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## STRONG FAMILY VALUES AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT OF NEIGHBORHOOD: MALAYSIAN ELDERLY ASPIRATIONS AND PREFERENCES FOR LIVING

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### Abstract:

There is inevitable aging. By 2030, the steady rise of the elderly will make Malaysia an aging country. Malaysians historically practice the custom where the elderly co-reside with their kids. The strong family values among family members make older people strongly believe that in the elderly their family will take on filial responsibilities and take care of them. Nevertheless, the social characteristics of Malaysians have also steadily changed in tandem with increased urbanisation and modernisation. This research is therefore aimed at researching the housing aspirations of the elderly in Malaysia. Elderly people's perspectives are varied. Therefore, recognizing the diversity of different ways involves a thorough study of the elderly. This article uses qualitative approaches, adopts library-based research, and, by content analysis of documents, applies the literature review approach. The literature highlights the views and perspectives of researchers in the study who have raised the subject and problems. The research used was therefore focused on the content analysis on the previous academic studies carried out on the housing options preferred by elderly people, the potential elderly mobility reasons for them to move from current housing, and the types of houses and location of future housing preferred by the elderly. The results of these studies show that most elderly people in Malaysia have shown a preference for living close to their children, indicating the strong family values and physical environment of neighborhood as the preferences and aspirations among them.

### Keywords:

Elderly, Family Values, Housing, Preferences, Housing Aspirations

## Introduction

The Malaysian Social Welfare Department (JKM) takes the definition of senior citizens declared at the "World Assembly on Aging 1982" in Vienna, namely those aged 60 and above (Official Portal of the Social Welfare Department, 2020). The National Elderly Policy defines the elderly as individuals aged 60 and above (Jal Zabdi Mohd Yusoff, 2009). Rikiya Matsukura, Assistant Professor from Nihon University in Japan, defines the aging population phenomenon into three characteristics, namely, an increase in the number of senior citizens and a decrease in the number of young people, a decrease in fertility, and a decrease in mortality. Shipra Singh and others (2014) in his study referred to the elderly as individuals who are in a phase of life that is deficient in terms of physical ability, deterioration of mental ability, gradually leaving a role in social economic activities gradually and moving to economic dependence status.

It is currently estimated that 15 percent of the world's population, or some 1 billion people, live with one or more disabilities. More than 46% of older people, aged 60 and over, have disabilities and more than 250 million elderly people have mild to extreme disabilities. Looking ahead, the global trends in ageing populations and the higher risk of disability in older people are likely to lead to further increases in the population affected by disability. According to data from World Population Prospects: the 2015 Revision (United Nations, 2015), in most countries and regions, the number of older people has increased significantly in recent years, and growth is expected to accelerate in the coming decades. Between 2015 and 2030, the number of people in the world aged 60 years or over is projected to grow by 56 per cent, from 901 million to 1.4 billion, and by 2050, the global population of older persons is projected to reach nearly 2.1 billion. As a result of an accumulation of health risks over a lifetime of illness, injury, and chronic disease, the higher disability rates among older people lead to higher disability rates among older people, urges countries to review and further explore the complementarities between aging and disability discourses. People with disabilities face a range of obstacles around the world, including attitudinal environmental and institutional barriers that prohibit their complete and equitable involvement in all aspects of life. Often older persons with disabilities are among the most adversely affected, facing further age barriers in society.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its Optional Protocol (A/RES/61/106) was adopted on 13 December 2006 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York and was opened for signature on 30 March 2007. The Convention entered into force on 3 May 2008. It sets out the legal obligations of States to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities in society and development. It contains numbers of articles which highlight the cross-sections of ageing and disability. For instance, article 9 (accessibility), article 19 (living independently and being included in the community), article 20 (personal mobility) and article 25 (health) are just a few examples of how the Convention provides a concrete framework for action which may be of particular interest to the discussions on disability and ageing (CRPD, 2006).

## Methodology

In the study of the interests and expectations in the ageing-in-place of the elderly and the strong family values that may influence the preferences, this study aims to look at the discussion of the researchers' views and perspectives. Approximately 26 literature reviews on the topic and issues were included in the analysis. This thesis uses qualitative approaches, adopts library-based research and, by content analysis of documents, applies the literature review approach. The literature highlights the views and perspectives of researchers in their studies who have

raised the subject and problems. The previous academic studies performed on the housing aspirations and desires of the elderly in the ageing-in-place were also focused based on the content analysis. The findings show that most elderly people in Malaysia have shown a preference for living close to their children, indicating the strong family values and physical environment of neighborhood as the preferences and aspirations among them.

## **Analysis and Discussion on The Literature Review**

### ***The Elderly and The Strong Family Values***

Based on the Convention of Human Rights, family can be defined as basic societal unit, and the task of the society is to offer all the necessary support and protection to the family, so that the family can undertake all the responsibilities. Family should be understood as a complex psycho - physical, spiritual, culturally historical, and a dynamic unit. The way we define family depends on cultural values, social, economic, personals and political contexts. The family should be viewed as influenced by the socio-cultural, political economic and historical contexts of the time. In the contemporary society considerable changes took place in the society that also has determined the way we define the family (Dzintra Ilisko et al, 2015).

The family is a basic unit of study in many social science disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, economics, anthropology, social psychiatry, and social work (Sonawat, 2001). The UNESCO report stated that a family is a kinship unit and that even when its members do not share a common household, the unit may exist as a social reality (UNESCO, 1992). The meaning of the term “family” also depends on whether it is being interpreted in a social, biological, cultural, or statistical sense (Hodgson et al, 2002). In a social sense people may see themselves as being members of several families, as members of families with their parents and siblings and members of families that they have formed themselves (Hodgson et al, 2002). It is to be expected that the changing societal arrangements in the current times will be a huge challenge for any model of classification of family structure. This is a proposed redefinition of “family” and a proposed scheme of classification of family structure, to try to match the pace of change of current societies (Rahul Sharma, 2013).

The strong family values will normally reflect on the family care. Family caregiving to impaired older people has become increasingly common, as life expectancy has nearly doubled over the past century (Wolff and Kasper, 2006). Caregiving represents a broad range of activities, including providing personal care, doing household chores, preparing meals, shopping, taking care of finances, providing companionship, checking up regularly, arranging and supervising activities and outside services, and coordinating medical care (Roberto and Jarrott, 2008).

### ***The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda: Leaving No One Behind***

The promotion and preservation of the rights and dignity of the elderly and their full involvement in society are an important part of the pursuit of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which guarantees that no one will be left behind. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda make explicit references to older persons and persons with disability with regards to ending poverty, good health and well-being, decent work and economic growth, and sustainable cities and communities, as sustainable development will not be achieved without the conscious and intentional inclusion of the increasing number of older people with and without disabilities. It offers a vital forum for countries to tackle aging

and disability cross-cutting at the global level, but opportunities and challenges need to be thoroughly explored, recognised and implemented into national social and development programs and policies. **Leave no one behind** is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It represents the unequivocal commitment of all United Nations Member States to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and humanity.

### *Elderly Housing Aspirations and Preferences*

Hafiszah Ismail and others (2020) found that senior citizens in Malaysia for some reason intend to move to another place and live independently or move to another type of residence that is more suitable for them to occupy. However, they still hope to stay close to family members. In addition, the findings of the study show a positive acceptance from every generation in Malaysia on the proposal for residential accommodation that is specific and conceptual in the Malaysian context. Therefore, researchers in this finding suggest more senior housing options to create healthy aging.

Mohamad Naquiddin Md Mansor and others (2016) bring an example of a retirement village in Sri Seronok Retirement Village located in Cheras which is also the first retirement home in Malaysia but does not meet the standard for retirement homes. The proposed retirement home has active and health facilities and is open only to residents aged 65 and above. In addition, the design is environmentally friendly for seniors, meets the lifestyle of seniors, and is friendly to health screening and care. Questionnaire conducted by Azlina Md. Yassin, Haidaliza Masram and Ong Suet Khim (2018) on society's perception of retirement village in Malaysia found that many still do not know the existence of this retirement home. In fact, most people prefer to live in their own home after retirement rather than living in a retirement home. The community also expects retirement homes to provide various special facilities to the elderly including a 24-hour emergency response system in each unit as well as care facilities for the elderly.

Nur Syakiran Akmal Ismail (2017) through the findings of his study found that senior citizens in Malaysia are more comfortable living alone in their own homes than living with their children. However, a high percentage indicates that many members of the public are unaware of the existence of the Senior Citizens Activity Centre (PAWE) and government programs specifically for the elderly.

Sr. Dr. Siti Uzairiah et al (2019) have proposed the guidelines framework for ageing in place population in Malaysia. The developed framework consists of the 'Key Themes' and 'Sub-Themes' that are related and complemented each other, inclusive of following connecting items: Housing, Social and Facilities and Service. The 'Housing' item includes of Tangible, Intangible factors and UD Regulated. The 'Social' item includes community safety and security, dissemination of information, financial stability, fund and support, promote independence and self-empowerment, social activities by Agency and close with family and relatives. The 'facilities and service' item includes the facilities transportation and mobility and also the healthcare service. Therefore, it should be used as a reference guide and consideration for both the policy maker and implementer before any development in relation with ageing community is undertake. The framework may be extended to other factors that contributes

towards a proper guideline for ageing in place population in Malaysia (Sr. Dr. Siti Uzairah binti Mohd Tobi, Dr. Mohamad Syazli bin Fathi and Professor Dilanthi Amaratunga, 2019)

Nadhirah Nordin and Hitoshi Nakamura (2020) have analyzed the objective and subjective influence of the physical environment of the neighborhood on the physical activities of senior citizens in Johor Bahru. The objectives of the physical environment of the neighborhood involve the entropy of mixed soils, population density, traffic intersection density and distance with facilities. While the subjective physical environment of the neighborhood refers to the scales of increasing the distance of pedestrians in the neighborhood. Findings indicate that there is low accessibility to places of worship and recreation. In addition, the findings show that a high population does not guarantee high physical activity facilities. In fact, the recreational facilities provided are only suitable for the younger generation and this prevents senior citizens from engaging in outdoor activities. This study also outlines the importance of objective and subjective measurement in expanding physical activity among the younger generation for areas from small geographical units. This study also proves that high-density housing environment is not suitable as a place of origin for the elderly.

The developer has studied a senior's typical day and considered what it can do to make basic living easier for them. Design parameters such as low hazards, minimum physical effort requirement, usage convenience, flexibility in use and a good line of sight are critical when it comes to designing a home to meet seniors' daily needs (Jotham Lim, 2020).

In Malaysia there are Physical Guidelines for the Elderly that focus on the site planning, building design and provision of facilities in three types of settlements for the elderly, namely, new housing construction and retrofitting of existing homes, senior care centres and retirement villages. A senior citizen or retirement village is a planned area where within its boundaries, elements of accommodation and support services exist. Residents live there voluntary, whether on a long-term or temporary basis (Yuen Meikeng, 2017).

### ***PLANMalaysia - Better Living, in a Safe and Protected Environment***

The Physical Planning Guideline for Elderly published by the Federal Department of Town & Country Planning, Ministry of Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government (KPKT) are to guarantee seniors living in a safe and protected environment. There are six planning principles that have been highlighted on this guideline; harmony, affordable, communicative, healthy, safe, easy to access and user friendly (PLANMalaysia, 2018).

1. **Harmony** - The definition of harmony including layout planning, building design and settlement environment for senior citizens should be harmonious, able to create social interaction and have a local image.
2. **Affordable** - Affordable housing is a housing that is deemed affordable or purchased. Affordable housing financing comes from sources of savings pensions and family expenses. Provided close to worship, health, recreation, and public transport facilities to facilitate the movement of senior citizens.
3. **Communicative** - It is the elder opportunity with the community to enjoy life together in terms of acceptance, association, interaction, sharing and shared rights. Besides, able to communicate information, consultation, collaboration and learning with the



community and freedom to make decisions and choices, independent to continue living and gain privacy in life.

4. **Healthy** - Healthy environment such as provides safe walking and cycling routes from one area to another, provide comfortable living space, safe neighborhood and healthy environment, provide recreational area facilities, places of worship and educational facilities, offering job opportunities and provide a variety of healthcare services, comprehensive, high standard and cost effective towards achieving a healthy life.
5. **Safe** - The development of senior citizens' settlements should be safe from catastrophic risks such as erosion, landslides, floods, near electricity leaks and industrial areas, especially those at high risk. Placement in swampy, hilly and steep slopes is also not recommended. Promoting gated community housing that emphasizes the safety and well-being component of senior citizens. Security facilities provided include 24-hour security control, patrols, fences and CCTV. The layout of the building should take account the security elements which need to provide open space, not hidden and a clear level of visibility to create a safe and crime-free environment.
6. **Easy to access and user friendly** - Elderly settlements should be easily accessible and accessible with public transport facilities. Elderly settlements should also be contacted directly to other facilities such as hospitals or health centres, public parks and shop units. The placement of the facility should be close and easily accessible by a network of pedestrian paths that are connected, safe and comfortable without any obstacles. The provision of support facilities such as parking, elevators and public transport services should be practical, user-friendly, not overburden physical and easily understood by all groups whether senior citizens, the disabled (temporary or permanent), children or active adults. This is in line with the requirements of Malaysian Standards MS1184: 2014 Universal Design and Accessibility in the Built Environment - Code of Practices (Second Revision).

The discussion on the past studies showed various issues involving the residence of the elderly. This study suggests some improvements in the national strategy involving the residence of the elderly including information and suggestions in helping these groups plan for a better old age. In addition, the strategy of the relationship between home design and the health of the elderly, maintaining the presence of the elderly despite the threatening economy, housing relocation, choice of housing type, and planning and provision of specialized housing for the elderly as a national strategy for the welfare of the elderly. Efforts in realizing the golden age-friendly residence should be seriously taken care by the authorities and related communities to the elderly. Several suggestions have been listed based on the findings of the study, namely, housing support to ensure the survival of the elderly, general needs in housing to make it easier for the elderly to live independently in old age, housing specifically for the elderly and information and advice facilities for the elderly due to their age limitations old.

## Conclusion

As life expectancy in general increases, persons with disabilities who survive into old age can also be expected to contribute to the overall growth in the population of older persons with disabilities. This highlights the need for countries to take a longer-term approach to investing in urban planning, design and development in order to ensure the inclusion and accessibility of

the environment by working towards the objective of building a society that meets the needs and capacities of all users. It demonstrates a clear need to start articulating policies and programmes with regards to ageing which takes into consideration the cross sections between ageing and disability and how society can ensure programmes and facilities designed to meet the needs of an ageing population are also successful in meeting the needs of older persons with and without disabilities. In the context of Malaysia and the global trend of population aging and disability-inclusive growth, broader policy considerations should be deliberated and further explored.

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