
PSYCHOLOGICALLY IMPACTED HOUSES – SUPERSTITIONS AND MARKETABILITY PROBLEMS

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Abstract

Psychologically impacted houses may be a new context in Malaysia but the term psychological impacted or defects have been distinguished in the United States and Australia. With the increases of wrongdoing these days, there is a possibility that the crime will result in death in a house. This paper focused on the issues of psychologically impacted houses with respect to the discernment of the society towards these houses and the problems in marketing these tainted properties. A study is carried out to acquire the data on the level of superstitious convictions that are still practiced by the Malaysian society. The relationship between superstition and psychologically impacted houses are being discussed as the perception of the society towards the stigmatized houses is clouded by their superstitious beliefs. The issues in regards to the marketability of psychologically impacted houses are highlighted through the findings obtained from interviews with estate agents and negotiators. Thus, the main aim of this paper is to ascertain the dilemma faced by estate agents and negotiators when marketing houses with psychological defects. Recommendations are made to help the estate agents and negotiators to see things clear with respect to the disclosure of information of the houses.

Key words: psychologically impacted houses, superstitious beliefs, estate agents, marketability problems.

Introduction

A house can be defined as a place of habitation for human beings where it functions as a haven for an individual from the outside climates. However, as the time passes, the functions of houses had expanded. Houses these days serve as a haven, as well as for investment purposes. More houses are, no doubt purchased and leased to parties who are interested in renting a house. For a prospective tenant, the rental price of a house is an issue that has to be considered before leasing one. Prospective tenants will hunt for the best offer of rental price, worth paying with the quality and nature of the house. It is justifiable that physical defects in a house will affect its value, thus houses with any noticeable physical defects will be having lower rental price compared to a newly constructed house (Qin, 2008, Whitford, 2007). In the event that a house has been tainted with a homicide or suicide case (regardless of the fact that the condition is excellent) most individuals think that the events will affect the value of the house. These effects of any intangible blemish on rental and price are not as readily determined.

These 'tainted' houses are becoming more common occurrence as there is an increment in the rates of unlawful acts everywhere throughout the world. Crime such as murder can happen anywhere, anytime and committed by anyone. Despite the fact that suicide is not considered as murder, it is one of the world's leading causes of death (World Psychiatry, 2002). Subsequently, when a house apparently has been reportedly tainted with these incidents, can it be considered as less valuable compared to a house with the same qualities where the events has never occurred? Such properties can referred to as 'psychologically impacted' as they may impact the leasing decision of a prospective tenant if the tenant is physically disturbed with the facts or even suspicion regarding the house (Larsen & Coleman, 2010, Qin, 2008).

As for the estate agents, trying to market these psychologically impacted houses would be a challenge. Estate agents will face a dilemma on whether to disclose the information to prospective and might frighten them away or staying silent on this matter. Laws typically require an owner to disclose the house's physical conditions, any material defects or repairs that might affect the purchasers or tenant's decision. The focus is generally on the physical conditions of a property thus showing that the concept of psychological defects in real property had not been focused by Malaysian law. Thus, this paper focused on the issues circulating psychologically impacted houses in relation to the perception of the society towards these houses and the problems in marketing these tainted properties.

Psychologically impacted houses

Almost every house has its own tale. Nevertheless, whether the tale consists of murders, suicides or ghosts are an alternate story. The houses where awful occurrences such as murder and suicide once took place are referred to as psychologically impacted houses, emotional defect and stigmatized or tainted property. All these terms refer to defects which are not visible in physical aspects of the property but have the existence of emotional or psychological factors that tend to affect the decision of a prospective buyer or tenant. Psychological defects might encompass the occurrence of murders, suicides, or even natural death or that the property was built on once a graveyard, or more notoriously that the property is haunted (Whitford, 2007).

Larsen and Coleman (2010:1) adopt the following definition, *...a psychologically impacted property is any parcel of real property or structure thereon, where the existence of certain circumstances, suspicions or facts, may create emotional or psychological disturbance or concerns to a prospective purchaser, with the potential of influencing the buying decision. If prospects are discomforted by such events, they may either not make an offer on the property or reduce their bid.*

Many countries have not yet recognized and acknowledged the concept of psychological defects in real property. However, the terms psychologically impacted houses or tainted property are common in the United States. Certain states in the United States even had enactment in regards disclosure of psychological defects in properties. In California, if a death has occurred in the property within the previous three years, the sellers are obliged to disclose the information to prospective buyers and tenants (Qin, 2008).

Section 114 of Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Law stressed that psychologically impacted shall mean an impact being the result of facts or suspicions including, but not limited to, the following:-

(a) that an occupant of real property is now or has been suspected to be infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus or with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome or any other disease which reasonable medical evidence suggests to be highly unlikely to be transmitted through the occupying of a dwelling;

(b) that the real property was the site of a felony, suicide or homicide; and

(c) that the real property has been the site of an alleged parapsychological or supernatural phenomenon.

According to sub-section 2, section 442.600 of Missouri Revised Statutes, psychologically impacted real property is defined as:-

(1) Real property in which an occupant is, or was at any time, infected with human immunodeficiency virus or diagnosed with acquired immune deficiency syndrome, or with any other disease which has been determined by medical evidence to be highly unlikely to be transmitted through the occupancy of a dwelling place; or

(2) Real property which was the site of a homicide or other felony, or of a suicide.

In addition, this statute also highlighted that there is no reason for action shall emerge or be kept up against a seller or lessor of real property or a real estate broker or salesman, by statute or at common law, for failure to unveil to a purchaser or tenant that the real property is or was psychologically impacted. Despite the prior, the provisions of this section shall not authorize a seller, lessor or real estate broker or salesperson to make an adulteration of fact or false proclamation.

Various studies had been carried out in regards to the issue of psychologically impacted houses such as Chau (2002), Larsen & Coleman (2010) and Whitford (2007). For instance, in December 2004, New South Wales Office of Fair Trading, Australia took action against Mahevi Pty Limited, where LJ Hooker ordered Mr Peter Hinton and Mrs Erecia Hinton to pay penalties of \$20,900. The action was taken in relation to the non-disclosure of Gonzales property where the agents did not disclose that Mr Sef Gonzales had murdered his family using a baseball bat in 2001 to the prospective tenants. The prospective tenants who were Buddhist sought to withdraw from purchase when they learnt about the brutal history. The Lin family claimed, as devout Buddhists, they believed that the spirits of the murdered victims would bring them bad fortune and will haunt the house (Whitford, 2007).

Psychologically impacted houses are said to be sold or to leased at a lower price or stayed in the market longer compared to other houses (Larsen and Coleman, 2010). A study conducted by Chau (2002) proved that there is a negative correlation between murder and property values, where the psychological defects will not only affect the property of incident but also the properties within the nearby vicinity. However, for the purpose of this study, only houses that are impacted by murders and suicide will be discussed.

Murder

As defined by Common Law of most countries, murder is the unlawful killing of another human with malice aforethought (Merriam Webster online Dictionary, 2010). Murder is considered as the most serious crime and there are several severe penalties imposed on its commission.

Crime is defined as the breach of a rule or law for which some governing authority or force may prescribe a punishment (Amar Singh, 2005). The term of "crime" is normally used for activities that are injurious to the population or the State, including some that can cause major loss or harms to individuals. Most criminal acts require the combination of space and time of likely offenders, suitable targets and the absence of capable guardians against crime (Amar Singh, 2005; Cohen and Felson, 1979). Among of the most committed crimes are murders, rapes, robbery, burglary, drug possession, theft and others.

A research carried out by Fajnzylber et.al (2002) showed that as a country develops, the crime rates of the nation will likewise increase. It is said that there are a significant impact of unemployment and income inequality towards the increment in crime rates (Ehrlich, 1973). According to survey carried out to disadvantages youths in Boston, Case and Katz (1991) found that the probability of a youth to commit crime rises when his peers are also engaged in criminal activities.

According to the Malaysian Royal Police Force, the crime index of 2008 was 157,459 cases where there is an increase of 41,163 cases which results in 198,622 cases in 2009. As for the murder, the amount of cases reported in 2009 is 604 where there was a rise of 107 cases where 497 murder cases were reported in 2008 (PDRM Official Website, 2009). However, according to Tan Sri Musa Hassan, the Inspector General of Police, the crime index was dropped by 15.35% for a period between January to April 2010 as compared to the same period in 2009.

For the developing countries of Asia, the social stability are being threaten by these violence and crime and are becoming major obstacles to development. As a developing country, Malaysia cannot escape from the reality that its crime rates are increasing from day to day. Crimes such as murder are one of the astounding crimes committed by Malaysian (Amar Singh, 2005).

Suicide

Suicide is not considered as a crime as it is being defined as an act of terminating one's own life. Suicide is also noted as the metaphorical sense of 'willful destruction of one's self-interest' (Merriam Webster online Dictionary, 2008). Suicide may occur for various reasons, including depression, guilt, shame, pressure, financial difficulties and other undesirable circumstances. Some of the common methods of suicide are poisoning, hanging and jumping off from heights.

A 2010 study of the pattern of suicides by the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital shows that the common method of suicide were poisoning (39%), hanging (34%) and jumping from height (22%). The study also showed that the suicide rate among the Indian was the highest with 21.1 per 100,000. The suicide rate among the Chinese was 8.6 per 100,000 where most cases were committed by the elderly Chinese. For Malays, the suicide rate was 2.6 per 100,000. Overall, with respect to the year of 2010, the suicide rate for Kuala Lumpur was estimated at 7.4 per 100,000. However, this may have increased by now. Modern medicine viewed suicide as a mental concern, usually associated with mental disorders and pressures. According to the Malaysian Psychiatric Association (2009), individuals with mental disorders are estimated to between 10 and 15 per cent of Malaysian's population. Mental disorders ranged from illness such as depression to anxiety disorders and substance addiction.

Some suicide cases are committed by a person after he took the life of others. According to Danson & Soothill (1996), for over a hundred years (1887-1990), there was an evidence of 142 (or 6 percent) out of 2,274 identified reports of murders in England, where a murder will be followed then by suicide of the murderer. The study supports the view that murder-suicides are mostly family affairs. Female murder-suicides were reported to always involve family members. It was reported that in 1920s, the act of throat-cutting is one of the striking method of suicide. Males were said to favor shooting as a method of suicide.

Superstitious belief

Despite the fact that the concept of superstitious is practiced by a wide range of believers, most can be defined as "beliefs that are inconsistent with the known laws of nature or with what is generally considered as rational in a society" (American Heritage Dictionary, 1985). Superstitions have existed in every human society because it is the nature of mankind to believe in supernatural and powerful

forces that were the cause of all natural phenomena. Our ancestors, who were scientifically undeveloped, drew conclusions to various actions and symbols that supposedly caused disasters was bad luck. These beliefs were passed to the following generations and thus creating widespread false notion.

In this world where it is conquered by rational thinking based on science facts, these illogical beliefs should be put down on a rest. However, superstition beliefs still play a role and being accepted by all societies around the world (Foster & Kokko, 2009). Based on a study by Torgler (2007), the determinants of superstition belief among society are socio-demographic and socio-economic. Even when it comes to the action of buying or leasing a new house, some individuals made their decisions based on their gullible viewpoint.

The media and film industry also played a role in spreading the belief in superstition. Years by years, Hollywood came out with horror movies to attract viewers. A ghost story about Bloody Mary, a horrible disfigured spirit which will appear whenever being summoned by chanting "Bloody Mary" into a mirror was one of the urban legends which was kept being turned into movies such as *Urban Legends: Bloody Mary* in 2005 (starring Kate Mara and Robert Vito), *Bloody Mary* in 2006 (starring Jaasan Simmons and Kim Tyler) and *The Legend of Bloody Mary* in 2008 (starring Paul Preiss and Robert J. Locke) (Internet Movie Database, 2008).

Among the most popular horror movies are *The Exorcist* in 1973 (starring Ellen Burstyn, Max von Sydow and Linda Blair), *The Sixth Sense* in 1999 (starring Haley Joel Osment and Bruce Willis) and the popular TV series of *The Ghost Whisperer* (starring Jennifer Love Hewitt). Asian countries are widely known with the beliefs in superstition where the superstitions are being portraits in their production of horror movies. Japan, Korea and Thailand are the Asian countries that produce several horror movies in a year. In Malaysia itself, there are also a few movies which include 'Jangan Pandang Belakang' in 2007, *Karak* (2012), *Ular* (2013) and many more. The existence of these horror movies does not only proves that the society is still preoccupied with the superstitious belief, it also encourage supernatural belief among the community.

Research questions and objectives

From the above discussion, it can be summarized that the psychologically impacted houses present certain questions on their ability to be rented out and to be marketed. What types of tenants would dare to rent a house which used to be a murder or suicide scene? Another question that evolved from above is what are the difficulties faced by estate agent or the owner of these psychologically impacted houses to market their houses and how do they overcome them? To answer these questions, there are three specific objectives are designed namely;

- To identify the relationship between superstitious beliefs and psychologically impacted houses;
- To determine opinion with regards to superstition belief and hesitation in buying and renting of psychologically impacted houses; and
- To identify the marketability problems faced by estate agents/negotiators in marketing psychologically impacted houses.

Research methods

This research applies mixed method which adopted the quantitative (questionnaire surveys) and qualitative methods (interviews) as a research methodology. The questionnaire survey was designed in close-ended and interview was based on semi-structured questions which are to determine the relationship between superstition and hesitation in buying and renting tainted properties. Interviews are conducted with the estate agents or negotiators to clarify the marketability issues and problems regarding psychologically impacted houses.

The respondents for the questionnaires were limited to the residents of the area of Petaling Jaya, Mont Kiara and Seri Hartamas in Greater Kuala Lumpur. These areas are well known for its high-end residential area and consist of highly income individuals and expatriates. For the interviews, the respondents are limited to estate agents and negotiators of real estate agencies located within the proximity of these areas.

Research findings

Respondents' profile

In this study, there are 54 respondents whereby 30 of the respondents are female while 24 are male. There are four categories of age which consists of 20-29 years old, 30-39 years old, 40-49 years old and 50 years old and above. Majority (N=22) of the respondents are in between the age of 30-39. The second highest respondents are from the category age of 40-49 with 16 respondents, followed by 20-29 years old and 50 years old and above with 9 and 7 respondents respectively. The result also shows that 26 of the respondents are Chinese ethnic, followed by 16 other ethnic who comprise of expatriates ranging from Japanese, Europeans and Americans and 8 Indian ethnic participated in the survey. Malay ethnic are the category with the least participation with only 4 respondents.

Superstitious beliefs among respondents

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of respondents based on their ethnicity and superstitious beliefs. Based on the figure, it is fair to conclude that majority of the Malaysian society consider themselves as superstitious. Out of 26 Chinese respondents participated in this study, 21 of the respondents consider themselves as superstitious while 5 respondents do not view themselves as superstitious. Concerning the Malay respondents, there is only 1 respondent claims to be not into superstitious beliefs whereas the remaining 3 Malay respondents imply that they still practice superstitious beliefs. Out of the 8 Indian respondents, 5 respondents admit that they are superstitious person while the remaining 3 do not consider themselves as superstitious. However, for the other ethnicity category which majority consists of the expatriates, shows a different result from the local respondents. The number of the expatriates who claim to be superstitious is less than those who claimed to be not superstitious. Only 6 respondents out of the 16 respondents in this category consider themselves as superstitious.

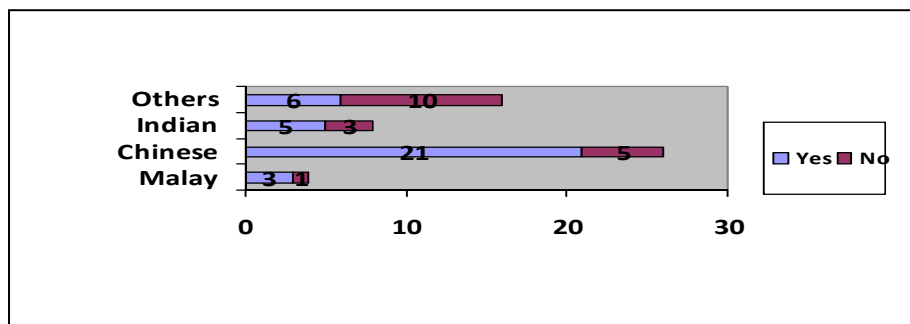


Figure 1: Superstitious beliefs among respondents

The reasons on why the respondents do not believe in superstition

The survey also investigates the reason why the respondents consider themselves as not superstitious. Based on Figure 1, there are 19 respondents do not view themselves as superstitious. However, Figure 2 shows that 9 respondents out of the 19 non-superstitious respondents think that any superstition beliefs are irrational. Superstition beliefs are also being considered as an exaggeration of the old folklore tales to scare the children, where 6 respondents agreed on this. Only 4 respondents think that superstition beliefs are irrelevant to the modern society.

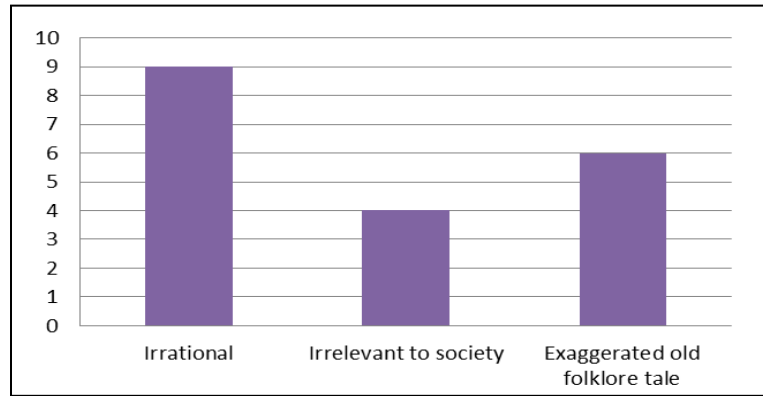


Figure 2: The reasons on why the respondents do not believe in superstition

Superstitious beliefs observed by respondent’s family

Figure 3 shows that majority of the respondents have a superstitious background where their family practices superstitious beliefs. 89% of the respondents admitted that their family still practices superstitious beliefs. As for the rest of the respondents (11%) do not think that superstition plays a role in their family life. While Figure 4 shows that all the local respondents regardless whether they are Malays, Chinese and Indians came from family who still believe in superstition. On the other hand, 10 expatriates’ respondents admit that there are superstitious beliefs being observed in their family.

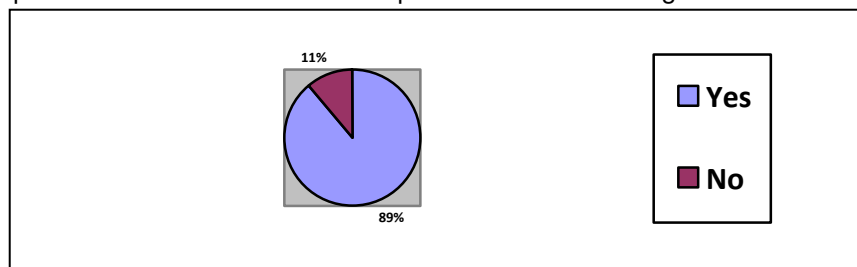


Figure 3: Superstitious beliefs observed by respondent’s family

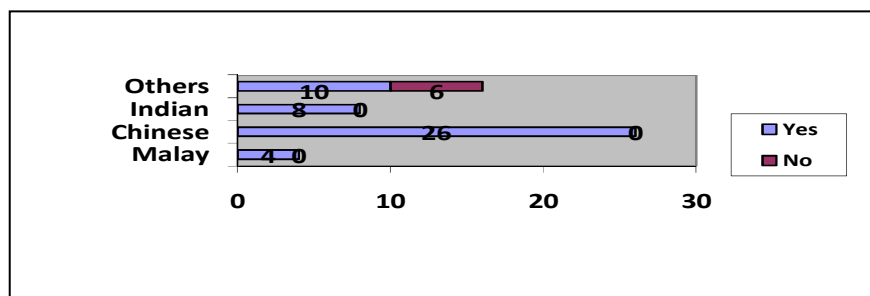


Figure 4: Superstition beliefs observed by respondent’s family (ethnicity)

Superstitious beliefs practiced within ethnicity

Figure 5 shows that all the 54 respondents admit that superstitious beliefs are still being practiced within their ethnicity, while Figure 6 shows that all the 54 respondents have acquaintances that believe in superstitions and still practice the beliefs.

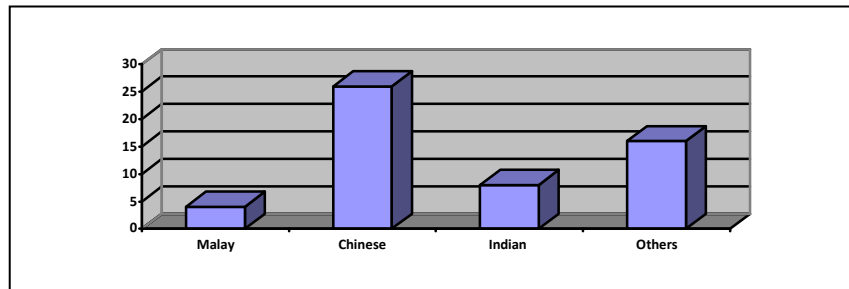


Figure 5: Superstitious beliefs practiced within ethnicity

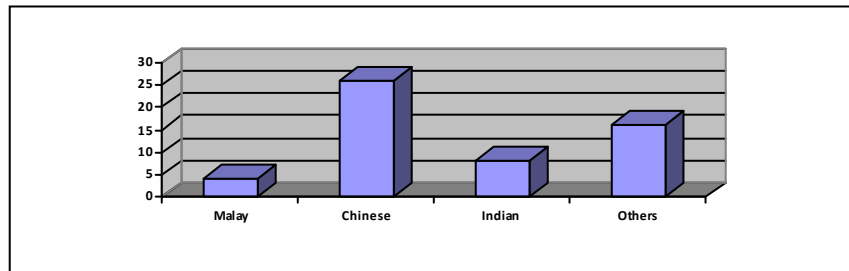


Figure 6: Superstitious beliefs practiced by acquaintances

Respondents' believing in ghosts

Figure 7 illustrates the number of respondents who believe in ghost. As expected, respondents who consider themselves as a superstitious person also admitted that they believe that ghost exists. The same also goes to the amount of the respondents who do not believe in ghost. The same set of the 19 respondents who declare themselves as not superstitious claim as not believing in ghost as well.

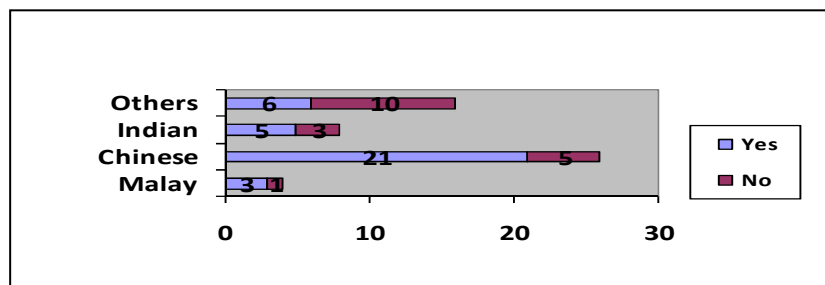


Figure 7: Respondents believing in ghost

Figure 8 shows the views of respondents on why ghost exist. This question was answered by the 35 respondents who claim to believe in ghost. This question also allowed the 35 respondents to answer more than one reason. This is to obtain the respondents' views on the reasons they think ghost exists. All 35 respondents think that ghost exists because ghost still have 'unfinished' business in the mortal world. 30 out of the 35 superstitious respondents also think that ghost is the restless souls of victim who had died unwillingly of some tragedy as in murder, accident, fire and landslide. Ghost are also claimed to be the soul of people who practices black magic or a cult. This is agreed by 10 respondents. This study also shows that majority of the superstitious respondents comprehend with the idea that ghosts are the souls of dead people.

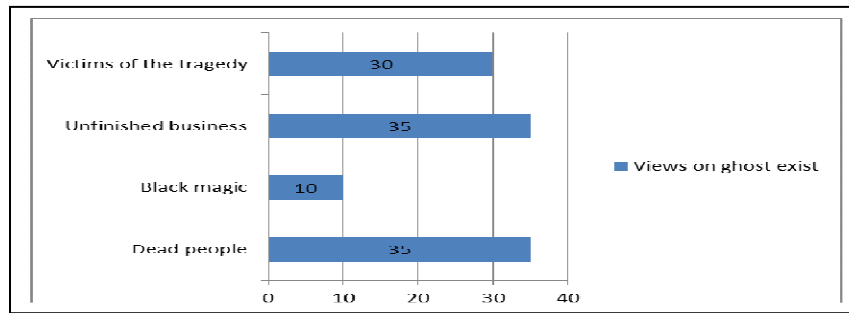


Figure 8: Respondents' view on ghosts

External factors influencing superstition

This question is to examine the opinion of the respondents on the external factors encouraging superstitious beliefs among society. The factors are limited to family, friends, media, religion and reading materials. Based on Figure 9, it shows that all of the 54 respondents feel that family plays a vital role in influencing superstitious beliefs among society. There are 30 respondents agree that family is an external factor in encouraging superstition. However, 9 respondents strongly believe that family indeed plays a major role in the superstitious society. Some 15 respondents fairly agree with the statement that family plays a role in encouraging superstition.

Figure 9 above also shows the opinion on friends' influence in promoting superstitious beliefs. Majority of respondents which are 40 respondents disagree with the statement. There are 8 respondents fairly agree that friends influence superstition among the society. 4 respondents agree with the statement while 2 respondents strongly agree that friends play a major role in encouraging superstition.

The survey shows that 32 of the respondents which are the majority agree that media act as an important medium in encouraging superstition among society. Media is referred to movies and television shows. None of the respondents disagree with the statement while 9 respondents fairly agree with the statement that media do play a role in influencing superstitious society. 13 respondents have the same opinion as to agree superstition among society is being influenced by media.

With respect to religion, a majority of 22 respondents do not agree that religion plays a role in encouraging superstition as shown in Figure 9, where 2 respondents strongly disagree and 20 respondents disagree with the statement. Only 5 respondents strongly agree that religion encourage superstition. They consist of 3 Chinese respondents, an Indian and an expatriate from United States respectively. However, there are 21 respondents who fairly agree that religion plays a part in influencing superstition.

Figure 9 also illustrates the opinion of the respondents whether reading materials encourage superstition among society. It is shown that all the 54 respondents think that reading materials somehow act as a player in promoting superstition. 31 of the respondents fairly agree with the statement while another 14 respondents agree and 9 respondents are strongly agreed with the statement that reading materials encourage superstition.

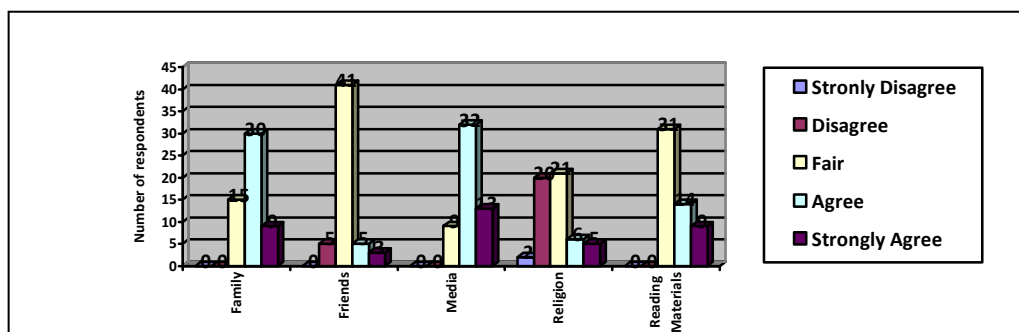


Figure 9: External factors influencing superstition

Preferences when choosing a house

This section investigates the criteria of a house which is being preferred by the respondents before renting it. This section also deals with the reaction of the respondents if they were to come across psychologically impacted houses.

Factors considered before renting a house

Table 1 shows the factors considered by the respondents before renting a house. It is shown that location is the most important factor considered by the 54 respondents before deciding to rent a house. This is proved by the majority of 37 respondents who agree that location is the most important factor in renting a house while 7 respondents strongly agreed with the statement. All the 54 respondents agree that location is an important factor in renting a house whereas none of the respondents disagree and 10 respondents fairly agree. Table 1 also shows that 31 respondents consider accommodation as an essential criterion before leasing a house. 9 respondents will strongly consider accommodation before signing off the rental agreement. All respondents agreed that accommodation should be considered before renting a house, though only 14 respondents fairly agree with this.

Table 1: Factors Considered Before Renting a House

Factors	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Fair	Agree	Strongly Agree
<i>Location</i>	0	0	10	37	7
<i>Accommodation</i>	0	0	14	31	9
<i>Neighbourhood</i>	0	0	26	20	8
<i>Physical condition</i>	0	8	28	10	8
<i>Amenities</i>	0	5	32	10	7
<i>Rental Price</i>	0	15	23	10	6
<i>History</i>	5	8	38	3	0
Mean	0.71	5.14	24.43	17.29	6.43
Median	0.00	5.00	26.00	10.00	7.00
Variance	3.571	32.143	95.952	157.905	8.952

The neighborhood of the house is proved to be one of the important criteria that being considered when renting a house. Based on the result, 20 respondents agreed that neighborhood plays an important role before making a decision to rent a house while 8 respondents strongly agreed with it. None of the respondents strongly disagree or disagree with the statement while 26 of the respondents fairly agree that they will consider the neighborhood of the house before renting it.

Physical condition of the house seems to be considered by the respondents as well. Out of 54 respondents, 10 agree and 8 respondents strongly agree that physical condition is one of the factors they will look into before renting a house. However, 8 respondents do not view physical condition as an important criterion in renting a house as they disagree with the statement while 28 respondents fairly agree.

As shown in Table 1, 17 respondents agree and 7 respondents strongly agree that amenities are one of the important factors being considered before renting a house. None of the respondents who strongly disagree with the statement but 5 respondents disagree that amenities is an important factor to be considered before renting a house while 32 respondents fairly agreed with the statement.

Another factor that is being considered by the respondents before renting a house is its rental price. Out of 54 respondents, 10 respondents agree that they will consider the rental price of a house before renting it while 6 respondents strongly agree with it. However, 15 respondents disagree and 23 respondents fairly agreed with this.

Through this survey, it also proven that majority of the respondents does not think that the history of a house is as important as its location. As shown in Table 1, only 3 respondents consider the history of the house before renting a house. There are 13 respondents disagree and 5 respondents strongly disagree that the history of the house is one of the important factors that should be considered before renting a house. However, there are 38 respondents who rated fair when it comes to consider history in renting a house.

First action taken before renting a house

Figure 10 shows the first action that will be taken by the respondents before renting a house. Majority of respondents will consult an estate agent in helping them to decide whether to rent a particular house or not while 7 respondents will do some research on the property and 6 respondents will survey

the price of the property that they are interested in. There are only 3 respondents that will go and have a look at the neighborhood of the property they are interested in.

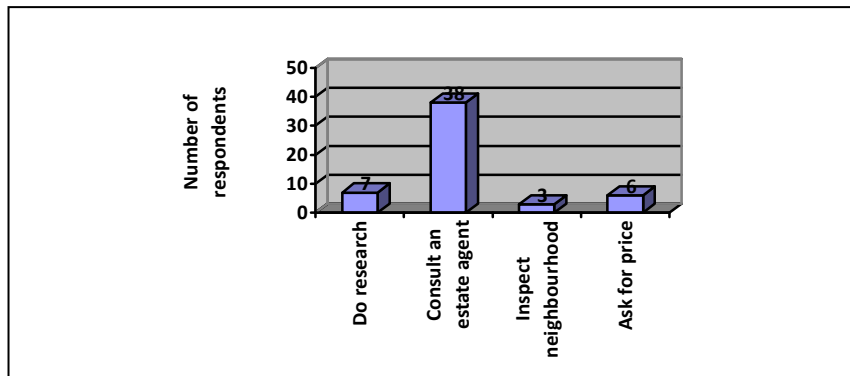


Figure 10: First action taken before renting a house

House inspection before renting it

Based on Figure 11, it shows that all the respondents will do house inspection before renting it. Usually a house inspection will be assisted by the appointed estate agent or the house owner.

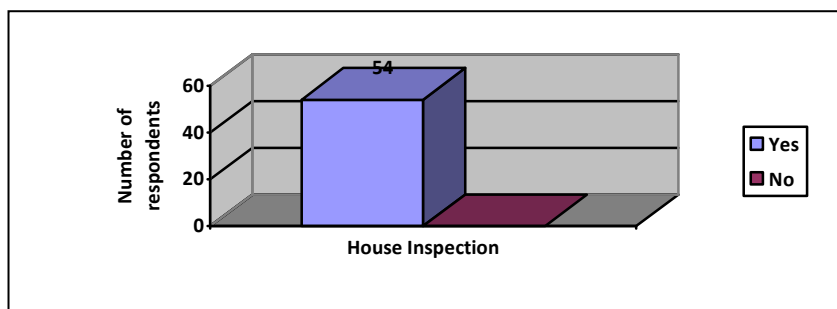


Figure 11: House inspection before renting it

The aura of a house

Figure 12 shows the percentage of respondents who decided to rent a house based on their first instinct during their first inspection of the house. The first instinct that the respondents felt can be referred to the aura or 'chakra' of the house. A percentage of 74% of the respondents admitted that their decision is influenced by the feeling they had when inspecting the house but 26% of the respondents do not influenced by their instinct when deciding to rent a property.

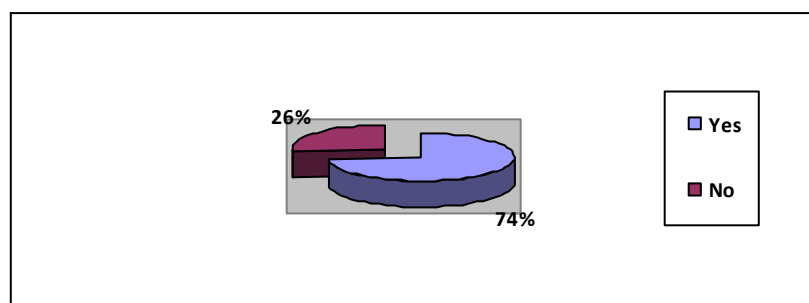


Figure 12: The aura of a house

Emotional relationship between people and places

Through this study, it is proven that there are emotional relationships between people and places as shown in Figure 13 whereby 83% if the respondents admitted that they believe that there are an intangible relationship between people and places. For this purpose of study, the emotional

relationship is between the occupiers of a property with his or her property. However, 17% of the respondents do not believe that there is any relationship between the houses with the property they occupied.

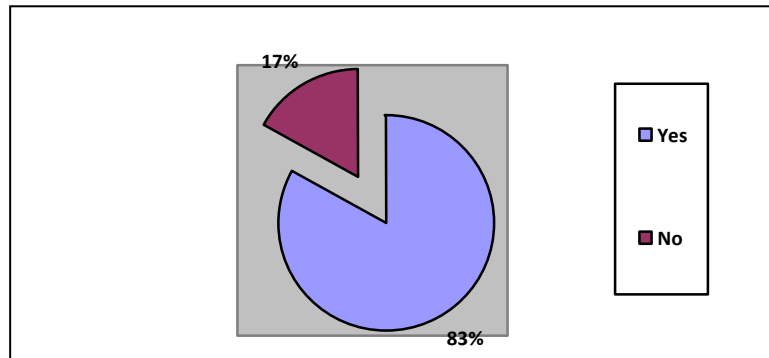


Figure 13: Emotional relationship between people and places

Action taken before renting a psychologically impacted house

In this question, a situation was given to the respondents to study the reaction of the respondents if they distinguished the house that they are renting was previously a murder or suicide scene. The result is shown in Figure 14. There are 38 of the respondents claimed that they will not have the intention to rent the house once they distinguished that it was a psychologically impacted house while 13 of the respondents will request for an explanation from the appointed estate agent to clarify the information that the respondents had received regarding the house. Only 3 respondents will contact the owner to request for a lower rental price compared to the rental price that they had agreed upon.

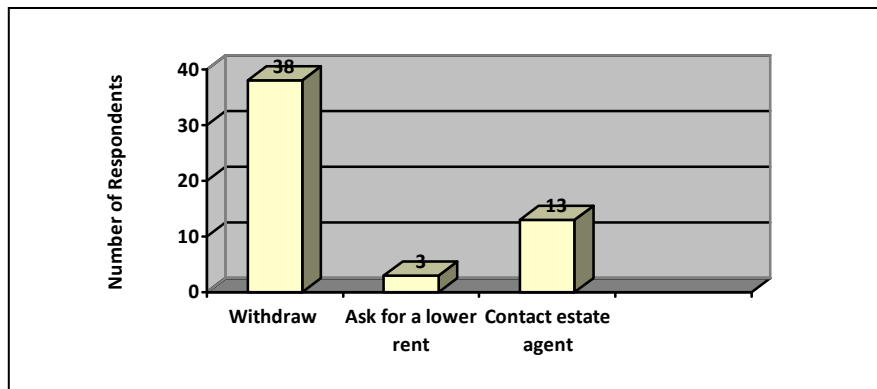


Figure 14: Action taken before renting a psychologically impacted house

Action taken after renting a psychologically impacted house

As shown in Figure 15, 28 of the respondents will take legal actions against the estate agent involved and the owner of the house for not disclosing the information about the murder or suicide that had once happened in the house. While 9 respondents considered moving out of the house once they knew that it was a psychologically impacted house. The remaining 17 respondents will contact the owner and requested for a lower rental price.

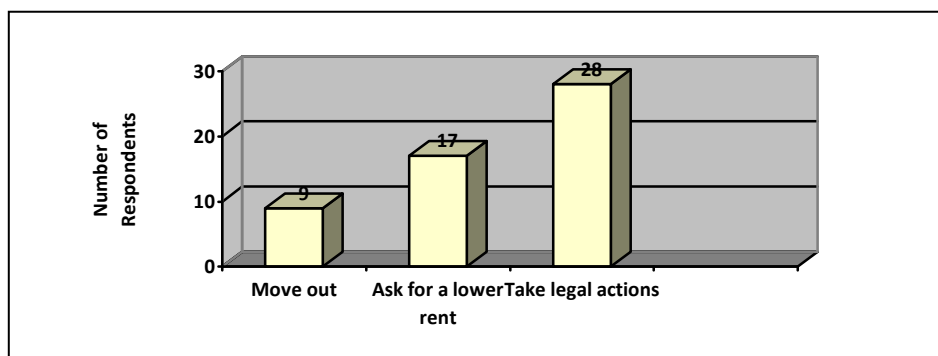


Figure 15: Action taken after renting a psychologically impacted house

Findings from interviews

Interviews are also conducted to identify the opinion of estate agents or negotiators regarding the issue of psychologically impacted houses. Interview session 1 was conducted with 29 estate agents while interview session 2 with 31 negotiators. The overall feedbacks of their opinions are as follows:

Interview Session 1

Most of the interviewees are from estate agent companies located in Petaling Jaya and Mont Kiara area. Most of them declared that they have not come across any transaction or cases of psychologically impacted houses because their firm will only choose a house with a clean track record for marketing. However, they are aware of the psychologically impacted houses in the market. They claimed that there will be problems and issues regarding the marketability of the houses of that category, where there are not many prospective buyers and tenants who are interested in the psychologically impacted houses. Owner of the houses will normally offer a lower rental price than the market value in order to attract prospective buyers and tenants to buy or rent the house.

Normally, prospective tenants who are adamant to do their own research on the property apart from consulting an estate agent will know the history of the house by their own as there will always be rumors being talked by the residents of the neighbourhood. The stigma of the murder or suicide that once had happened in the houses are hard to remove as they believed that the society are still superstitious where they will assume the houses are haunted by the people who had died there. However, they anticipate that there are prospective tenants and buyers who care less about the history of that tainted houses. These members of the society who can be considered as not superstitious and they considered that the house which had a murder or suicide scene is disturbing. If the condition of the house is still good and the owner is offering a lower rent, there are prospective tenants who will accept the good bargain.

Interview Session 2

Most of the interviewees are negotiators in estate agent companies located in Petaling Jaya and Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. They claimed that they are aware of the issue of psychologically impacted houses. However, they still think that the term is not widely used and the legalization in Malaysian has not yet acknowledges the matter. Furthermore, all of them have not handled any cases of tainted properties. However, they are aware with a murder cases in apartments or houses. For example a case in Mont Kiara - a body which had been chopped into 11 parts was found stuffed in a fridge in the unit in 2007. The victim was identified as a businessman from Singapore. The shocking findings were made by a new owner of the unit which he had bought in an action. Media had been covering the brutal murder since the victim's wife had surrendered herself to the police not long after the findings (The Star Online, 2007). Since then, the unit was left vacant as the new owner does not live there anymore.

In the matter of the marketability of psychologically impacted houses, they admit that there will problems in making the properties marketable. Malaysian are still superstitious and do not like the idea of a possible haunted house. To make the properties marketable, the usual approach is to offer a lower rental price. However, there is a possibility that the properties will be in the market for a longer time compared to normal properties as the prospective tenants might hear rumors about the history of

the house. The interviewees think that when the information about the house is being disclosed, there is a big possibility where prospective tenants will withdraw from entering the agreement.

Discussion of findings

The findings of this study can be divided into three issues which are - superstition among Malaysian, the society perception on psychologically impacted houses and the marketability problem of the tainted properties.

Superstition among Malaysian

Based on the survey that has been conducted, it is fair to say that majority of the Malaysian society believes in superstition. Superstitions are still being practiced by the various ethnicities in Malaysia. It can be assumed that the existence of a superstitious society is due to having a superstitious family unit.

One of the external factors that encourage the superstitious beliefs in someone is the influence of their family. It is assumed that almost all of the Malaysian has a superstitious family background whereas family plays an important role in providing the beliefs which has been handed down by ancestors. Friends, however do not seem like a trait to the society regarding superstitions. Media such as movies and television shows are considered as a major source in promoting superstition in the society. As media has been easily accessible throughout the country, thus one has no limit access to the movies and television shows that are being aired. Hindus and Buddha devotees mostly will link their superstitious beliefs with their religion where both religions acknowledge the existence of ghosts. As for Islam, the apparitions of genies are often misinterpreted as ghosts. As for reading materials, the existence of famous author such as Stephen King and R.L. Stine who writes for the teenage promote superstitions among the Malaysian society. The most widely acceptable superstitious belief is the existence of ghosts where the society believed that ghosts are spirits of people who had died unwillingly. Thus, the spirits are believed to be wandering in the earth among the livings as to they has wishes that has not been fulfilled before their death.

Through this research, the issue of superstition had been discussed thoroughly. It had been proved that Malaysians are indeed still residing under the shadow of superstitions. Superstitions are defined as beliefs that are inconsistent with the known laws of nature (American Heritage Dictionary, 1985). It is normal for our ancestors to believe in supernatural powers as the cause of natural phenomena as they were not scientifically developed. These beliefs were then being passed down to the following generations. Even though Malaysia is a developing country, its society can be considered as superstitious. Malaysians which are consists of various ethnicity which each ethnics has its own beliefs, thus a mixture of superstitions are being practiced by the society.

Among the beliefs that are still being hold by the society is the existence of ghosts, misfortune that will happen when certain actions are being done or not being done and various actions which will leads to good fortune. Ghosts are believed to be the spirits of dead people who still have unfulfilled wishes and thus will wander in Earth. In every ethnics, there explanation on why ghosts exists. For example, Malays believe that ghosts are not the spirit of dead people but an apparition of genies, which are created by Allah SWT. These genies with the will of Allah SWT can possess individuals who are weak in form of religion standings.

As for the Chinese, they believe that ghosts are the restless spirits of the dead people. Offerings will be done to bring peace to these spirits. The Chinese even have the Hungry Ghost Festival which is being held once a year on the seventh day of the seventh month in the lunar calendar. It was believed that the Buddha had decreed that once a year, the gates of hell will be opened as to allow the lost souls to roam the earth and be fed (Wikipedia, 2014; Too, 2011). Offerings made of paper in form of money, clothes are being burned by the relatives of the dead for the use of the dead in the afterlife.

Indians believe that there are three categories of spirits where the way they died was different from one another. Hindus, especially believe that a dead person can be ghosts who will haunt the livings based on his or her wrong doings during their lifetime (Gujari Net, 2009). Indians also believe ghosts can possess an individual and the help of a witch doctor had to be sought in order to perform the exorcism.

The perception on psychologically impacted houses

The psychologically impacted houses are believed to be not popular among the prospective tenants as the houses are believed to be haunted. In our superstitious society, death is being considered as a bad omen to properties. Through the analysis of data obtained, it is shown that before renting a house, prospective tenants will consider the location and accommodation of the property. The histories of the houses are barely taken into consideration. However, when it is made known to the tenants that they will be renting or has been renting a house which had been tainted with murders, most will withdraw from entering the rental agreement. Most will also take legal actions against the estate agent or owner who failed to disclose the information. The tenants felt as if they had been cheated to rent the house even though they, themselves has not done any enquires regarding the house before renting it.

The existence of a certain feeling or an aura of a house will influence a tenant in his or her decision making. It is said that one should know then, when a property is stigmatized just by the first instinct he or she felt when first entering the property. Emotional relationship between people and places is also being acknowledged. One can always feel peace and calm in their house compared to when staying in a hotel for a holiday.

Even though it sounds ridiculous, some individuals made their decision on buying or renting property based on their gullible beliefs. This is based on their instinct on the house that they are going to buy or rent. Various studies on the emotional relationship between places and people have been done. Several concepts such as place dependence are being introduced. Place dependence is defined as the distinguish strength between a person and specific places (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981). This concept of emotional relationship can be applied to the feelings one will felt of his or her own house. House is considered as a place where one will feel the ease to be their true self, hence there is no wonder that one will feel safe when being in their own house. The invisible connection between an individual to a place can also be referred as psychological relationship. The Maslow's hierarchy which had been proposed by Arthur Maslow in his paper, 'A Theory of Human Motivation', (1943) can be used best to explain the psychological needs. It is proposed by Maslow that the psychological needs of a human have to achieve first in order to enjoy life. This can applied to the first instinct one felt when entering a new house, usually when doing the first inspection for the potential house to be rent. If psychologically, an individual have a bad feeling for the house, most probably the individual will feel the same way for the rest of the occupancy period of the house.

Marketability problems of psychologically impacted houses

Based on the primary data obtained through the survey and interviews, there are problem when it comes to market stigmatized properties. Psychologically impacted houses tend to be in the market for a longer period compared to a newly constructed house. The suspicion surrounding the property make it hard to market since Malaysian society, being superstitious will not rent a house that has been speculated as haunted.

Psychological defects are defined as the existence of certain suspicion or facts that may create psychologically disturbance where it might influence the buying or renting decision (Larsen and Coleman, 2010). If an estate agent should market this kind of properties, the agent will faced the dilemma on whether not to disclose or to disclose the incidents that once occurred in the house. By revealing the truth of the house's history, the agent will face a risk where the prospective tenants will refuse to make an offer or the risk where the potential tenants will reduce their bid.

The simple of economics is that when the demand of an object increase, the price of the object will also be increased. Hence, what will happen if there is no one who wants to buy a haunted house as in saying there is no demand for the house? The result will be the other way around. Players in the market, who in this context of study are referring to estate agents and the prospective tenants, are the one who will determine the price of the house.

It is justifiable to say that psychologically impacted houses where murder and suicide had once occurred will be less popular than a new house. In this superstitious society, an individual will shudders at the thought of living in a house reported as haunted. There is no much demand for this type of houses as many consider purchasing or renting a stigmatized property as to bring misfortune into their life.

However, the existences of individuals who do not make a big deal on the brutal history of tainted properties have to be acknowledged. There are even fans of the 'Seekers' and 'Misteri Nusantara' television shows who loves the idea of exploring the world of the unseen. Although the paranormal fans in Malaysia are not as bold as the fans in the Western, their interest should be not recognized.

As for the estate agents, they will face a dilemma when handling the cases of tainted properties. They have to choose on whether to disclose the facts of the house or to be silent on the matter. By disclosing the information, they will face a risk where the prospective tenants will withdraw from the deal that had been agreed upon. By being silent on the matter, the agents are at a risk of being sued by the tenants once the tenants had known about the history of the house. A practice that is being practiced by the agents is to disclose the information only when being enquired by the prospective tenants. However, in the society where rumors and gossips are often being taken too seriously, a prospective tenant will know about the incidents that had once occurred in the house as words do spread around.

Conclusions

Malaysia legalization should acknowledge the term of psychological defects where unseen defects in the form of the history of the house can affect a buying decision. A law ought to be enacted regarding the psychologically impacted houses where it outlined the action that had to be taken by estate agents in marketing a stigmatized property.

In California, United States, the concept of psychologically impacted houses is being recognized where an agent must disclose any death that occurred in the house within the past 3 years to any prospective tenants. This is to avoid any confusion of the potential tenants once they had made the offer to rent or purchase the house. By introducing legalization regarding psychologically impacted houses in Malaysia, estate agents are free from any liabilities when they disclose the information to the potential tenants. It is then up to the prospective tenants to proceed with the intention to rent or not. When the prospective tenants are made known to the history of the house and had entered into the agreement, any action by the tenants to withdraw afterwards will cause the tenants to lose the deposits that had been paid as being agreed upon.

The findings of this research indeed proved that the Malaysians are still superstitious even though they came from different backgrounds and ethnicity. Superstition beliefs are believed to be passed down by the ancestors to the new generation. This process keeps going on until now where irrational beliefs are assumed to be true even though they have not been scientifically explained. Malaysian society is also being skeptical when it comes to the issue of psychologically impacted houses. Houses that had once been a site of murder and suicide are being speculated as haunted. Having a superstitious society does not help much in marketing these tainted properties. Victims of the murder and suicides are believed to wander in the house and will haunt the new occupiers of the house. Superstition will then lead to the problem to sell or to rent out a tainted property. Estate agents faced the risks of losing a potential buyer or tenant when the information of the psychologically impacted houses is being disclosed. Proper guidelines or property legislation in Malaysia needs to be created or revised in order to protect both the estate agents in conducting their job with integrity and the prospective buyer or renter, with regards to psychologically impacted houses.

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