

Collecting data no easy job

PETALING JAYA: Facing hostile residents, being mistaken for scammers or being threatened by a mentally unsound man – it's all in a day's work for the 9,000-member team tasked with conducting door-to-door surveys at millions of homes for the Malaysia Population and Housing Census.

For Jennie Chiang Huey Yuan, 25, who has been with the Statistics Department's short-term employment programme (MyStep) since last year, entering high-end condos remains a challenge even with the permit she has from the authorities.

"Kuala Lumpur has about 600 condominiums and some management bodies deny us access, citing the law. With the Covid-19 pandemic, it's even harder," she said.

Chiang was once even called a "scammer" while conducting the survey.

"They did not believe that a woman of Chinese descent works with the government. I think this should not have happened because all enumerators state our identity and come with complete documents.

"There was another incident in which we were met by a mentally unsound man waving a sharp object at us during a physical survey.

"Being chased by dogs is also quite normal for us," she said.

Part-time enumerator Nur Ain Baizura Baharudin agreed, calling it "most challenging" when confronting stray dogs.

The 28-year-old from Perak said initially, she felt upset when some senior citizens rejected her questions, claiming that they could not speak Malay or English.

"They brushed me off by saying tak tahu (don't know) while some were worried that I was a scammer.

"But I tried to explain and persuade them to cooperate and agree to be interviewed," she said, adding that she also had to ask neighbours for help in translation.

For department supervisor Dayang Faezah Ag Tuah, 42, conducting the census during the movement control order has meant an even greater challenge.

Recently, a respondent in an elite residential area in Kota Kinabalu scolded and even hurled abuses at her and the other enumerators.

"It was quite upsetting and we could only inform our superiors about the incident," she said, adding that the department continued to engage with the community on the importance of completing the survey.

Part-time enumerator from Sabah, Mohd Hafiz Hatimin, 27, recalls trekking into rural areas and crossing a river in Kiulu to get to the community last month.

“When we were done and about to leave, the river had risen following hours of heavy rain. We had no choice but to wait, “ he said, adding that his team could only head home late into the night.

When Sabah was hit with a high number of Covid-19 cases last year, the response rate among the residents dropped tremendously, with some building management bodies even demanding that enumerators be tested negative before granting access. Anisah Banu Seenimuthu, 44, from Kuala Lumpur, said being an enumerator was a noble duty despite the many challenges.

“However, the awareness (on the need) to complete this once-a-decade census is still low.

“The people need to realise that their data is important to nation-building and our future, ” said Anisah, who has been in the job for over 20 years, including training new enumerators.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/04/19/collecting-data-no-easy-job>