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Local Influence in the Dimensions of Designing Birthing Spaces for the Malay-Muslim Malaysians

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summary Aims and Objectives: The study aims to uncover the myths and realities of cultural and belief influence in the design of preferred birthing spaces for the selected Malay-Muslim population of Malaysia and compare them to the clinical settings of existing community based maternity units with the objective of finding a conducive design for better health outcome for mother and child. The study also seeks to delineate the notion of universal birthing space for all locations that architects should consider the cultural and spiritual dimension in each of their design for better outcome. Clinical and background literature - The Government of Malaysia, in the quest for a healthy nation is continuously providing Women and Child Healthcare centres throughout Malaysia at the hospitals, health clinics and rural clinics of the country. The question posed to architects was: was there a Malaysian standard in designing those facilities? For maternity care, home nursing and home delivery had always been the cultural norm of the Malaysians until the advent of western medicine. Although 21st Century witness a trend where the western society goes back to “homes” delivery either in the community hospital or at the home, the reality on the general condition of the Malaysian society, do still warrant the provision of ‘good’, ‘suitable’ and ‘acceptable’ centres for maternity care other than their respective homes. Current space standards adopted for maternity care in Malaysia are generally based on culture alone to Malaysians. Asians, their lives being very much intense in their culture and beliefs, seems to suceed to those conditions. Methodology and Scope: This paper is a qualitative paper. The methodology for this research is through literature review for secondary data and selected primary data through observation and questionnaires survey on selected architectural firms/architects and sites in Peninsular Malaysia as well as identifying the level of society it serves. The research will be based on the study of traditional birthing practices of the Malay-Muslim and current maternity procedures of the public Alternative Birthing Centers (ABC’s) of the health Clinic and Selected District Hospitals in Peninsular Malaysia. Findings and Conclusions: The findings of this research is in its contribution in demystifying the social, cultural and religious myth surrounding the spatial and environmental requirements of traditional birthing in the Muslim-Malay Malaysian society and how it can provide added input in the establishment of an added criteria towards future design of birthing spaces of the public healthcare facility of that locality. Standard approach for local customization of design Applicability to the field & the work to be done next: The findings from this research will contribute significantly to the main research of the PhD thesis on the “added dimension” as one of the corner for the design of birthing room spaces that address the perceived natural needs of the society. The research will be an impetus for subsequent research of other areas of public healthcare facilities. The significance of this research is in its contribution in demystifying the social and cultural myth surrounding the requirements for traditional birthing in the Malaysian society.

keywords: Birthing Space, Health, Culture & Beliefs, Design,