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## Social Barrier in Da'wah Mission to Older Population

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**Abstract:** Although the number of older population in Malaysia is still small as compared to developed countries, its number and percentage are now increasing. This is certainly posing particular challenges to the missionaries in their efforts to invite people to the oneness of Allah. This paper discusses the aging of population and its problems in the context of da'wah mission to older population. To explore social barriers in da'wah mission to older population, this study interviewed five key informants aged between 41 years to 60 years. It was revealed there are five major problems will be faced by missionaries in their da'wah mission. These problems include health problems, overwhelmingly elderly women in the community, decline in mosque attendance, poverty and negative attitude of the elderly. With health problem the older people may not be so interested to think about religious practices. As the number of older women is more than the older men, preaching may not receive attention in the future because preaching activity mostly done in the mosques and women are not so encouraged to go to mosque. Because of too old they become less interested in visiting places of worship and preaching activities. Poverty and negative attitude are also become social barriers.

**Key words:** Older population • Population aging • Preach • Mosque attendance • Poverty

### INTRODUCTION

Although the number of older population in Malaysia is still small as compared to developed countries, its number and percentage are increasing. This is certainly poses particular challenges to the missionaries in their efforts to invite people to the oneness of Allah where the vast majority of the adult population is older persons. Although the aging of population is the success story of development process [8], it also poses various problems to the older persons [5]. The importance of religious in the 21st century cannot be denied [12]. This paper discusses the aging of population and its problems in the context of da'wah mission to older population in Malaysia. When a person becomes older his physical ability will decrease. Thus the preacher will be facing with challenges and barriers in undertaking the task with older persons. This is particularly true as da'wah mission, as an activity of inviting people to Allah, frequently conducted in mosque. Ibn Abbas narrated that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "There are two

blessings which many people lose: (They are) Health and free time for doing goods" [3]. In other Hadith, Mujahid narrated that Abdullah bin Umar said "Allah's Apostle took hold of my shoulder and said: "Be in this world as if you were a stranger or a traveler". The sub-narrator added: Ibn Umar used to say: "If you survive till the evening, do not expect to be alive in the morning and if you survive till the morning, do not expect to be alive in the evening and take from your health for your sickness and (take) from your life your death" [3]. These Hadith summarizes the phases which one may go through throughout life; youth, middle age and old age. Old age means one faces many difficulties as compared to the youth. Thus, a da'wah mission to these persons will also be challenging and difficult. As this mission would include everybody; it requires certain approaches.

There are three approaches suggested, namely preaching with wisdom (*al-hikmah*), preach the good advice (*al-maw'izah al-hasanah*) as well as a good approach and effective confrontation (*al-mujadalah bi al-husna*). These approaches are evident in the words of

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Allah in Chapter al-Nahl (16), verse 125: "Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth the best, who have strayed from His Path and who receive guidance" [1]. As Islam is a religion based upon surrender to the Will of the One God or Allah, da'wah mission continues to be practiced in accordance with that principle: "inviting people to the will of Allah and His oneness" because gaining peace in Islam is by virtue of this very act of surrender [11]. Islam sees religion as not just as rituals alone but it included all the facets of human life. It is a way of life (*al-din*). That is why Islamic religion always uses the term *al-din* as embracing all the facets of human life, leaving nothing outside its dominion [11].

The older population, which defined as the population aged 60 years and above, has been increased dramatically all over the world in recent years. Although the number and proportion of older person in Malaysia is still small [13], it is recorded that Malaysia has also shown signs of population aging. In 1970, its number was 539 118, 5.2% of the total population of Malaysia at that time. Ten years later (1980) this figure has increased to 745 152 (5.7%). In 2000, the percentage was still not exceeded 7% and it is projected that there will be 3 216 000 older persons aged 60 years and older in 2020 which is around 11.3%. With many older persons in society, the activities of da'wah will become complicated because da'wah missions frequently involve certain activities. The preacher frequently invites people through these activities. Older people, because of their limitation, frequently do not have a strong desire to participate in activities conducted. In this context, the purpose of the present paper is to discuss barriers to da'wah mission in an aging population.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Following there are signs that the population of Malaysia is moving towards aging, it is felt important to gather a lot of information on this category of population. This information is particularly important in order to provide a strong basis for plan of action to address whatever the needs of older persons in the future, including the efforts of preaching. The study from which data for this article are obtained, conducted using a qualitative design. This study explores the opinion of five key informants through several in-depth interviews. Informants were aged between 41-60 years, all worked as university lecturers. Two have a PhD degree, associate

professors and three others are working on a PhD thesis. They are two women and three men, selected based on their academic background. From the in-depth interviews, there are five major barriers of preaching have been explored, namely: (1) health status of older persons, (2) more woman older persons in the community; (3) frequency of attending mosques declines; (4) poverty and (5) negative attitudes of older persons.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Health Status of Older Persons:** The experience of later life of every individual varies considerably. Some persons exhibit health declines quite early, whereas others continue to function as better than ever into their 80s and 90s and gerontologists now argue that early declines reflect pathology, rather than the effects of aging [4]. An important issue concern with population aging has been the changes in health status of older population and the implications of these changes for social and medical services, family relationships and public programs [17]. As the number of older population grows, the demand for health services rises. In countries with a high proportion of older population, government faces the task of improving health services to meet the special demand of the older population. The increasing age of the population, from one aspect, is the success of development, but on the other aspects, it can cause problems. This is because the increasing in age is not necessarily accompanied by better health. They are two different things. Human beings now have the opportunity to live into old age, but many of them do not enjoy healthier living. Health problems can be a troublesome for individuals to perform religious practices. They may not be so interested to think about religious duties because of their health conditions hindering them to perform the duties correctly. Thus, da'wah mission in a society where older population is the majority will be a difficult one.

**Female Population:** One common characteristic of populations throughout the world is the preponderance of women at older ages [7]. Women are the majority of older population and the share of this category of population increases with age. Life expectancy, the average expected number of years a person can live calculated from birth to death is not the same as in the male and female population. The life expectancy of the older persons means how many years the older persons could expect to live. Life expectancy of older people aged 60 years and over in the world is increasing. In the year

1990 to 1995 life expectancy of elderly men recorded as 15.2 years and 16.9 years for female and in the year 2000 to 2005 it increased to 15.9 and 17.8 for male and female respectively. In the year 2010-2015 the life expectancy of the elderly is expected to increase further to 16.6 for men and 18.4 for women [15]. In most Asian societies, because of women have longer life expectancy, older women make up the majority of older persons in this region [14]. Particularly among the oldest-old aged 75 and above, female elderly population outnumbers their male counterparts [6].

Generally life expectancy of female population exceeding male is about five years or more. Life expectancy in Malaysia is also higher among women. It was estimated that, in 1970 the life expectancy for male was 61.6, while 65.6 for female. In the year 2000 these figures were 70.2 and 75.0 and in 2010, the figures were increased to 72.6 and 77.5 [9] and as a result there will be more elderly women in the community in Malaysia in the future. Life expectancy is an indicator of the number of years a person is likely to live at the time of birth [9]. In the context of preaching, overwhelmingly female population could create problems for preachers in fulfilling their task. Their efforts will not be attractive.

This is due to the fact that in Islam, women are not so encouraged to go to mosque. They are encouraged to perform any religious activity at home. Because of this, in the near future, as preaching activity is mostly done in the mosques, centers of religious activity are likely to be not so attractive. This situation adds another problem and poses challenges to preacher to their effort of preaching da'wah to older women effectively.

**Decline in Mosque Attendance:** Mosque and daily life cannot be separated in Muslim life. Indeed, mosque attendance is an important indicator to measure an individual religious commitment. Preaching efforts in Muslim community mostly done in mosques. All Muslims are trying to attend mosque to fulfill the religious duties. Studies on religious commitment outside Malaysia show the percentage of older persons who visit church declined in parallel with the increasing age. Visitors to mosque are also generally the middle aged, or the young-old. There will be not many too old people attending mosques. Wan Ibrahim and Zainab [16] found only a small fraction of their respondents reported always come to group prayer in mosques. This is because increasing age is frequently accompanied by a decline in physical health. Physical condition makes people difficult to move and result in less

interested in visiting places of preaching activities. With various forms of activities conducted in the mosques [2] and also if the community is full of older people, da'wah mission will particularly be difficult to conduct.

**Poverty:** Globally, the poverty rates among the older population as a whole are lower than they are for people of other age groups. Moreover, women are at greater risk of poverty than men and the old-old are more likely to be poor than the young-old [10]. For most people poverty is obvious. In fact, poverty is a major problem around the world in Muslim community. The poor cannot afford to look ahead. Their thoughts and attention are apparently limited to the fulfillment of daily living needs. They are even willing to do anything as long as they can get the bowl of rice for their children. Poverty is a challenge to the preaching activities. That is why there are people who are dare to change Islam to the religion that offers luxury livings. Various forms of financial assistance from other religion including scholarships fees, books, clothing and other living expenses directed to students to influence their religious beliefs. Luxury items like this can affect the fidelity to the religious beliefs of elderly. People who are in extreme poverty often see material is more important than thinking about religious matters. Poverty has been stated by the Prophet Muhammad as a disease that can lead to disbelief.

**Negative Attitudes of Older Persons:** The older persons in the study area, although by no means all, are also said to always have a rather negative attitude. If these older persons were committed with their religion when they were young, the preaching efforts to these people may not be too difficult. But if the way of life of these older persons when they were young is not accordance with religious practices, then it is difficult for preachers to persuade them to religious activities. Today, there are still many older persons who practice a way of life that is incompatible with religious requirements even though they are on the verge of death. This negative attitude makes the preaching affords so difficult. Health status of older persons also seems to be a major barrier for them to be actively involved in religious activities because aging goes hand in hand with deterioration of health. Because this category of population are seems unlikely not to be actively involved in religious activities, they will also will be reluctant to go to the mosques which eventually will also become a barrier to the preaching efforts.

## CONCLUSION

This paper discussed the aging of population and its barriers in the context of preaching or da'wah mission in Malaysia. The increasing number of older persons in the community can bring various challenges to missionaries in their efforts to invite people towards the oneness of Allah and da'wah mission to older persons will be challenging and difficult. Through in-depth interviews there were five main problems faced by missionaries in preaching da'wah to the community where the majority of the population are the older persons, namely; health problems, overwhelmingly elderly women in the community, decline in mosque attendance, poverty and the negative attitude of the elderly themselves. Health problems can be a problem for individuals to perform religious practices. With health problem the older people may not be so interested to think about religious duties. As the number of older women is more than the older men in the community, preaching may not received attention in the future because preaching activity mostly done in the mosques and women are not so encouraged to go to mosque. Poverty and the negative attitude of the elderly persons are also will become main barriers in da'wah mission to older population. As the older population continues to increase all over the world, including Malaysia, all these barriers are seen to be facing by future missionaries in their efforts to invite people towards the oneness of Allah.

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