

The Essence of Young Elderly Active Lifestyle: A Phenomenological Approach

Dr Hanan Elsawahli^{1*}, Dr. Faizah Ahmad¹, Assoc.Prof. Dr Azlan Shah Ali²

1. Faculty of Built Environment, University of Malaya, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2. Faculty of Built Environment, University of Malaya, Department of Building Surveying, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Email :hanan_mhe@hotmail.com, faiz@um.edu.my, asafab@um.edu.my

Abstract

Objectives. A quality housing environment reflects a sense of convenience among its residence through physical characteristics such as housing conditions and availability of certain facilities. A housing environment that promotes active lifestyle has become a vital research objective.

Methods. We employed a phenomenological research to explore the meaning and essence of having an active lifestyle from the standpoint of 12 young elderly aged 60-75 years residing in two neighbourhoods in Malaysia. The phenomenological data presented description of how these young elderly maintain an active lifestyle. The account provided information about their lived experience of being both physically and socially active and why they valued maintaining an active lifestyle.

Results. Findings suggest that gender has no influence on maintaining an active lifestyle; rather the neighbourhood environmental factors fostered their physical and social activity. Young elderly have learned to maintain an active lifestyle by being aware of the importance of being active at an older age.

Discussion. The evidence suggests that active lifestyle has positive effects on young elderly health and well-being. The essence of the experience is staying occupied and that staying occupied has the potential to be both physically and socially active.

Keywords: Active lifestyle, neighbourhood environmental factors, phenomenology, young elderly.

Introduction

Maintaining an active lifestyle involves an interaction between people and their environment. Based on this assumption; planners have expanded their concepts of active lifestyle to include social and physical factors as well as individual factors and employed qualitative approaches to focus on subjective elements. These subjective elements explain the individuals' relationships with places (Strath, Isaacs, & Greenwald, 2007) and how they are experienced by individuals in context. Such analysis in providing a micro level perspective of the phenomenon (Marvasti, 2004) and explains its differentiated impact on individuals (Gilbert, 2005).

According to the continuity theory proposed by (Atchley, 1972), which holds that adult individuals develop certain preferences and habits that are inhibited in their personality. As they age, individuals continue to have those habits and preferences and these tend to become stronger, despite the changes they experience. Such an evolution would follow transformation patterns to uphold modes of habitual behaviour. The study theoretical framework is based on the interaction between young elderly active lifestyle behaviour and their environment. This is further defined as the socio-physical transformation construct that involve both persons and characteristics of the residential neighbourhood in which they live. Based on this assumption, the contextual experiences described must be collected through personal and direct interactions between the subject and the interviewer. As such, the focus was to capture the thoughts and actions dynamics of the young elderly within the perceived and particular opportunities and constraints of their specific neighbourhood.

Although many qualitative studies in Europe, Australia and the United States have explored the perceived neighbourhood environmental factors with active lifestyle among the elderly, in Malaysia the majority of studies conducted were by researchers from the medical field. Since the types of issues which are important in physical planning are essentially different to those in other fields because different assumptions apply, the main purpose of the study was to extract the changing dimension of involvement and relationship with the outdoor environment of everyday life from the personal experiences of the young elderly living in two different neighbourhoods namely Taman Tun Dr Ismail (TTDI) in Kuala Lumpur and Taman Meru in Ipoh.

Literature Review

Neighbourhood environmental factors provide opportunities for the elderly to engage in both physical and social activities. Such characteristics play a role in placing value on elderly activity, interests and needs (Frank, Kerr, Rosenberg, & King, 2010). (Cousins & Vertinsky, 1995), for example, argued that class and status, gender, race and age stereotypes have an influence on the activity behaviours among the elderly. However, researchers have recently begun to explore active lifestyle patterns as influenced by neighbourhood environmental factors (Clark et al., 2009), the role of both social and physical activities over the life course (Menec, Means, Keating,

Parkhurst, & Eales, 2011), facilitators, obstacles and perceptions about active lifestyle by and for individuals and elderly in particular (Aspinall P A et al., 2010).

Researchers have also found that active lifestyle plays a crucial role in maintaining quality of life for the elderly as it reduces social isolation and mortality levels ((WHO), 2002). However, the elderly active lifestyle is frequently faced with some obstacles as in many cases older people favour to age in place (Pretty G.H., Chipur, & Bramston, 2003) and live independently (Kluge, 2002); . Consequently, this has led to relative loneliness and social isolation which themselves tend to influence the older people's sense of active wellbeing.

Research on elderly active lifestyle has been identified as beneficial to society stimulating new theories and practice. The concept of co-housing, for example, has emerged in Denmark in an attempt to address the issue of loneliness and social isolation. The concept was adapted by the older people who wish to age in place, and has become a new approach to active elderly living, initiated by young families (Bamford, 2005). The concept led a large body of research to focus on specific neighbourhood characteristics and their influence on social relationships and social isolation (Owen, Humpel, Leslie, Bauman, & Sallis, 2004) and further examined their relation with both psychological wellbeing and illness (Routasalo, Savikko, Tilvis, Standberg, & Pitkala, 2006). Other studies have explored relationships between neighbourhood design and physical activity and documented the benefits of providing activities in older people communities. Older people who are more exposed to green spaces enjoy better social cohesion which consequently results in an improved relation with neighbours and friends. Furthermore, daily verbal and visual contact between residents enhanced the residents' sense of friendship among the senior community (Dill et al., 2010); (Aelbrecht, 2010). On the other hand, street connectivity, density, mix-land use and accessibility to activity centres facilitate enhance social interaction among the elderly (Sugihara & Evans, 2000). It follows that, for the elderly to be active the physical environment has to be designed to enhance social cohesion and promote physical activity (Lui, Everingham, Warburton, Cuthill, & Bartlett, 2009). However the majority of published studies have relied on objective environmental measures and have mainly used self-reported surveys (Van Cauwenberg et al., 2011). The above review showed that researchers have significantly contributed to the active lifestyle determinants for elderly. But, few studies have employed qualitative approaches. To fill this gap, the study interviewed 12 young elderly aged 60-75years residing in different neighbourhoods: Taman Tun Dr Ismail (TTDI) in Kuala Lumpur and Taman Meru in Ipoh, to ask: 1-What is the essence of active lifestyle among young elderly? The use of a phenomenological approach distinguishes this study and makes it unique and different from related previous studies. It enabled the researchers to bring the young elderly voices to the discourse to identify the essence of active lifestyle experience among them.

A Phenomenological Methodology

The study aimed at understanding what constitutes the experience of active lifestyle among young elderly aged 60-75 years, residing in different neighbourhoods, selected based on the fact that they are the neighbourhoods of highest elderly population.

Sampling and Selection Procedure

In phenomenological research the participants represent knowledgeable informants who discuss their lived experience with the researchers and are quite aware of the purpose of the research. These participants must be capable of sharing their lived experience with the researchers and contribute equally to the study. For the purpose of the study, they were purposely chosen to meet the following criteria:

- 1- Aged 60⁺ and not more than 75 years old and are able to communicate their experience.
- 2- Participants are to be living in the study areas for more than a year.
- 3- Participants freely choose to participate and share their experience.
- 4- Participants have to be able to communicate in English in order to share their experience and views with the researchers.

The potential study participants were selected from two neighbourhoods: Taman-Meru neighbourhood in Ipoh-Perak and Taman-Tun De Ismail (TTDI) neighbourhood in Kuala Lumpur. (Polkinghorne, 1989) recommends 5-25 persons to develop the possibilities of the experience. According to (Cresswell, 1998) and (Boyd, 2001) a sample size of ten participants is considered sufficient for a phenomenological study. However, According to (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009), in qualitative research generalisations are not about a population rather they are made to theory and therefore, researchers may continue to conduct interviews until data-saturation is reached. Thus, the researchers decided to conduct interviews till the saturation level was reached. This resulted in seven participants from TTDI neighbourhood and five participants from Taman-Meru. An explanatory letter and a consent form were distributed to the potential participants. The participants who were interested to take part in the study were asked to contact the researchers to set an appointment to conduct the interview at the time and place most convenient to them. The interview took about 30 minutes-1hour

Data Collection

Phenomenology emphasizes that social facts are only recognizable because of what they mean to members of the society, therefore, researchers are expected to understand a social phenomenon from the point of view of the social group of interest rather than testing the hypothesis.

The study is interested to understand why some young olds are active while others are not. Active lifestyle seems to be significant in relation to social cohesion and physical activity. Therefore, from the literature review the researchers could extract the following questions:

1. What do elderly understand by active lifestyle?
2. What is the extent to which active lifestyle meet their needs for healthy aging?
3. What sort of support they get from the physical environment?
4. What are the services the elderly feel that the physical environment should be providing for them to remain active?

Based on the above questions, the researchers set a list of themes that reflect the variables to be studied and need to be explored. Therefore, the themes are organized with the following topics:

Theme 1: Elderly active lifestyle:

This is where the analysis of active lifestyle begins in relation to social cohesion and physical activity. The participants are asked to answer four related questions:

- 1- What does active lifestyle mean to you?
- 2- What are the things you do to stay active?
- 3- What is your daily routine activity?
- 4- What are the benefits of staying active in your opinion?

Theme 2: Issues related to active lifestyle of the elderly:

This is where the issues are identified in relation to the following variables of interest:

Issue 1: Neighbourhood perception (accessibility and permeability); two questions were asked:

- 1- How easy would you navigate in your area?
- 2- How would you rate the level of isolation of your neighbourhood?

Issue 2: Neighbourhood Satisfaction (convenience), one question was asked:

- 1- Could you please describe the services and amenities provided by the neighbourhood that have provided opportunities for elderly to meet interact and perform physical activities?

Issue 3: Residents' satisfaction, this included sub heading to further elaborate on the concept, three questions were asked:

- 1- Trust in people (social interaction): How do you maintain close relationship with your neighbours?
- 2- Concerns about leaving home (safety): How do you view your neighbourhood safety? Do you feel safe to go out at any time?
- 3- Concerns about neighbourhood conditions (maintenance): Do you possess any fear of falling due to bad walkways conditions?

Theme 3: Barriers and facilitators to active lifestyle:

This involved exploring more the neighbourhood environmental factors that are responsible for promoting elderly active lifestyle. Three questions were asked, the variable of interest for the first two questions was walking and for the third question the variable of interest was management:

- 1- In your opinion what are the facilitators to physical activity in its simplest form 'walking'?
- 2- In your opinion what are the barriers to physical activity in its simplest form 'walking'?
- 3- Is there any program in your neighbourhood that helps you stay active?

Content Analysis

Establishing the meaning for the interview documents involved arriving at a deeper understanding by a form of interpretative understanding or structured analysis. (Dooley, 2001) argued that understanding the surface message of a document is difficult because language use differs between the various groups and cultures. Content analysis provides a good overview of the subject matter under study as it gives structure to the research. It categorizes variables in a specific manner to see them separately and weighs them equally (Gilbert, 2005). The questions were coded to reduce the data into analytical categories for analysis.

Therefore, the researchers asked questions that represented important themes to the study and could be measured with variables. The questions were coded to identify key variables. The answers to these questions were sought through quantification by content analysis, where the importance of each topic was measured by the number of times it is mentioned. Moreover, to further test the internal validity of the findings, the researchers asked a question "Would second readers of the phenomenological data explication be able to identify the phenomenon only by having read through the report?" This question remained unanswered until the researchers summarised the data explication and presented it to a senior lecturer and four other colleagues. All their reports have been positive.

Phenomenological Data Explication

(Hycner, 1999) argued that the term analysis should be avoided in phenomenology as it means 'breaking the data'

into parts and thus losing the whole phenomenology. On the other hand explication means investigating the phenomenon constituents while keeping the whole content.

Detailed interviews were conducted with seven participants from TTDI neighbourhood in Kuala Lumpur and five participants from Taman-Meru neighbourhood in Ipoh. The Researchers referred to the participants by participant1, participant2..., to protect their identity. The data explication followed a modification described by (Moustakas, 1994):

1- Transcription: This step involved transcribing the recorded interviews. This in turn included literal statements and noting the general meaning units. To enable good analysis, the researchers had to read and reread the transcription and then wrote down impressions as going through the data. **2- Bracketing and reduction (epoche):** This step involved focusing on the wholeness of the experience in an attempt to search for the essence of the experience. The researchers had to set aside prejudgement and theoretical interpretations-epoche (Cresswell, 1998)and (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, the researchers focused the explication through two approaches. The first approach involved looking at how participants responded to each question identified earlier. Thus, the data was organized by question to enable the researchers to look across the responses and identify differences and consistencies. The second approach was to focus by neighbourhood, i.e. the researchers organized data about individuals from each neighbourhood separately, and then analysed it as a whole to get an overall picture of young elderly active lifestyle.

3-Delineating units of meaning: This step involved extracting the statements that seemed to highlight the research phenomenon. Therefore, having transcribed the interviews and reduced (bracketed) presuppositions and stayed as much as possible true to the data, the researchers managed to get a sense of the context of the interview. Then the researchers began the process of going through words and sentences to elicit the interview meanings. This process helped in getting at the meaning essence. This involved crystallizing what the interviewees have said using their literal words in an attempt to stay close to literal data. This general meaning unit expressed a unique meaning clearly different from the meaning that preceded and followed. This process continued until the researchers were able to identify all the relevant themes.

4-Coding the data into Themes

Having transcribed all the recorded data, the researchers assembled the textual and structural description through the bracketing and reduction process. The researchers were interested in describing the lived experience of the young elderly active lifestyle as influenced by their neighbourhood environmental factors. The researchers set their own prejudgement aside and described the young elderly lived experiences. Their own lived experiences were added into the description of the overall essence at the end. The following themes were set to describe their lived experience:

Theme 1: Elderly Active life style

The young elderly were asked what active lifestyle meant to them. In describing active lifestyle as a lived experience, the themes of physical activity and social activity appeared throughout as main factors in their experience of active lifestyle "Active lifestyle means that I keep fit and maintain good health and also have a social life not staying alone." Most of the participants stated that active lifestyle meant to them benefiting oneself and their community "Active lifestyle means to me that I am busy doing something either by myself or with people". They all talked in detail about the benefits of physical activity and social activity. According to their experience those who are physically active often become socially active leading to the concept of active lifestyle "Active lifestyle means that I do something I like such as painting or carving, walking and also go out and meet people and talk." The participants also mentioned the importance of certain neighbourhood facilities such as parks, restaurants, worship facilities and community centre to their active lifestyle "I walk every day for 1 hour then go to the restaurant/cafe to have breakfast with friends". Another one stated "I usually walk up early go to Masjid for Subuh prayer then go to the park for a walk after that I meet my friends for breakfast and then go back home if there is no voluntary work in the community centre". Therefore, the participants positively defined active lifestyle by virtue of having maintained both physical and social activities. They recognized the importance of active lifestyle to both their physical and mental health, "Keeps me healthy both in my body and mind because I am busy doing something". Another participant stated about the benefits of active lifestyle as health and social benefits "Lots of benefits to my health, my heart, no high blood pressure or diabetes. Social life is also important especially in our age we like to share history and experiences".

Consequently the researchers appreciated that the notion of active lifestyle for these young elderly was related to positive issues of both physical and social activities. From their experience a loss of these two domains of active lifestyle could have an effect on active and healthy aging, "Walking is good for my heart and if I do not go out and meet my friends I will just be sitting watching TV all day." Another one talked about active lifestyle as "Keeps me healthy both in my body and mind because I am busy doing something". Their daily routine active lifestyle showed both physical and social activities, one participant stated "I care very much to exercise every day, walk/jog and I always like to go to the cafe to meet my friends", another one stated "I walk for one hour everyday if it is not raining and I participate in voluntary work in the community centre." Some young elderly enjoyed voluntary as it gave them opportunity to compensate of lost role, one participant stated "It is good for

my health and my heart, being engaged in the voluntary work also gives me pleasure.” Another one stated “Good for my health, gives me pleasure.” The researchers concluded that health and social benefits were expressed by the majority of the young elderly despite the varying level of both physical and social activities.

The researchers also reported that there were no significant differences between the elderly active lifestyle in the two different urban setting. The pattern of routine daily physical activity, community-based activities and other relevant social activities were almost the same. Since most of the participants were Malay, the finding is consistent with Diez Roux (2004) who suggested that cultural and ethnicity affected neighbourhood environmental factors and thus influence active lifestyle among individuals. Theme 1 showed that the young elderly will be healthier as they age than their precedents and will have a more active lifestyle. While many studies have been done on elderly active lifestyle, relatively little focused on the lived physical and social experience of elderly. Throughout the theme both physical and social components were appraised as facets that most affected the young elderly active lifestyle. As planners, this enables us to understand active lifestyle from the young elderly perspective. Such understanding would help in planning for the young elderly in urban settings and would also allow the young elderly perspective to be more effective in the development of community services and programs. The factors identified “physical activity” and “social cohesion” showed the need for more studies that would not only generate knowledge but would also provide direction for the development of aged-friendly neighbourhoods.

Theme 2-Issues related to active lifestyle of the elderly

The neighbourhood physical environment is important to young elderly active lifestyle. The young elderly perceptions about their neighbourhood environmental factors have the greatest influence on their active lifestyle. Theme 2 discusses measures of young elderly perceptions of their neighbourhood accessibility, permeability, convenience, social interaction and safety. Specifically, theme 2 identified issues in relation to the following variables of interest:

Issue 1: Neighbourhood perception (accessibility and permeability); the participants were asked how easy would they navigate in their area? All the participants stated that it was quite easy for them to move around their neighbourhoods. One participant stated “Easy *lah* I have no problem to find my way”. They related this to specific neighbourhood elements such as shorter distances to destinations and well-connected streets. Another one stated “Quite easy I can go anywhere from my place”. Neighbourhood location and environmental factors were major sources of active lifestyle through affecting destinations and providing facilities. When the elderly were asked to rate the level of isolation of their neighbourhood, the participants perceived their neighbourhood as not isolated and as well connected to basic daily needs. One participant stated “Not isolated at all I can go to meet daily needs within a reasonable distance” another one stated “Not isolated I can go everywhere within few minutes”. Their active lifestyle was facilitated by the fact that the neighbourhoods provided the necessary facilities and all their needs were nearby. The researchers concluded that accessibility and permeability of the neighbourhood influenced and also contributed to active lifestyle among the young elderly.

Issue 2: Neighbourhood Satisfaction (convenience); the participants were asked to describe the services and amenities provided by the neighbourhood that have provided opportunities for elderly to meet, interact and perform physical activities. Most the participants reported that the area park, the worship facilities and also the shopping centre provided opportunities for them to involve in both physical and social activities. One participant stated “Definitely the park and the worship facility” another one stated “For sure the area park and Masjid”. The participants seemed satisfied with their neighbourhood facilities and amenities as promoting active lifestyle and enhancing physical activity.

Issue 3: Social Interaction, this included sub heading to further elaborate on the concept; the participants were asked how they maintain close relationship with their neighbours? The participants reported that they enjoy having a strong community and that the strength of this community was a key facilitator in both physical and social activities. In TTDI although the participants stated that they do not often visit each other but they maintain good relations built on trust. One participant stated “I visit my neighbour when I have time, we sometimes have tea together and yes I do trust my neighbours”. Another one stated “my relation with my neighbours might not seem to be strong because we are all quite busy with our private lives, but we respect each other and are there for each other”. This was strengthened by another participant stating that “we maintain a good relation full of respect and care though no many or regular visits”. “We do not visit each other regularly but we meet every day down the road while walking or in Masjid and we always have a chat”. In Taman-Meru the social relations are even stronger and young elderly not only know each other’s names and visited each other but also arranged all the physical and social events in the neighbourhood. One participant stated: “We have very good relations with our neighbours; we trust each other and help each other if in need.” Another one stated “we visit and we are almost every day together in the park, Masjid and restaurant, we maintain close relations and trust each other”.

Issue 4: Safety-participants were also asked regarding concerns about leaving home (safety): How they viewed their neighbourhood safety? Did they feel safe to go out at any time? Most of the participants especially in Taman-Meru viewed their neighbourhood as quite safe apart from some petty crimes. One participant stated “Well everywhere there are opportunity offenders but the area is relatively safe. The time I go for a walk around

5:00 pm the streets are normally safe because you can find many people going for a walk or jogging, so I feel safe". Previous researches suggested that unsafe neighbourhoods experience low active lifestyle levels (Mendes de Leon CF et al., 2009) thus, the researchers concluded that both neighbourhoods have low crime rates because the elderly showed high levels of both social and physical activities. One participant stated "the neighbourhood is safe, there are some house breaks and street snatches but the crime rate is relatively low in the neighbourhood. I usually go for a walk in the park and the park is very safe". A participant with a knee problem stated: "The neighbourhood is fairly safe, yes we hear about street snatching and house break-ins but we have been living in this area for over 22 years and have not been victims to any type of crime. As I told you before I rarely go for a walk because of my knee problem but I possess no fear of crime when I do".

Issue 5: Maintenance-The participants were also asked about their concerns about neighbourhood conditions (maintenance) and whether they possessed any fear of falling due to bad walkways conditions? Most of the participants reported that they do not really walk around their neighbourhood and they normally go to the area's park for walking or for performing other types of physical activity. However, they stated that walkways conditions in some areas were poor and the lighting needs improvement. One participant stated "Actually we do not really have walkways, besides I usually walk in the park"; another participant stated "The walkways are either too narrow, or not well maintained or full of plant pots. Anyhow I usually take my car to the park to walk there." But some participants in Taman-Meru stated that walkway conditions did not really deter them from walking as their area is fairly quiet and no fear of speedy traffic "Well the area is fairly quite you can walk in the middle of the street no heavy or speedy traffic; however I go to park for a walk more fresh air and beautiful scene". The importance of having a park for the young elderly to engage in both physical and social activities emerged almost throughout the themes. Generally, all the participants showed little concerns about traffic and crime deterring their active lifestyle.

Theme 3: Barriers and facilitators to active lifestyle:

This involves exploring more the neighbourhood environmental factors that are responsible for promoting elderly active lifestyle. Three questions were asked, the variable of interest for the first two questions is walking and for the third question the variable of interest is management. The participants were asked about the facilitators and barriers to physical activity in its simplest form 'walking'? The participants agreed that provision of walkways, good lighting and enhancing conditions of parks are among facilitators to walking. Conversely, lack of walkways, poor lighting and bad conditions of parks deter their active lifestyle. One participant stated "I think if we have walkways in good conditions we will be encouraged to walk; poor lighting and lack of shading path could be barriers"; another one stated "The park facilitates walking but lack of maintenance and services are real barriers"; also another participant stated "No heavy traffic and safety facilitates walking but lack of walkways, benches and shading are barriers". The participants showed awareness of the neighbourhood environmental factors that facilitated /obstructed their active life and that they would become less active if barriers are not eliminated.

Participants were also asked if they have some programs in their neighbourhood that help them stay active? The majority reported that they have both physical (sports groups, sports competitions) and social (voluntary community work) neighbourhood programs that help them stay active. One participant stated "Yes the community centre arranges for different events and arranges sports competitions." Another one stated "Yes there are always different programs to join both physical and social; this weekend we had racing competition for the different age groups. We also have classes every day in the evening at the Masjid and everybody can join", another one stated "Yes the community centre arranges programs both physical and social". Table 1

Table 1: Delineating units of meaning

Units of general meaning	Significant Statements
Active lifestyle means do something either to benefit yourself or to benefit the community	Do something, benefit the community
I care very much to exercise every day, walk/jog and I always like to go to the cafe to meet my friends.	Exercise every day, meet my friends.
I walk up early in the morning, and after Subuh prayer I go the park for a walk (provided it is not raining) then I go and have breakfast with my friends after that I start my work at around 8 o'clock in the morning till 1 o'clock in the afternoon. I go and have lunch with friends and normally we have classes in the afternoon about general knowledge, skills and religion. After that I go with my friends for tea then go back home.	Go for a walk, have breakfast with friends, start my work, have lunch with friends, have classes, have tea with friends
Walking is good for my heart and if I do not go out and meet my friends I will just be sitting watching TV all day.	Health benefit and social engagement.
My neighbourhood is not isolated, it is accessible and permeable I can navigate through quite easy I can go anywhere from my place	Accessible and permeable
The area park, the worship facilities and also the shopping centre facilitate active lifestyle	Park, worship facility and shopping centre
I maintain good relations with my neighbours, I visit them when I have time, we sometimes have tea together and yes I do trust my neighbours.	Visit, have tea, trust
My neighbourhood is fairly safe no safety concerns while walking except of fall.	Fairly safe
Some of the walkways are in poor conditions and some are too narrow I normally go to the park for a walk	Walkways are in poor conditions/too narrow

Clustering units of relevant meaning to form themes

Having the list of significant statements, the researchers re-bracketed the presuppositions and stayed true to the phenomenon of active lifestyle among young elderly as much as possible. The next step involved finding units of relevant meaning that clustered together naturally, i.e. identifying themes that united the different significant statements or discrete units of relevant meaning. The themes emerged through the examination of each unit of relevant meaning to extract or elicit the essence of the specific unit of relevant meaning in the context of young elderly active lifestyle. For example, the essence of a number of units of relevant meanings pointed to the vital role of socializing “benefit the community; meet people; seeing other friends” which occurred while investigating active lifestyle experience, those units of meaning were put together under the theme or cluster of social cohesion. Here the context is critical because there might be a number of different themes or clusters addressing active lifestyle as explained by social cohesion. Therefore, given the context of active lifestyle, most of the significant statements were taking the above separate themes. In this step the researchers involved their own judgement and insight. Thus, the researchers went back to the interview transcription and summarized each interview. This helped in providing the context for the themes’ emergence as well as giving a sense of the whole (active lifestyle) Table 2.

Please insert table 2 here

Table 2: Clustering units of relevant meaning to form themes

Evidence from Significant Statements	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active lifestyle means do something Active lifestyle means that I am occupied and doing something Active lifestyle means to me that I am busy doing something Active lifestyle means that I keep fit and maintain good health It means that I stay active It means that I perform physical activity every day; go out see friends 	Active Lifestyle
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benefit the community Doing something either by myself or with people. Have a social life not staying alone. Participate in voluntary work in the community centre. Go to community centre if we have some voluntary work to do We have a community centre that I volunteer in if needed Have shared all good and bad events we support each other We are quite a strong community and we build up very good relations with each other 	Social Cohesion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I go for physical exercise Exercise every day, walk/jog I walk for one hour everyday I walk, jog and do physical exercise I am concerned to exercise everyday I cycle every day 	Physical Activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I visit my neighbour We maintain good relation, trust and respect each other We respect each other and are there for each other We trust each other and help each other if in need. 	Social Interaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I walk for one hour everyday I go to the park and walk 	Walking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy to get from place to place Easy way finding Park and restaurants Walkways in good conditions No heavy traffic and safety 	Facilitators to Walking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of shading path Not many interesting things to see. Walkways are narrow Walkway condition and lack of street benches Maintenance and services Poor lighting and absence of walkways 	Barriers to Walking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Park, Worship facility Shopping centre Community centre 	Convenience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have no problem to find my way I can go everywhere within few minutes I can go to meet daily needs within a reasonable distance There are some hilly areas that make cycling hard No problem easy to go around 	Accessibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy to get from place to place I can go anywhere from my place Easy way finding My neighbourhood is not isolated We have no problem getting anywhere 	Permeability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Falling while walking is a real concern Lack of walkways; I am always afraid to fall when it is raining Some walkways are in poor conditions Area is quite 	Maintenance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fairly safe, street snatch Safe, crime rate low, park is safe Very safe, no fear of potential victimization Quite safe I can go out at any time The neighbourhood is quite safe 	Safety

Findings

In general interviewees were satisfied with their active lifestyle. They described their experience of active lifestyle and focused on its importance in maintaining independence over long periods of time. Almost all of them had a regular routine active lifestyle. They showed awareness of the importance of good health at an older age. They described the importance of active lifestyle in their physical and social aspects of their daily lives. A wide variety of perspectives regarding these aspects was found. Among others, the importance of social cohesion and the significant role of physical activity stood out. These were associated with the important commitment of the elderly to stay active and their capacity to perform physical activity. However, young elderly experienced some difficulty in maintaining an active lifestyle due to the absence of some neighbourhood facilities.

The transcendental approach represented unique challenges. The systematic flow of the different stages, i.e. finding significant statements, delineating units of meaning and eliciting the essence of the specific units of meaning to enable the researcher to extract the meaningful whole of the experience. For example, in the study a significant statement "I like to stay healthy", "do something", "being occupied", "meet my friends for breakfast", "benefit my community", and "do voluntary work", narrows to the theme of physical activity and social cohesion and on the essence of staying occupied.

Therefore, active lifestyle has a positive effect on the young elderly health and well-being. The essence of the experience is staying occupied and that staying occupied has the potential to be both physically and socially active. This finding is consistent with previous studies on positive feelings related with physical activity by (Pan et al., 2009) who argued that the social and physical environments correlate with active lifestyle at an older age

The study reported that provision of parks and open spaces were the most important determinants of active lifestyle among the elderly. The researchers further observed that many of the young elderly preferred to come to parks and open spaces for walking/cycling or socializing. They are aware that such facilities have an impact on the young elderly well being and general health. This finding supports (Alves & Aspinall, 2008) who found that older people preferred parks as offering different benefits to other environmental attributes. The findings also showed that both male and female participants had nearly the same routine activity and concluded that gender has no influence on their active lifestyle. This finding does not support (Cousins & Vertinsky, 1995) and (Kluge, 2002) findings that active lifestyle differ among different gender.

The central message elicited is that the neighbourhood facilities that would encourage young elderly to go out to perform physical activity or to socialize have to be provided, i.e. the neighbourhood environmental factors promote active lifestyle among its elderly population and this active lifestyle has the potential to include both physical and social activities.

Discussion

The study used phenomenological research as a means of studying the subjective experiences of the young elderly as they are lived and included describing in detail how they perceived and interpreted their world. According to (Moustakas, 1994) phenomenological empirical research involves experience in order to provide textural and structural descriptions. These descriptions reflect the data explication that portrays the experience essence. In this study, the textural description was presented first. It comprised 'naïve' descriptions obtained through dialogue and open ended questions. Then, the structural description was provided based on interpreting and reflecting the essence of the experience based on the participants stories. The purpose was to decide about what the experience meant for them as they have experienced it.

The textural description noted the similar experiences of active life style among the young elderly and the meaning of these experiences as they lived it. Reasons for having an active lifestyle appeared to be many, but converged to physical and mental health benefits. Data explication suggested that the young elderly are aware of the benefits of having an active lifestyle. They seemed to recognize the need of having an active lifestyle because they had a deep sense of the core benefits of active lifestyle to their general health and wellbeing. They focused on the needs of maintaining their independence for as long as possible through being both socially and physically active and thus composed their lives as active beings. They recognized both tangible and intangible benefits from their lived experiences with active lifestyle. The tangible benefits included health benefits measured by objective means such as reduced blood pressure, lower diabetes and weight control. The intangible benefits included joy of meeting peers while walking, having meals or volunteering. These were crucial to their mental health as they share same history and experience.

The structural description was negotiated by assessing facilitators and overcoming barriers to both physical and social activities. The phenomenon of young elderly active lifestyle involved a wide spectrum of perspectives. Among others the importance of physical activity and the significant role of social activity stood out. However, maintenance of parks and open spaces were perceived as obstructing outdoor social and physical activities. The perception that ease of way finding (permeability), accessible facilities and amenities, and safety; played a major role in encouraging physical and social activities. However, difficulty in walking was experienced due to poor walkways lighting. Another essential perspective was the perceived importance of the required response by local authorities to the needs of young elderly. The stories of the participants suggested that the significance and

meaning of active lifestyle is to stay occupied doing something that benefit both yourself and the community; this staying occupied has the potential to be both physically and socially active.

Conclusion

An active lifestyle for elderly aged 60-75 years is focused and characterized by being occupied/doing something. These young elderly valued active lifestyle because they recognize the health benefits of being both socially and physically active. They perceived active lifestyle as enabling them to be mentally alert and physically able. However, declined health status and deteriorating neighbourhood conditions presented more challenges. Nevertheless, these young elderly perceived active lifestyle as an attitude; health benefits and the ability to overcome barriers helped them stay active.

The majority of participants were Malay and living in urban areas, thus considering that localities and ethnicity are core processes of community construction and recognizing its importance in analysis could reveal different power relationships. However, future researchers are recommended to answer the following questions:

1- How do ethnicity influence young elderly experiences with active lifestyle?

2- How do experiences with active lifestyle differ among young elderly residing in different localities (rural versus urban)?

5948 words

Funding

This research was funded by the University of Malaya Postgraduate Research Grant No.: PV100-2012A

Acknowledgement

The authors are thankful for the University of Malaya for supporting the research.

References

- (WHO), World Health Organization. (2002). *Active Aging: A Policy Framework*. Paper presented at the Second United Nations World assembly on Aging, Madrid, Spain.
- Aelbrecht, P. . (2010). Rethinking urban design for a changing public life. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 3(2), 113-129. doi: 10.1108/17538331011062667
- Alves, S., & Aspinall, P., A., . (2008). Preferences of older people for environmental attributes of local parks; The use of choice-based conjoint analysis. *Facilities*, 26(11/12), 433-453.
- Aspinall P A, Ward Thompson C, Alves S, Sugiyama T, Brice R, & Vickers A. (2010). "Preference and relative importance for environment attributes of neighbourhood open space in older people". *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 37(6), 1022-1039.
- Atchley, R. (1972). *The social forces in later life: An Introduction to Social Gerontology*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Bamford, G. (2005). Cohousing for older people: Housing innovation in the Netherlands and Denmark. *Australian Journal on Aging*, 24(1), 44-46.
- Boyd, C.O. (2001). *Philosophical Foundation of Qualitative Research*, In Munhall, P.L. (Ed) (2001) *Nursing Research: a qualitative perspective* (pp, 65-89). Sudbury, Mass: Jones and Bartlett.
- Clark, C.R., Kawachi, I., Ryan, L., Ertel, A., Fay, Me., & Berkman, L., F. (2009). Perceived Neighbourhood Safety and Incident Mobility Disability among Elders:The Hazards of Poverty. *BMC, Public Health*, 9. doi: 10, 1186/1471-2458-9-162
- Cousins, O., & Vertinsky, P. (1995). Recapturing the physical activity experiences of the old: A study of three women. *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity*, 3, 146-162.
- Cresswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dill, J., Neal, M., Shandas, V., Luhur, G., Adkins, A., & Lund, D. (2010). Demonstrating the benefits of green Streets for Active Aging: Final Report to EPA. Portland: Centre of Urban Studies, Portland State University.
- Dooley, D. (2001). *Social research Methods* (4th ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Frank, L., Kerr, J., Rosenberg, D., & King, A. (2010). Healthy aging and where you live:community design relationships with physical activity and body weight in older Americans. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 7(Suppl1), S82-S90.
- Gilbert, N. (2005). *Researching Social Life* (2nd ed. ed.). London, New Delhi: Sage Publications-Thousands Oaks.
- Hycner, R.H. . (1999). *Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data*. In A Bryman & R.G. Burgess (Eds): *Qualitative research* (Vol. 3). London: Sage.
- Kluge, M. (2002). Understanding the essence of a physically active lifestyle: A phenomenological study. *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity*, 10, 4-27.
- Lui, C.W., Everingham, J.A., Warburton, J., Cuthill, M., & Bartlett, H. (2009). What makes a community age-friendly: A review of the international literature. *Australian Journal on Aging*, 28, 116-121.
- Marvasti, A. (2004). *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. London. Thousands Oaks. New delhi: Sage Publications.

- Mendes de leon CF, Lagney KA, Biericas JL, Barnes LL, Skarupski KA, Scherr PA, & DA, Evans. (2009). Neighbourhood social cohesion and disorder in relation to walking in community-dwelling older adults: a multi-level analysis. *Aging Health, 21*(1), 155-171.
- Menec, V., H., , Means, R., Keating, N., Parkhurst, G., & Eales, J. (2011). Conceptualizing Age-Friendly Communities. *Journal on Aging, 30*(3), 479-493. doi: 10.1017/S0714980811000237
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Methods*: Thousands Oaks, CA:Sage.
- Owen, N., Humpel, N., Leslie, E., Bauman, A., & Sallis, J.F. (2004). Understanding Environmental Influences on walking: Review and Research Agenda. . *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 27*(1), 67-76.
- Pan, SY., Cameron, C., Desmeules, M., Morison, H., Graig, CL., & Jiang, X. (2009). Individual social, environmental and physical environmental correlates with physical activity among Canadians; A cross-sectional study. *BMC, Public Health, 9*, 21-33.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1989). *Phenomenological research methods*. In R. S. Valle & S. Halling (Eds), *Existential phenomenological perspectives in psychology* (pp. 41-60). New York, Plenum.
- Pretty G.H., Chipur, H., M., , & Bramston. (2003). Sense of place amongst adolescents and adults in two rural Australian towns. The discriminating features of place attachment and place dependence in relation to place identity. *Journal of Environmental Gerontology, 23*, 273-287.
- Routasalo, P., E., , Savikko, N., Tilvis, R. S., Standberg, T.E., & Pitkala, R. H. (2006). Social contacts and their relationships to loneliness among aged people-A population-based study. *Journal of Gerontology, 52*, 181-187.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2009). *Research Methods for Business Students* (5th ed.). Essex: FT Printice Hall, Pearson Education Limited.
- Strath, Isaacs, R.F., & Greenwald, M.J. (2007). Operationalizing Environmental Indicators for Influencing Physical Activity in the Elderly *Journal of Physical Activity & Aging, 15*(4), 412-424.
- Sugihara, S., & Evans, G.W. . (2000). Place Attachment and Social Support at Continuing Care Retirement Communities. *Environment and Behaviour, 32*, 400-409.
- Van Cauwenberg, J., De Bourdeauhij, I., De Meester, F., Van Dyck., D., Sa;mon, J., Clarys, P., & Deforche, B. (2011). Relationship between the physical environment and physical activity in older adults: a systematic review. *Health & Place, 17*(2), 458-469.