

## An Exploration of Elderly Care in Elderly Care Centers in Malaysia

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### Abstract

Aging is an issue in developed countries as well as in developing countries. Malaysia as a developing country is also faced with the aging population issue. The main objective of this study is to identify the nursing home issues faced by the elderly in Malaysia and the demographic factors associated with those living in Subang Jaya, an urban area near Selangor, Malaysia. Findings from this study can help provide information to improve the care of the increasing elderly at this age. A case study research design of five respondents as members of the community aged over 60 was selected for the interview process. The main findings of the study are that the main needs of the elderly are the most important things taken care of in the elderly care center are physical health, mental health, leisure activities, spirituality, and finances. This suggests the need for private nursing homes and improving the quality of care. The needs of private care homes are also supported and the study's findings can be used to justify the construction of care homes and assistance from the government to support these needs. The implication of this study is the awareness and need to improve the care of the elderly needs to be started as soon as possible for the good of the elderly

**Keywords:** Senior Citizen, Aging, Counseling, Quality of Life, Nursing Home

### Introduction

Every country in the world is experiencing growth in the elderly in the population. By 2030, one in six people in the world will be over 60 years old. Currently the proportion of the population aged 60 and above will increase from 1 billion in 2020 to 1.4 billion. By 2050, the world's population aged 60 and over will double (2.1 billion). The number of people aged 80 and over is expected to triple between 2020 and 2050 to reach 426 million. In Malaysia, the number of elderly who are more than 60 years old reached one million in 1997 and increased to 1.5 million in 2000. In 2050, it is predicted to reach 4 million and exceed the number of children for the first time (Osman, 2015). Therefore, the care of the elderly in our country must be prioritized and all their needs must be met accordingly. This includes the facilities provided at the care center, what training or courses need to be given to caregivers, and the physical and mental health of the elderly.

There are several things that need to be prioritized including physical health issues, spiritual and mental needs (Tamat & Vellymalay, 2019). Previous studies have focused on the issues faced by the elderly in general. For example, there is a study that focuses on the training of caregivers in nursing homes (Hapsah et al., 2022). However, there is a lack of research in Malaysia that focuses on non-B40 residents. This leaves a practical gap to focus on non-B40 seniors. Qualitative studies can help space for further research to discover variables to add to the current literature on elderly care. With the information obtained, the government can build policies to coordinate and increase nursing homes in Malaysia. The main objective of this study is to study the management of the care center so that the elderly in the place are cared for as well as possible.

## **Literature Review**

### **Elderly Home Requirements**

In Malaysia, aid for the people is progressing. Children's guidance clinics have become more established compared to 20 years ago (Siti Hajar, 2016). However, there are shortcomings from the aspect of nursing homes for the elderly. Alavi et al (2011) stated that the elderly need more support from physical and mental aspects. For them, support from family members and the community is important and necessary. They suggest social support guided by community education to continuously change and foster relationships between family members and other community members with social institutions in the elderly's living environment to achieve the best old life. Non-formal education from the aspect of caring for the elderly from childhood to the elderly as a whole is very important to improve the quality of care for the elderly. The government is also responsible for being proactive in improving the number and quality of nursing homes for the elderly and temporary nursing homes, especially to change so that the elderly can be independent and also provide opportunities for their caregivers to rest for a while.

Now, the government has provided support for the elderly and their caregivers in Malaysia. Although there is a shortage of care homes and temporary care homes that will be a very big issue in the next 10 years. The new policy can control the care of adult children and the quality of life of the elderly is better taken care of. Sanmargaraja and Wee (2022) feel that there are also a few people who live in nursing homes out of necessity. Not all nursing home residents choose to live in a nursing home after seeing and experiencing the lack of facilities. However, the elderly have no other choice after being forced out of their own homes (Salleh et al., 2021). The quality and facilities of nursing homes must be strengthened so that residents can stay voluntarily, not by force. The study done by Alavi et al (2011) also agrees with this statement, finding that at this age the burden to take care of their parents is getting harder because of the reduction in family size and major changes in health care and services. This leads to adult children who fail to take care of the elderly and neglect which causes many elderly people to be neglected without good care and protection in their old age. Neglect can also arise in terms of a lack of attention and care that is more focused on the individual. Therefore, focus now needs to be given to strengthen the center for the old age must have an increasing place in our lives. One of the pioneers in this movement is Dr Lillian Martin who retired from the chair of Psychology, at Stanford and established a center in San Francisco for counseling the elderly (Stevens and Gardner, 1982). Malaysia is expected to become an aging country when more than 15 percent of the total population has reached the age of 60 and above. In 2019, an estimated 3.4 million (10.3 percent) of the total population were senior citizens (Department

of Statistics, 2019). In addition, there was an increase in the number of senior citizens by 6.7 percent compared to 6.5 percent in 2018. The increase in the number of elderly people in Malaysia can be attributed to the aging of the Jones Generation (Boomers II) who were born in 1955 to 1964. The trend of increasing the number of elderly people has had an impact on the increase in elderly people living in residential care homes. The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (2018) reported a total of 1,413 senior citizens living in Rumah Seri Kenangan (RSK) and 207 living in Rumah Ehsan (RE), which is managed by the Malaysian government. Meanwhile, 1,706 registered residential care homes in Malaysia are managed by NGOs and private organizations and a total of 6,927 senior citizens living in the residence live in nursing homes. This report shows that nearly 8,500 elderly people in Malaysia live in residential care and do not live with family members (Yusof et al., 2022). Efforts to create awareness about different communities in Malaysia have been encouraged by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (KPT). KPT is already moving towards a more collaborative approach with the community through the implementation of Service Learning Malaysia (SULAM) into curriculum courses at higher institutions in Malaysia. SULAM combines service/community-based learning as a teaching pedagogy that brings students to the community (Yusof et al., 2022). Through these intentional program activities, the students will have the opportunity to meet and interact with various people in the organization and build relationships with other professionals. By interacting with community members, college students are exposed to real-life opportunities and can apply theory to practice (Yusof et al., 2022). Specifically, students who are interested in the elderly population are required to learn certain skills which are counseling principles in dealing with them (Yusof et al., 2022). This is because of the nature of the elderly who require special care and attention in terms of physical, mental, and emotional needs.

### ***Physical Health***

Older people are at higher risk for diseases such as heart disease, stroke, and cancer. More than 27.1% of people aged 65 and over are limited by heart conditions (Osman, 2015). As for stroke, many elderly people with heart problems are also at risk of cerebrovascular disease. 80% of the causes of 200,000 deaths occur when people are 65 years old or older (Osman, 2015). 55% of cancers occur and are diagnosed after the age of 65. Bowel cancer is malignant in those aged 70 years and above and second is lung cancer. (focus on care/needs). Based on the study of Hami et al (2019), there is a phenomenon called Geriatric Giants (GG) which is a physical and mental disability or deterioration that appears in older people. Among the characteristics of GG are mental cognition, urinary incontinence, instability, falls, and inability to move. Impaired cognition mostly presents as dementia in the elderly.

### ***Mental Health***

Seniors need a safe and supportive environment in their homes for a high quality of life. The majority of older people want a quiet life (Hami et al., 2022). The trend of increasing the number of elderly people has had an impact on the increase in elderly people living in residential care homes. Efforts to create awareness about different communities in Malaysia have been encouraged by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (KPT). KPT is already moving towards a more collaborative approach with the community through the implementation of Service Learning Malaysia (SULAM) into curriculum courses at higher institutions in Malaysia. Specifically, students who are interested in the elderly population are required to learn certain skills that are the principles of counseling in dealing with them. This

is because of the nature of the elderly who require special care and attention in terms of physical, mental, and emotional needs. Therefore, there is a greater need to incorporate counseling principles into gerontology training (Yusof et al., 2022). Laycock's theory became the basis of the theory (1945) states that every human being has basic psychological needs that become normal from the day they are born. There are six basic psychological needs. First, the need for love, which is to live in friendly mutual respect with one or more human beings. Second is the need to belong which is to be desired and a member of the desired group. The third is the need to be independent, that is to have the freedom to live one's own life and make one's own decisions. Fourth is the need for achievement. That is to do something, to perform a task, to create something and to find success. The fifth is the need for recognition, which is to feel that one's personality and behavior are accepted by peers. Last is the need for self-esteem, which is to feel that personality and behavior are sufficient from the aspect of one's internal standards. However, Hami et al (2022) opposed living in the elderly home. Based on his research, the quality of life at home will usually be better at home, followed by a new *rumah pondok* for the elderly. Especially for those who are at a low economic level. Hami et al (2022) feel that because of the spiritual aspect, many individuals live in *rumah pondok* for a long time because they want to spend their last years more spiritually, and *pondok* is for Muslims who want to increase their religious knowledge (Seman et al., 2007). The elderly need a safe and supportive environment in their home for a high quality of life. The majority of older people want a quiet life (Akil & Abdullah, 2013). They must feel comfortable there and have a sense of belonging. They also need to be allowed to move and carry out their duties. They need social, physical, and psychological fit, in other words. A comfortable and functional home can offer all of this. Place of residence has an effect which is significant on the quality of life of the elderly in this study. Those who lived in their own homes had the best quality of life, followed by those who lived in *rumah pondok* (Riji & Ahmad, 2008). Elderly people living in nursing homes experience the worst quality of life (Hami et al., 2022). However, Hami et al. (2022) did not study the population that is at a medium and high economic level.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The application of a phenomenological approach with face-to-face interviews was more appropriate than a grounded theory approach using focus groups due to the sensitive nature of the topic (Rowan & Huston, 1997). Because of that and also based on the study of Noraini et al (2015), this approach is used. The researcher is a true observer, able to analyze a wider scope but may lack access to more dynamic details.

The study was conducted in an elderly home in Subang Jaya, Selangor. The old people's house is private and mostly inhabited by people who are M40 and T20. The house is not too cramped, and the residents are cared for with hospice and outside medicine. This research has received ethical approval from the National University of Malaysia and permission has been given by the administration of the school where this study was conducted.

### **Study Population and Sample**

The study that was conducted was qualitative. The population of workers was selected by purposive sampling in an old people's home in Subang Jaya. This selection of old people's homes is to target participants who are not B40. The study sample is 4 residents in the old man's house. The characteristics of the selected respondents are residents aged 60 and over. The race of the respondents was noted to study potential differences from cultural aspects.

The selected sample is the most practical and possible implemented based on objective research, the nature of the target population, and available resources. The study of Noraini et al. (2015) was used as a reference. Based on their research, four respondents are sufficient to avoid duplication of information and redundancy (Rowan & Huston, 1997)

**Data Collection and Instrumentation**

Data was collected through the interview method. Interview questions were based on a literature review and reviewed by experts. The open-ended question interview method uses a flexible question structure instrument on the study sample to obtain accurate information to achieve the objectives of this study (Creswell, 2014). The interview was conducted face-to-face. Credibility (internal validity) and marketability (external validity) of the data are achieved by trying to find exceptions, the use of triangulation (that is, by describing various data collection methods, data sources, researchers, or theories), rejecting possible observer effects and obtaining a level of "saturation" (concordance ) which is high in category development. Peer review, or validating findings with the research participants themselves, is another method of assessing data credibility and has also been recommended in recent ethical guidelines (Tri-Council Working Group, 1996).

**Data Analysis Methods**

The data was analyzed by the thematic process of examining the transcription of the recordings and identifying themes that arose based on the objectives of the study.

**Findings**

The findings of the study using thematic analysis found five main themes as a result of interview exploration, namely mental health factors, physical health, leisure activities, spirituality, and finance. Two subthemes under the mental health problem factor are Dementia, passion for life, and missing loved ones. Two sub-themes under physical health are disease and fitness. Two subthemes under leisure activities are social life, and always active.

Table 1

*Themes and subthemes of research findings*

Theme	Subtheme
Mental Health	Dementia, Will to live, Missing Loved Ones
Physical Health	Diseases, Fitness
Leisure Activity	Social life, Being Active

The research question of this study is what are the needs of the residents in the old people's home who are not B40? Based on the findings of the study, several themes are clear. The first theme, which is mental health, includes several subthemes. Among them are dementia, passion for life, and longing for loved ones. Although Alzheimer's is primarily a neurodegenerative dementia and one of its main cognitive features is memory loss (El Haj et al., 2020), this disease is also characterized by the early appearance of various

neuropsychiatric symptoms, especially depression. with worry. This means that fear or stress from dementia is also actually caused by the disease. Carmel et al (2007) suggest that passion for life has a positive correlation with survival.

Based on Maslow's theory of needs, the lowest level, which is the physiological level, cannot be met by unhealthy elderly people. The passion for life and longing for loved ones is in line with Maslow's theory of needs, the third level which is social needs. A sense of belonging is "being comfortable with relationships with others that result from acceptance, respect, and affection. For example, some large social groups might include clubs, co-workers, religious groups, professional organizations, sports, teams, groups, and online communities. Some examples of small social relationships include family members, intimate partners, mentors, co-workers, and confidants. Humans need to love and be loved - sexually and non-sexually - by others based on Maslow's theory (Heylighen, 1992). All of this is to mental well-being, and of course there is a relationship between mental health and physical health (Aisha, 2020). The second theme, which is physical health, has several subthemes, namely disease and fitness. The physical health of the elderly must be taken care of for their well-being. The third theme is leisure activities which are divided into two sub-themes, which are social life and always being active. Based on a study by Kang et al (2020) in the United States, the importance of leisure activities is (a) peer relationships foster a sense of belonging, purpose, achievement, and importance; (b) residents' relationships with family members support a sense of belonging, continuity, and importance; (c) mutual respect and reciprocity between residents and nursing home staff promote a sense of belonging and importance; and (d) organizational factors create barriers to establishing meaningful relationships. Each type of relationship, peer, family, and staff, makes its contribution to residents' psychosocial well-being. This coincides with the response of the research findings of 4 respondents. Relationships between people are still very important in old age, including peers, staff and family members. This is in line with Maslow's Theory of Needs, the level of social needs. The fourth theme is spiritual. Hami et al (2022) stated that when a person gets old it means that a person will gradually increase and get closer to death. For example, an elderly person who chooses to live in a hut begins to look ahead and prepare him or herself for death with spiritual knowledge, and they learn to be content with what they have (Riji, 2008). This explains why shantytown residents score the highest in the psychological life satisfaction domain, even though they have a high risk of disease. Elderly people generally believe that life is predestined and everyone must accept old age. Old people can maintain good health by staying in a hut where mass prayers are held. The fifth theme is the financial aspect. Findings from a study by Endut & Ahmad (2009) stated that there is a demand for care centers for the elderly, especially private ones. In addition to private care homes run by individuals and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the government can help to give grants to operate. This ensures that the standard of care and facilities provided by paid nursing homes are better than those that are free. The implications of the research findings are some themes that can be focused on in future studies to help strengthen nursing homes or retirement homes for the elderly. Not only from the government's help, the private sector can also use this information to improve existing nursing homes for the benefit of its residents. Malaysia can emulate countries such as Japan, Finland, and the United States that have already provided private care homes that are complete and comfortable for the elderly. Although Kuala Lumpur and Selangor are already advanced in development in terms of nursing homes, the needs of other states should be measured to also strengthen and increase nursing homes outside the suburban areas.

## Conclusion

Overall, the most important things to take care of in an elderly care center are physical, mental, recreational, spiritual and financial health. However, there are some weaknesses in the research that is carried out which cannot be avoided due to cost and time factors. Several factors cannot be explored such as cultural, religious and gender factors. In addition, another weakness is not focusing on the differences within the Malaysian state. Recommendations for future studies are to focus on these factors and also to see the relationship between leisure activities and the quality of life of elderly people in nursing homes.

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