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Impact of Urbanization in a Small Himalayan City: A Case Study

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Abstract:

Thimphu is one of the smallest green cities in the world. As the Bhutan develops economically, Thimphu became the economic centre of the country. Thimphu alone contributes 45% of the GNP of Bhutan. The increasing economic activities simultaneously enhanced the rate of urbanization in Thimphu. This paper assesses the verity of the impact of unprecedented urbanization such as increasing crime rates, traffic congestions, insufficiency of urban infrastructures and their perceptions on urbanization. Such impact of urbanization requires immediate attention of the policy makers. The paper also highlight the possible solutions to address the issues at the earliest by exploring the best city management practices seen around the world. This paper would serve as a reference to develop accurate remedies to the existing issues caused by urbanization in Thimphu.

Keywords: Urbanization, Population, infrastructure, Structural change. JEL Classification O180, O150, O140.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bhutan is one of the smallest developing countries located on the Himalayan Mountains. The form of government in Bhutan is Democratic Constitutional Monarchy. It has not been long since the country instituted democracy in 2008. Bhutan has pledged to remain a carbon neutral country for all times to come but the unprecedented urbanization in the country is a major threat to the ambitious pledge that it has made to the world.

Urbanization is the process of movement of people from rural areas to urban areas resulting in the increase in population in the urban areas. It is also defined as the expansion of urban areas. This is in a demographic sense but it is also identified as the industrialization which is the main driver of rural populations to urban areas for jobs (Chen, Cheng & Peng). In 2009, 30% of the total Bhutanese population was living in urban areas and expected to increase to 50% by 2020 (Bhutan 2020). By 2020, the urbanization level will be 73% and 17000 Ha of land will be required to meet the demand which is 27% of the entire arable land. It is observed that in most of the country the urban population grew with urban proportion (World Urbanization Prospect, 2001)

Thimphu is one of the smallest green cities in the world. It is the state capital of Bhutan. The transition of Thimphu from a small village settled by hamlet group to a modern city began in early 1960s. Today Thimphu is growing at the rate of 10-12% annually and the population density is 3,030 peoples per sq.km. Thimphu has established its Thimphu City corporation in 1955 and prepared its first urban plan in 1964 which remained unimplemented. Later a new plan was developed in 1986 which remains as the development guidelines for the city through 1990s (Thimphu City Corporation, 2010)

Serving the residents of municipality, ensuring smooth progression of all development and other activities within the boundaries of Municipal Corporation and to ensure proper implementation of the Thimphu Structure Plan are some of the missions of City Corporation. Its vision is to build Thimphu, a dream city with rich and vibrant culture. (Thimphu City Corporation, 2010)

According to the first bulletin of Thimphu City Corporation, the city has the total land area of 26 km/sq. with the population 79,185 which comprises of 40% of the total urban population in Bhutan. The city also generates 50 tons of waste per day which has increased from 8 tons per day in 90s. The area has also expanded by 1783 ha.

Royal government has been focussing more on rural development since its 60% of the total population resides in the rural areas. Therefore urban development received less attention from the government. However the population in urban areas are increasing every year which is more likely to cause various social and economic disharmonies in the town.

The Royal Government of Bhutan is facing difficulty in finding external donor for the development of infrastructure in the country. The rapid socio-economic development in the country has increased the demand for urban infrastructure and development plans and on the other hand the concerned authority is faced with increasing challenges in terms of technical support and donors from abroad as well as from within the country (MoWHS). The urban areas in Bhutan lack proper town planning and management. Ministry of Work and Human Settlement has started the work of urban planning since 1974 but the government was not able to carry out with the plan due to the lack of financial assistance within the country and from abroad.

Comparing to other urban areas in Asian countries, the urban areas in Bhutan are least populated. Thimphu had with only 90,000 people in 2005 but it has increases to 104,000 in 2010 with the annual growth of 2.2%. The urban population in Bhutan by next 20-25 years is projected to be 400,000 people where almost half of the total population will be living in urban areas. The population in Thimphu has expanded over a past few years due to the natural rise in the population and also the massive rural urban migration. (Urbanization & Development)

This increase in urban population is putting a greater pressure on the holding capacity of the town. Therefore the town has expanded has expanded its area in the north and south of Thimphu which were considered to be a rural area in the past few years. On the other hand, Thimphu is restrained with infrastructure development such as improved education, health and the housing facilities to support the increasing population. The Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) failed to provide such infrastructure basically due to the inadequate market for the provision of such goods and also the public institution failed to deliver the available services efficiently (Urban Infrastructure Project)

With increasing population, the number of vehicles increases every year. According to RSTA, of the total 53,382 vehicles in the country, 29,139 are found in Thimphu and other major towns in the west.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Urbanization is now felt pervasively over the entire world (Davies 1981 as cited in Roy & Saha, 2011) Bhutan is also facing unprecedented rate of urbanization in major part of the urban areas. According to the report written by Dasho Karma Ura, Migration and urbanisation are two intertwined processes as per the data from Population and Housing Census of Bhutan, 2005. It observed that 51% of the population has moved and moreover people from rest of the country had moved towards western region for employment opportunities, education and marriage.

A report by World Urbanization Prospects in 2001 indicates that by 2030, urbanization will continue to grow to grow throughout the world where by, the number of countries expected to account for 75 per cent of the world's urban population is anticipated to rise to 28 and most of the countries will be from the developing world. Moreover, most of the developing countries has experienced higher annual urban growth ranging from 2% to 6%. The highest growth rate was observed in Bangladesh and Nigeria with the annual growth of 5.9% and 5.6% (World Urban Prospect, 2001). Unprecedented urbanization will put pressure on land resource, urban infrastructure, agriculture land and urban governance and management. Phuentsholing, another largest city in Bhutan, is in severe scarcity of land appropriate for urban extension (PCC, 2004). Moreover, the health sanitation has huge impact on the health of the people especially in reducing the common incidence of diarrhoea and other waterborne diseases. The waste water treatment service is under provided where current mortality rates are quite high. (Urban Infrastructure Project) The current wastewater treatment capacity can treat only 17% of the total wastewater.

As Thimphu being the small city in terms of its geographical area, rapid urbanization would also give rise to various economic and social issues such as urban poverty, unemployment and youth related issues. This statement is in line with the report of World Urbanization Prospects, 2001 which states that small cities with less resources face more constraint to urbanization.

The rapid urbanization in Thimphu is a threat to the flowing Thimphu River. According to a report by Urban Infrastructure Project the current capacity of wastewater treatment can treat

only 17% of the wastewater generated and the population is projected to further increase which will require even more wastewater treatment plants to expand the capacity. Moreover, there is a strong correlation showing that urbanization causes many physical and chemical damages to the Streams (Paul & Meyer, 2001 as cited in Bryant & Carlise, 2013)

On the other hand, if the specific physiochemical factor associated with the ecological impairments are understood and identified, the measures and remedies can be carried out in cost effective ways. These would result in the effective and ecologically relevant outcomes (Bryant & Carlise, 2012)

Comparing to other urban areas in Asian countries, the urban areas in Bhutan are least populated. Thimphu had with only 90,000 people in 2005 but it has increases to 1, 04,000 in 2010 with the annual growth of 2.2%. The urban population in Bhutan by next 20-25 years is projected to be 400,000 people where almost half of the population will be living in urban areas. The population in Thimphu has expanded over a past few years due to the natural rise in the population and also the massive rural urban migration. (Urbanization & Development)

China has experienced an unprecedented urbanization resulting in rapid labour force in urban area since 1980s. This rural urban migration has contributed to the redistribution of resources and rising income of the labours (Song & Yu, 2005) However, in India Municipal Corporation like Siliguri, rural poor come to the town to look for productive work with a view to get two square meals for their families and secure better education for their children (Ahmed, 1954 as cited in Roy & Saha, 2011).

Congestion is usually defined as an average number of people living in a neighbourhood. In case of housing, it means a larger number of inhabitants living in circumscribed area and overcrowding of buildings in that area. (Newman, 1914). Until today the concept of housing is still not clear in Bhutan. This is because Bhutan does not have trained personnel working in such division and the people living in private owned rented place land up paying equal to 30 to 40% of the monthly income to the landlords (Penjor). Due to the increasing population in Thimphu the middle income and low income group were found to be most affected by this issues and the limited housing acts and regulations prevailing today is under monitored and the setting of rent are almost to the wish of the landlords.

The geographical characteristics of Thimphu may fail to expand geographically after certain point of time but the population may continue to increase considering the current rate of migration and urbanization in Thimphu. This point is in line with another study where Breslau city could not expand geographically but kept absorbing the extra populations which further led to urban housing problems in Breslau city. (Barnstone, 2016).

Moreover, Congestion of population and concentration of industrial activities in the urban areas has left no space for the normal human development and efficient industrial growth (Aronovici, 1914). The study is also in line with another study of Procupez in 2015 where the time when Latin American metropolises and other cities underwent urbanization, the city has not been able to accommodate the increasing population of its own and the increasing flow from the rural areas due to rapid industrialization and later by stagnant regional economies.

The report of second largest city indicates that, rapid urbanization has given rise to into more demand for housing. Land values over time have increased rapidly depending on its use. The incomplete and underprovided infrastructure systems leading to inadequacy in services and creates high dependency of housing facilities to the border town of India (PCC, 2004).

Due to urbanization, the number of vehicles in the city is at the rise. The second largest city of Bhutan is facing the increasing car ownership and usage, resulting in the need for road up gradation, improved traffic management and parking facilities (PCC, 2004)

In 2015, the highest crime record in Bhutan was in battery and assault followed by larceny and the crimes related to Drugs. (Kuensel, 2017). In 2015, the crime rate has dropped by 13% but Thimphu continues to be the crime capital of the country (Kuensel, 2016)

According to the 1994 Statistical Abstract of the United States, metropolitan areas have 79 percent more violent crimes than other American cities and 300 percent more violence than rural areas (Glaser & Sacerdote, 2009). Similarly, urban areas in Bhutan experienced comparatively higher crime rates than the rural areas.

The probability of committing crimes in cities are higher than in the rural areas. This is because of the high youth unemployment and lack of income for their living. This statement is in line with another finding of Glaser and Sacerdote that cities may create greater returns to crime because criminals may have greater access to the wealthy and face a greater density of victims in urban areas. The probability of getting the culprits arrested is also found to be low in the larger cities.

With the country's transition from least developed state to more developing state, the crime rate also increases. According to the Police Brigadier Kipchu Namgayal during the press conference in 2016, rising crime in a society is like a side effect of development. The crime rate in Trongsa has shoot up after the Mangdechu power project Began.

People from rural and rest of the country has moved towards the western region in search of the better employment opportunities, education and others. It is observed that an overwhelming percentage of population under the age of 35 had moved in the recent years (Ura). The study is in consistent with another study that modernization theory would view urbanization in the developing country are driven by industrialization, technological progress, information penetration and Cultural diffusion (Chen, Cheng & Peng)

In addition to these, during 1950s, the development economist saw the demand for labour in the urban areas are due to the 'growing modern industrial complex' which is the main pull factor for migration. (Williamson 1988 as cited in Song & Yu, 2005).

2.1. Significance of the Study

Urbanization is major issues all over the world. More specifically, Thimphu is growing at the rate of 10-12% annually. The population density of Thimphu is 3,030 people per sq.km which is comparatively higher than other part of the country. Every year an overwhelming numbers of people moves into Thimphu in search of career opportunities and educational facilities. Beside youths there are also other section of the population moving to Thimphu in search of better living standard. The urban population was 21% in 1999 and is projected to increase to 50% by 2020 (Jamtsho, 2010).

Although Thimphu is the most urbanized and developed city in the country, the geographical structures, lack of technical support and lack of financial aid both from abroad and within the country are the major constraint to the developmental and expansion of urban infrastructures.

The current rate of urbanization in Bhutan will need a gear up for the development of infrastructure. Thimphu is already facing major issues such as high housing prices, water supply shortage, youth unemployment, traffic congestion and high crime rates.

Therefore such impact on the cities due to urbanization needs immediate attention of the policy makers. This study would serve as a reference to develop the remedies to the existing issues.

2.2. The objectives of the study is to

- Examine the impact of urbanization on the Urban Infrastructure
- Evaluate the impact of urbanization on the traffic Congestion
- Assess the impact of urbanization on the crime.
- The study specifically aims to evaluate the people's perspective on housing problem and traffic congestion and crime in Thimphu.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research is quantitatively descriptive in nature. The research examined the impact of urbanization on Thimphu, the capital state of Bhutan. The study employs four specific objectives to study the impact.

The study will deploy three dependent variables namely:

- Urban infrastructure
- Traffic Congestion
- Crime

To assess the impact of urbanization on urban infrastructure, basic urban infrastructure such as housing and health facilities will be studied. Along with the available secondary data, primary data were also collected to evaluate the perspectives of the people on housing crisis, traffic congestion and crimes in Thimphu.

The independent variable is Urbanization.

3.1. Sample and Sampling Technique

The Systematic Random Sampling method was used to draw a sample size of 220. The respondents with varying social and economic groups are interviewed with structured questionnaire starting from 01st March to 5th March 2017.

3.2. Research Instruments

A structured Survey questionnaire was used as a tool to obtain data from the sample population. **For details refer the questionnaire in annexure.**

People's view on housing, traffic congestion and incidence of crime were studied based on some theoretical questions. **See annexure.**

All the questions in the questionnaire were self-structured with strict relevance and context to Bhutanese society. Therefore no sources were referred while structuring the questionnaire.

3.3. Collation and Treatment of Data

The secondary data used were analysed using SPSS and Excel simultaneously. The primary data accumulated from the field was also analysed using SPSS software. A Simple linear Regression and Correlation were run to study the relationships between different variables.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Housing in Thimphu

The survey questionnaires were distributed to the residents of Thimphu of various socio economic background. The questionnaire was distributed to 220 respondent in Thimphu. According to the survey, only 12% of the respondents has their own home where as 88% of them do not own one. Of the total respondents 84% of the respondents are living in rented apartment. The natural growth of the population and

the increasing rural-urban migration has contributed to the increasing population. It has become extremely difficult to find a decent place to live. It is evident from the responses that 43.8% of the respondents are still looking for a place to live in and 89.6% of the respondents said that it is extremely difficult to find a place to live in Thimphu. This finding is consistent with the report published by Phuentsholing City Corporation in 2004 where the increasing population has put pressure on the housing demand.

Beside other possible reasons for not getting a decent place in Thimphu, 70% of the respondents agreed that high rent is the reason for not getting a proper place to live in along with 12% of the respondents stating that long distance from work is another constraint for getting an appropriate place to live. This finding is in line with the study done by Barnstone in 2016, where the Breslau City could not expand geographically but keep absorbing the population further leading to housing problems and rise in housing price specifically.

The increasing population has increased the demand for the housing leading to a higher housing price in Thimphu. According to the survey, 46% of the respondents pay more than 30% of their monthly income as rent while 23.7% of the respondents pay 21-30% of their monthly income as rent followed by 16.7% paying 0-10% of their income as rent.

On the other hand 57.22% of the respondents were happy with the electricity and water supply provision by the city corporation. Even though the respondents believe that the government is coming up with better strategies to combat the urban housing issues, 76.28% of the respondents agrees that there is lack of proper monitoring of housing regulations in Thimphu.

4.2. Health Infrastructure

With the increasing population the demand for health services has also increased. As Shown in the figure 1, NSB 2013 Full Reference?the number of health facilities has increased over the time along with the increase in the population that is from the year 2007 to 2012.

A simple linear regression was run to study the relationship between the growth in health infrastructure and population. The P-value of 0.000651 indicates that there is positive relationship between the population growth and health infrastructure development. It is evident that for every 1000 increase in population the health infrastructure increases by 0.651. (Table 1)

Table 1
Regression table

<i>ANOVA</i>					
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	1	22.49746	22.49746	223.0828	0.000651
Residual	3	0.302544	0.100848		
Total	4	22.8			

The adjusted R square value of 0.80542 also shows that 80.54% of the increase in health facilities can be explained by the increase in population.(Table 2) Moreover, 52.66% of the survey indicates that people are happy with the current health facilities although they have to wait in a long queue to meet the doctors in the hospital as agreed by the respondents.

Table 2
Regression Summary

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.821538516
R Square	0.813417858
Adjusted R Square	0.805427232
Standard Error	0.425313098
Observations	6

4.3. Traffic Congestion

Due to the unprecedented urbanization, Thimphu city has expanded both geographically and demographically. Thimphu has also motorized at a faster speed over the last decade. It is seen that with the increasing number of population the number of vehicles in the city has also increased over the years (Fig 2) NSB 2016 Full Reference?

The study also found that there is correlation between the increasing population and the number of vehicles with correlation coefficient of 0.792. A correlation test was run validate the correlation coefficient and the P-value of 0.000091 shows that there is significant relationship between the two variables

A survey was also conducted to assess the perspective of the residents regarding the traffic congestions in the city. It is found that Thimphu is experiencing the issue of traffic congestion where 76.46% Of the respondents agreed to it. Most importantly 66.06% of the respondents also expressed that they get delayed to work and other destinations due to heavy traffic in and around Thimphu. Due to increasing number of vehicle in the city, it has been hard for the motorist to find a proper parking space in the town whenever necessary. It is evident that 83.13% of the respondents expressed their difficulty in finding a proper parking space. Nevertheless the respondents also agree that the RGoB is coming up with new strategies to deal with the increasing traffic issues in the city.

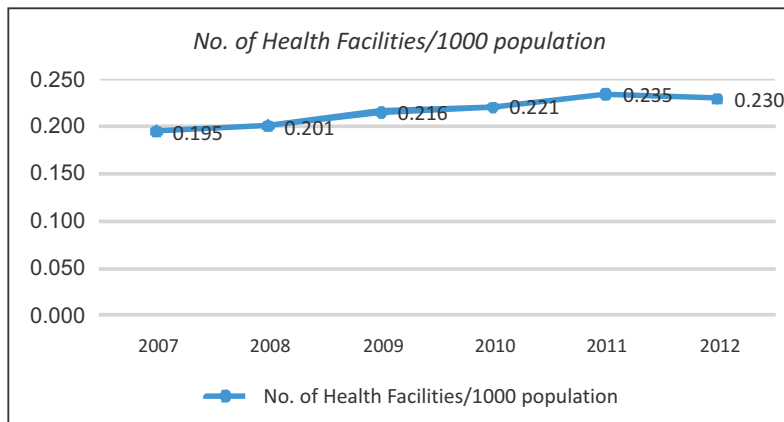


Fig 1: Number of health facilities per 1000 population.

Source: NSB, 2013

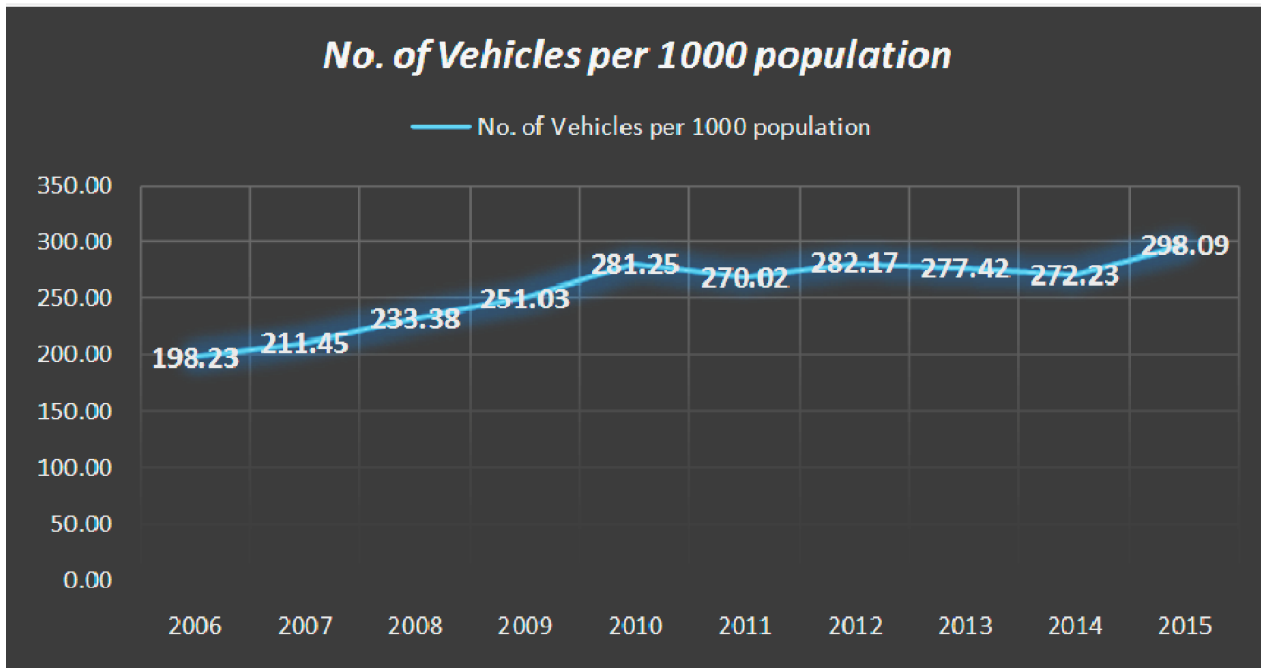


Figure 2: Number of vehicles registered per 1000 population

Source: NSB, 2016

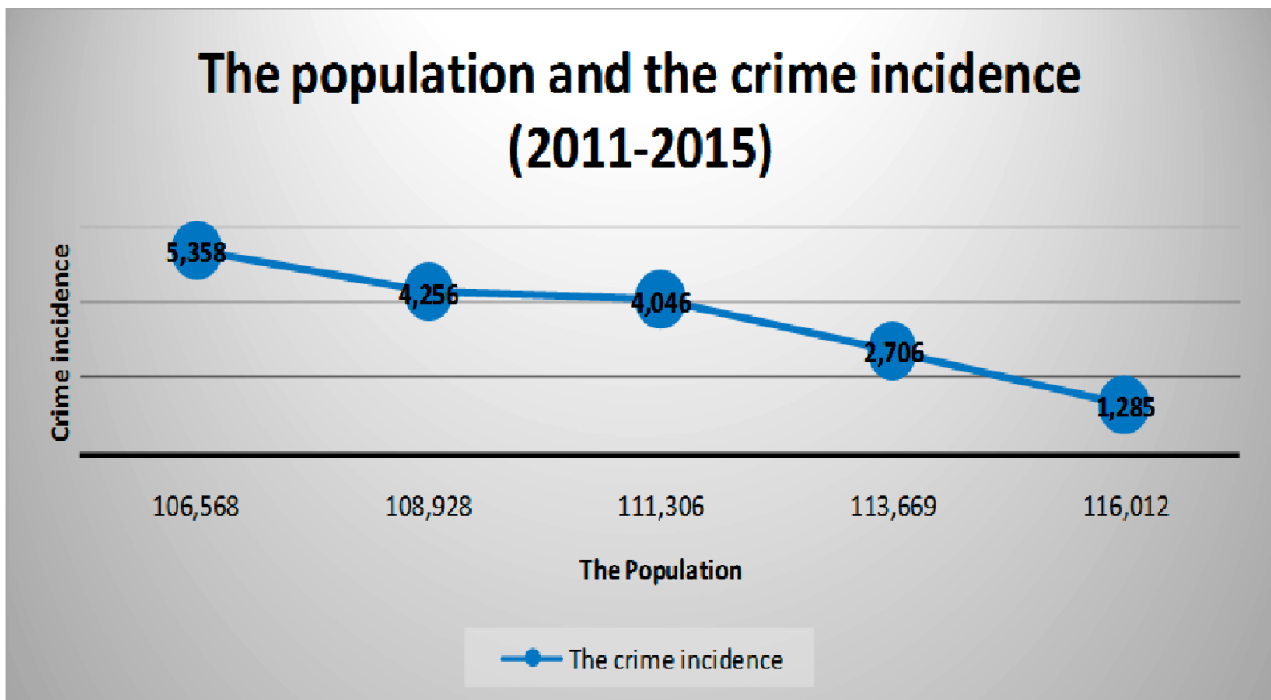


Figure 3: The crime trend over the last 5 years

Source: NSB, 2016

4.4. The Crime incidence in Thimphu

Unlike most of the urbanizing cities in the world, the data available on Thimphu revealed that there is a negative relationship between the crime and urbanization. The incidence of crime in Thimphu has dropped over the last 5 years.(Fig 3)

The study also found that there is negative correlation with the correlation coefficient of -0.762 between the urbanization and incidence of crime in Thimphu. The correlation test was also done to validate the correlation coefficient. The p-value of 0.00436 shows there is a significant inverse relationship between urbanization and incidence of crime.

On the other hand, the survey respondents agree that Thimphu is not so safe to live in. The response of 68.36% agrees that they do not feel safe to walk or stay alone at night. The possible reason could be that Thimphu is the capital city and almost 60% of the crime in the country are happening in Thimphu over the last few years (NSB, 2016). Moreover the other reasons could be that, most of the crimes in the cities get under reported. This statement is in line with the findings of Glaser and Sacerdote where the crimes are under reported in cities and the probability of culprits getting arrested is also low in urban areas than in rural areas.

5. CONCLUSION

The study which deploys both secondary and primary data has shown that with the increasing population in the city, the demand for the urban infrastructure specifically, the housing demand is at its peak. Moreover, the study found that people are dissatisfied with the existing housing regulations.

With the increasing population in the city the health facilities seem to grow at slower rate, and people also expressed that they wait in a long queue to meet a medical doctor.

Over the past years, Thimphu has succeeded in bringing down the crime incidences. As per the annual report, the crime incidences in Thimphu are declining. On the other hand, the respondents have expressed their fear of personal safety and security in the town.

The number of vehicles in the town has been increasing over the last decades which have caused traffic congestion and other traffic related issues in the city. The major traffic issues faced by people in the city are, finding proper parking space whenever necessary and getting delayed to work due to heavy traffic.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusion from the study has shown that with the increasing population in the city, the demand for the urban infrastructure specifically, the housing demand is at its peak. So the government and the concerned authorities should look in to the issues to cater the need of the rising population.

Moreover, the study found that people are dissatisfied with the existing housing regulations. The concerned authority must ensure the proper monitoring of housing regulation in the city.

With the increasing population in the city the health facilities seem to grow at slower rate, and people also expressed that they wait in a long queue to meet a medical doctor. In this regard the government can always check the ratio of population to the available health facilities and health personals.

Although the annual report shows a decreasing crime rates in the city, the respondents expresses the

fear of their safety in the town. The concerned authority should also look into the issues and see if certain crimes in the cities are getting under reported or not.

The number of vehicles in the town has been increasing over the last decades which has caused traffic congestion and other traffic related issues in the city. The Thimphu City Corporation can put a better effort to reduce such issues by improving the public transport facilities.

7. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study done has certain limitation that needs to be highlighted. For the housing variables since no secondary data were available with the concern authority, the analysis were purely on the basis of the perspective of the respondents.

The data available for crime is also limited to last five year which may not serve the purpose of the study. Moreover, within the limited time period and the fund, the study might not have taken to the depth of the issues related to urbanization.

8. ANNEXURES

8.1. Questionnaire

Dear Respondent,

I am conducting a research on 'Urbanization and its impact on Thimphu; A case in Bhutan.' The information accumulated from the participant are highly confidential. I encourage and appreciate sincere and honest response to every question.

1. Please indicate your gender.
(a) Male (b) Female
2. Please indicate your age.
(a) 18 and below (b) 18-30 (c) 31-43 (d) 43 and above
3. Do you own an apartment? Please tick one.
(a) Yes (b) No
4. Do you live in a rented apartment? Please tick one
(a) Yes (b) No
5. Are you still looking for a house? Please tick one.
(a) Yes (b) No
6. How long did it take to get you an apartment? Please tick the appropriate one

0-2 months	2-4 months	4-6 months	6-8 Months	8 Months and above
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What percentage (%) of your monthly income do you pay as rent? Please tick one

0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	30% and above
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Please indicate your response as: Strongly Disagree- 1, Disagree- 2, Neutral- 3, Agree -4 & Strongly Agree- 5

Table

Sl/No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1.	I receive enough amount of water to meet your daily needs					
2.	It is extremely difficult to get a rental place in Thimphu.					
3.	There is proper monitoring of housing regulations in Thimphu					
4.	The public health facilities are well developed in Thimphu					
5.	Government and the relevant authorities are working at their best to improve the public health facilities.					
6.	Normally we do not have to be in long queue to meet the doctors in the hospital.					
Traffic Congestion						
7.	How far do you agree to the issue of “Traffic congestion” in Thimphu?					
8.	I do often get delayed to work due to the heavy traffic?					
9.	It has been hard for me to find a proper parking space.					
10.	The Government and the relevant authorities are coming up with new strategies to minimize the traffic congestion.					
Crime						
11.	The overall crimes are increasing in Thimphu.					
12.	I feel safe to walk/stay alone at night					
13.	Crimes related to woman are increasing					

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