

Frequency of Interaction Between Older Person and Adult Children in Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad, PhD^{1*} Azizi Amat² Kamariani Suati Tapah²
²Norhayati Soufiah @ Velin Yunus Wahida Othman² Zuasrida Abdul Kadir²

1. Assoc. Professor, School of Applied Psychology, Social Work and Policy, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia

2. Post Graduate Students, School of Applied Psychology, Social Work and Policy, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia

*E-mail of the corresponding author: wanibrahimwanahmad@gmail.com

Abstract

Today population ageing, a term used to refer to the increasing number of older persons in a population structure, has been well recognized not only in developed but also in some of developing countries as well. One of the important issues in population aging is regarding the issues of social interaction between older persons with their adult children. The present paper presents the result of a cross-sectional survey conducted in rural Malaysia, to investigate the frequency and the perceived importance of interaction of older persons with their adult children who live out of their village. More specifically, the present paper analyzes (1), some demographic and socioeconomic profiles of older persons in rural Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia; (2), monthly income of older people in rural Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia; (3), the availability of interaction between older persons and their adult children; and (4), level of interaction satisfaction between older persons and their adult children in rural Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. This study was conducted in Port Dickson district, one of the rural areas in the state of Negeri Sembilan. This paper is basically employed a descriptive research design. It is used when a researcher seeks a better understanding and measure how variables are naturally distributed. Data for the study were collected through structured and unstructured interviews with research participants, coupled with observations on their daily lives. Data were analyzed using descriptive and thematic approach. Results of the study revealed that (1), older persons are young old, aged between 69 or below. 52 of them reported as having secondary school certificate, or above, not working and still married; (2), there is substantial variation in their monthly income. Only 49 of them have a monthly income of more than RM870, above poverty level as has been used in Malaysia; (3), most of older persons have children living out of village; (4), older persons are always interact with their adult children, and (5), most of older persons are satisfied with the interaction between them and their adult children. To conclude, older persons in rural Malaysia are not neglected and children are important parts of the life of older person in rural society.

Keywords: population ageing; older persons; rural areas; social relationships; well-being

1. Introduction

Frequency of visits from children has been seen as very important to the life of older persons in rural society in Malaysia. However, empirical validation of the frequency of relationship between adult children with their elderly parents in rural Malay in Malaysia did not support the general assumption i.e. if adult children are frequently going home to visit their elderly parents; these elderly parents will be happier (Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad, 1999). The purpose of this paper, however is not to re-examine the relationship between the frequency of visits with the well-being of older person in rural Malaysia, but to explore whether the perceived importance of the interaction through the eye of older persons in rural society in Malaysia remains. In particular, the paper is concerned with the frequency of interaction between older person and their adult children in rural Malaysia. It presents the results of a cross-sectional survey conducted in rural Malaysia, to investigate the frequency and the perceived importance of interaction of older persons with their adult children.

Older person in this article is population aged 50 years and older. Although older persons, a term generally used to refer to population aged 60 years and older, population aged 50 years is taken into account in this study as in rural Malaysia those aged 50 and older are frequently perceived as older people. The investigation of social interaction between older persons and their adult children is important because information gathered may be used to help policy makers and the like to develop a suitable program for the maintenance of quality of life of older persons in rural society. Nearly two decades ago a research conducted in rural Kelantan, Malaysia (Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad, 1999) shows the frequency of interaction, particularly the frequency of visit from adult children to elderly parents has a negative impact on parents' well-being. Older people who are frequently visited by children have demonstrated lower levels of subjective well-being.

Little is known whether the similar result will be found in other areas of rural Malaysia nowadays. Although research on social relationship between older people with their adult children in developed countries has well developed (see; examples, Troll, Miller, and Atchley, 1979; Rossi and Rossi, 1990), research on the

same issue is still considered as the least developed in Malaysia, and thus many research initiatives are still needed on this issue. Because of the importance of interaction between older people with adult children in rural areas, it is felt necessary, therefore, for this paper to explore the issue. Data gathered can be used to add to the existing knowledge on social relationship between older person and adult children in rural areas in Malaysia.

2. Objectives

This present article analyzes frequency of interaction of older person in rural Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia with their adult children. More specifically, it analyzes; (1), profiles of older persons; (2), income status of older persons; (3), level of interaction satisfaction between older persons and their children; and (4); the importance of interaction between older persons and their children who live out of village.

3. Literature Review

Following the global population is ageing, the United Nations designated 1999 as “The Year of the Older Person” (Kinsella and Velkoff, 2001). Today, population ageing, a term used to refer to the increasing number of older persons in a population structure (Kinsella and Wan He, 2009; United Nations, 2013), has been well recognized not only in developed but also in some of developing countries as well (Kinsella and Wan He, 2009). In other words, the world’s population is ageing (Kinsella and Wan He, 2009), and all countries in the world is experiencing the growth of older persons in their population (United Nations, 2015). Although the pace of population ageing varies widely by geographic regions, all nations are now experiencing the growth of its older population (Kinsella and Taeuber, 1993). Starting in developed countries in the late nineteenth, population ageing is now a global phenomenon (Myers, 1985; Gasparini, Alejo, Haimovich, Olivieri and Tornarolli, 2007). The first attention to population ageing emerged in France at the close of the nineteenth century (Myres, 1985). The proportion of older persons aged 65 years and over in France has already exceeded 5 per cent as early as 1800, and increased to 8 per cent by 1900 (United Nations, 1956; Myres, 1985). Today the world’s older population is increasing by 1000 000 persons every month (Troisi and Kutsal, 2006), and it is expected in 2025, in every seven populations, there will be one person aged 65 and over in the world (Myers, 1990).

In all parts of the world, because of relational, caring and economic supporting, family is an important part of the life of older persons (Sussman, 1985). Most of older persons have close family members who live nearby and always get in touch with them although they are living far away, through visit, telephone, or letter (Rossi and Rossi, 1990). In developed countries nearly 80 per cent of older persons meet with at least one child once a week (Shanas, 1980). Although older persons in developed countries prefer to live independently, family members are still the source of their social ties (Troll, Miller & Atchley, 1979).

Following the importance of family as a source of social relationships due to their long-standing emotional bonds (Rosenmayr, 1977) even though they are living far away from their children, older persons prefer to form “intimacy at the distance” with their children (Rosenmayr, 1977) through visit or telephone (Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad, 1999). Older persons choose to live close to their family members (Cantor and Little, 1985), but not with them, a situation also called as “intimacy at the distance” (Gibson, 1981).

One of the important themes in research on older persons has been regarding the issues of social interaction with their adult children. Interaction or particularly, relationship between older persons with their adult children is one of the important determinants of the well-being of older persons (Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad, 1999). This is because humans are social animals, and thus relationships are critical to their well-being (Grattan Institute, 2012). As human beings are social animals, all human beings cannot live in isolated (Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad and Zainab Ismail, 2014). Especially when age-related losses accumulate, personal relationship can become critical to an older adult’s adaptation and well-being (Hansson and Carpenter, 1994).

This is particularly true because extended loss of social contact typically leads to feeling of emptiness, depression and unhappiness (Hansson & Carpenter, 1994). When a person ages and age-related losses accumulate, older persons started to encounter physiological, social and psychological changes (Hansson & Carpenter, 1994), and thus they find their family an important source of support in later life (Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad, 1999; Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad and Zainab Ismail, 2014a; Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad and Zainab Ismail, 2014b; Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad and Zainab Ismail, 2014c; Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad and Zainab Ismail, 2014d). Thus, it is why older persons perceive family, friend and neighbors as the most appropriate source of social support in most situation of need (Cantor and Little, 1985). Arling (1976) shows older people have a consistently high degree of contact with family members. According to Arling, most available evidence on this aspect points to the fact that older people are not isolated from their family members. Shanas (Arling, 1976) found over one-half of older persons in her study saw family members in the day before the interviews. A high degree and consistently of contact with family members also found throughout old age for married women and widows, and research show that female has more contact and stronger emotional ties with children (Arling, 1976).

Although family has been very important to the life of older person, the family in Malaysia right now is

facing challenges from within and outside the family. The drive towards industrialization that has attracted many young people to work in industries located in urban areas is seen as an important factor for this situation, and now rural-urban migration becomes inevitable for many adult children (Masitah and Nazileh, 1988). After the New Economic Policy was launched in Malaysia, urbanization has become accelerating and more and more young people, boys and girls, moving into urban areas. Older parents were left behind in rural areas (Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad, Fuziah S., Jamaluddin M., Ahmad Syukri A. H. & Rusimah S., 2015). Adult children may still wish to sustain living in rural areas as traditional practiced, but rural-urban migration and increased work participation of women may causing a break-up in the extended family structure (Masitah and Nazileh, 1988) which eventually become a major barrier for children to fulfil their responsibility towards their elderly parents.

4. Materials and Method

This study was conducted in Port Dickson district, one of the rural areas in the state of Negeri Sembilan. Port Dickson is situated around 100km to the south of Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia. The district was chosen for this study because it represents the characteristics of traditional Malay Muslim life where Islamic rituals are practiced as part of the Malay culture. The study is designed with the aims to have a better understanding on the level and the importance of interaction between older persons and their adult children. There are 70 older persons aged 50 and older in a village of Port Dickson district has chosen as respondents. They are selected as respondents through convenience sampling. When entering the study area, older residents are approached, and are told the objective of the visit. If older persons agree, the interview will be started soon after that. Older persons aged 50 and older is included as older persons in this study because, although their age are not yet reaching 60, in Malaysia we call those aged 50 and above as older persons. This paper is basically employed a descriptive research design. Descriptive research design is used when a researcher seeks a better understanding and measure how variables are naturally distributed (Yegidis and Weinbach, 2002). Data were collected through structured and unstructured interviews, coupled with observations on respondent's daily life. Data were analyzed using descriptive and thematic approach.

5. Results and Discussion

As stated in the objective section, this article analyzes 4 aspects, which are; (1), profiles of older persons in rural Malaysia; (2), income status of older person in rural Malaysia; (3), level of interaction and satisfaction of interaction between older persons and their adult children; and (4), the importance of interaction between older persons and their adult children.

5.1 Profiles of Older Persons

As depicted in Table 1, respondents in this survey are older people aged between 50 – 79 years, residing in one of the villages in rural Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Analysis of profiles of older persons in the study revealed that a higher percentage of them were male. They are categorized as young old, aged between 69, or below. From 70 older persons interviewed in the survey, 52 of them reported as having secondary school certificate, or above. Only a few of them reported as just completed primary education. The majority of respondents are not working, and still married.

Table 1: Profiles of Older Persons

Profiles of Older Persons	Number	Per Cent
Gender		
• Man	45	64.3
• Woman	25	35.7
Age		
• 69 and below	62	88.6
• 70 – 79	8	11.4
Education		
• Primary	14	21.2
• Secondary, or above	52	78.8
Economic Activity		
• Still Working	21	30.0
• Not Working	49	70.0
Marital Status		
• Divorce	3	4.4
• Married	65	95.6

5.2 Income Status of Older Persons

Substantial variation in monthly income of older persons in study area exists. There are older persons who have a monthly income as high as RM5000, while other older persons only have RM300 a month. An observation of income according to poverty line income to detect how many of the older persons fall in poor category, we categorized income of respondents into two categories; above and below poverty line income, that is RM870. Poverty line income (2014) for rural residents in Peninsular Malaysia that still being used today is RM870. Those whose income is below the poverty line are categorized as living in poverty. This family is considered as poor. 49 of them have a monthly income of more than RM870, while 21 of older persons have a monthly income of less than RM870. Thus, what we can conclude is that the majority of older persons in the study area are categorized as a high income category. A look at more detail on this category of older persons, it is found that the majority of them are retired from the government servants. Because they are retired, they have a stable income from their retirement. These older persons, besides their own income from retirement, they also receive a monthly extra income from their adult children helping these older persons have a better income. This category of older persons only used half or less than half of their income for daily expenses (Table 2).

Sending money to elderly parents is not a strange social fact in rural Malaysia. Research conducted in other rural Malaysia found that adult children always sending money back to their elderly parents. Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad (1999; Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad and Zainab Ismail, 2014a; Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad and Zainab Ismail, 2014b; Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad and Zainab Ismail, 2014c; Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad and Zainab Ismail, 2014d) for example, found that the majority of adult children sending money back to their parents. Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad found that there are two main sources of income of older persons in his study; working and remittance from children. Through working most of older persons in his study have a very low income; and remittance from children has helped them not to live in poverty. Although the majority of them have a monthly income of more than RM870, there are older persons whose income is below than RM870 that are categorized as living under poverty level. From the unstructured interviews, we found that these older persons are involved in small business. Their economic activity does not give them a high return. They are using all their income for their basic needs. Because their income has been very low, the older persons perceive their income as not enough.

Table 2: Income Status of Older Persons

Income	Number	Per cent
• 870 and below	21	30.0
• 871 and above	49	70.0
Perceive on Income		
• Not Enough	36	53.7
• Enough	29	43.3
• More than Enough	2	3.0
Income Used		
• All	51	78.5
• Half	13	20.0
• A Small Portion	1	1.5

5.3 Level of Interaction Satisfaction

Level of interaction satisfaction is used here to refer to the perception of whether older persons satisfied with the interaction or relationship their adult children. This aspect is important to measure because its level could be used as an indicator of whether adult children are still be hoped for the responsibility of care and support their elderly parents. There are four items to be explained Table 3. First, in terms of the availability of children living out of village, there are 62 from 70 older persons have such children. Only 8 older persons did not have children living out of village. Second, an overview of the frequency of interaction between older persons and their adult children, 4 of them reported the interaction as very frequent. The majority are frequent. Third, when asked the frequency several months before the survey, this figure is not different, and forth, 63 out of 70 older persons interviewed perceived their relationship as satisfied.

Result of the study reveals that nearly all older persons are satisfied with their interaction with their adult children. Result of this survey is not much different with some other research conducted in rural Malaysia. Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad (1999) for instance, also found that most of adult children are frequently going back to visit their elderly parents at home. They love each other, and older persons are satisfied with it. The frequency of visit decline with geographical distance, however. Although children who live far away is not always going back to visit their elderly parents, they are always communicating through telephone, or by letter, so that their relationship does not break.

There are two other studies in Malaysia conducted on this issue revealed the same result. Strange (1980), who conducted a survey in rural Terengganu, and Malaysia Masitah and Nazileh (1988) who conducted a

research in Negeri Sembilan, Malacca and Selangor also found that adult children in those areas do not forget their elderly parents. These adult children, whether living nearby or very far away, always come to visit their parents. This is because as stated by Masitah and Nazileh (1988) in Malaysia, socio-cultural and religious norms still have strong influence on the young with respect to their commitment towards elderly parents. It is a common phenomenon for adult children living in urban areas come back home to visit their elderly parents, or other family members and relatives in rural areas.

Table 3: Level of Interaction Satisfaction

Availability of Children Living Out of Village	Number	Per cent
• No	8	11.4
• Yes	62	88.6
Frequency of Interaction (Currently)		
• Not Frequent	24	34.3
• Frequent	42	60.0
• Very Frequent	4	5.7
Frequency of Interaction (Prior the Survey)		
• Not Frequent	26	37.1
• Frequent	42	60.0
• Very Frequent	2	2.9
Level of Satisfaction		
• Not Satisfied	2	2.9
• More or Less	5	7.1
• Satisfied	63	90.0

5.4 The Importance of Interaction

Interaction between older persons and their adult children is seen important in the life of older persons. Because of the importance of relationship, research shows that older persons are likely to maintain their relationship with their adult children, and if possible to live close to their family members (Gibson, 1981). In this survey, nearly all of respondents agree that the interaction is important, or very important. Only seven feel that the interaction is not important (Table 4).

Table 4: The Importance of Interaction

Level The Importance of Interaction	Number	Per Cent
• Not/ Not Too Important	7	10.0
• Important	32	45.7
• Very Important	31	44.3

There are many reasons can be put forward to explain this. First; older persons feel that their children is an integral parts of their life. For most of the Malays, having children is very important in marriage. Children are an important source of old age security. When older persons are too old, they will no longer able to active in any economic activities, and their income tends to decline; and at this age economic contributions, or money remittance in particular, will be very important for them. Especially for older persons who are not working in the government sector, they have to depend on to their adult children for their income. Because of the importance of children in terms of economic contribution, most of the Malay couples are trying hard to get a child immediately after marriage. Couples in rural areas are also entering marriage at the early age for this reason. Second; at the older age, generally older people do not have many friends. Their close friends normally had passed away, and they do not have enough strength to go out to meet their friends. Thus, children are important as the only available networking is their children. Third; older persons need to interact with their children because they need help from them.

There are various kinds of support, where one of them is instrumental support. To help older persons in terms of instrumental support, children need to come to their parent's house, and thus, both parties need to interact. Fourth; because of the changes in the nature of social relationships, where older persons are exposed to the isolation. Research outside Malaysia shows that the transition from middle to old age is marked by changes in social relationships (Arling, 1976). Role of older persons will change, and the number of networking, particularly friends and neighbors will decline. Health and income problem will restrict involvement of older persons with friends and neighbors. Older persons are exposed to the prospect of increasing isolation. This is why interaction with their children is becoming an important aspect.

6. Conclusion

The present paper is basically describes descriptively the level and the importance of interaction between older

persons with their adult children in rural Malaysia. It presents the results of a cross-sectional survey conducted in rural Malaysia, to investigate the frequency and the perceive importance of interaction of older persons with their adult children who live out of their village. On a whole, the study shows that interaction between older persons and their adult children is seen important in the life of older persons. In Malaysia children are an important source of old age security. Older persons perceived that when they are too old and will no longer able to active in any economic activities, children will be very important for them. Beside that children are important as the only networking available for them is their children. They need to interact with them because they need help. Research outside Malaysia shows that the transition from middle to old age is marked by changes in social relationships, thus family members are important to interact with. Because of the importance of such relationship, research shows that older persons are likely to maintain their relationship with their adult children, and if possible living close to family members. Nearly all respondents agree that the interaction is important, or very important.

References

- Arling, Greg. 1976. The elderly widow and her family, neighbors and friends. *Marriage and the Family*, 38: 757-768.
- Cantor, M., & Little, V. (1985). Aging and social care, in Binstock, Robert H., & Shanas, E. (eds.). *Handbook of aging and the social sciences*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co.
- Gasparini, L., Alejo, J., Haimovich, F., Olivieri, S. & Tornarolli, L. (2007). Poverty among elderly in Latin America and the Caribbean. Background paper for the World Economic and Social Survey 2007, The World Ageing Situation
- Gibson, M.J., 1981. Family Support Patterns, Policies and Programs in Developed Nations. Working Paper for the 34 annual meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, USA
- Grattan Institute. (2012). Social Cities. A Grattan event, Melbourne 28 March
- Hansson, R. O. & Carpenter, B. N. (1994). *Relationships in Old Age*. NY: The Guilford Press
- Kinsella, K., & Velkoff, Victoria A. (2001). *An aging world: 2001*. International population reports. Washington, DC.: U. S. Government Printing Office
- Kinsella, K., & Wan He. (2009). *An aging world: 2008*. International population reports. Washington, DC.: U. S. Government Printing Office
- Masitah Mohd. Yatim dan Nazileh Ramli. 1988. *Socio economic consequences of the ageing of Population Survey 1986: Malaysia Country Report*. Kuala Lumpur: NPFDB.
- Myres, George C. (1985). Aging and worldwide population change, in Binstock & Shanas, E. (eds.). *Handbook of aging and the social sciences*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co.
- Myers, George C. (1990). Demography of aging, in Binstock, Robert H., & Linda K. George (eds.), *Handbook of aging and the social sciences* (third ed.). California: Academic Press.
- Rosenmayr, L. (1977). The family: A sources of help for the elderly, in E. Shanas & M. Sussman (eds.), *Family bureaucracy and the elderly*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Rossi, A.F. & Rossi, P.H. (1990). *Of human bonding: Parent-child relations across the life course*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Shanas, E. (1980). Older people and their families. *Marriage and the Family*, (Feb): 9-15.
- Strange, H. 1980. The Effect of modernization on rural Malay aged. *Kebajikan Masyarakat*, Vol.1(2): 19-38.
- Sussman, M. B. (1985). The family life of old people, in Binstock, Robert H., & Shanas, E. (eds.). *Handbook of aging and the social sciences*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co.
- Troisi, Joseph & Yesim G. Kutsal. (2006). Introduction, in Joseph Troisi, & Yesim G. Kutsal. *Aging in Turkey*. Malta: International Institute on Ageing.
- Troll, L.E., Miller, S.J., & Atchley, R. C. (1979). *Families in later life*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- United Nations. (1956). The aging of population and its economic and social implications, ST/SOA/SER. A. 26. New York: United Nations
- United Nations. (2013). *World population prospects: The 2012 Revision*. NYork: United Nations.
- United Nations. (2015). *World population ageing 2015*. New York: United Nations.
- Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad. (1999). Hubungan sosial, sokongan dan kesejahteraan warga tua: Satu kajian di pedesaan Kelantan. PhD Thesis, Universiti Putra Malaysia.
- Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad & Zainab Ismail. (2014a). The availability of family support of rural elderly in Malaysia. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 30 (7): 899-902
- Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad & Zainab Ismail. (2014b). Frequency of family support of older rural Malaysian. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 30 (7): 915-918
- Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad & Zainab Ismail. (2014c). Satisfaction of family support of older rural Malaysian. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 30 (7): 919-922
- Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad & Zainab Ismail. (2014d). Reasons behind the availability of family support of older

- persons in Malaysia. *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research*, 20 (11): 1457-1460
- Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad, Fuziah Shaffie, Jamaluddin Mustaffa, Ahmad Syukri Abdul Hamid and Rusimah Sayuti. (2015). Rural-urban migration: Its implication on living arrangement of older persons in Malaysia. Paper presented at the International Conference on Labor Migration and Industrial Citizenship: Albanians on the Move - Citizenship, Identity and Development, University of New York Tirana (Albania), 13th and 14th November.
- Yegidis, B. L. & Weinbach, R. W. (2002). *Research method for social workers*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.