Satisfaction of Family Support of Older Rural Malaysian

W.A. Wan-Ibrahim and I. Zainab

School of Social Development, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia
Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

Abstract: One of the most significant demographic changes of the twentieth century is the aging of the world’s population. Population aging or the increasing proportion of older population has become a challenge not only for developed countries but developing ones as well. There are signs that the population of Malaysia is also moving towards aging. The purpose of this paper is to analyze satisfaction of older persons in rural Malaysia on family support they receive from their adult children. The design used in this study was a combination of the sociological method of face-to-face interviews and the anthropological method of participant-observation. Using a simple random sampling technique, a total of 214 older residents aged 60 years and above in rural Kelantan, Malaysia was selected as respondents. Results reveal that on the average, one-third of the respondents are very satisfied, while more than half are satisfied with the support they received. The respondents who less satisfied with support received were not significant. Based on the small proportion of older people who less satisfied with support received, it can be concluded that all family members and neighbors have contributed significantly to the welfare of the elderly.

Key words: Elderly • Population aging • Support • Care • Kin

INTRODUCTION

Following the growing number of older persons in most of developing countries, family, or community members have to adapt themselves with this new environment. Thus, family support of older persons has become an important issue. This is because, unlike in developed countries, family members are the main providers of care to older persons in developing countries. Moreover, the main providers of care in any families are generally women. As women also the main childcare providers, these sources of care frequently will be facing a lot of burden resulted in dissatisfaction of support received by elderly parents.

Research suggests that older persons perceive the informal network of kin, friends and neighbors as the most appropriate source of social support [2]. The more developed the economies, the lower the rates of labor force participation of older population [5]. This is because the more develops the economy the higher the per capita incomes of the country result in the more the older population has the higher real income per capita. This situation may alter the desire of older population to continue staying in the labor force, resulted the rates of their participation in the labor forces decline. In developed countries, the main source of income and livelihood is from pension as one reaches a given retirement age [9]. There has been a widespread acceptance in developed countries of the responsibility of government in transferring income and providing services to older persons [3].

It was also noted that family support varies substantially with the level of economic development [6-8]. The situation is quite different in developing economies, however. The older persons in developing countries have to continue working in the labor force up to the very old age in order for them to support themselves. The older persons will only stop working if they are very weak and no longer able to use their physical strength as deteriorating health status. At such
conditions the older persons will have no choice but will need to rely on the family and the local community for support and care.

Thus the discussion of support systems is one of the most contentious issues facing the older persons in developing countries and represents a major source of conflict in family relations. Frequently, older persons report dissatisfaction with the availability and quality of support given by their adult children. In Malaysia very sparse information is available about the nature of family support of the older people. Many questions regarding the extent to which these older people are satisfied with the support received remain unanswered. In an attempt to answer this question, therefore, this paper aims at analyzing the satisfaction of older persons in rural Malaysia on family support from their children. The older person in this article is defined as persons aged 60 years and above.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in the district of Limbongan, in the state of Kelantan, Malaysia. Malaysia, a small country, comprises of 14 states which have different levels of urbanization. Most of the population in Kelantan lives in rural areas. Farming of rice is the most important agricultural activities in the state. Rice and rubber are growing well in Kelantan because most of the region has fertile soil and abundant water supply. Rains provide enough water for growing rice. Other crops planted in the region include rubber. The people of Kelantan also raise cattle, chickens, ducks and vegetables for food. The majority of the people of Kelantan live under the poverty line.

The design used in this study was a mixed method approach that is a combination of the sociological method (survey) and the anthropological method of participant-observation. Survey is useful in research of a large population [4], while participant-observation is used to get a better understanding of what is going on behind the quantitative data collected. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the satisfaction of the older population in rural Kelantan in family support they receive. Using a simple random sampling technique, a total of 214 older residents aged 60 years and above in rural Kelantan, Malaysia was selected as respondents. Samples of this study were older people living in rural areas in the district of Limbongan, in the state of Kelantan.

They were selected as respondents using simple random sampling technique. The study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data. Major data for the quantitative analysis are derived from face-to-face interviews, while data for the qualitative analysis are derived from unstructured interviews and information from key informants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio Demographic Profiles: As in any other community elsewhere, due to the fact that the life expectancy of the elderly women is higher, the majority of elderly population is women. In this study, however, the majority of respondent was elderly man. The average age of respondents was 68 years, while median and mod of age were 67 and 60 years respectively. The age of oldest respondent was 95. When this age is categorized into four categories, that is 60-64 years, 65-69 years, 70-74 years and 75 years+, than 40% of the respondents was in 60-64 years category. The older population in other three categories was quite similar, around 20%.

In terms of marital status, three respondents were never married. The respondents currently married were 143, four divorced and 64 respondents were widow/widower. There were two elderly male and one elderly female who never married. Male respondents who currently married outnumber female respondents (112 male compared to only 31 female respondents). In terms of academic, the educational attainment or educational level of the respondents reflect the level of academic among the Malaysian as a whole before Malaysia gained independence from British in the past several decades (1957). At that time not many people, especially in rural areas, has the opportunity to attend formal school. As all of the elderly respondents are those who were brought up at the time before independence, they did not have much opportunity to attend formal school. Analyzing the educational attainment, the level of education of the respondents was low. More than half was never attend formal school (58%). Around one-third has an elementary school. The elderly woman who did not attend formal school was higher than the elderly man.

Satisfaction of Support: An analysis of respondents' satisfaction about the support received is aim at looking at the welfare of the respondents; whether they are satisfied with the support receive (Table 1).
The importance of children in helping elderly parents is usually described as the obligations and responsibility is usually described as the sense of belonging and security. On the other hand, children who do not know their obligations and responsibility of adult children to give support and care to the elderly parents is synonymous with Islam. In line with this, the villagers, particularly the older ones have always emphasized that children should be brought up accordance to Islamic teaching. The parents are responsible for financing their children until they leave school finish schooling [10].

Respondents are also asked on the possibility to establish a special body to take care of the older persons in this community. To get a deeper picture, respondents are asked their assessment of satisfaction about the support they received:

- In your opinion, is the welfare of the older persons in this community satisfied or neglected?
- In your opinion, is a special body to take care of the older persons in this community necessary to establish?

Analysis revealed that most (81.8%) felt their welfare is satisfied; only 18.2% of the respondents who said the welfare of the elderly in the study area are neglected. From questions about whether to establish a special body to take care of the elderly in the study area, although most (64.5%) felt it is no need, 35.5% felt needed. These responses reflected the need to place a special body that may be responsible as a complement to the care of elderly population in study area is welcome. Overall, support system in study area is predominantly informal. In addition to the Social Welfare Department, which provides support in terms of monthly allowances, there are no other formal organizations that provide support to the elderly. Thus, a relatively large number of respondents felt the need to establish a special body to look after the welfare of elderly population.

Requirement of a special body as this does not mean that the welfare and well-being of elderly in study area is being neglected, but it can mean to support informal ones to ensure the maintenance of the welfare of elderly persons in the future. This situation reflects both forms of supports, either informal support from family and community, as well as formal support from government or voluntary bodies are important. This is also true as there are a number of older persons in study area believe that there are needs cannot be met by family members or friends, but can only be met by government. They felt that their welfare will be more secure in the future if there is cooperation between the family and government.

Table 1: Family Support Received

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Support</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Not Satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other than financial (goods)</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home repairing</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House cleaning</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying local bills</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the context of helping the financial problems, for example, the number of respondents who is very satisfied with this supports is 50.5%, much higher than the average (39.8%). The number of respondents, who are satisfied with other forms of support, is not different with this average. Support in terms of help other than financial problems, help clean up the house and help paying the local bills, are three forms of supports in which more than 60% of the respondents are satisfied. In the context of dissatisfaction, there are no respondents who are dissatisfied with these forms of support. Based on the small proportion of older people who less satisfied with support received, it can be concluded that all family members and neighbors have contributed significantly to the welfare of the elderly.

From the above discussion, it is clear that children are playing a crucial role for the older persons in rural areas in Malaysia. In a Malay-Muslims local community, the importance of children in helping elderly parents is usually described as *kenang budi*, which refers to the obligation and responsibility of adult children to give support and care to the elderly parents. It also refers to social ties between community members that result in mutual assistance. Adult children who know their obligations and responsibility, or *kenang budi* will give the elderly parents a sense of belonging and security. On the other hand, children who do not know their obligations and responsibility is usually described as *tidak kenang budi*, or *anak derhaka*, which refers to the adult children who neglect or reluctant to give support and care to the elderly parents. Islam imposes a great sin to children who neglect or reluctant to give support and care toward their elderly parents, while the children who give assiduous care towards their elderly parents will receive blessing from God in life and will be rewarded in the life after death [10].

While the responsibility of adult children to give support and care to their elderly parents, the responsibility of the parents is to bring up their children in a proper manner with in line with Islamic teaching. The majority of population in the study area is the Malays. The Malays, particularly in rural areas in Kelantan, is
proposed the concept of duality of informal and formal support. Through the hierarchical compensatory theory of social support [1] postulates that kin, particularly spouse and children are preferred as the cornerstone of the support system. If these elements fail to function or not available to older persons, they are followed next in preference by friends, neighbors and eventually formal organization in a well-ordered hierarchical selection process. In line with this, Cantor [1] has also conceptualized the social support system of the elderly as a series of concentric circles each containing a different type of support element, where the older persons is at the center and the sources of support radiate outward according to the degree of social distance from the older persons and the degree of bureaucracy of the support element.

Thus, with a relatively large number of respondents felt the need to establish a special body to look after the welfare of elderly does not mean that the welfare of elderly in study area is being neglected, but based on the relative importance of these two kinds of support.

CONCLUSION

That the population aging has become a challenge worldwide is widely acknowledged. Population aging poses certain challenge to all families, especially in terms of support to older persons. In developing countries family support is an important element for the lives of older persons. This paper presents the portion of the results of a bigger study to examine the well-being of rural older person in rural Kelantan, Malaysia. From that study a wide range of data on rural older persons has been collected and relevance to this paper is data on the satisfaction of family support. It is an extension of two more papers related to family support in this volume. The main objective of this paper is aims at analyzing the satisfaction of older persons in rural Malaysia on family support they receive from their adult children. Results reveal that on the average, one-third of the respondents are very satisfied with the support they received and more than half are satisfied about the support. The respondents who less satisfied with supports received are not significant in number. In Malay society, children are playing a crucial role for elderly parents. The importance of children in Malay society towards elderly parents is very much related to the Islamic teaching. It is obligatory for adult children to give support and care to their elderly parents resulted in receive support from family members is not difficult in rural society.

REFERENCES