

Subjective Well-Being of Older Persons at Elderly Day-Care Center

¹W.A. Wan-Ibrahim, ²Majidah Abd Majid and ³I. Zainab

¹School of Social Development, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia

²Jabatan Keselamatan Jalan Raya, Persiaran Perdana, Presint 4, 62300 Putrajaya, Malaysia

³Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Malaysia

Abstract: In Malaysia, because family members are the main care providers to the elderly parents, the well-being of the older persons is very much depends on their family members. In recent years, family members have become increasingly difficult to continue such function as before. The provision of care within family becomes more difficult in urban areas as family size decreases and women, who are traditionally the main care providers, increasingly engaged in employment outside the home. This study was conducted to analyze the level of subjective well-being of older persons attending the Elderly Day-Care Centre, in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Utilizing data collected through face-to-face interviews on 35 respondents aged 60 and above whom regularly come to the center; this study shows that nearly all of older persons in the survey have a moderate level of subjective well-being. Assessing subjective well-being across different profiles reveals that the level of subjective well-being of respondents in various categories was not much difference.

Key words: Population aging • Older person • Elderly • Senior citizens • Well-being

INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the findings of a cross-sectional survey on older persons in Malaysia. In particular it analyzes the level of subjective well-being of older persons attending the Elderly Day-Care Centre, in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Older persons have become a distinct phenomenon globally. In this century the world population will be characterized by a population aging never experienced before in the history of humankind [1]. Before this most people associate the growth of older population with developed countries only [2]. Although until recently developing countries still have a high proportion of children and a relative low proportion of older persons, the absolute number of older persons in developing nations are large and increasing [2]. The older persons aged 65 years and older was estimated to be 426 million in 2000 and 828 million in 2025, however, the majority of these older persons in the world are shared by developing regions, 59 percent in 2000 and 69 percent in 2025 and seventy percent of the world's net gain of elderly population every month occurred in developing countries [3].

The study of subjective well-being of older persons is important because data gathered on these problems can help government to plan appropriate action plan for the welfare of this category of population. In developing countries like Malaysia, most often discussions concerning the well-being of older persons emphasize the availability of the family members to provide social care. Research suggests that older persons turn first to the informal network of kin, friends and neighbors for social care [4]. The importance of social care from family for well-being of the older persons cannot be denied. Family is indeed an important institution in human life and it is the primary caregiver to the older persons. The importance of informal support system transcends culture and the level of economic development of a society. Despite industrialization and modernization, the connectedness of older persons with their families and kin networks is unbroken [5].

The functions of families in modern times, however, have become increasingly limited. This is especially true where provision of care within the family becomes more and more difficult as family size decreases and women who are traditionally the main care providers increasingly

engaged in employment outside the home [6]. The widespread of nuclear family as a modern family norm in the majority of families all over the world also gives rise the problems of care for older persons. Following the importance of children in families, Ullah [7], in his study in Pakistan points out that the institutionalized idealization of western nuclear family is not the reflection of the larger Pakistani society. As a result of this new norm, elderly parents will be left at home without care by the members of the family which is become an important factor determines the well-being of older persons.

Literature has documented extensively on subjective well-being of older persons outside Malaysia [8, 9, 10, 11]. Among a few scholars who have been exploring subjective well-being of older persons in Malaysia is Wan Ibrahim and his colleagues. Wan Ibrahim *et al.* [12] in their study in rural Malaysia found the majority of older persons have a moderate level of subjective well-being. As that study was conducted in rural areas, many other questions about the subjective well-being of older persons in urban areas remain unanswered. Do the urban older persons also have a relatively the same level of well-being with rural counterparts? How is the level of their subjective well-being? How is the level of their subjective well-being across different profiles? So far there is no definite answer on these problems. In an attempt to answer this question, therefore, this study is conducted, particularly to analyze the subjective well-being of older persons attending the Elderly Day-Care Centre, in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data for this article were taken from a research conducted on the older persons at the Elderly Day-Care Centre in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur. The center sometimes called “golden age center”, “recreational center”, or “activity center”, created to fulfill the psychosocial needs of older persons. The center was purposely selected for research site because the older persons in this center were all living in urban areas that were expected to have different levels of well-being. Respondents were older persons aged 60 and above.

There were about 500 people aged 60 and above have been registered at the day care center. Out of this number, a total of 35 were selected randomly as respondents. Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews, comprised a wide range of information about the older participants at the center.

Subjective well-being has been assessed in many different ways and by many different investigators [13]. This concept can be measured through single items scales, or multi-item scales. Happiness scales and single-item satisfaction scales are the most widely used as measures of subjective well-being [13]. Subjective well-being in this study was measured through happiness single-item scale. The elderly respondents were asked to rate their happiness whether they were very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy as: “Taken all together, how would you say things are these days – would you say that you are (1) not too happy, (2) pretty happy, or (3) very happy. The responses are then translated to low, moderate and high level of subjective well-being.

There are scholars who assessed subjective well-being through this question. Vaughan, Kashner, Stock and Richards [10] for instance, also assessed subjective well-being through this kind of scale, which was “In general, how satisfied are you with your life?” and responses ranged on a three-point scale from mostly disappointed, to mostly satisfied. Campbell *et al.* [14] and Douthitt, Macdonald and Mullis [9] also used a question “How do you feel about your life as a whole?” with a seven-point scale (7 = delighted; 1 = terrible).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Elderly Day-Care Centre, managed by the Department of Social Welfare, Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory, provides daily care to older persons. The center operates from 8.00am-5.00pm since the last 10 years and had served to a total of 500 older people since it opened. Government provides an allocation of RM39 thousand per year besides assistance from NGOs to cover operating expenses.

Older persons gathered at the day-care center to interact and perform various activities and programs together with other older persons. They are given food and drink and are provided with some facilities such as reading room, rest rooms equipped with beds, foyer, dining room, sports and exercise equipment, radio and television, free of charge. Besides that there are also programs and activities such as mass exercise, aerobics, tai-chi, singing, cooking, indoor games, trips, health screenings, or talk.

This study involved 21 female respondents and 14 male respondents comprising Malays, Chinese and Indians. They are aged between 61 and 79 years. The majority of respondents are aged between 65 to 70 years.

Table 1: Level of Subjective Well-Being of the Respondent

Level of Well-Being	Frequency	Percent
Low	-	-
Moderate	31	88.6
High	4	11.4
Total	35	100.0

Table 2: Level of Subjective Well-being across Different Profiles (%)

Profile	Moderate	High
Sex		
Male	12(34.3)	2(5.7)
Female	19(54.3)	2(5.7)
Age Category		
60-64 years	4(11.4)	1(2.9)
65-69 years	11(31.4)	1(2.9)
70 years (+)	16(45.7)	2(5.7)
Education		
Schooling	28(80.0)	4(11.4)
Not Schooling	3(8.6)	-
Marital Status		
Married	31(88.6)	4(11.4)
Never Married	-	-
Employment		
Ever Working	30(85.7)	4(11.4)
Never Working	1(2.9)	-
Income		
RM650 (-)	11(31.4)	-
RM651 – RM1499	18(51.4)	3(8.6)
RM1500 (+)	2(5.7)	1(2.9)
Total	31(88.6%)	4(11.4%)

In terms of education, 32 respondents attended formal school and three have never attended formal school. Most of them are widow/widower, or single mothers and all of them used to have a spouse. They were all used to be working and some used to have RM2000 income per month. Their average income was RM700 per month. There were also 4 respondents earning RM1500 and above. Their main sources of income are from retirement and support from children.

Level of Subjective Well-Being: As Table 1 reveals, in general, there were four older persons who perceived themselves as having high level of well-being. Almost all of the respondents at the Elderly Day-Care Centre in this survey have a moderate level of well-being (closed to 90%).

Quite interesting to note that from 35 elderly participated in this survey, none of the respondent who rated as having low level of well-being. A question arises as how we can explain this situation? This is probably due to the fact that most of the elderly who come to the day care center are those from the middle class. They were

used to be working in the formal sector and have their own income. Their monthly income was beyond the poverty line and at the time of survey, their income is still beyond the poverty line. Their education level was also beyond primary level result in the higher the level of their well-being.

Level of Subjective Across Different Profiles: The level of subjective well-being across different profiles is presented in Table 2.

Several important facts are revealed by this table. First, none of the respondents reported that they have a low level of well-being. Second, the analysis based on gender indicates that both sexes have more or less the same level of subjective well-being. Whether the respondent is males or females, they will have the same opportunity to have a high level of subjective well-being. While there were older women in the category of moderate level of subjective well-being, there was no different in the category of high level of subjective well-being. This can mean that both man and women older persons have the same opportunity to have a high level of subjective well-being. There was also no difference in terms of high level of subjective well-being across age category, although the number of older persons aged 70 years and older was higher in terms of moderate level of subjective well-being. This is because even though the older persons are poor in material aspects they are likely to admit with pleasure with what they obtain. Respondents who reported used to attend formal education have higher level of subjective well-being. These are also the same in terms of marital, employment and income. Respondents reported as being married, used to be working and have higher income are having higher level of subjective well-being.

CONCLUSION

Research suggests that older persons turn first to the informal network of kin, friends and neighbors for social care. However, the functions of families in modern times have become increasingly limited. This is especially true as family size decreases and women who are traditionally the main care providers increasingly engaged in employment outside the home. All these circumstances affect the well-being of older persons. In Malaysia family members are the main care providers to elderly parents and the well-being of older persons is depends on family members. With recent development, family members have become increasingly difficult to continue such function.

The provision of care within family becomes more difficult in urban areas because family size decreases. Women, who are traditionally the main care providers also increasingly engaged in employment outside the home. Thus, study on well-being of older persons is important as it information can help governments plan and take action needed for their welfare. Result of the study reveals almost all of respondents have a moderate level of well-being. Assessing subjective well-being across different profiles reveals that the level of subjective well-being of respondents in various categories was not much difference.

REFERENCES

1. Kuroda, Toshio. 1991. Structural Change of Age Composition in the Future and Its Socio-Economic Implications, in United Nations, Population Ageing in Asia: Asian Population Studies Series No. 108. Bangkok: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.
2. Kinsella, K. and C.M. Taeuber, 1993. An Aging World II. International Population Reports P95/92-3. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.
3. Kinsella, K. and V. Velkoff, 2001. An Aging World: 2001. International Population Reports P95/01-1. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.
4. Cantor, M. and V. Little, 1985. Aging and Social Care. In R. H. Binstock and Ethel Shanas. (eds.). Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences. New York: Van Nostrand.
5. Sussman, M.B., 1985. The family life of old people. In: R. H. Binstock and Ethel Shanas (eds.). Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences. New York: Van Nostrand.
6. United Nations, 2001. World Population Aging: 1950-2050. New York: Department of International Economics and Social Affairs.
7. Ullah, Hazir, 2012. Cultural Imperialism through Education in Pakistan and the Loss of National Identity. Middle East Journal of Scientific Research 12(2): 215-222.
8. Connidis, Ingrid A. and Julie A. McMullin, 1993. To Have or Have Not: Parent Status and the Subjective Well-Being of Older Men and Women. The Gerontologist, 33(5): 630- 636.
9. Douthitt, R.A., M. Macdonald and R. Mullis, 1992. The Relationship Between Measures of Subjective and Economic Well-Being: A New Look. Social Indicators Research, 26: 407-422.
10. Vaughan, Dale A., J.B. Kashner, W.A. Stock and M. Richards, 1985. A Structural Model of Subjective Well-Being: A Comparison of Ethnicity. Social Indicators Research, 16: 315-332.
11. Wilkening, E.A. and D. McGranahan, 1978. Correlates of Subjective Well-Being in Northern Wisconsin. Social Indicators Research, 5: 211-234.
12. Wan-Ibrahim, W.A., I. Zainab, H.A.R. Asyraf and A. Fadzli, 2012. Subjective Well-Being of Older Rural Muslim Community in Malaysia. International Journal of Asian Social Science, 2(3): 330-335.
13. Andrews, Frank M. and John P. Robinson, 1991. Measures of Subjective Well-Being. In: J.P. Robinson, P. R. Shaver and Lawrence S. Wrightsman. (eds.). Measures of Personality and Social Psychological Attitudes. New York: Academic Press.
14. Campbell, A., P.E. Converse and W.L. Rodgers, 1976. The Quality of American Life. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.