Division of Labor of Older Person’s Household in Rural Malaysia

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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 division of labor of older person’s household in rural Malaysia. The design used in this study was a combination of the sociological method of face-to-face interviews the anthropological method of participant-observation. Results of the study show that there is a tendency that works outside the home is considered as the responsibility of the husband. Number of respondents who felt this task is a shared responsibility is not significant. Almost all respondents felt that work in the home is the responsibility of the wife. Respondents felt holding spending money as a wife responsibility. In the context of a purchasing decision, the majority of respondents felt that both husband and wife all together should be responsible for any decision to purchase any items. Making important family decisions task is also considered by many respondents as a task to be undertaken both by husband and wife.

Key words: Elderly • Older population • Population aging • Demographic changes

INTRODUCTION

When Head of one of a sociology department in a public university in Malaysia asked me to pursue my PhD on aging in 1994, there were yet not many public universities in the country that offered courses on aging at that time not many people in Malaysia are aware that the world is aging. Research in the field of aging was sparse and courses offered at undergraduate levels almost nonexistent at that time. Unfortunately, in the past thirty years, research on aging has grown exponentially. Many academicians are striving to conduct research on aging. Population aging has become a mode of debate in academic’s milieu. Thus, many of the issues of this category of population have been documented.

There is now widely recognized that population aging has become a distinct demographic changes occurs very rapidly in developing countries [1]. Improvements in life expectancy of the population result in a higher proportion of older persons [2]. Developing countries not only experiencing the aging of population, but this experiences are sometimes at unprecedented rate. Although developed nations today have relatively high proportion of older people in their population, the most rapid increases are in developing world [3]. Seventy-seven percent of the world’s net gain of the older persons aged 65 years and above from July 1999 to July 2000 (615,000) occurred in developing countries [4]. The net balance of the world’s older persons grew by more than 795,000 people each month during the year [4]. By the year 2010, it was projected that this net monthly gain of older people will be 847,000 each month [3]. Since 1980s much of the increase of older persons of the world is in developing countries [5].

Thus, today older population not only has increased dramatically in terms of number or percentage, but also in terms of speed. Before this, most of developed nations took more than a century to double their older population. It took more than a century for France’s population aged 65 and above to increase from 7% to 14%, but surprisingly, in the present day, Japan only took 26 years (from 1970 to 1996) to increase its population aged 65 and above from 7% to 14% [4]. Thus, the aged population is concentrated in the developing regions most of the additions to the aged population will also be in this region [6].
In terms of family life, it is commonly believed that women do not have to contribute or participate in economic activity outside the home. Their responsibility should be mainly concentrated on domestic chores. Husbands are seen responsible for everything outside the home, including power in household. Modern family is normally characterized by reduced power differentials between husbands and wives [7]. Better education and paid employment have enhanced women opportunity to share their power in household. They begin to enter all economic sectors as well. In Malaysia, historical records show that besides accomplishing a multitude of domestic chores, women have work long and hard in rice fields, tin mines and rubber plantation [8]. In rural Kelantan, women have formed a very important component of the informal sectors. Women’s dominance in market trade is obvious in Kelantan it is observes nearly 100 percent of Malay women are engaged in market trade [9]. Although a lot of information has been documented on the involvement of Malay women in market place, the division of labor of older person’s household in rural Malaysia is still relatively unexamined. Many questions about this remain unanswered. In an attempt to fill the gap, this paper therefore aims at analyzing the division of labor of older person’s household.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Respondents: The majority of respondents in this survey are elderly man. The average age of respondents is 68 years. The age of oldest respondent is 95. 40% of the respondent is in 60-64 years category. The respondent currently married is 143, four divorced and 64 are widowed three respondents are never married. There are two older male and one older female who are never married. Male respondents who are currently married outnumber female respondents. The majority of male still have spouse. The educational attainment of the respondents is also very low. When they were young, they did not have much opportunity to attend formal school. More than half are never attend formal school (57.5%). Although the number of respondents who attended formal school is quite big (42.5%), one-third has only an elementary school level. Most of them are in lower socioeconomic class.

Division of Labor in Household: In modern societies men and women have been generally accepted as having an equal status. In Malaysia, women have been treated as housewives social expectations placed the major responsibility of woman on nurturing and caring for others, while man is the primary breadwinner. The wife is generally not excluded from decision making in important family affairs. Division of labor may be examining in terms of participation of individuals in the labor force as well as in household level. Division of labor in this article is to mean the division of labor between husband and wife. The responsibility of husband and wife are varied, but it is devoted to five aspects, namely work outside the home, job in the home, holding spending money, purchasing decision to important decision-making (Table 1).
Table 1: Division of Labor in Household

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Husband</th>
<th>Wife</th>
<th>Husband and Wife</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jobs outside the home</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs in the home</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding spending money</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchasing decision</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>55.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important decision-making</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>58.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Jobs Outside the Home:** For the majority of respondents, jobs outside the home are seen as a responsibility of a husband. The number of respondents who felt this work is a shared responsibility is not quite significant. Similarly, only a small number of respondents who feel this responsibility are the responsibility of the wife. A total of 69% of respondents who felt jobs outside the home is the responsibility of the husband, while 27% felt it is a shared responsibility. Only 4% who felt that such work are the responsibility of the wife. Works outside the home, are often related to earning a living sometimes using physical strength. Although there is a wife who also works outside the home, the Malays are generally thought of earning a living is the responsibility of the husband. A common practice of the Malays in Kelantan is woman is an economic pillar of the family. They are fun to work day and night to get money. Women with better education, involve in informal economic activities as a temporary activity before they get suitable job in the government sector. These conditions are sometimes taken as an advantage by husbands to put works to earn a living on a wife's shoulder. There are a relatively large number of elderly who felt work outside the home as a joint responsibility.

**Jobs in the Home:** A total of 80% of older respondents felt that the work in the house is the responsibility of the wife. This is because, for them the duties of a wife, is essentially related to the household the work that does not involve the use of a lot of physical strength. The majority of the respondents felt the responsibility of a wife is to be a manager, helping a husband manage the household. Work in the home is diverse, ranging from cooking, washing clothes as well as care for grandchildren. Due to the Malays expectation that the work in the household is the responsibility of the wife, there are adult children who hand over the responsibility of care for young children to their parents while they are going out working. They do not send their children to baby sitter because they want to save money. For them by giving this responsibility to parents, they can save costs. One of the sons said they asked for their mother to care for their children while going out working as the cost for it are expensive. They do not have to pay anything if the children are cared by their parents.

**Holding Spending Money:** Tasks such as holding spending money are generally regarded as the duty of the wife. The common practice is that spending money is held together. Respondents feel no problem whether the wife or husband who hold spending money. There are 46% who felt spending money is a responsibility of a wife a nearly equal number, 32% felt that spending money is a shared responsibility between husband and wife. There are three patterns of holding spending money, namely the husband, wife, as well as husband and wife. The question of who should hold spending money is generally depends on the mindset of respondents. For more autocratic husband, they generally felt spending money is their responsibility. If the wife is more dominant, the wife is often felt holding the money is their responsibility. For respondents with high spirit of tolerance, they generally feel anyone could hold spending money. For them, holding spending money is a shared responsibility. All these patterns of holding spending money can be observed in this study.

**Purchasing Decision:** In the context of a purchasing decision, the majority of respondents (56%) felt it is a shared responsibility. Both husband and wife should be responsible for any decision to purchase any important goods. Buying in this context does not include buying groceries for their daily needs, but it is to mean as purchasing a valuable goods, including vehicles or assets. In the context of the Malays, there is a tendency the older the person, the more intimate the couple. They always together, include to the market or to anywhere else. This is one of the ways they show they love each other. They discussed the matter before a decision to be made. There are some who felt decisions to buy are the responsibility of the wife. Due to the fact that women love to shop, decisions to buy should be placed on the shoulders of the wife. To them, women are also having the ability to make a good choice.

**Important Decision-Making:** Important decision-making is considered by the majority of respondents as the task to be undertaken together by husband and wife. Important family decision-making task such as going to Mecca to undertake the hajj, for instance, is considered by many respondents as a task to be undertaken together.
by husband and wife. Such tasks do not involve the use of physical strength it can be done with or on mutual agreement. Couples who have high spirit of tolerance, conducting many work together. There was 59% of respondents felt important family decisions is a shared responsibility. There were also quite a larger number (38%) who felt like this task is the responsibility of the husband. The remaining 3.5% felt this task was a responsibility of the wife. For the Malays in the study area, performing tasks jointly between husband and wife is not a strange. Husbands as heads of families often work with family members, rather than just work for family members. Women are the main contributors to economic sectors in the study area. In the study area, as in other places in Kelantan, women have the freedom to work outside the home, actively involved in the informal sectors, whether to help increase family financial, or as the main sources of family income. Any important decision in family is generally determined by the women.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, at the household level, the duties of husband and wife varied. Division of labor in this article is taken to mean the division of labor between husband and wife in the household with special references to work outside the home, work in the home, holding spending money, make a decision to purchase to make important family decisions. For most respondents, work outside the home is responsibility of the husband. Respondent who felt this task is a shared responsibility is not significant. Almost all respondents felt work in the home is responsibility of the wife. In terms of purchasing decision, the majority felt both husband and wife all together should be responsible for any decision. Making important family decision is also considered as a task to be undertaken by a husband and a wife. Thus, the responsibility differentials between husbands and wives in study area are not clearly exercised. The husband is not considered the primary decision-maker in the family. The wife, on the other hand, is not excluded from decision making in important family affair.

REFERENCES