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Interdependency and Quality of Life amongst Malay Older People in the Community: An interpretative phenomenological analysis

Ahmad Shahir Abdul Mutalib, Akehsan Dahlan^{*}, Ajau Danis, Mohamad Ghazali Masuri

Occupational Performance and Behaviour Measurement Group (RIG), Occupational Therapy Department, Faculty of Health Sciences / CORE Management Science, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Puncak Alam, 42300 Selangor, Malaysia

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the practice of interdependence in Malay older people who live in the community setting in Malaysia. Eleven Malay older people participated in this qualitative study involved an in-depth interview. The data was analysed using six stages of the interpretative phenomenological analysis. Two main themes emerged from the interview transcripts, which are an interpersonal relationship and festive and congregation. The event is a platform to meet and communicate with each other to foster a closer relationship. This interdependence is postulated to facilitate the sense of the quality of life.

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Keywords: Interdependence; older people; quality of life, interpretative phenomenological analysis

1. Introduction

Malaysia is progressively becoming an ageing country. Officially published data by the Department of Statistic of Malaysia verified that in the year 2010, 5.0% of the total population of Malaysia were older people above 65 years old, with a dependency ratio of 7.4%. By the year 2040, the figure was estimated to increase more than double to 11.4% with the dependency ratio of 16.6% (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2012).

^{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +03-32584380; fax: +03-32584599
E-mail address: akehsan@salam.uitm.edu.my

The main concern regarding older people is they may become increasingly more dependent due to deterioration of their health and physical status. Significant deterioration in physical, cognitive and psychological conditions among the older people in Malaysia has been highlighted in some of the previous literatures such as musculoskeletal problems (Lee & Khair, 2007), cognitive impairment (Sherina, Rampal & Mustaqim, 2004) cardiovascular problems (Chin & Pengal, 2009) and chronic medical conditions (Wan Ibrahim & Zainab, 2014; Abolfathi Momtaz et al., 2012). These deteriorations have great implications on their functions, daily activities and personal tasks may lead to depression (Ibrahim et al., 2013) and social isolation (Ibrahim, Abolfathi Momtaz & Hamid, 2013). They will progressively become less independent and may cause decrease in Quality of Life (QoL). Under these circumstances, older people with functional disabilities may be increasingly and involuntarily compelled to opt for interdependency for their personal needs.

Interdependence is defined as a mutual dependence between one another. Beeber (2008) defined interdependence as actions of individuals with common bond, give and receive love, appreciation and admiration, together to and from one another. Interdependence among the older people is seen as the action of seeking supports through the development of reciprocal relationship (Del Aguila, Cox & Lee, 2006). It is also seen as the prime linkages between family members and friends (Wrzus, Wagner & Neyer, 2011) which promote and help to transpire interactions between two people or more. Rusbult & Van Lange (2008) proposed an interdependence theory in which interpersonal connection and realisation were activated by motivation, oriented by one's cognition or physical ability, which drives intentions and activities resulting in interaction. Other contributing factors for interdependency would include their need for family support, personal beliefs, cultural affiliations, and religious obligations (Wan-Ibrahim & Zainab, 2014). The benefits of interdependency include increased socialisation and life satisfaction, decreased depression and social isolation, and significant improvement in the quality of life (Dahlan, Nicol & Maciver, 2010; Wan-Ibrahim & Zainab, 2014) and psychological and spiritual well-being (Kim, et al., 2011; Momtaz et al., 2013).

2. Methodology

Aligned with the aims of the study, which is to identify the constructs of interdependency and its possible contribution to QoL, a qualitative phenomenology was chosen as the method of study. Phenomenology is defined as an approach to understand in-depth people live experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), in which it attempts to provide in-depth understanding regarding the interdependency life experience amongst older people who live in the community. An interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) was chosen as the theoretical perspective underpinning the study. Interpretative phenomenology seeks to understand and interpret the ideographic life experience of a person who lives in the phenomena under study and how they ascribe meaning to their lives experiences.

Participants of the study were recruited from various states in Malaysia, such as Kelantan, Selangor and Melaka. These states were chosen as they represent unique and diverse characteristics in relation to the constructs of the interdependency. The inclusion to the study are a) aged 60 and above, b) able to speak fluently in Malay (official Malaysian language) or English, c) scores 22 and above in Malay-Mini Mental States (MMSE) (Zarina et al., 2007) and scores below 7 in Malay Geriatric Depression Scale (M-GDS 15) (Teh & Hasanah, 2004) which signified a good cognitive functions and are not depressed.

Participants were chosen based on purposive sampling strategy and was approached individually. They were explained about the aims and method of the study, and written consent was obtained from each participant. Each participant was interviewed based on a series of semi-structured and open-ended questionnaires that was developed from the review of the literature, a pilot study and KAWA Model of Occupational Therapy practice that was adapted as the theoretical framework of the study. The route of delivering the questionnaires was adapted from a triangular structure of questionnaires by Plummer-D'Amato (2008) which described a step by step process of asking the questions related to the experience of the interdependency. The interview was taped using a digital audio-recorder and typed verbatim. Each interview lasted about 45 to 70 minutes. The transcribed data was analysis using six steps of data analysis as described by Smith et al. (2009). The steps are; 1) data familiarization and emersion, 2) text analysis and theoretical comment, 3) initial theme development, 4) making connection between themes, 5) analysis of another transcripts, 6) Merging of themes across transcripts. Superordinate themes, master themes and sub themes

were subsequently developed that exemplified the constructs of the interdependency and the relationship with QoL. To ensure the rigor/trustworthiness of the study, several methods were employed such as No bias was ensured during the construction of questions and questions from the pilot study were used in the actual study for every respondent. Several quotes were chosen to represents and highlight the themes developed. The quote was translated from Bahasa Melayu to English initially using a certified translator. Aligned with the ethical principle of anonymity and confidentiality, a pseudonym will be used to illustrate the quotes presented by the participants of the study.

3. Findings

This finding presented by 11 participants consisted of 8 males and 3 females. Seven of the participants live alone and four participants live with their spouse leading to interdependency with others. Using IPA revealed two superordinate themes, each with varying number of subthemes. Superordinate themes and subthemes of QoL and benefits of interdependency among older people emerged are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Master themes and Superordinate themes emerged from the interview transcripts

Superordinate themes	Master themes
Interpersonal alliances	Meaningful social relationship
	Care of the sick
	Companion when lonely
Festive and Congregation	Eids or 'Hari Raya'
	Wedding reception
	'Gotong-royong'

The participants in this study expressed two superordinate and a number of master subthemes. These themes represent a variety of underlying experiences, which are further detailed with excerpts from the interviews. However, only some excerpts are chosen to link and illustrate each of the superordinate themes emerged (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

3.1. Superordinate theme 1: Interpersonal alliance

This superordinated theme describes the ideographic experiences regarding relationship and alliances at the interpersonal level between the older people with other people such as children, family members, friends and neighbours. There are three master themes emerged from the interview transcripts, which are; meaningful social relationship, care of the sick and companion when lonely.

3.1.1. Meaningful social relationship

This master theme was illustrated by Mr. Aziz, a 60 years old man who live in Kota Bharu, Kelantan. He is a pensioner who live with his wife. Mr. Aziz highlighted his ideographic experience regarding his social relationship with people in the community where he lives explained how, as a member of the society have to maintain his interaction by face to face meetings with them and to help each other during in needs. He convinced us how much he appreciate the cooperation among the society members and enjoy and satisfied for being able to chat with others and maintain the close relationships. He will certainly be disappointed if these routines were not possible.

“As we are part of the society, we need them. When we interact with them, we are helping each other; to be able to converse with them is a satisfaction. If we are not close with the community, there is no fun.”

This master them also was illustrated by another participant, Mr. Arif, 72 years old who is an army pensioner and live alone stated that he has been regarded as the elderly in his neighbourhood and has been readily helping members of the community. He consistently performed his role and obligation as the imam (religious leader) and committee member of the local mosque since he moved into the neighbourhood.

“I live here; helping, assisting each other. Apart from that, I perform my duty here as a committee member of the madrasah and have been the imam (the person who leads prayers in a mosque) since I moved to this place”.

3.1.2. Care of the sick

Mr. Arif also told the tasks of having to take care of his wife who is sick and running the household chores such as buying groceries and preparing the meals every day by himself. However, in spite of his tight daily schedules, he still finds time to meet up with his friends at the market and seems to enjoy the opportunity very much. He was fully committed to the responsibilities by keeping to his schedules very well and finds time to cook meals for his wife.

“... when my wife was still alive (sick), I prepare the breakfast, help to keep the house clean, and take care of her needs when she was sick. At 8 am, I go to the market to buy vegetables, fish and meeting friends there and go back home and cook”.

3.1.3. Companion when lonely

Almost all of the participants went through the interview in a very delightful and cheerful manner as evidenced by their excellent cooperation and enthusiasm, lots of laughs, giggles, and smiles. None of them appeared to be in the state of depression or revealed the sense of loneliness when talking about their relationships with others. Only one particular participant, Mrs. Mina a 66 years old female who has been living alone for sometime but was regularly visited by her children during the weekends, mentioned about the sense of loneliness. When asked whether she ever had the feeling of loneliness, she admitted having the sense of loneliness only when she was in needs of the company of someone, especially when she wanted to go out of the house. She preferred not to be alone and emphasised the need of friends or companion to enable her to go out, such as to the mosque to perform the prayers in congregation or to attend religious teaching session.

“Yes, I do feel lonely when I have some needs to be fulfilled. When I want to go out, I need a person as a companion, as a friend. It’s better than going out alone. When I want to go to the mosque for a (religious) teaching, I need a companion”.

3.2. Superordinate theme 2: Festive and congregation

This superordinated themes describes the ideographic experiences regarding the mechanism on how the relationship was fostered and maintained. There are three masterthemes emerged from the interview transcripts, which are:

3.2.1. Eid or Hari Raya

During Eid holidays, Mrs. Mina was visited by her siblings and her husband’s siblings from far and near. The only one sibling she had who is nearby also came and visited her during Eid. She explained about her husband’s siblings from as far as Johor, Pahang and Perak, who came to gather at her house during Eid. Most of the family members would usually come during festive seasons because of the distance they need to travel. They came to her house and stayed for the night even not during Eid.

“My husband has 7 siblings. One is staying in Johor, another in Ipoh and the other one in Pahang, all of them will come to visit us during the Eids festive. Even when it is not during festive, they will come to visit and stay overnight at my home”.

3.2.2. Wedding reception

Mr. Aziz used to hold a wedding reception at his house, and he was helped by all his siblings to facilitate the organisation of the occasion.

“When I organise a wedding reception at home, all my sibliings would come and help out”.

The obligation to accept a wedding invitation differs between individuals. Mrs. Ros, who is living alone at her house, said, although does not frequently gets a wedding invitation, has been choosy in making the decision to attend any of the invitations.

“Not that frequent. I do get some invitations during the last Eid but I chose only to go to a few particular one”.

3.2.3. ‘Gotong-royong’

Gotong-royong indeed has been perceived by some members of the society as a platform and opportunity to meet up and communicate with each other in order to foster a closer relationship. Mr. Aziz was an example of a member of the society who was delighted to be involved with such opportunity to be in contact with his neighbourhood friends. The spirit of working together during the gotong-royong promoted better relationship with his neighbours. This was facilitated by lots of chatting and discussion between them while gotong-royong.

“I like it very much because we can get together with the neighbourhoods during gotong-royong. It will foster better relationships as we gather and talk to each other with ease (laugh)”.

4. Discussion

The themes emerged signified the important interdependency that consist mainly related to a good social relationships and alliances that exist between the older people with other people who are around them, such as spouse, children, grandchildren, friends, family members, neighbours and other peoples in the community. There is a trend of interdependence between these two constructs, i.e. the older people and people around them which occur in various occasions such as during festive and congregations and also at the interpersonal level. This interdependency regarding psychosocial and physical interdependency is postulated to have contributed to the enhancement and maintenance of QoL amongst the older people under study. These findings support previous finding that stressed the important of inter-dependency in terms of good interpersonal relationship and its contribution to QoL (Kim et al., 2000; Karim & Rashid, 2010; Dahlan, Nicol & Maciver, 2010; Ibrahim et al., 2013; Gunawan & Chich-Jen, 2014) and enhancement in health status (Momtaz, Ibrahim and Hamid, 2014).

Care of the sick and dependent exclusively involves immediate family members particularly the spouse, children and grandchildren. Anyone during sickness needs love and constant encouragement to gain back the strength and get well quickly and be able to engage in daily activities. Thus, special care which require high commitment was usually provided by the most caring and available immediate family members. Literature identified this as functional interdependence (Del Aguila, Cox and Lee, 2006).

Apart from the sense of family or religious obligation, the amount of appreciation and the sense of obligation to even up the courtesy when the other are sick, are the major motivation and benefits that foster the practice of interdependence during sickness. These were aligning with religious obligations as Muslim which emphasizes they have right to each other as narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

“The rights of one Muslim over another are five: returning the greeting of salaam, visiting the sick, attending funerals, accepting invitations, and saying yarhamuk Allah (may Allah have mercy on you) to one who sneezes.”

HR. Al-Bukhari no. 1240 and Muslim no. 2162

Furthermore, the narration above illustrated as religious obligation to fulfil invitations to a wedding or house during festive season signified an acknowledgement that brings honour to the people who are invited.

In this study almost older people engaged social activity during the festive such as during Eid. All family members and friends come to the older people house to celebrate these situations strengthen family ties, provide opportunity to communicate with each other, provide psychological supports which eventually bring happiness to the older people. These were aligning with religious obligations as Muslim which emphasize to do good deeds to other as narrated in the Al-Quran:

“The believers are brothers to one another, therefore, make reconciliation between your brothers and fear Allah, so that you may be shown mercy.”

Quran 49:10.

It shows that as a true devotee in Islam, Muslims should show their commitment to the establishment of peace and reconciliation amongst individuals in society. In addition, there is also a verse in the bible that says:

“And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

Colossians 3:14.

Cultural affiliation and core value also play a significant role in shaping perception of the Malay in Malaysia towards the older people. The cultural values which require everyone to respect the older people are deeply rooted in the heart of everyone as narrated in widely known local Malay proverbs below:

“Air dicincang tak akan putus” (Sliced water will never be divided)

Malay proverb

In addition, Beh & Folk (2013) showed that parents will receive more support from their children if they endorsed the traditional practice of filial piety themselves. The concept of religious obligation, cultural norm, and filial piety, emphasised the important role of children to rely on as the main supporter and assistance to the livelihood and wellbeing of older people.

The themes of ‘Gotong-royong’ is an activity which involves congregation of all members of the local community for a common public interest, mostly masterminded and conducted by the older people in the community. It was practiced as a way of life and customs among the Malays in Malaysia. The programme has been designated as one of the socio-economic development for the people of Malaysia. The whole community will work together to achieve a common task. Through the spirit of mutual cooperation, they worked together to clean places such as the playground, drains, and place of worships, creating a genuine sense of belonging. The programme brings together community members to value the sense of caring and compassionate among individuals in the society. It is a unique and useful activity to foster understanding and the practice of interdependence between individuals in order to create conducive and harmonious society. The cultural values which require older people interdependence with neighbours is deeply rooted in the heart of everyone as narrated in a widely known local Malay proverbs below:

“ke bukit sama didaki, ke lurah sama dituruni”

(Together we climb a hill, together we descend the valley)

“Jiran sepakat membawa berkat”

(Agreed Neighbours bring a blessing)

Malay Proverbs

All proverbs signified cultural significant influence towards life amongst Malays older people under study. They have a strong belief towards religious and cultural values which indicates the importance of interdependency between close family members and community where the older people lives. These proverbs and religious belief shaped their perceptions towards interdependency practice that subsequently facilitate enhancement in QoL.

5. Conclusion and implication of the study

Interdependency is important because it is proven to increase QoL, mediated by good interpersonal relationship between the older people with others especially with children, family members and neighbour. The practice of interdependence during festive and congregations could be seen clearly as an important occurrence amongst the Malay older people in the community to sustain their active and healthy daily living, provide social support, acknowledgement that is postulated to facilitate enhancement in QoL.

The finding of this study is important to health care profession. Health care profession should encourage older people to have good social relationship with friends, family members and strengthen intergeneration relationship (as

suggested by Shavit, 2015). Good social relationship provides positive affects, providing psychological supports, maintaining close family ties and friendship, maintaining self-honour, communication, fulfilled daily needs, satisfaction and security, which subsequently contributed to QoL. The present study provides important information to the various sectors that are directly or indirectly involved in the management and welfare of the older people in Malaysia. Promoting interdependent might be one of the most effective ways for the Malay older people in the community in Malaysia to achieve and maintain maximum life satisfaction and productivity which will ultimately improve their overall quality of life. Furthermore, interdependency is fit into the Eastern culture and philosophy in life.

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