

Perception of Problems and Needs of Near Elderly

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Introduction

Ageing is a new phenomenon for the nation and studies need to be conducted to elicit information on problems and needs of the current elderly and the future elderly in Peninsular Malaysia. The study was design to establish the socio-economic profile, socio-psychological health, perception of needs and problems of near elderly and elderly and to determine the extent of preparation to face prospects of individual ageing. The data will provide vital information on the status of the current elderly and glimpses of the future elderly.

Materials and Methods

The research was conducted in two phases: phase one, was conducted for the near elderly and phase two, was for the elderly population. The 1408 near elderly sample was derived from the public sector workers. The sample was proportionate to sex and the different categories of employment in 1996. The elderly sample of 1726 was proportionate and based on the 1991 census. A survey amongst government sector workers was carried out in the middle of October-November 1996 and another survey was implemented amongst the elderly in the months of October-November 1999.

Results and Discussion

Majority of the near elderly sample was married men within the ages of 44-49 and had upper secondary education with the mean of four children. The mean monthly income was RM1280. In terms of living arrangement many want to live in the kampung after retirement for reasons of convenience to relax. Their main source financial support is old age is pension and EPF and a third mentioned work after retirement. However, about a quarter of the respondents mentioned their present income was

adequate only for basic necessities. About a third had some savings in the form of cash and share that amount to less than RM20,000. One fifth had life insurance and very few had health insurance. Majority placed their identity with their work. Majority of respondent had not thought about life after retirement they wanted to relax. However, perceived that life after retirement will be a happy one and they will not have many problems. Nevertheless, 80% felt they will be dependent on someone when they are old.

In terms of health problems a high percent suffered eyesight and high blood pressure as many recorded having family history of high blood pressure. Their source of health information is from doctors, newspapers, and televisions and radios. Slightly more than fifty people consumed vitamin supplements. Close to fifty percent recorded sedentary life style and one-third smoke about 16 sticks of cigarettes a day.

A small percentage is not happy with life because of health problems and inadequate income. Similar reasons were given for being happy. Having better health status would make respondents feel happier and more than forty percent worries about their health status in the future. Slightly more than fifty percent worries about their children's education and a third worries about their family's future and road accidents.

In terms of value orientation, respondents are concern about their spiritual well-being, they reported strong communal spirit and harmony and they felt it is right to re-organised society based on problems faced.

The respondents' reported health is good and they received medical attention when needed. They also did not have problems in conducting their daily life activities and instrumental daily

life activities. (ADL and IADL). Sources of information on health matters are doctors, television and friends. Government health facilities is still the place where they received health treatments, second is private health facilities. Older persons are members of political organizations, religious groups. Other community involvement is in *gotong royong* activities.

Conclusions

The near elderly had positive attitude towards retirement even though they seem not to have thought about life in retirement. They also seem to have dependency orientation. This might not fare well when they might not have network of support relationship. Most of them want to return to their place of origin after retirement. Health, finances, children and family is their utmost concern for their future. It is a bit premature to conclude on the status of the older persons, as the data has not been analyzed fully.

Benefits from the study

The benefits of the study are for policy and programme implications. There is a need for pre-retirement planning programme instituted at most workers had idealistic attitude towards retirement even though they had not thought about life in retirement. The life style of the workers especially in term of health behaviors might develop into potential health risk factors in old age. For the older persons, their profile and living situations will provide impetus for further work in the area of lives of the older persons and also provide a basis of programme design and planning based on expressed needs and problems of the older persons themselves.

Literature cited in the text

None.