Abstract

The world’s ageing population seems to increase rapidly over the years. The medical advancement contributes to the growing percentage of senior citizens, and Malaysia is of no exception. Thus the need to look for alternative solutions for nursing homes are gathering momentum. The purpose of this study was to find the middle class retirees biasness towards any particular established models of Old Folk Home (OFH) with particular focus on the choices of Malay ethnicity in Malaysia. At first, the components from each of the models were extracted. A sample of Malay ethnic respondents ageing 60 years old and above, were chosen to rate the components. Through statistical analysis, the most favourable components were picked to form a context-specific model of OFH. Triangulation method was used to provide validity of the findings.

Keywords: Senior Citizen, Retirees, Elderly, Old Folks Home, Malay, Malaysia

1. Introduction

In this modern day, the issue of old folks not being taken care of by their grown up children always arises. There are reasons that contribute to this issue such as the young generations might be too busy with their career, or there are conflicts that lead to reluctance of the parents to live with their children in the city as such. Thus there grows an option of the old folk home (OFH), which seems like a reasonable solution where the old folks are being taken care of by professional hands while their children can have a visit once in a while. However, the rising issue is that OFH have already created certain negative perception in our society that made choice to spend old days at an OFH to be a terrible one. Besides the social values that loom behind, it might have been aggravated due to some insensitive OFH designs as many such homes do not recognize efficiently the needs for the old folks.

The needs for old folks have been classified into five levels of cognitive needs that include safety needs, psychological needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs and the need for self-actualization (Maslow, 1970). A good model for an old folks home should respond positively to these needs. However, the degree of these needs may vary depending on the specific users. The purpose of this study was to discover the perception of the middle class retirees of an ideal OFH to have a better guidance in designing a better future for the elderly focusing on the Malays ethnic groups in Malaysia.

2. Old Folk Homes for Malay Elderlies in Malaysia at present

The issues of common OFH consist of many aspects. According to Chee and Barraclough (2007), an OFH should be a housing system that assimilates with the well-being and health of senior citizen. Conversely, the design of some OFH in Malaysia today does not suit the need and capabilities of the elderlies as they are usually just transformed from typical houses to become OFH. Typical house does not
provide the necessities that the elderly need such as unobstructed spaces for wheelchair or walker support, for example. In addition, some of the houses even have staircases and level changes to make matter worse. Furthermore, the spaces also are congested with no sense of privacy as the coordinators of OFH tend to place up to three or four elderlies in one room. Sadly, the sense of belonging is not present as the coordinator often treats the elderlies like a hostel fellow instead of being a guardian or a care taker. These homes are said to be a place for the elderly but from empirical observation, they do not seem to fully understand the users’ needs and do not bother to meet the requirements to suit the elderlies. Even the level of care is still low and dissatisfaction making the overall performances of existing OFH very poor. However these folks living in the OFH do not have a say as it is the only option left for them. On the other hand, the old folks should also make a better planning for their future instead of totally depending on their children. The moment they retire, they enter a different environment in the society. Some may not imagine living at an OFH when they retired as they still capable of handling their life but as they get older, the help and care they need may be overwhelmed to be handled by their busy children. As placing seniors into the OFH still seems like violating the cultural expectation in many contexts including Malaysia, but due to the increasing demand and need, it is becoming more like a practice (Dahlan et al, 2010). However, as mentioned earlier, due to some ineffective management of some OFH and its rigidness, it is creating a bad image for the OFH and those who are living in it look pitiful. Contrasting to this case that happens for government supported OFH, the exclusive OFH provided by the private sector seems too overwhelming as if the users are getting ‘over care’, which still does not satisfy the actual needs of an individual. Housing is a significant external environment aspect that may play a major role of affecting a person’s ability to maintain congruence the internal and external demands in later life (Hooyman and Kiyak, 1988). Therefore, under or over care, both are equally unacceptable. Finally, government and private sectors can also try to educate the future senior citizens to become different from the present where they can value issues like own privacy, maintaining independent personal lifestyle and more secure financially (Ong, 2007). As a result the necessity for an ideal OFH comes into place. An OFH is not just a place for the elderly to live and being taken care of who are not capable of looking after themselves. It has an extended meaning as nursing home. Therefore it can be a place of residence which can provide nursing care for people with deficiencies like old people. However, these are only the physical hardware for an OFH. There are software for a good OFH that will be discussed later on. In Malaysia, the place can either be financially supported by the government or independently through private financial sources. The care centre today faces many rising issues especially due to its lacking management making it not conducive for its users. For example the senior citizens are not well being taken care of due to lacking of staffs or it can be said that lacking of properly trained staffs. But financial or management issues are also not the only issues. Even most of these building are not designed to meet the needs for old people. According to Welfare, Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Fatimah Abdullah, the committee should ensure that the residents’ level for being care of is covered and comprehend the requirement of the facilities in the future when designing a centre or optional housing for the senior citizens. Director of World Health Organization’s Department of Ageing and Life Course, John Beard, reported with the rapid rising of ageing population, the necessitate in finding the right model for the elderly care is becoming a priority. So, there is need to study all the hardware and software involved in running an OFH.
3. Deliberation of OFH options

Based on Lim and Khan’s study (2012), the term OFH related to basic four types which are; i) Ageing in-Place, ii) Institutional Long Term Care, iii) Retirement Village, and iv) Supportive housing. Here the authors showed analytically what can be the advantages and disadvantages of OFH in terms of their different requirements in terms of their access to elderly care services which are the hardware and a much needed involvement with the community, which are the software.

3.1 Ageing in-Place

‘Ageing in-place’ is spending the rest of the life remaining in one’s personal home which is a preference by many elderlies (Hancock, 1987). This is maybe due to the feeling of comfort and security while staying with own family members. Human nature derives a feeling of being comfortable within the confines of their home and same goes to the seniors who prefers to age at home. The desire to live in a homely environment for old folks is known as the shield of reliability and the deep emotional value of oneself (Paduch, 2008) where home would provide a comfort of security that one is attached to them.

However, though a home provides the basic necessities for its users, but the incompetency of existing housing developments in Malaysia does not meet the requirements for the elderly to live. Housing is one important aspect of external environment that may have a significant effect on one’s ability to maintain congruence between internal and external demands in later life (Hooyman and Kiyak, 1988) yet, currently developers do not consider their designs suitable for the elderly that somehow proves that there are no fair thoughts in designing for the community as the elders are a part of the community too. Mostly the housing suits the buyers for the present time where the buyers are mostly middle aged and mostly not retired. However, later when they get old, the house can no longer meet their life demands and abilities.

Nevertheless, ageing in-place needs not only a barrier free physical environment, but also presence and support from family. The elderlies would not face serious problem if they are still able to take care of themselves by this options, however when ageing cause the incapability, the role of the family comes in. Family care giving occurs when assisting required by the elders are beyond as part of everyday life from one or more family members (Walker et. al., 1995).

The society today are mostly career orientated, thus efficient family caregiving may be less possible. Tan et al (1999) showed that elderlies who are living in rural area tends to live alone or only with spouse as they oppose to move into the city with their working children. Hence there leaves a second alternative to provide alteration and private home care services which is very costly. Consequently, Lawler (2001) stated that the independent living seniors are left with no option and forced to live in an institutional nursing homes due to the inability for them to afford the private home care service if their family are unable to cater for them. Therefore, the elderlies may become separated from easy access to services and community (Fig 1).

![Figure 1: Ageing in-Place](image-url)
3.2 Institutional Long Term Care

Current institutional long term care may raise many negative issues to the public. The perceptions of old folk housing is already embedded in the society as a pitiful place to spend their golden day in. It may relate to the scenario in the OFH itself where there is no sense of privacy and the users themselves often surrounded by the feeling of being isolated and abandoned especially when the loved ones fail to show up as promised. Thus it is not surprising, that being forced to stay in a nursing home is what every senior citizen dislike most. Nevertheless, placing elderlies in the institution seems like normal practice these days due to increasing demand (Dahlan et. al., 2010) despite the contrast with the cultural expectation.

Current government in Malaysia has not resolved the issue of long term care for the old folks. Even the living environment is ill suited to the seniors with barely any privacy and poor facilities. Though, for those who are unable to financially support a better long term care has no other options but to give in with the situation. This is because a private institution cost for assisted living on the other hand is substantially high. But Waters (2009) speculated when the percentage of elderly increased to nearly 14% is 2040 as predicted, the demands for elderly care will increase dramatically. This can be due to the well-financed children of the seniors would be willing to pay for their parent’s long term care fund instead of choosing the governmental institutional care. Yet, with the rigidness of large scale delivery system, a long term care may exceed or lacking in meeting the care level of individual’s actual needs (Lawler, 2001).

As shown in Figure 2, Institutional Long term care may include services, but the folks remain separated and isolated from the community.

![Figure 2: Institutional Long Term Care](image)

3.3 Retirement Village

According to Chang (2011), there should be more options for the senior citizens and it is essential for Malaysia to create a retirement village to best suit the needs of the senior citizens. A retirement village are community designed for older adults who can take care of themselves but still receives care assistance when needed. There are also facilities provided for leisure and social activities.

For example in Australia, there are retirement homes, villages and resorts. Each of those provides basic needs for the elderly but the difference in level of luxurious treatment is based on a person’s affordability to pay. It is likely to be favourable for the elderly as they can still mingle within their group of age without the feeling of being abandoned like the long term care.

However, according to Ong (2002), retirement villages are suitable only for the young-old people ageing 60 to 74 years old with the facilities for active lifestyle provided. As they get older, the folks cannot live without assistance, and especially in Malaysia, the Malays move more towards the spiritual practice trying to get closer to their creator. Therefore, the cultural contrast between Malaysia and the Western countries is sky high thus though retirement village is a success in Western countries, the result may not be the same in Malaysia. Furthermore, Saisan et. al. (2012) emphasized on age restriction for joining the retirement village which means the youngsters are not allowed to join the group. This will cause lacking of diversity in a community when the separation of age existed (Levine, 2004). From figure
3, it is clear that services are reachable in retirement villages, and they can have their own community within their compound with active engagement, but they are still away from the community around.

![Retirement Village](image1)

**Figure 3: Retirement Village**

3.4 Supportive Housing

Supportive housing for elderly gives emphasis on providing an independent living environment but encourages living around the community by which the seniors can be a part of the community daily activities and even receive the support when they needed. Kahn (1979) posited that there are three aspects of social support. *affect*, which is a positive expression of feeling of a person towards another; *affirmation*, which is the endorsement of views, perceptions and behaviours of another person; and *aid*, which in term of material giving or symbolic aid to another. It is found that social support provides prudent conceptual model for the variety of psychosocial findings that were related to health (Cohen and Syme, 1985). This will help to enhance the elder’s quality of living when they are living an active social environment.

Furthermore, Werby (1990) posited that elderly would articulate sense of control when they are living independently. Although with all the support, supportive housing still promotes the elderly to live independent to make them feel more homely, therefore the level of privacy and personal interest still remain intact. Plus, in need, the services needed by the elderly are placed in reachable distance for the ease of the folks. These consideration is very important as the old people capability is limited thus it will be environmental friendly to them.

![Supportive Housing](image2)

**Figure 4: Supportive Housing**

4. Search for a Customized Model Suitable for Malay Elderly

Firstly through literature review, the four prominent OFH models were analyzed. Then the context specific components of each model regarding services and community were extracted out to form a set of structured questionnaire. The structured questionnaire was used to interview among a sample of Malay elderly ageing 60 years above with a monthly income range from RM 1500-RM 3000 (1 USD = 3.2 RM as in January, 2014) which was categorized as middle class retirees. In the interview, the respondents were to rank the components of OFH according to their preference. Through statistical Kendall test, the ranking showed a list of preferences suitable for Malays Elderlies.

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5. Findings

5.1 Supportive housing that can nurture a particular value can be the best Model of OFH

Under specific scope of Malay elderly, the findings showed the respondents favor all of the
components from supportive housing compared to the other OFH models. It is parallel with the finding of
Lim and Khan (2012) that stated the best model of OFH for Malaysian is the supportive housing.

The components of supportive housing showed that elderlies want to live as a part of the
community while at the same time wants to be able to live in personal living environment with local
services and facilities are within their reach. The cost would be much cheaper than living in long term
care or retirement village, yet still, they would probably receive the attention but only when they need it.
It would also be like a home like environment and in order to achieve it, Wilson’s (1990) identified 6
attributes of homelike environment namely privacy, dignity, choice, independence, individuality and
homelike surroundings still remain there.

Furthermore as the elderlies age, they tend to engage with their inner psychology and searching
for meaning of life (Cohen, 1993) hence there is need for balanced emotion. As Malays are related to
Muslim religion, the spirituality level is related to Islamic values. Holy Quran (24:23) states those who
believe in the Oneness of Allah and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah, verily in the
remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest which means being at ease with spiritual mind thinking of God.
Thus with the right implementation, it could help the elderly reach the peaceful state of mind and be more
calm to live their life with deep meaning. Supportive housing can give a perfect platform for that as
community can share the same feeling with them within the same compound.

5.2 Components of Ideal OFH for Malays Elderlies

The current option of OFH in transformed buildings is too devastating and ill-suited to the
Malaysian ageing old folks. Therefore, the need for a design code of OFH in Malaysia guided by the new
model would surely answer what the folks are looking for especially for the specific context.

The customized new model consisted of a more precise list of components for an OFH based on
the specific context that added the spiritual component to the other three components.
5.3 Integrating the Components

In Malaysia, for the middleclass retirees, there is no luxury to spend a lot of money on OFH. Supportive housing does not consume lots of money by being surrounded by highly paid services and facilities. The management cost can be reduced if the marginalized people (example: single mothers) can be trained to give services with the exchange of their free accommodation. Even the cost of the housing can be made affordable considering their retirement capabilities by asking charity from the community. Simple facilities such as park or garden in the area for the folk to spend their leisure time can be added components which can be occasionally let to the community so that there exists win-win situation.

These components were triangulated during interviews. The overlaying ideas were to have a supportive housing that can offer spiritual relief to old folks, as well as attract community to share facilities as well as that spirit. Community and old folks mingling with a purpose is the best situation one can expect.

5. Conclusion

In the Malaysian context, particularly with the Malays, an overwhelming acceptance of OFH may be still a bit far away, but this study showed that the Malay middle class retirees who value their privacy and personal will can accept the option of supportive housing. They still need the homelike attention and support some time which can be received from the community. Adding to it the spiritual components, the old folks can also be regarded as useful contributors to the community. This is the time when Malaysia should rethink about their approach for the old folks as the current governmental long term care are way below the user’s satisfaction and needs, and private retirement villages are still out of reach of most. The model of Supportive housing that provides the necessary hardware, and supplemented with the context specific component as the software can work together to give the old folks a value of their life that they spend in their past for the current young generation to enjoy. That brings benefit to all.
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