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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 85 (2013) 164 – 178

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

AcE-Bs 2013 Hanoi
ASEAN Conference on Environment-Behaviour Studies
Hanoi Architectural University, Hanoi, Vietnam, 19-22 March 2013
"Cultural Sustainability in the Built and Natural Environment"

Cultural Sustainability and Islamic Perspectives in Introducing a Cohesive Retirement Village for Muslims

Noor Hanita Abdul Majid*, Mohd Hazwan Hamidi, Zuraini Denan

International Islamic University Malaysia, 53100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Abstract

The growing elderly population indicated a shift in the cultural context in Malaysia and the needs of elderly care facilities. This paper looks at the cultural sustainability issues and Islamic perspectives requirements through a review on the recommendations outlined in the Quran and Hadiths; surveys and case studies on the available elderly care facilities in Malaysia. The results indicated the perception of the respondents on the idea of having elderly care for the Muslim community and also the preferred type of care facilities. The research findings outlined the criteria for a cohesive retirement village for Muslims.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of Centre for Environment-Behaviour Studies (cE-Bs), Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

Keywords: Cultural sustainability; retirement village; elderly care; Islamic perspectives

1. Introduction

The growing numbers of the elderly population have caused a shift in the cultural context in Malaysia. The changes are due to the growing percentage, education level and aspiration of the ageing population. These changes need to be adhered to in ensuring a quality living for this population group in their golden age. Currently there are provisions for health care facilities, retirement villages, old folk's homes and other facilities of the kind for elderly and retirees. Currently there are many promotions of different concepts of facilities retirees; Malaysia as a Second Home, Resort Style Retirement Environment and others that is mainly modeled after retirement facilities overseas. However, due to the local cultural

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +0-000-000-0000; fax: +0-000-000-0000.
E-mail address: noorhanita@gmail.com.

context, Malaysia needs to address the issues and needs of the population to provide for a conducive and cohesive environment.

Retirement refers to the time when a person has stopped working for good. This usually happens upon reaching a determined age, or when a person's condition does not allow him/her to work due to illness, accidents or by personal choice. In Malaysia, a person is eligible for retirement at the age of 56 beginning the year 2001, and recently the retirement age has been extended up to 58 years old by the Public Civil Department. In Malaysia, the population over 50 years of age is considered an elderly population or golden citizen and is given privileges in facilities such as travelling fares, admissions and health facilities.

The increase in the elderly population is the basic indicator that the provision for future retirees is an issue. The CENSUS results in 2010 indicated that the proportion of the population in the working ages (between 15-64) has increased to 67.3% from 62.8% in the year 2000. While, the population group of above 65 years has also increased to 5.1% compared to the statistic in 2000 which stated a percentage of 3.9%. Figure 1 shows that the trend indicates the shift of the age structure towards ageing population (CENSUS Malaysia, 2010). The situation in Malaysia is in line with the Asian region that registered a Boomer for the age of 50+ that is growing five times faster than overall population growth. In addition to the increase in the ageing population the people are also living longer as evidenced by an increase in life expectancy. The ageing populations may reach up to seventy five (75) years old compared to the previous life expectancy few years back which was just around sixty (60) to sixty five (65) years old.

The Boomer period coincides with the improvement of educational level for the population since Malaysia Independence in 1957. The affected group is now approaching retirement age and mainly involves working class or professionals (Fig. 1). Hence, the aspiration of the group has differed from the conditions where the elder population mainly resides in villages and worked in the rural areas. This fact is further supported by Datin Paduka Siti Sa'diah Sheikh Bakir (Aishah, 2010). She reiterated the issue that currently the Baby Boomer (born between 1946 and 1965) in Asia is a generation of well educated and affluent people that have great interest in healthcare and wellness, and retirement homes. The needs and aspiration of these retirees are different and further enhanced by logistic factors. Due to migration of the population and the education level, the population group at the age of 50+ has been residing in the urban area and has worked and raised their families there. Instead of returning to the village for retirement, the retirees now prefer to age-in-place close to their children who are raised, worked and also reside in the urban area.

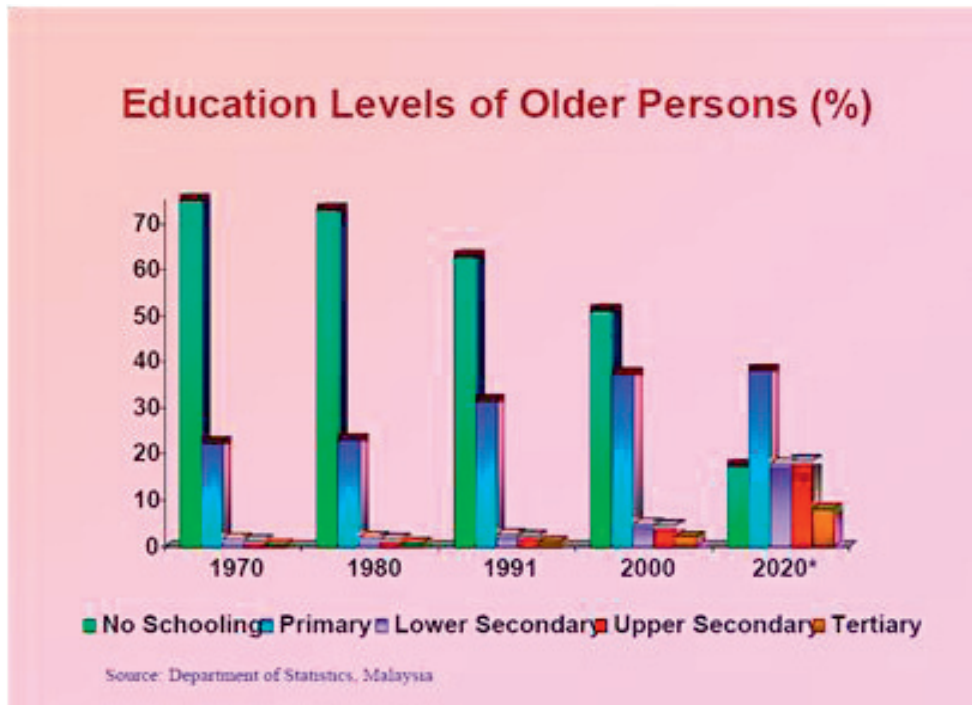


Fig. 1. The increasing level of education among the elderly population

The current cultural context in Malaysia has outlined the children's responsibilities to care for the ageing parents regardless of the race and religion. However due to the economic constraints and demands, most children with ageing parents are committed to work for a living. Hence, many have opted to send their parents to elderly care center or hire help at home. Senator T Murugiah suggested that children above 21 years old must be responsible to care for their ageing parents or they are eligible to be punished according to the law (reference). In Malaysia, the elderly care is provided both by private, NGOs and governmental bodies. The facilities ranged from daily to long term stay with options of packages and facilities. All elderly care centers should adhere to the requirements and standards determined by Care Centre Act (1993) and Care Centre Regulation (1994) to protect the interest of older people.

Currently, the elderly care centers have more percentages of non-Muslim patrons. Due to religious and cultural guidelines, the Malay Muslims had hesitated to send their ageing parents to the elderly care facilities and care facilities for this group is scarce. The concept of retirement home/ facilities/ villages does not exist since it is the obligation for all Muslims in looking after their parents.

Allah's Apostle (peace be upon him) said:

"Let him be humbled into dust; let him be humbled into dust"

It was said: *"Allah's Messenger, who is he?"*

He said: *"He who sees either of his parents during their old age or he sees both of them, but he does not enter Paradise (neglecting his / her duties towards them)"*

(Muslim 6189)

In Islam, serving one's parents is a duty second to prayer, and it is their right to expect it. It is clearly stated in the Surah Al-Isra' (The Journey by Night) in verses 23-24:

Your Lord has commanded that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to your parents. If one of them reaches old age with you, do not say to the word of disrespect, or scold them, but say a generous word to them. And act humbly to them in mercy, and say, "My lord, have mercy on them, since they cared for me when I was small."

(Quran, 17:23-24)

Currently, the concept of retirement village in Malaysia is not very popular among the Muslim retirees. This might be due to the religious and cultural guidelines or the preference of the retirees. There has been researches conducted to analyze the relationship between what has been prescribed in the Quran and Hadith to the social conduct and built environment. Mohd Nor and Siti Fatahiyah (2010) discussed how the Quran and Hadith can inculcate a good behavioral attitude towards the environment. On the other hand Noor Hanita et. al. (2010) analyzed the verses of the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet (pbuh) on the needed facilities to comply with the needs of elderly care facilities. Hence, consideration of what has been stipulated in the Quran and Hadith has been considered in suggesting the compatible facilities for the elderly/ retirees.

This research intends to conduct a survey to collect responses from the 'future retirees' to gather some of the aspirations of the group. It is hypothesized that the retirement facilities should be an advanced version or a combination of the Sri Kenangan Home (RSK) (that houses the incapable and neglected elderly) and the Centre of Activities for Golden Citizens (Pusat Aktiviti Warga Emas-PAWE). PAWE provided opportunities for the elderly and retirees be in touch and contribute to the community as provided by the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia (Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat). It is advisable for the retirement facility provided to be among the community for the elderly to continue fruitful contributions to the community as of when they were working. The elderly population should have the option to devote their retirement age of spirituality and knowledge enhancement and fulfillment.

At present there is an inclination for Muslim retirees to choose the *Pondok* system to spend their time after retirement. *Pondok* (Islamic teaching system descended from 'Ulama and guided by *Tuan Guru* or religious teachers) is an institution for Islamic studies which instills the Islamic spirit and impart religious knowledge that is popular for the Muslim to spend old age to deepen their understanding in Islam. In this manner, the retirees can enhance their knowledge and practice and also keep themselves intellectually stimulated. *Pondok* institution is an example of the implementation of Islamic way of life for a retirement facility. The elderly tend to choose and to concentrate their life after working in learning in depth about Islam.

2. Aim and objectives

Based on the factors discussed, the paper aimed to look into the issue of the ageing population and to provide necessary facilities for the elderly according to their needs. It is the objective of this paper to deliberate on the contributing factors in stages. Due to the scarcity of elderly care facilities for Muslims and to support cultural sustainability, the research focused on the retirement facilities for Muslims. Hence, the paper begins with the first objective to formulate the background information by reviewing the selected elderly care facilities. The research goes further to check on the compatibility of the existing facilities to the requirements stipulated by the Quran and Hadith. The results are then vetted to the results of the questionnaire survey that validated the facilities as suggested by the conformity analysis.

3. Methodology

The research is undertaken in stages to define the cohesive environment needed for cultural sustainability of the elderly. The case studies (first stage) were conducted to review the existing facilities at selected elderly care centers. The research has identified five elderly care facilities that represent governmental and private organizations, and *Pondok* institutions that are popular for Muslim retirees. The assessment includes elderly facilities in general to gain insights on the existing facilities without discrimination of the race and religion of the patrons. This is based on the assumption that all good facilities would conform to the Islamic guidelines. This has led to the assessment of the conformity of the existing facilities to the Islamic guidelines for the care of elderly (second stage). The Islamic guidelines (as specified by the Quran and Hadith) are deemed to be important for the formulation of cohesive retirement environment that is suitable for the cultural sustainability of the Muslim population.

The data gained on the conformity is then compared to the results of the questionnaire survey conducted on population as described by the CENSUS as the working group between forty (40) to sixty (60) years of age (third stage). The respondents consist of 60% of the government sector, 29% of the private sector and 11% of self-employed individuals. One hundred (100) assisted surveys were administered on 50 male and 50 female respondents. The survey results are important indicators of the needs and aspirations of the future retirees that are needed to provide a cohesive retirement facility for the group.

4. Background

4.1. Case studies

The selected case studies in the review of the elderly facilities are done randomly. The selected case studies are Pondok Pasir Tumbuh (PPT), Pondok Lubuk Tapah (PLT), and Yayasan Al Jenderami (YJ) as representative of the Pondok institutions. In addition, the case studies also included Rumah Sri Kenangan Cheng (SRK) that is a government funded retirement home and Sri Seronok Retirement Village (SSRV) that is privately owned. The case studies (first stage) will determine the facilities and also the basic information in the retirement home. All selected case studies except SSRV have a majority of Muslim patrons.

In general the selected case studies suggest the importance or necessary facilities for retirees. The data gained is from a limited number of case studies; nevertheless it is representative of the two (2) main types of facilities provided for the retirees/ elderly; the *Pondok* institution and elderly care. The facilities can be grouped into housing, community/ public facilities, leisure facilities, training/ education facilities, health facilities and other supporting facilities. Table 1 indicated in detail the available facilities at the selected case studies. In general all the case studies have housing and common facilities of various types.

All facilities have independent living accommodation except RKC that also catered for assisted living. In addition, SSRV has some guest-house facilities for visiting family members. Places of worship are provided in all case studies except SSRV. RKC catered for all races and religion and provided a general place for worship; on the other hand the *Pondok* institutions have *Masjids* for congregational prayers and elderly/ retirement homes/village has more leisure and health oriented facilities due to the basic purpose of their establishments. PPT and PLT are educational institutions that also have patrons of all ages. On the other hand YJ is established mainly as a welfare and learning institution for elderly. Among all, RSC has the most equipped public facilities in line with establishment purpose by the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia.

Table 1. Facilities at case studies

FACILITIES	PONDOK PASIR TUMBUH	PONDOK LUBUK TAPAH	YAYASAN AL- JENDERAMI	RUMAH KENANGAN CHENG	SRI SERONOK RETIREMENT VILLAGE
Housing					
Detached/ Self-contained Housing	√	√			√
Assisted living				√	
Dormitories	√	√	√		
Staff housing	√	√			
Guest House					√
Community / Public Facilities					
Masjid	√	√	√		
Facilities for worship				√	
Dining Hall				√	
Visiting Area				√	
Leisure facilities					
TV room				√	
Karaoke Room				√	
Sport and recreation facilities				√	√
Sewing room		√			
Training / Education Facilities					
Community/seminar hall		√	√		√
Exhibition Hall		√			
Classrooms	√	√	√		
Library		√	√		
Computer facilities	√	√			
Health facilities					
Isolation room and sick bay				√	
Physiotherapy room				√	
Others					
Administration offices	√	√	√	√	√
Landscape Areas					√
Public toilets	√				

4.2. The Islamic Guidelines

The intention of the review is to identify the facilities available for retirees and to check the conformity of the facilities to cultural sustainability and Islamic guidelines. The review of related Islamic guidelines was undertaken and discussed in Noor Hanita et. al (2010). The detailed review of the selected Quran verses and Hadith is described in Appendix A. The Islamic guidelines forwarded comprise of considerations on the physical state or conditions, physical facilities and emotional needs of the elderly. The physical state or conditions is described as physical vitality, mental capacity; the physical facilities are described by sleeping and resting facilities and basic necessity of food and drinks; and, emotional needs are described by mercy and love, elevations of sensitivity and the priority given to women.

The guidelines derived from the Quran verses are assessed against the common facilities outlined in the case study analysis. Table 1 (second stage) shows the analysis to check the conformity of the facilities to the guidelines.

Table 2. The Conformity of the Existing Facilities to the Islamic Guidelines.

FACILITIES	ISLAMIC GUIDELINES						
	PHYSICAL STATE/CONDITIONS		PHYSICAL FACILITIES	EMOTIONAL NEEDS			
	PHYSICAL VITALITY	MENTAL CAPACITY	SLEEPING AND RESTING FACILITIES	BASIC NECESSITY OF FOOD AND DRINKS	MERCY AND LOVE	ELEVATIONS OF SENSITIVITY	PRIORITY GIVEN TO WOMEN
Housing	√		√	√			√
Community/ Public		√		√	√	√	√
Leisure	√		√				√
Training and Education		√					√
Health	√	√	√	√	√		

Table 2 shows that the facilities provided meet the Islamic guidelines. It also suggested that the facilities are essential since no single facility will fulfill all the guidelines at once. Hence, the retirement villages need to incorporate all facilities to comply with Islamic guidelines. Noor Hanita et. al (2010) forwarded analysis of the Islamic guidelines in the care of the elderly through the analysis of Quran and Hadiths. The discussion outlined the emotional status and physical needs of the elderly through excerpts from the religious guidelines. The results of the study indicated a few pertinent factors to consider which will lead to cultural sustainability.

5. Analysis and findings

The survey aimed to determine the aspirations and the preferred retirement facilities of the respondents. The survey results are distinguished between male and female respondents. The main issues covered are the perception and agreement of the respondents to live in retirement/ elderly care facilities and the preferred living environment. Most respondents (51% male and 46% female) agreed with the idea of living in a retirement home; specifically a retirement home for Muslims (Fig. 2). The survey also investigates the respondents’ preference on the decision making for the admittance to the retirement facilities (Fig. 3). Most respondents (86% male and 84% female) agreed that they should make the decision for the admittance to the facilities (Fig. 4). The respondents also feel that the retirement facilities should not be a permanent stay for them and prefer for the facilities to be a transit with the freedom to come and go as they please (Fig. 5).

Table 3 discussed the conformity of the survey results to the Islamic guidelines. The survey results confirmed that the majority of the respondents shows desires that are similar to the guidelines. The discussions also highlighted some Quran verses linked to the guidelines and suggested the needed environment of the retirement village. The discussions highlighted some important considerations to include in the facilities provided for Muslim retirees. Adhering to the suggested facilities will support the cultural sustainability according to the stipulated Islamic perspectives.

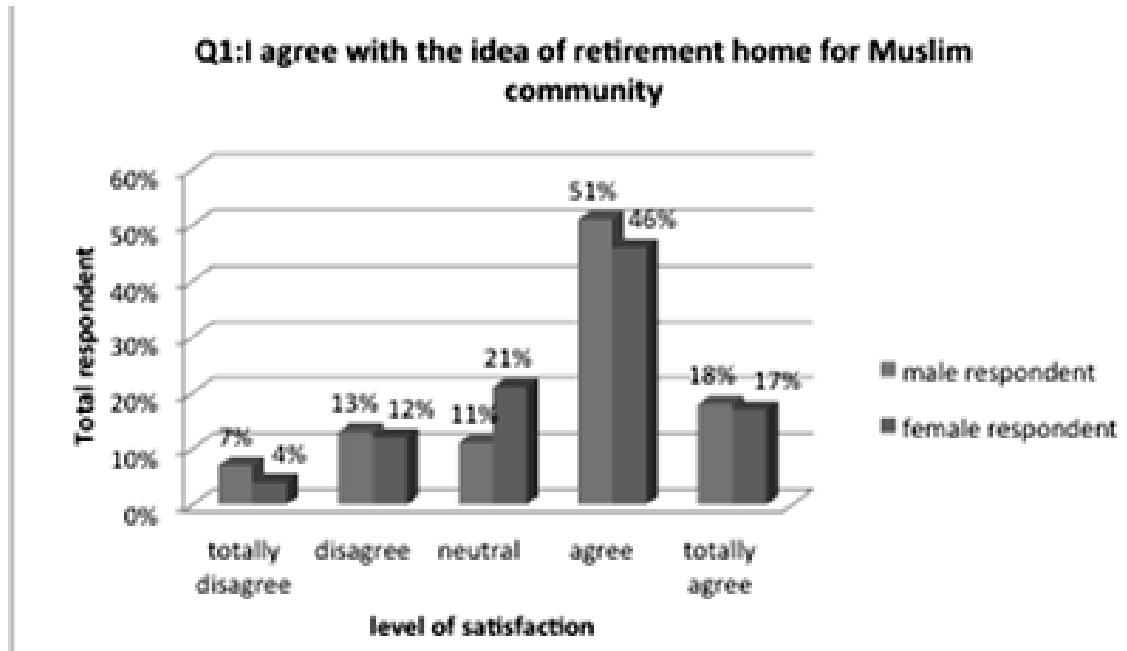


Fig. 2. Agreement to the idea of a retirement home

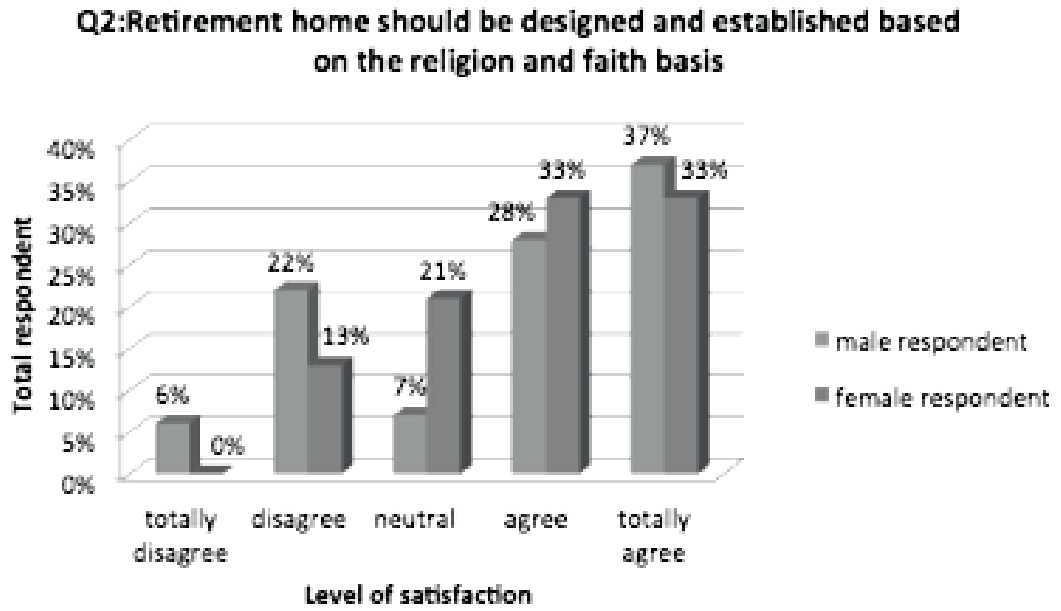


Fig. 3. Agreement to the idea of a retirement home established based on religion or faith

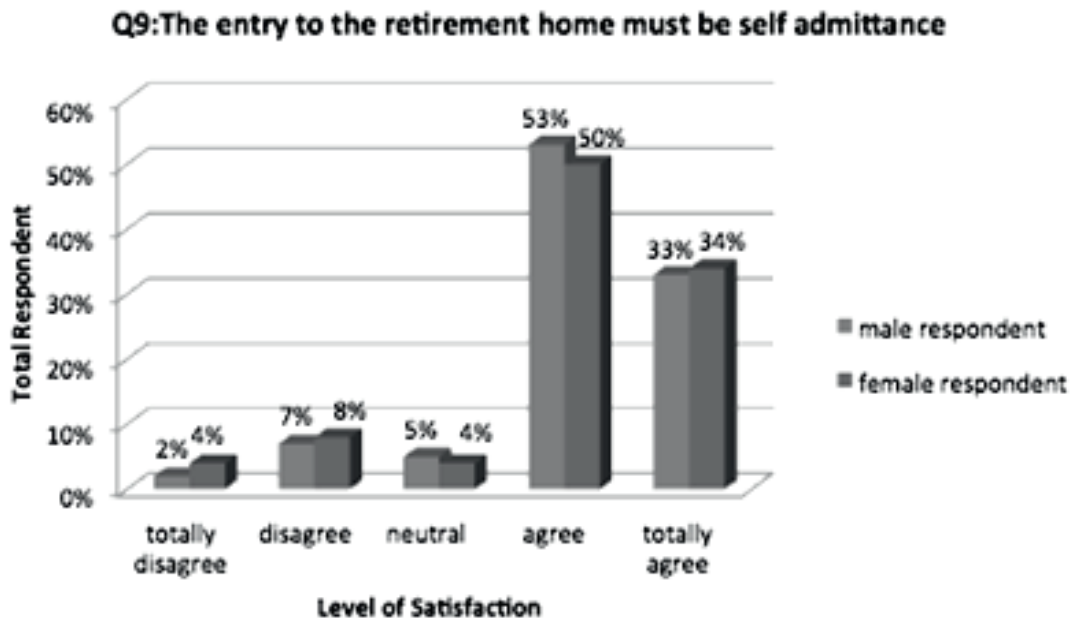


Fig. 4. Decision for admittance

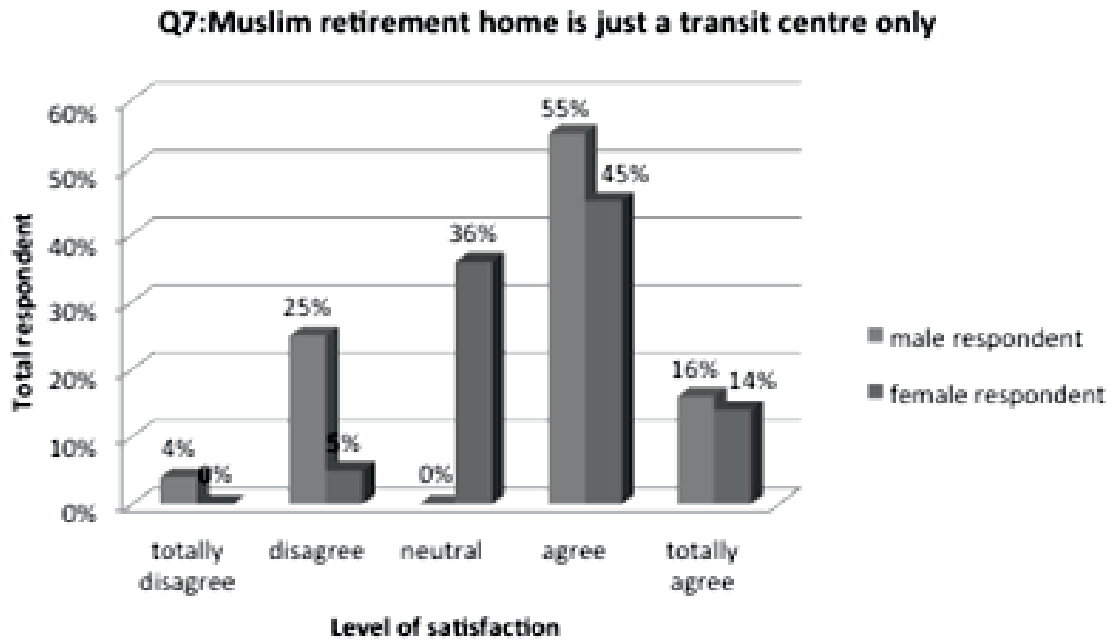
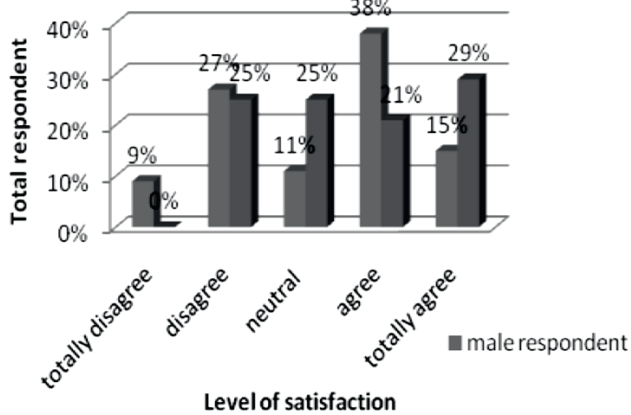


Fig. 5. Permanence of stay

Table 3. The Conformity of the Existing facilities to the Islamic Guidelines.

ISLAMIC GUIDELINES	SURVEY RESULTS	DISCUSSION																		
PHYSICAL VITALITY	<p style="text-align: center;">Q10: Muslim retirement home is suitable to be design as a single and isolated building to provide privacy</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>level of satisfaction</th> <th>male respondent</th> <th>female responden</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>totally disagree</td> <td>7%</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>disagree</td> <td>31%</td> <td>37%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>neutral</td> <td>11%</td> <td>13%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>agree</td> <td>38%</td> <td>33%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>totally agree</td> <td>13%</td> <td>17%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	level of satisfaction	male respondent	female responden	totally disagree	7%	0%	disagree	31%	37%	neutral	11%	13%	agree	38%	33%	totally agree	13%	17%	<p>Housing, leisure and health facilities are related to the mention of the physical vitality in Quran and Hadith. There is a fair opinion about the idea of isolated building arrangement among the respondents. Some of the elderly prefer to stay in the single building within a community. The privacy from this living arrangement will give the retirees time to focus on the ibadah with the least distractions.</p>
level of satisfaction	male respondent	female responden																		
totally disagree	7%	0%																		
disagree	31%	37%																		
neutral	11%	13%																		
agree	38%	33%																		
totally agree	13%	17%																		

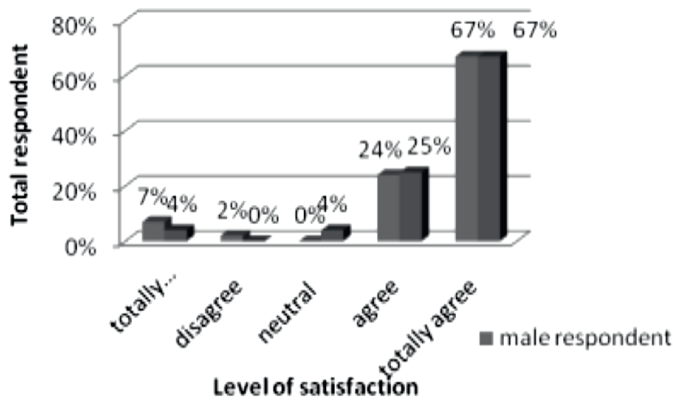
Q17: Muslim retirement home concept should be self independence living environment



The verses in Quran mentioned the incapability of the elderly to conduct their daily activities as they get older (Appendix A). If the elderly should choose to live independently, the accommodation should be designed to be barrier free with relevant designs. There are some equal distributions of answer to this question in which half of the total respondents agreed that the concept for the retirement home should be self-independence living environment and half of them disagree with the idea. It shows that the retirees need some assistance for living during their ageing time.

MENTAL CAPACITY

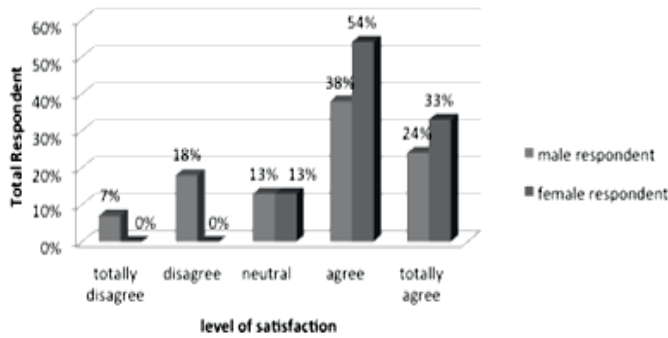
Q12: Mosque and Musolla must be the main facility provided in the Muslim retirement home



In the Quran, verses 22: 55 have acknowledged the decrease in mental capacities at old age. Hence it is important to create an environment that will alert consciousness and retain the mental capacities of the elderly. It is also recommended for the human being to remember Allah SWT at all times. Providing this environment is an essential condition of the retirement facilities about half of the respondents agree that Muslim retirement hold should be designed with Masjid and Musolla as a point of reference as well as the main facilities. The elderly need a reference point in the environment of recognition and way finding.

SLEEPING AND RESTING FACILITIES

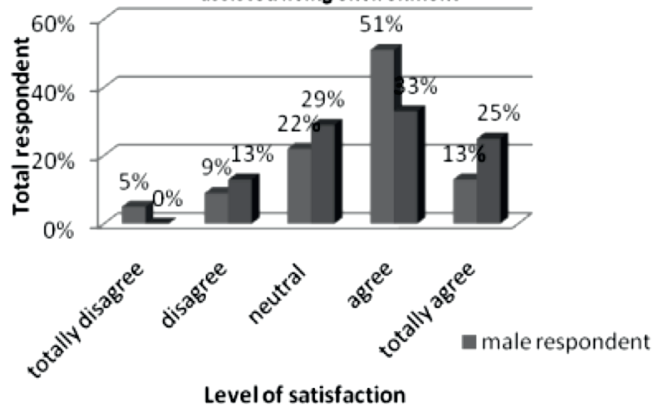
Q3: The establishment of the Muslim retirement home is as essential idea in reducing the social and family problem such as elderly abuse



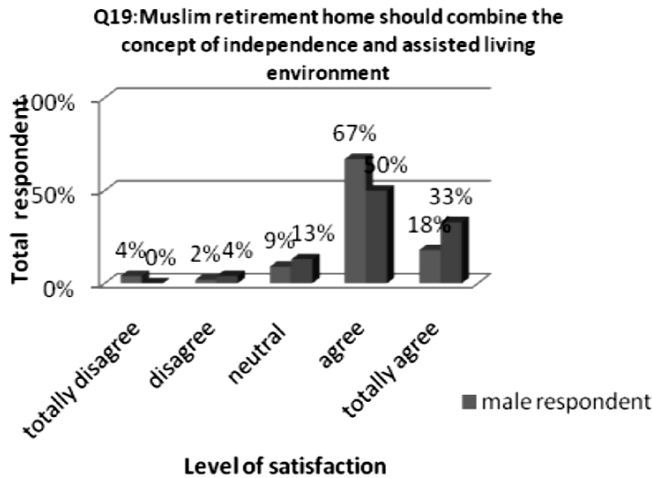
Islam advice on the rights of the human body to be at rest (Quran 10:67). The surrounding environment of the retirement village should support this guideline. Nevertheless there is almost equal opinion on the question of the spending the retirement period; should it be time for rest or to conduct other activities. The respondents believe that the retirement time should not be just for rest but rather to be spent fruitfully or contribute to the community.

BASIC NECESSITY OF FOOD AND DRINKS

Q18: Muslim retirement home concept should be assisted living environment

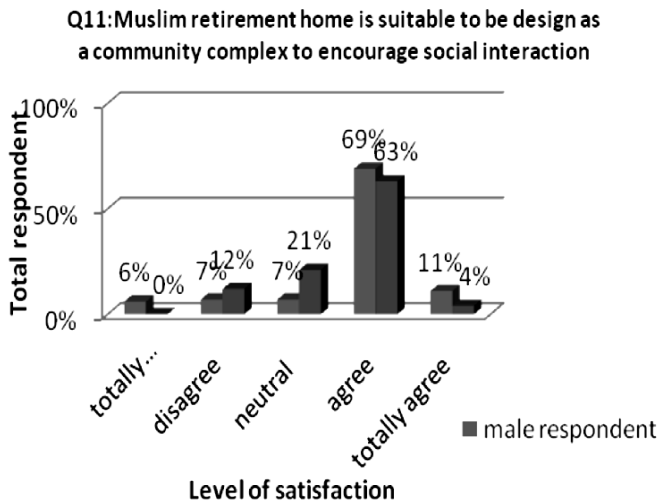


The chart shows that most of the respondents (64% male and 58% female) agreed that retirement home/ village should be assisted living environment. It is recommended that the retirement home must provide some living assistance which may help the elderly to have a comfortable life.



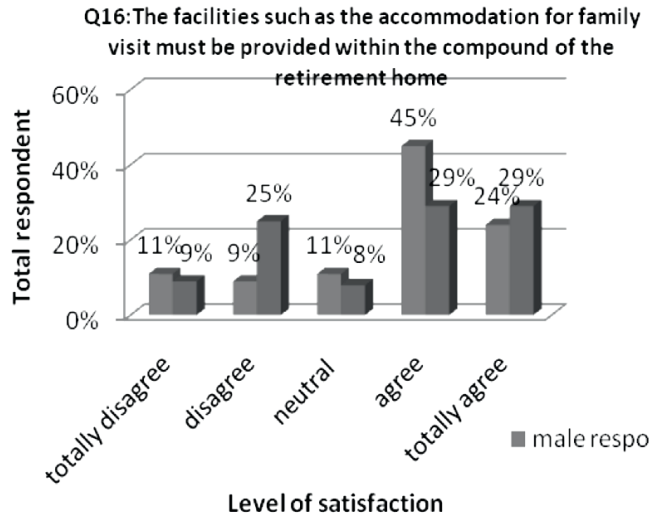
85% male and 83% female respondents agreed with the combination of independent and assisted living in Muslim retirement homes. The elderly may need assistance in the preparation and facilities catering for this are essential in the retirement village, canteen, cafeteria, restaurants, bistro etc. The children should also take into consideration to provide for this need and assist the elderly in providing for the basic necessities.

MERCY AND LOVE



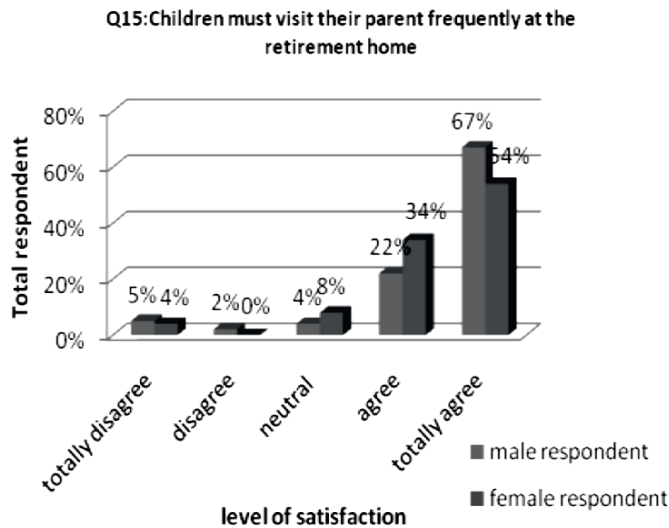
Children and community involvements are important for the emotional well-being of the elderly. Most of the respondents (80% male and 67% female) tend to agree with the idea of the community complex for social interaction. It is actually a nature of the aging population to stay intact with the community as to share their experience and talk among each other with the same rhyme and rhythm. It is stated in one of the key elements in achieving active and productive ageing population in Malaysia (Social Welfare Department Malaysia).

ELEVATIONS
OF
SENSIVITY



The Quran (17: 23-24) stated clearly that the children should show the same mercy and compassion as what they have received from their parents when they were young. The retirement village should be designed to accommodate the involvement of children and other family members in order for the elderly not to feel secluded or abandoned.

69% of male and 58% female respondents supported and agreed that the children are supposed to visit their parents frequently at the retirement home. The concept of visit here can also be defined as consistent visit and spend a quality time with their parents. Hence accommodation for guest is essential in the retirement villages.



In order to avoid the abandonment of the elderly by the children, a certain precaution should be taken such as provision of facilities like accommodation for a family visit in the retirement home. According to the survey 89% male and 88% female respondents agree with the proposal of accommodation for families at the retirement home. It shows that the elderly still need attention from the community and the idea of accommodation is to inculcate the children to come and visit their parents without difficulties.

This paper outlined the important factors to be included in the retirement village for Muslims. The villages should include both independent and assisted living to cater for the needs of the retirees that suits their physical abilities. In cases of independent living, the accommodation needs to be barrier free with specific details that fits the physical requirement of the elderly. In some cases the retirees may need

assisted living or intensive care. The environmental design for the retirees also should support the mental capacity of the retirees. Retirees may need a strong reference to be included in the master planning to assist recognition and way finding.

Community and leisure facilities should be included in the retirement villages. There should be a balance of activities for the retirees to be involved in that will accommodate the physical needs for rest and leisure. The community facilities should cater for the basic daily facilities for the elderly for spiritual (*Masjid*), intellectual (classes and community spaces) and physical needs (food and eating facilities). Guests or children accommodations should also be an essential inclusion in the retirement facilities. There should be accommodation for the children to visit or reside in individual homes or guest facilities. This provision is essential to uphold the Islamic guidelines in the care for elderly.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The establishment of Muslim retirement homes should have a strong fundamental. It has to be a model that meets the cultural and Islamic perspective of Malaysia. Understanding the cultural context and the needs of the population is the key to successful and appropriate facilities for retirement facilities. This research has focused on samples and case studies that cover *Pondok*, governmental and private institutions that are popular as elderly institutions and facilities. Future researchers in this area should include these facilities but may include a larger number of samples of respondents and case studies from all over Malaysia. The elderly facilities usually include facilities for orphans that are hypothesized to have a positive impact on the well-being of elderly. The social factors and cultural sustainability may be affected by a combined facility for both groups. A future research on how this relationship contributes to the well-being of the elderly groups could enhance the quality of life after retirement. This research should be seen as the instigator to future researches and a basis for the formulation of retirement facilities that suits the contemporary needs of the Malaysian population.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all involved in this research at all stages.

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