HEALTH CARE AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC SUPPORT OF

THE ELDERLY IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

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-1995-
To my family.
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ABSTRACT

The population of Malaysia is still relatively youthful. However, continuing decline of fertility and mortality has resulted in the aging of her population. Elderly persons aged 60 and over have increased substantially, in absolute term and as a proportion to the total population. In the year 2025, it is projected that every 100 persons in the working age group will have to support on average 20 elderly persons aged 60 and over. On the basis of past trend, fertility decline rather than the decline in mortality has been the dominant factor in the aging of the population in Malaysia between 1957 and 1992. This can be explained by the fact that fertility decline results in fewer young persons, while mortality decline particularly in infant mortality results in an increase in the proportionate share of the young.

Population aging will have profound implications on the provision of health care and socio-economic support of the elderly. Using data from the 1988 Malaysian Family Life Survey II (MFLS-II), this thesis attempts to examine the health status and socio-economic support for the different subgroups of older Malaysians. Data show that unlike the stereo-typical image of elderly as being frail and dependent, most of the elderly are still physically fit and are able to look after themselves. While there is a need to ensure proper care of those elderly who are in need of assistance, programmes should be implemented to encourage the elderly to continue their active participation in the mainstream of the society.
The MFLS-II shows that a sizeable proportion of elderly are still working, particularly the male, Malay and those from rural areas in good or fair health status. Although labour force participation decreases with advance in age, it is of policy concern to determine if financial necessity has forced some of the old-old to remain in the labour force. The majority of the working elderly are engaged in the agriculture sector, with lower earnings than those in urban-based, secondary and tertiary sectors. Consequently, many of them do not receive sufficient income to support themselves. Social security in the form of coverage provided by employees provident funds and pension is very limited among the elderly. This raises questions regarding the welfare of the elderly, particularly for female, older, rural and less educated elderly.

Family members are still the main care providers of the elderly in Malaysia. Coresidence with adult children remains common and only a small proportion of the elderly are living alone. Children are still the most important source of support for the elderly. They care for their elderly parents by providing money, assisting in household chores and personal care, paying medical bills and providing emotional support. The socio-economic, demographic and ethnic background of the elderly has some impact on the type of help received from children.

The elderly also, to some extent, contribute directly to household activities and child care, generally to a very advance age. Some elderly, particularly the more capable such as male, younger, more educated and currently working elderly, provide financial support to their children and aged parents living elsewhere. Hence, the elderly indeed
are an important resource at both the societal and familial levels. Efforts should be made to facilitate their continued productivity and contribution, as well as protect their welfare and interests.
CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS (i)

ABSTRACT (ii)

CONTENTS (v)

LIST OF TABLES (viii)

LIST OF FIGURES (xiii)

LIST OF APPENDICES (xiv)

CHAPTER 1  GENERAL BACKGROUND 1

  1.1  INTRODUCTION 1

  1.2  SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY 3

  1.3  REVIEW OF LITERATURE 5

  1.4  RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 11
       1.4.1  Framework of Analysis 11
       1.4.2  Data Source 14
       1.4.3  Definition of Variables 16
       1.4.4  Statistical Method 17

  1.5  OUTLINE OF THE STUDY 18

CHAPTER 2  DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AND POPULATION AGING 20

  2.1  INTRODUCTION 20

  2.2  CHANGES IN AGE STRUCTURE AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROCESSES 20
       2.2.1  Past and Prospective Changes in Age Structure 20
       2.2.2  Trends in Fertility and Mortality 23

  2.3  POPULATION AGING IN MALAYSIA 26
       2.3.1  Trends in Median Age of Population 27
2.3.2 Age-Sex Composition of the Elderly Population
   Young-Old and Old-Old
   Sex Ratio

2.4 IMPLICATIONS OF POPULATION AGING
   2.4.1 Trends in Dependency Ratios
   2.4.2 Trends in Aging Index
       Components of Population Aging

CHAPTER 3 HEALTH STATUS AND HEALTH CARE PRACTICES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.2 HEALTH STATUS OF THE ELDERLY
   3.2.1 Perceived Health Status
   3.2.2 Physical Health Status
   3.2.3 Period of Physical Limitation

3.3 HEALTH PRACTICES OF THE ELDERLY
   3.3.1 Utilization of Health Care Services
   3.3.2 Cost of Health Care
   3.3.3 Financial Source of Medical Costs

3.4 MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS: HEALTH STATUS AND HEALTH
   CARE PRACTICES
   3.4.1 Influences of Physical Health Status
   3.4.2 Influences of Private Health Care Utilization

3.5 CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 4 SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND SUPPORT OF THE ELDERLY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE ELDERLY
   4.2.1 Educational Status
   4.2.2 Current work status and Remuneration
       Multivariate Analysis on Current Work Status
   4.2.3 Provident Funds and Pension Benefits
   4.2.4 Estimated Total Financial Resources
       Remittance from Children
4.3 LIVING ARRANGEMENT OF THE ELDERLY
   4.3.1 Coresidence with Adult Children

4.4 INTERGENERATIONAL SUPPORT
   4.4.1 Support Provided to Elderly
          Physical Support for the Elderly
          Visits of Non-coresiding Children
          Non-financial Support from Non-coresident Children
   4.4.2 Support Provided by Elderly
          Financial Support Provided by Elderly
          Non-financial Support Provided by Elderly

4.5 CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

5.2 CURRENT AND EMERGING ISSUES

5.3 POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

REFERENCES
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Number and Percentage of Elderly Population (in thousand) in Developed and Developing Countries, 1980-2025</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Composition of Population by Broad Age Group, 1957-2025, Malaysia</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Crude Birth Rate, Total Fertility Rate and Crude Death Rate by Ethnic Group, Peninsular Malaysia, 1957-1990</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Life Expectancy at Age 55 for Males and Females by Ethnic Group, Peninsular Malaysia, 1989</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Population Age Structure of Selected Countries, Mid-1993</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Median Age of Population by Region, 1957-2025</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Median Age by Ethnic Group, Peninsular Malaysia, 1957-1990</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Age Structure of Population Aged 60 and Above, Malaysia, 1970-2025</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Sex Ratio of Age Groups 60 and Over, Malaysia, 1970-2025</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9 Sex Ratio of the Elderly by Ethnicity and Age Group, Peninsular Malaysia, 1990</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10 Dependency Ratio, Malaysia, 1970-2025</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11 Old Dependency Ratio by Ethnic Group, Peninsular Malaysia, 1970-1990</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.12 Old Dependency Ratio by Region, 1970-1990</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.13 Familial Dependency Ratio, Malaysia, 1970-2025</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.14 Aging Index by Region, Malaysia, 1980-2025</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.15 Aging Index by Sex and Ethnic Group, Peninsular Malaysia, 1970-1989</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.16 Aging Index for Projected Population (in thousand), 1957-1992
3.1 Percentage Distribution of Health Status of Male and Female Elderly by Age Group
3.2 Unadjusted and Adjusted Mean Index Score of Health Status for Elderly Aged 50-79 by Selected Background Characteristics
3.3 Per Cent of Male and Female Elderly Aged 50-79 Who are Able to Perform Different Types of Activities
3.4 Per Cent of Elderly Aged 50-79 Who Are Now Not Physically Active by Duration of Limitation
3.5 Percentage of Elderly Aged 50-79 by Type of Health Care Services Utilized in the One Month Prior to the Survey
3.6 Percentage of Elderly Aged 50-79 Using Various Types of Health Care Services by Age Group and Sex
3.7 Percentage of Elderly Aged 50-79 Using Various Types of Health Care Services by Age Group and Place of Residence
3.8 Percentage of Elderly Aged 50-79 Using Various Types of Health Care Services by Place of Residence and Ethnic Group
3.9 Percentage of Elderly Aged 50-79 by Type of Health Care Services by Selected Background Characteristics
3.10 Percentage Distribution of Health Care Expenditure (During the Reference Month) of Elderly Aged 50-79 by Place of Residence
3.11 Mean Medical Expenditure (in RM During the Reference Month) of Elderly Aged 50-79 by Type of Health Facilities
3.12 Percentage Distribution of Elderly Aged 50-79 by Financial Source of Medical Cost During Illness
3.13 Financial Source of Medical Cost by Selected Background Characteristics of Elderly Aged 50-79
3.14 Statistics for Model Chi-Square and Goodness of Fit
3.15 Estimated Probabilities of Being Physically Active by Various Characteristics of Elderly Aged 50-79
3.16 Statistics for Model Chi-Square and Goodness of Fit

3.17 Estimated Probabilities of Utilizing Private Health Facilities by Various Characteristics of Elderly Aged 50-79

4.1 Percentage Distribution of Male and Female Elderly Aged 50-79 by Education Level

4.2 Percentage of Male and Female Elderly Aged 50-79 Currently Working by Selected Background Characteristics, Unadjusted and Adjusted for Age, Ethnic Group, Place of Residence, Education Level and Perceived Health Status

4.3 Percentage of Elderly Aged 50-79 Working in Various Sectors and Mean and Median Annual Earned Income by Selected Background Characteristics

4.4 Percentage Distribution of Working Elderly Aged 50-79 by Employment Status and Selected Background Characteristics

4.5 Statistics for Model Chi-Square and Goodness of Fit

4.6 Estimated Probabilities of Currently Working Elderly by Various Characteristics of Elderly Aged 50-79

4.7 Percentage of Elderly Aged 50-79 Covered by Employees Provident Fund or Other Funds or Pension Benefits by Various Background Characteristics

4.8 Percentage Distribution of Annual Financial Resources of Elderly Aged 50-79 by Place of Residence

4.9 Median Annual Financial Resources Received by Elderly Aged 50-79 by Place of Residence and Selected Background Characteristics

4.10 Mean Annual Financial Resources Received by Elderly Aged 50-79 by Current Work Status and Source of Financial Contribution

4.11 Percentage of Elderly Aged 50-79 Receiving Remittance from Children Living Elsewhere by Selected Background Characteristics

4.12 Percentage Distribution of Elderly Aged 50-79 With Children Living Elsewhere by Quantum of Annual Remittance from Children and Place of Residence
4.13 Percentage Distribution of Elderly Aged 50-79 by Quantum of Annual Remittance Received from Children Living Elsewhere by Selected Background Characteristics
4.14 Percentage Distribution of Male and Female Elderly by Living Arrangement and Age Group
4.15 Percentage Distribution of Male and Female Elderly Aged 50-79 by Living Arrangement and Place of Residence
4.16 Percentage Distribution of Male and Female Elderly Aged 50-79 According to Living Arrangement by Ethnic Group
4.17 Statistics for Model Chi-Square and Goodness of Fit
4.18 Estimated Probabilities of Coresidence With an Adult Child of Elderly Aged 50-79 by Various Characteristics
4.19 Source of Physical Support by Selected Background Characteristics of Elderly Aged 50-79
4.20 Percentage Distribution of Visits from Children of Male and Female Elderly Aged 50-79
4.21 Percentage of Male and Female Elderly Aged 50-79 Receiving Support from Children Living Elsewhere by Selected Background Characteristics
4.22 Percentage of Elderly Aged 50-79 Providing Financial Support to Children Living Elsewhere by Selected Background Characteristics
4.23 Percentage Distribution of Elderly Aged 50-79 with Children Living Elsewhere Who Provide Financial Support to Children by Selected Background Characteristics
4.24 Percentage of Elderly Aged 50-79 Providing Financial Support to Aged Parents Living Elsewhere by Selected Background Characteristics
4.25 Percentage Distribution of Elderly Aged 50-79 with Aged Parents Living Elsewhere by Quantum of Financial Support and Selected Background Characteristics
4.26 Percentage of Elderly Aged 50-79 Who Help Children Living Elsewhere in Various Activities by Selected Background Characteristics
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>An Analytical Framework on Interrelationships between Socio-economic and Demographic Variable on Health Care and Socio-economic Support of the Elderly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Average Annual Growth Rate of Total Population and 3 Broad Age Groups, Malaysia, 1957 - 2025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Percentage Distribution of Elderly Aged 50-79 by Level of Physical Fitness by Age Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Age Standardized Level of Physical Fitness by Ethnic Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Age Standardized Level of Physical Fitness by Place of Residence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Age Standardized Level of Physical Fitness by Education Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Child Care Provided by Elderly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Age Specific Death Rates by Sex, Peninsular Malaysia, 1991</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Education Level and Age Group</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Percentage Distribution of Respondents Aged 50-79 by Marital Status and Place of Residence</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>