

BUILT ENVIRONMENT WELL-BEING IN MIGRANT WORKERS' ACCOMMODATION - A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

In the past decades, migrant workers have faced challenges settling down in host countries due to the temporariness of their work and living situations; provided by employers, the workers' accommodations are mostly built economically, barely meeting the minimum standards. Consequently, concerns were expressed concerning how the poor living conditions of migrant workers were affecting the well-being of this community. It is crucial to define migrant workers' well-being in the notion of "temporariness" to design an adequate temporary living space. Therefore, this research aims to establish a theoretical framework for migrant workers' well-being in temporary, collective accommodations. A systematic review was conducted to identify well-being definitions in the published literature on migrant workers' accommodation, focusing only on collective dwellings of low-wage migrant workers. The literature search on Scopus and Science Direct in July 2022 included 28 studies, and the thematic analysis method was used to review the articles. Five key themes were identified: environmental satisfaction, social well-being, psychological well-being, mental well-being, and subjective well-being. These themes form a theoretical framework of "built environment well-being in temporary accommodations" in migrant workers living quarters. The research focused on migrant workers' well-being concerning their living environment as the main research topic. The developed theoretical framework can guide future studies to evaluate built environment well-being in migrant workers' accommodations and establish directions for temporary workers' quarter design.

Keywords: Accommodation, Migrant workers, Systematic review, Well-being.

1.Introduction

With a total of 169 million migrant workers globally in 2019 [1], the challenge of settling down in host countries is one of the significant issues faced by this community. For low-wage contract-based migrant workers, living in a foreign country would mean losing access to a familiar housing system and often depend on the employers' arrangements to obtain a dwelling space. However, the current situation of low-wage migrant workers' accommodation is often associated with poor sanitisation, over-crowding, insecurity, and insufficient basic living infrastructure [2]. With global concerns about reforming migrant workers' accommodation frameworks, there is an urgent need to examine the existing situation and propose improvements.

It is critical to recognise the existence of migrant workers' accommodation within the context of a temporal infrastructure to evaluate its socio-spatial quality [3]. Temporariness is a migration studies term used to describe the unstable situation of migrants in host countries, including refugees and migrant workers. One of the factors contributing to temporariness is living in temporary accommodations such as hostels, refugee camps or shelters. Due to this nature, collective accommodations provided by employers hardly meet the minimum standards. Concurrently, the accommodations are both “temporary” and “permanent” because there might not be an end in the short term for these inhabitants, turning into a static experience of being temporary which is defined as “permanent temporariness” [4].

Therefore, migrant workers living in deprived conditions are affected longer than the public perceives. Although access to adequate housing in host countries is closely associated with migrant workers' well-being and standard of living, there is common negligence in examining the well-being of these occupants in architectural studies due to the perception that they are not permanent.

1.1. Conceptualisations of migrant workers' well-being with the built environment

Human well-being has been discussed exhaustively from psychological, sociological, and economic perspectives [5]. However, there is much less information about the well-being of migrant workers in their living environment. To address the poor living conditions of low-wage migrant workers, the concept of well-being in the context of temporary accommodation must be precisely defined to provide a clear direction for design interventions. Therefore, this research aimed to establish a theoretical framework for migrant workers' well-being in temporary, collective living environments by identifying key well-being themes in relevant studies. The scope of this study is limited to migrant workers' well-being related to the temporary living environment, using the term “built environment well-being”. Base concepts and themes of well-being from the following conceptual frameworks were referred to establish a basis for identifying themes in the reviewed articles.

1.1.1. Migrants' overall well-being

OECD's Better Life Initiative proposed a set of individual well-being indicators in 2011 based on the recommendations of international experts and best practices of well-being measuring methodologies [6]. It has been widely used to reference

global policy-making and well-being research, including migrant studies. Additionally, the well-being dimensions were used in assessing migration well-being in OECD's migrants' well-being report [7].

1.1.2. Built environment well-being

Hanc et al.'s [5] conceptualisation of building well-being was referred to because of its significance as the first comprehensive scoping review to address the well-being concepts within the built environment. It was cited in several architectural studies discussing the relationship between human well-being and its physical surroundings.

Further to the above, Section 2 of this paper describes this study's systematic literature review process. Section 3 provides details of the built environment well-being themes and sub-themes identified from the included articles using thematic analysis. Section 4 then introduces the theoretical framework of well-being in migrant workers' accommodation informed by the themes. Section 5 discusses the limitations of this study. The concluding section analyses the relevance of this framework for design interventions and possible future studies.

2. Systematic Literature Review

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines 2020 were followed to conduct this systematic literature review.

2.1. Search strategy

A systematic search was conducted in July 2022 using a combination of keywords related to migrant workers living environments, including "hostel", "dormitory", "temporary housing", and "accommodation". The keyword combinations were searched within "title, abstract, and keywords" in Scopus and Science-Direct databases; the research was limited to scholarly research and reviews published in English between 2012 to 2022. The keyword combinations used were as follows:

- "Migrant workers" AND "temporary housing"
- "Migrant workers" AND "accommodation"
- "Migrant workers" AND "hostel"
- "Migrant workers" AND "dormitory"

Due to the scarcity of research addressing the topics of migrant workers' "well-being" and "accommodation" concurrently, literature describing migrant workers' accommodation conditions or environment was screened to determine if there were any well-being dimensions concerning the living environment. Articles from architecture, sociology, psychology, and other scholarly disciplines which fulfil the following criteria were screened and reviewed. The range of different terms used to describe migrant workers' accommodations globally presents a possibility that some relevant literature may not be included.

2.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

As this study focused on low-wage migrant workers, the target group's age range was limited to adults who could leave home for work in a foreign place. Therefore, studies focusing on retired migrant workers or migrant workers' children were not

included. Refugees, undocumented workers, and asylum seekers were also excluded from this study. The study selection was limited to temporary collective accommodations such as dormitories and living quarters provided by employers within the concept of temporariness. Migrant domestic workers were excluded as they did not live in collective housing. Both internal and international migrant workers were included since they fulfilled the criteria of living in temporariness. As the focus is on accommodations, studies related to migrant workers' relationship with urban environments and neighbourhoods were excluded.

Besides the above, a few questions were asked to ensure the criteria are met: a) Does the article describe migrant workers' well-being? b) Does the article describe migrant workers' living environment? c) Does the article relate migrant workers' well-being to their living environment?

2.3. Selection process

The search from Scopus and Science Direct retrieved 1015 records of relevant studies with the keyword combinations indicated above. After removing duplicates and screening through the titles and abstracts, 55 full-text articles were assessed. Of these, 27 articles were not included in the review due to no description of migrant workers' accommodation, well-being, and insufficient evidence to support the relationship between well-being and accommodations. Information on the research themes, methods, author(s), and work sectors was recorded on an Excel sheet. In total, 28 articles were included in the review. Figure 1 shows the flow diagram of the screening and selection process.

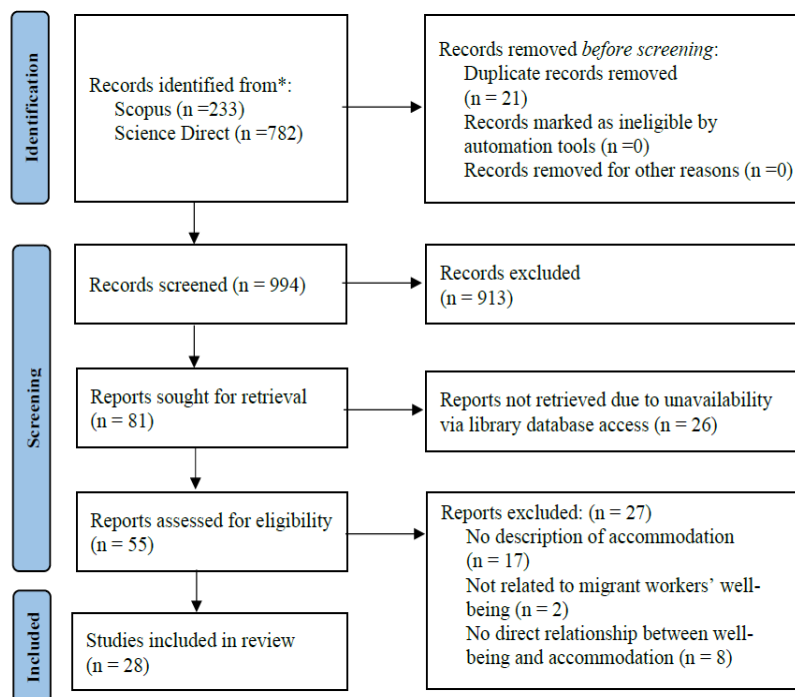


Fig. 1. Flow diagram of the article selection process according to PRISMA (2020) guidelines.

2.4. Selected articles

The review indicated a surge in the migrant workers' accommodation well-being research after the Covid-19 outbreak. About 57% of the studies were conducted between 2020 and 2022 (5 articles in 2022, 7 articles in 2021, and 5 articles in 2020). The remaining 43% was distributed almost evenly between 2014 and 2019. There was a systematic and scoping review; the rest were original articles. Methods used in the original articles are primarily qualitative interviews (15 articles, 53.5%).

Of the studies included, 8 articles (28.6%) specifically discussed the built environment well-being of migrant workers from the agricultural sector, 2 articles on construction migrant workers, while the remaining did not specify any particular work field. Host countries played an essential role in the studies retrieved. Except for studies from China (5 articles) which illustrated issues related to internal migrants, all other articles focused on international migrants. More than half of the included research were conducted in Asian countries (16 articles, 57%), and among these, Singapore had the most studies (7 articles, 25%). The US and Canada were the only non-Asian countries (7 articles, 25%), while no European articles were included. There is a possible risk of bias due to the lack of coverage of countries outside Asia and North America.

3. Themes and Sub-themes

The included articles were carefully reviewed using thematic analysis, and relevant descriptions of migrant workers' well-being were recorded in an Excel sheet. With reference to themes in both conceptual frameworks discussed in Section 1.1, the descriptions were synthesised and summarised to identify major themes and sub-themes related to migrant workers' well-being in their accommodation.

Five (5) major built environment well-being themes were identified concerning migrant workers' accommodation, namely: 1) Physical Health; 2) Psychological Well-being; 3) Social Well-being; 4) Environmental Satisfaction; and 5) Subjective Well-being. The thematic matrix (as shown in Table 1) summarises the well-being themes identified in each study. The reviewed studies revealed that built environment well-being in migrant workers' accommodation is most associated with physical health (14 articles, 50%). Following that were psychological well-being and environmental satisfaction, with 11 articles each (39%). Social well-being was mentioned in 9 articles (32%), and only 2 (7.1%) studies were identified with Subjective Well-being. The sub-themes identified under each main theme further describe the well-being issues discussed. The following discusses the detailed categorisation of sub-themes.

3.1. Physical health

The first theme is physical health, with two arising sub-themes: general health and illness. Generally, studies relate poor general health to a substandard living environment, a common phenomenon observed in most studies. Impaired sleep quality became a primary health concern of the migrant workers within this sub-theme [8-10]. Studies also associated migrant workers' poor living environments with infectious diseases [11, 12]. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many studies focused on illness prevention by reflecting on the design of migrant workers' dormitories. Few studies highlighted the importance of limiting fewer inhabitants

within the same room to prevent the spread of Covid-19 [13, 14]. Comparing two dormitory typologies, apartment-styled accommodations with facilities included in each unit have slower Covid-19 transmission than barrack-style accommodations [15]. Furthermore, a computational model case study revealed that overcrowding in migrant workers' dormitories could be prevented with a combination of physical design modifications and schedule changes [16].

Table 1. Migrant workers' built environment well-being: thematic matrix.

	Article	Physical Well-being	Psycho-logical Well-being	Social Well-being	Environ-mental Satisfact-ion	Subjective Well-being
1	Saldanha, 2022 [10]	X	X		X	
2	Reber, 2021 [17]		X	X		
3	Regmi et al., 2020 [18]		X			
4	Li et al., 2019 [19]	X	X	X	X	X
5	Öztaş et al., 2018 [20]	X		X		
6	Beloborodova, 2018 [21]	X			X	
7	Seo & Skelton, 2017 [22]		X	X		
8	Wang et al., 2016 [12]	X	X		X	
9	Beckford, 2016 [23]				X	
10	Accorsi et al., 2020 [13]	X				
11	Kraemer et al., 2016 [24]		X			
12	Salami et al., 2015 [9]	X				
13	Goh and Lee, 2022 [25]			X		
14	Perry, 2022 [26]		X	X		
15	Dutta, 2021 [27]	X			X	
16	Dutta, 2021 [28]	X			X	
17	Ortner & Tay, 2021[16]	X				
18	Dutta, 2020 [8]	X			X	
19	Perry, 2018 [29]			X		
20	Shirmohammadi et al., 2022 [30]		X			X
21	Lin and Li, 2017 [31]				X	
22	Zhu et al., 2022 [14]	X				
23	Gorny et al., 2021[15]	X				
24	Tong et al., 2020 [32]			X		
25	Tao et al., 2014 [33]			X	X	
26	Mak et al., 2021 [34]		X			
27	Devkota et al., 2020 [35]		X			
28	Regmi et al., 2019 [11]	X			X	
	Total	14	11	9	11	2

3.2. Psychological well-being

The second theme identified is psychological well-being. Four sub-themes frequently discussed under this theme are stress, depression, aggression, and work-life balance.

Stress is highly associated with migrant workers' psychological well-being due to overcrowded dormitories [8, 10] and the lack of basic facilities [35]. Reber [17] discovered that African and South Asian migrant workers expressed different levels of distress reacting to conditions in the dormitories, which include overcrowding and poor sanitation. Some studies did not elaborate on the cause of stress in

accommodations but identified that housing environments comprise one of the stressors among migrant workers [8, 34]. Depression and suicidal thoughts among migrant workers were also reported due to poor living arrangements [22, 27] and the lack of control over their accommodation environment [30]. Aggression was often observed in the context of migrant workers' accommodation. One of the reasons for aggressive behaviour toward dormitory mates was associated with unhygienic living conditions [24]. Canadian migrant workers were "constantly fighting" with their dormitory mates in crowded kitchens and bathrooms, displaying violent behaviours caused by insufficient shared spaces [26].

3.3. Social well-being

The third theme, social well-being, was discussed with sub-themes related to relationships with dormitory mates, the feeling of exclusion in host countries, recreational facilities, and the interaction with co-national migrant workers. The social life of migrant workers was often neglected as it was deemed unimportant. As a result, the lack of adequate public spaces in living environments contributed to poor relationships with dormitory mates. Perry [29] highlighted that interactions between seasonal migrant farm workers in Canada were unfavourable due to "forced intimacies" caused by limited and crowded dormitory spaces. Furthermore, poor living conditions and a mix of workers from diverse backgrounds often led to feelings of isolation from the local community [17]. Similar accounts of social isolation were described by workers interviewed by Perry [29], despite living closely with their fellow workers.

As a result of feeling excluded, migrant workers seek comfort and a sense of belonging by interacting with co-national migrants from the same origin country [27, 32]. Recreational facilities also played an important part in migrant workers' social well-being. Insufficient recreational facilities reduced migrant workers' enthusiasm to work and negatively affected their well-being [20]. The Singapore government's strategy to develop additional recreational facilities for migrant workers addressed their recreational needs while simultaneously fostering urban segregation [25].

3.4. Environmental satisfaction

As the studies were conducted within the built environment context, the included studies constantly explored the theme of Environmental Satisfaction. The most discussed sub-themes were comfort, indoor environmental quality, and basic facilities. The feeling of comfort in living environments was emphasised as one of the primary considerations in designing migrant workers' dormitories. Li et al.'s [19] suggestion for container-based temporary accommodation for construction workers identified sleep and safety as critical aspects of living comfort. More specifically, poor Indoor Environment Quality (IEQ), such as air quality, ventilation, and room temperature, has been observed in migrant workers' living environments. Many studies highlighted the lack of air change [21, 23, 28].

Additionally, room temperature is a common cause of concern owing to the absence of air conditioning and poor heat insulation [12, 23]. In addition, the provision and maintenance of basic facilities and services affected the environmental satisfaction of migrant workers. Housing satisfaction can be considerably increased by improving basic facilities and services [31, 33]. On the

contrary, poor housing maintenance and deteriorating physical conditions increased migrant workers' discontent [25].

3.5. Subjective well-being

The final theme, subjective well-being, is not a primary focus in the studies included as it relates to migrant workers' perspectives and often overlaps with psychological health. Sub-themes discovered under this theme are indicators of subjective well-being, including self-esteem and Conservation of Resources theory (COR). Self-esteem is a significant indicator of subjective well-being [36]. Nepalese migrants reported low self-esteem when living in dormitories with unliveable conditions, negatively affecting their subjective well-being [18]. The COR theory can also be used to examine subjective well-being. Shirmohammadi et al.'s [30] scoping review on migrant workers' subjective well-being draws on COR theory, in which the gain or loss of "personal resources" (defined as status, social networks, and knowledge) affect an individual's subjective well-being.

4. Discussion

This section compares the identified themes to the previously mentioned conceptual frameworks: the OECD well-being index and Hanc et al.'s scoping review. Themes related to physical well-being, psychological well-being, subjective well-being, social well-being, and environmental satisfaction are present in both OECD and Hanc et al.'s well-being framework. OECD referred to social well-being as "social connections" [6], indicating social connections between human beings as well-being factors. As a built environment well-being theme, social well-being in this review concerned interactions between migrant workers and their social interaction needs inside the temporary living environment. Subjective well-being was discussed in Hanc et al.'s scoping review with sub-themes such as "happiness", "affect", and "satisfaction".

Contrary to previous findings, this systematic review only identified sub-themes associated with subjective well-being indicators such as "self-esteem" and COR theory instead of positive indicators. In temporariness, themes related to long-term well-being or not relevant to the living environment were not identified in the articles included. For example, "Eudemonic well-being", which relates to meaning in life and self-actualisation [37], is not present in this study, although this theme was included in both conceptual frameworks above. "Civic engagement and governance", "Income and Wealth", "Jobs and Earnings", and "Education and Skills" in the OECD well-being index were not included as there is no direct causal relationship with the living environment. The above are related to personal rights and growth and are not discussed concerning the housing environment.

In conclusion, the differences in the built environment well-being themes between this study and the conceptual frameworks referenced are primarily attributable to the "temporariness" of the living environments of migrant workers. All identified themes and sub-themes above not only affect migrant workers' well-being directly, but the themes may also influence each other. For instance, physical and psychological well-being are two indicators of well-being that are closely related. Figure 2 illustrates the theoretical framework indicating the relationship between these themes.

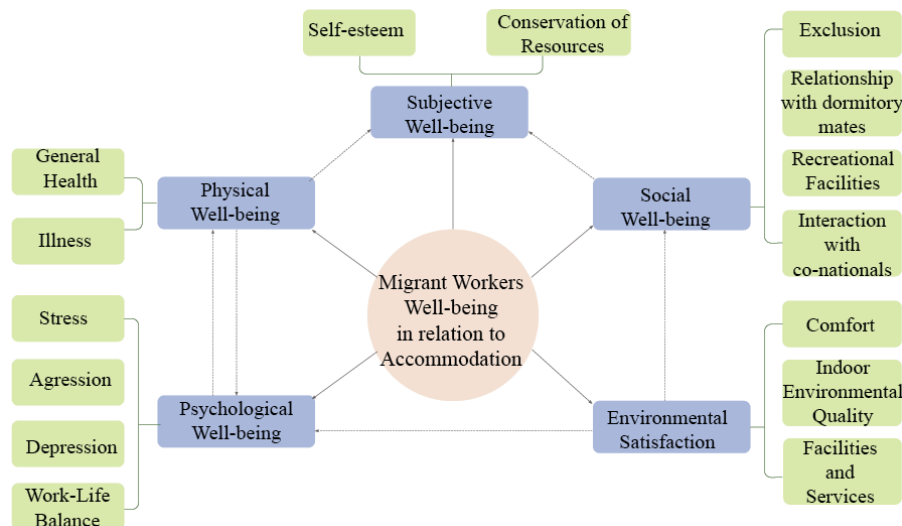


Fig. 2. A theoretical framework of migrant workers' well-being in relation to their accommodation.

5. Limitations

This study also presents several limitations. First, few studies focused on the well-being of migrant workers in relation to their living environment as the primary research topic; hence, most of the discovered themes were derived from peripheral discussions. Furthermore, studies conducted in languages other than English were excluded; hence, the broader perspective of migrant workers' built environment well-being may not be reflected.

6. Conclusion

This review identified built environment well-being themes within the context of “temporariness” and proposed a theoretical framework to illustrate existing well-being considerations. The findings of this study are essential to inform future studies on well-being within temporary living conditions, especially migrant workers' accommodations. Policymakers can identify acceptable accommodation guidelines to address migrant workers' needs by using specific indicators and measurement criteria for migrant workers' well-being in their living environments. This study can also inform architects and designers on the built environment well-being consideration when designing migrant workers' temporary living quarters. Furthermore, it is a reference point for employers when providing employee accommodations. Further studies can be conducted to examine the relationship between the well-being themes and migrant workers' spatial requirements in a real-life environment. Evaluation criteria and methods to assess migrant workers' well-being in collective dwellings can also be further developed using the themes identified in this review.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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