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## Frequency of Family Support of Older Rural Malaysian

<sup>1</sup>W.A. Wan-Ibrahim and <sup>2</sup>I. Zainab

<sup>1</sup>School of Social Development, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia,  
43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

**Abstract:** Population aging has become a challenge not only for developed countries but developing ones as well. Malaysia is being no exception. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the frequency of family support of older citizens in rural Malaysia. The design used in this study was a combination of the sociological method of face-to-face interviews and the anthropological method of participant-observation. Analysis on the frequency of support shows that the frequency of support the elderly receive varies. The analysis reveals that, out of 214 respondents, 20.2% reported they did not receive any support at all from family. From 79.8% of the elderly who receives support from family, 53.0% receive it once in a while and 26.8% receive it always in three weeks before the study. There were kinds of support the elderly received in almost every day, while others the elderly respondents only received once in a while. From the number of respondents who receive support shows that the welfare of older persons in rural community is not abandoned.

**Key words:** Elderly • Population aging • Care • Family • Family support

### INTRODUCTION

This article presents the results of a survey conducted at household level to examine the frequency of family support of older persons receive in rural Malaysia. Older person, a term used in this paper to refer to population aged 60 years and older, is growing in all countries [1]. There are much more older persons living today than ever before [2]. The growing of this population represents a human success story [3]. This is because, it is in the last two centuries that human population has successfully improved quality of life and life expectancy of most of the population has successfully been extended. In the eighteenth, or even in the early nineteenth centuries, life expectancies of the population all over the world were low. Many people died from infectious diseases such as typhoid and cholera. But starting from late nineteenth century, many development have been achieved in health technology resulted in the decline in the death rate as well as the prolongation of life. Demographers currently project that world older population aged 65 years and older will reach 1.3 billion by 2040 [3], with virtually all growth occurring in

developing countries. Although the current level of population aging varies widely by geographic region, all nations are now experiencing the growth of their older population and since 2007 it is projected that the world older population grew by an average of 870 000 every month [3].

Malaysia's population is in fact still youthful as according to the 2000 Census, it was recorded only 6.3% of the population aged 60 years and above [4]. The number of older persons is increasing substantially. In most cultures throughout the world, including Malaysia, the care for elderly parents is a responsibility that falls on the shoulders of the family. Thus, understanding the family support is important prior to developing any appropriate social and economic policies addressing the needs of older persons.

Because adult children can offer a broad range of support, from social or emotional to financial as well as physical care, they are generally viewed as the keystone to the care in later life. Thus, most of older persons in Malaysia found to be living with their adults children. It is only recently that it has become a normal situation to see elderly parents living alone in rural setting without the

**Corresponding Author:** W.A. Wan-Ibrahim, School of Social Development, Universiti Utara Malaysia,  
06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia.

presence of adult children and this situation is increasing substantially. A nationwide survey conducted in Selangor, Melaka and Negeri Sembilan by Masitah and Nazileh [5] revealed that about 51 percent of Malaysia's older persons aged of 55 and above live with their adult children. Another survey conducted in rural Kelantan [6] also showed that less than 50 percent of older persons aged 60 years and over live with their adult children. Through these surveys, it was revealed that more and more older people have to live alone. Family structure in Malaysia has also changed dramatically in recent years.

In traditional Malaysian society, particularly in rural areas, the older persons used to live with their children in the same household. Urban lifestyle is a new phenomenon. Through the history, the human population has lived in rural areas [7]. At that time, most families have an average of six to seven or even more children. Moreover, these adult children, if not living with their elderly parents in the same household, they were living in the same locality. Although until now in rural areas family is still the main support provider for old people, this situation has changed. More and more adult children are moving out, leaving their elderly parents in rural areas. If we found there are adult children live with their elderly parents, it is only for a temporary time frame. Also, because of certain reasons, such as still cannot afford to buy their own house. More frequently, children who live in the same locality with their parents are those who do not have opportunity to get a better education and thus do not have the opportunity to get a better job in urban areas, forced them to live nearby. Because of this, the welfare function of the Malaysian's family was reduced. This is, in part, due to the social and economic changes in rural environment following the implementation of the New Economic Policy in 1970 that encouraging young adults moving out to urban areas for job opportunities. Adult children who remain in rural areas are those who were dropped out and did not have opportunity to further their education.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The design used in this study was a mixed-method approach that is a combination of the sociological method of face-to-face interviews and the anthropological method of participant-observation. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the frequency of family support received by the older persons in rural Kelantan, Malaysia. The data reported in this paper is part of a larger study conducted

on the rural elderly to determine the factors affecting the well-being of these elderly in the state of Kelantan. From that survey a wide range of data has been collected, including data on marital status, living arrangement, the relationship of the elderly with their spouse, children and other family members, social relationships their neighbors and social support for older person. Relevant to this paper are variables related to the frequency of support the elderly respondents received.

Population from which samples of the study were drawn, was the older population aged 60 years and above numbered 1 067 living in rural areas in the district of Limbongan, Kelantan, Malaysia. Out of this number a total of 214 older populations were selected as respondents using simple random sampling technique. The study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data. Major data for the quantitative analysis are derived from face-to-face interviews. Data for the qualitative analysis are derived from unstructured interviews, information from key informants and field observation.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Socio Demographic Profiles:** As in any community elsewhere, due to the fact that the life expectancy of elderly women is higher, the majority of elderly population is women. In this study however, the majority of the respondent is man. The average age was 68 years, while median and mod of age was 67 and 60 years respectively. The age of oldest respondent was 95. In terms of marital status, three respondents were never married. The respondents currently married was 143, four divorced and 64 respondents were widow/widower. In the never married category, there were two elderly male and one elderly female. Male respondents currently married outnumber female respondents (112 male compared to only 31 female respondents).

In terms of academic, the educational attainment or educational level of the respondents reflect the level of academic among the Malaysian as a whole before Malaysia gained independence from British in the past several decades (1957). At that time not many people, especially in rural areas, has the opportunity to attend formal school. As all of the elderly respondents are those who were brought up at the time before independence, they did not have much opportunity to attend formal school. Analyzing the educational attainment, the level of education of the respondents was low.

Table 1: Frequency of Family Support Received

Form of Support	Never	Sometimes	Always
Financial	6.5	63.6	29.9
Other than financial (goods)	39.7	46.7	13.6
Home repairing	26.6	55.6	17.8
House cleaning	15.4	39.7	44.9
Pay local bills	12.6	59.4	28.0
Total	20.2	53.0	26.8

More than half was never attend formal school (58%). Around one-third has an elementary school level. The elderly woman who did not attend formal school was higher. In terms of employment status, nearly 60% of the elderly respondents are not working.

**Frequency of Family Support:** Family support can be analyzed in terms of sources of help, type or form of support, availability of support and it also can be analyzed in terms of frequency of support. Especially in developing countries, family is very important in the life of older persons. To measure the frequency of family support, respondents were asked five forms of family support, namely (1) people who support in terms of financial assistance, (2) people who support in terms of other than financial, (3) people who support in repairing any damaging items, (4) people who support in cleaning up the house and (5) people who support in paying the bills. They were asked to rate on these five forms of support whether (1) never, (2) sometimes and (3) always (Table 1).

To obtain support is not difficult in rural areas. As Table 1 reveals, out of 214 respondents, 20.2% reported they did not receive any support at all from family. From 79.8% of the elderly who receives support from family, 53.0% receive it once in a while (sometimes) and 26.8% receive it always in three weeks before the study. In the form of financial assistance, there were only 6.5% of respondents reported they did not receive support within three weeks before the study. The majority of them (63.6%) received support of this type once in a while and 29.9% received the support of almost every day. The respondents who never get this kind of support is very small. Giving money to the parents, or to anyone who is old, for most of the population in the study area, is a common practice.

Because the majority of respondents in the study area are living under the poverty line, money is very crucial. They are likely perceived money is more important than any other form of support. Money is important for old age security. One of the major attractions of children for the majority of respondents is the old age security and other

benefits the elderly parents will get from children. Elderly parents, when they are no longer able to work to earn a living, the children are available as sources of help. It is for this reason the rural society usually put pressure to the married couples to have children in marriage. Following the importance of children in old age security of elderly parents, there were found that the newlywed children, sons or daughters usually will be pressured to bear a child as soon as possible. Parents or parents-in-law usually do not want to wait any longer to have a grandchild in the hope that, besides their importance in old age security, these children also can help their parents in the work outside the home or in domestic chores.

There were a number of respondents who did not get support in the form other than financial assistance (39.7%), while the number of respondents who get this kind of support every day was small (13.6%). About half of respondents received this kind of support once in a while (46.7%). Gift items was one of the items of this support elderly persons always receive. Not all of respondent received this support as quite a number of them who were living with no neighbors nearby. In terms of repairing any damaging items at home, there were 55.6% of the respondents told they received it once in a while. There were also quite a lot who did not receive this support. The most common support received was in the form of support to help clean up the house. 44.9% of elderly said they received this support almost every day. Respondents who did not get this kind of support were the elderly living alone and did not have spouses and close relatives. Paying for the bills, such as water and electric bills are also support the elderly receive a lot.

In short, children are particularly important in the life of older persons in study area. Except those who used to be working in the informal sectors, other older respondents who are self-employed will be depending on their adult children for old age security. The respondents recognized the importance of having children, particularly for the economic benefits in old age. Unstructured interviews with some of the respondents on this matter revealed that the majority of the respondents want many children in family. There are many reasons for wanting many children in the family. The most important reason for wanting many children given by these respondents is to provide support and care in their old age. Thus, we can say that the contribution the children can make for the life of older parents has become a main reason why the elderly respondents in this study hope to have many children.

The important of children in the life of older persons as reveals in study area is in line with the importance of children in Islam. Islam places great importance to family. All children have to care and support their parents when their parents are no longer able to support themselves. Elderly parents should be taken care of by their adult children. According to the Qur'an, Allah says in the Chapter al-Isra' (17), verse 23-24: "Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, no repel them, but address them in terms of honor. And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility and say, "My Lord, Bestow on them thy Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood" [8]. Because of Islam places extremely importance upon the responsibility of adult children to elderly parents, we found most of elderly respondents in study area receive support from family members. Islam imposes a great sin to children who neglect or reluctant to give support and care toward their elderly parents, while the children who give assiduous care towards their elderly parents will receive blessing from God in life and will be rewarded in the life after death. As far as they can, adult children in the study area do not want to be labeled as *anak derhaka*, or *tidak kenang budi*, which refers to the adult children who neglect or reluctant to give support and care to the elderly parents [9].

### CONCLUSION

To conclude, following the increasing number of older persons in society, family support plays a critical role in the lives of older respondents. This is in line with the potential contribution family members can contribute to the welfare of older persons as in other parts of developing worlds. The main objective of this article was to analyze the frequency of family support of older citizens in rural Kelantan, Malaysia. The finding of the study shows that the frequency of support the elderly receive varies. The analysis reveals that out of 214 respondents, 20.2% reported they did not receive any support at all from family. From 79.8% of the elderly who receives support from family, 53.0% receive it once in a while and 26.8% receive it always in three weeks before the study. There were kinds of support the elderly received in almost every day, while others the elderly respondents only received once in a while. There were factors related to the frequency of support the elderly respondents received. These factors, among other factors, were geographical proximity, marital status of adult

children, whether adult children living in the same household and the number of friends their adult children have. All these factors are seen to be important factors in determining the frequency of support to the elderly respondents at the study area.

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