care in Malaysia. The factors are age, highest education level and average household income. Age variables is significant at 5% level of significance, while highest education level and average household income variable factors which has effect in choosing type of child care centre significant at 1% level of significance.

Table 4.2:
Result of Logistic Regression Analysis

	B	S.E	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Constant	4.218	0.406	0.291	1	0.000	0.000
CC	-0.219	0.278	2.560	1	0.589	0.803
CE	0.444	0.572	6.460	1	0.110	0.641
CPI	1.453	0.446	0.148	1	0.016***	4.274
SHF	0.172	0.436	8.351	1	0.024**	1.187
PE	-1.261	0.403	0.500	1	0.004***	0.283
PF	-0.285	0.184	6.938	1	0.480	0.752
C	-0.484	1.011	17.404	1	0.008***	0.616

***Significance at 1% significant level, **Significance at 5% of significant level

The logistic regression analysis equation for parents' perception on type of child care centre is stated below:

$$TCC = \beta_0 - \beta_1 CC + \beta_2 CE + \beta_3 CPI + \beta_4 SHF - \beta_5 PE - \beta_6 PF - \beta_7 C$$

$$TCC = 4.218 - 0.219 CC + 0.444 CE + 1.453 CPI + 0.172 SHF - 1.261 PE - 0.285 PF - 0.484 C$$

Where,

TCC = Type of Child Care Centre
CC = Caregiver Characteristics
CE = Caregiver Education
CPI = Childcare-Parents' Interactions
SHF = Safety and Health Features
PE = Physical Environment
PF = Parents' Feedback
C = Cost

Based on the result in Table 4.13, it shows four independent variables, which are childcare-parents' interactions, safety and health features, physical environment, and cost are significant while three independent variables which are caregiver characteristics, caregiver education and parents' feedback are insignificant. This refers to the p-value lower than 0.05.

For the independent variable childcare-parents' interactions, it also refers have a positive relationship with parents' perception on type of child care centre. The logistic regression shows that it is significant at 1% significant level. It assumes that childcare-parents' interactions affects the parents' perception on type of child care centre. This conforms to the findings found by Cristina and Rafael (2018) that childcare-parents' interactions positively affects the parents' perception on type of child care centre. The Exp (B) is 4.274 which mean that childcare-parents' interactions are almost 4 times more important for a parents' choice in choosing a child care centre.

The beta coefficient for safety and health feature is 0.172 which indicates that a safety and health features has a positive relationship toward parents' perception on type of child care centre. The logistic regression shows that it is significant at 5% significant level. This conformed by the study with Penelope, Jacqueline, Lars-Erik and Kathy (2006) where there is positive relationship between safety and health features and parents' perception on type of child care centre. From the table above, the Exp(B) show 1.187 which means the parents look safety and health features are almost 1 time more important for a parents' choice in choosing a child care centre.

The result shows that physical environment has a negative relationship with parents' perception on type of child care centre. This refers to the beta coefficient, which is -1.261. The logistic regression shows that it is significant at 1% significant level. This confirms with the previous study conducted by Elizabeth and Peter (2016) that there is a negative correlation between physical environments toward parents' perception on types of child care centre. This indicates that physical environment recording Exp(B) of 0.283. This means respondent who felt that physical environment is important factor almost 0.3 times more important for a parents' choice in choosing a child care centre

The beta coefficient for cost is -0.484 which indicates that a cost has a negative relationship toward parents' perception on types of child care centre. The logistic regression shows that it is significant at 1% significant level. This is confirmed by the study by Ellen (2007) where there are negative relationship between cost and parents' perception on type of child care centre. From Table 4.13, the Exp(B) shows 0.616 which means that the parents look cost almost 1 time more important for parents' choice in choosing a child care centre

In conclusion, five independent variables, which are childcare-parents' interactions, safety and health features, physical environment, and cost are significant. It follows the past study findings. Among all the factors, the strongest predictor of types of child care centre is childcare-parents' interactions as it has affected almost 4 times more important for parents' choice in choosing a child care centre.

5. RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSIONS

According to UNICEF Report (2010), early childhood is the most critical period in human development. By providing care and education from the early years of children, we are not only building a solid foundation for the child's life, but also for Malaysia's development. Based on the Chi-Square Analysis, it can be found that 3 variables from 7 variables are significant. The significant demographic variables are age, highest education level and average household income which show a significant effect to the type of child care centre.

Based on the Logistic Regression Analysis, five independent variables, which are childcare-parents' interactions, safety and health features, physical environment, and cost are significant. Among all the factors, the strongest predictor of type of child care centre is childcare-parents' interactions as it has affected almost 4 times likely to be in choosing register of child care centre.

As parents' perception always has a negative perception towards the child care centre in Malaysia such as abuse cases, sudden death of children, violence and others problem at child care centre, so is importance for all childcare providers need to register with the Department of Social Welfare. This is to ensure setting standards for their safe operation, and ensuring that a healthy and nutritious environment is created for children's early development. Then every licensed child care provider need receive monitoring visits to make sure they continue to meet licensing and health and safety requirements. These visits are conducted by a licensing specialist.

This study only used small sample size which is only 160 parents has participated. The participation of female in this study is higher than male. For the future research, it is advisable to use a larger sample size. It is also recommended for the future research to have more male respondents and make it equal. Future research needs to expand the variability of the ethnicity of respondents for a more comprehensive finding.

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