

THE COMFORT AND SAFE HOUSING AS A CHOICE FOR ELDERLY AND SENIOR CITIZEN

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ABSTRACT

A healthy lifestyle and technological facilities have led to a phenomenon of increasing senior citizens not only in Malaysia but all over the world. This phenomenon is an important problem to be studied and evaluated to meet the current needs and wants as they face the Old Country. Malaysia as a developing country will feel the aging of its population in future, even achieving the status of this 'old' country faster than developed countries. According to the United Nation (UN) forecast, Malaysia will achieve the status of an old country by 2030 when the population is 60 years old and above reaches 15 percent of the total population. If according to the national development program, Malaysia will become an old country by the 14th Malaysia Plan. Therefore, Malaysia needs to walk in line with this phenomenon to address the effects and consequences of the increase in senior citizens. One of the important elements that needs to be considered is safe housing for the elderly. Without considering the elderly as a burden, all parties need to find a way and implement more comprehensive planning to address the needs and plans for elderly safe housing. Most foreign countries are ready with policies and even special organizations in parliament specifically for the elderly, but Malaysia is still seen to be behind in discussing issues and policies towards the elderly. The study aims to analyze the housing needs for senior citizens by taking into account existing homes and lifestyles of seniors and suggest some improvements such as residential support facilities that can make it easier for seniors to purchase necessities, get services and be close to family members and friends of seniors to get visited. This study uses qualitative approaches, adopts library-based research and, by content analysis of documents, applies the literature review approach. The findings show that there are four basic types of senior settlements, namely family homes, care centres, health facilities and retirement homes, and the choice of placement of senior citizens depends on the comfort and adaptation of the elderly to make a choice.

Keywords: Elderly, Senior Citizen, Safe Housing, Comfort, Choice.

1. Introduction

The growth of the population in Malaysia will be facing the prospect of an aging population since the aged over 65 years stood at seven percent. The latest statistical data predicted this to be happening as soon as in 2030 (R. Hirschmann, 2020). It takes Malaysia only 25 years to move from an ageing to an aged nation while France took 115 years to do so (Pathma Subramaniam, 2020). There is a need for the nation to take this issue seriously as the elderly needs increase especially in their health condition. Besides, this issue should be run along with the development of the country. Nowadays, most of the elderly are felt lonely and alone since

their children get older and busy with their own schedule. Even most of the elderly to face their routine alone and might dangerous them. There are also increase of the violence and neglect among the elderly. Since the ageing phenomena and the issues regarding elderly continuously increase and to be worried, there is a need for a comfort and save home for them. This is to ensure their safety and health so they can face positive ageing during their lives.

2. Methodology

In the study of 'The Comfort and Safe Housing as a Choice for Elderly and Senior Citizen', the study aims to analyze the housing needs for senior citizens by taking account existing homes and lifestyles of seniors and suggest some improvements such as residential support facilities that can make it easier for seniors to purchase necessities, get services and be close to family members and friends of seniors to visited. This is towards the desire to create an environment that supports their housing to ensure the survival of the elderly and the general needs in housing to make it easier for the elderly to live independently in old age. The 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 issues. The findings show that there are four basic types of senior settlements, namely family homes, care centres, health facilities and retirement homes, and the choice of placement of senior citizens depends on the comfort and adaptation of the elderly to make a choice.

3. Analysis and Discussion

3.1 Issues and policies towards the elderly.

Malaysia's first National Policy for the Elderly was introduced in 1995 and revised to become the National Policy for Older Persons in 2011. Together with the 1997 Plan and Action for the inter-sectoral national policy, a National Advisory and Consultative Council for the Elderly was established, and the Department of Social Welfare under the Ministry of Women served as the national secretariat. In 2008, the Ministry of Health developed a National Health Policy for Older Persons to strategize the human and physical resources needed to meet the healthcare needs of a rapidly ageing society. Under the Town Planning Department, a guideline was developed to assist in the physical planning of facilities for the elderly in 2012.

Under the National Blue Ocean Strategy (NBOS7), the 1Malaysia Family Care program was initiated in 2012 to provide holistic health and social support to older persons, the disabled and single mothers where different government agencies network, collaborate and share resources to deliver services to the home of target recipients and located nearby housing area (Report on the Policy Dialogue of Asian Parliamentarians and Experts on Ageing, 2016). Yoshinori Kodama, Minister, Embassy of Japan in Malaysia in his opening speech on the Policy Dialogue of Asian Parliamentarians and Experts on Ageing concern on Malaysia as an Islamic country with different cultural background compared to the East Asian countries. This will lead to different experiences, outcomes and remaining challenges regarding population ageing issues and challenges.

For the population to prepare for their financial security and health care in old age, Malaysian government has developed savings and investments schemes in various sectors which for the lower income and more vulnerable groups, financial assistance is needed. The pension systems in the most Asian countries funded by the government are also not fully developed and the older population to rely on family for old age support due to the lack of social protection.

Malaysia is facing shortages on healthcare staffing, low levels of savings for retirement among the future generations of the elderly, increasing loneliness and isolation of older persons in the community, a funding gap in social care, an undersupply of retirement housing and underemployment of older persons due to shortage of flexible working opportunities. Even the elderly's social support is declining more rapidly than the government's ability to set up viable, alternative systems especially in the urban areas where the housing design is not conducive for multigenerational families. The insurance coverage among the older population is low and it's worse for the elderly at the bottom 40% of household in Malaysia.

Malaysia has only about 20 geriatricians and 10 psycho-geriatricians while supposed to have more than 700 geriatric specialists. Older person in this country also be forced to leave the labour force early. There are five barriers of healthy ageing namely outdated and ageist stereotypes, inadequate policies, lack of accessibility, inadequate or absent services and the lack of consultation and involvement from stakeholders. There is also a need for more connectedness in the terms of policymaking across many different government ministries and agencies such as health, housing social welfare, transportation and more in creating more affordable choices and alternative for the elderly.

Based on Professor Datuk Dr Lokman Hakim Sulaiman, a public health expert from International Medical University, Malaysia did not have adequate health and elderly care facilities to support the growing ageing population. There are more needed to be done and the need to determine the framework on the responsibility of elderly care. He has suggested to develop policies to guide development programmes towards a comprehensive elderly care that covers social, economic and health aspects (Nor Ain Mohamed Radhi and Tharanya Arumugam, 2019). Professor Nathan Vytialingam, Malaysia Healthy Ageing Society adviser also stated that one of the challenges is the lack of adequate elderly care homes built by the public and private sectors also the lack of geriatrist and specialized care providers pr professionals to the elderly population (Jason Loh Seong Wei, 2021).

3.2 National Policy for Older Persons in 2011

In October 1995, the government came up with the National Policy for Older Persons. The National Advisory and Consultative Council for Older Persons under the chairmanship of the Minister for Women, Family and Community Development was set up in May 1996 in accordance with the policy. A Plan of Action for the Older Persons was formulated in December 1998 as an outcome of the establishment of the Council. The Department of Social Welfare under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development is the secretariat for the Council and serves as the focal point for all issues related to older persons.

January 5th, 2011 the new National Policy for Older Persons and Plan of Action for Older Persons were approved by the Government of Malaysia. The plan of action and the policy were

formulated based on the review made to the earlier National Policy for Older Persons 1995 and the Plan of Action for the Older Persons 1998. To instill older persons with a high sense of self-worth and dignity, the review was carried out by the Government to re-look into incorporating the developmental and reintegration of the older persons in the society.

The National Policy for Older Persons 2011 acknowledge the older persons as citizens with varied background and experiences, have the rights to enjoy a comfortable and respected life and contribute to the development of the nation. This policy is the government's commitment to create a conducive environment for older persons who are independent, with dignity, high sense of self-worth and respected by optimizing their self-potential through a healthy, positive, active productive and supportive ageing to lead a well-being life. The objective of the policy is to empower the individual families and community to provide friendly services to the older persons efficiently and effectively and to ensure enabling and supportive environment for the well-being of the older persons. There are six strategies outlined in this policy, namely: (1) Promotion and Advocacy; (2) Life-long Learning; (3) Safety and Security; (4) Governance and Shared Responsibility; (5) Intergenerational Solidarity; and (6) Research and Development.

The National Policy for Older Persons and Plan of Action for Older Persons were formulated taking into consideration of various international conferences that focus on ageing including principles outlined in the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA). This National were drafted based on the three priority areas outlined in MIPAA:

First, Older Persons and Development where the first objective of the National Policy for Older Persons is to develop a caring society and capacity-building of society to face the ageing phenomena. Mainstreaming ageing in the nation's developmental agenda is addressed in one of the strategies in the Plan of Action for Older Persons.

Second, advancing health and well-being into old age where the National Policy for Older Persons addresses the safety and well-being of the older persons through its third objective. Services and health care, prevention of diseases as well as improving the quality of life of the older persons are some of the strategies that are outlined in the Plan of Action for Older Persons.

Third, Ensuring enabling and supportive environments which among the strategies that are planned to achieve enabling and supportive environment for older persons; accessibility and capacity-building of the organizations; and intergenerational interdependence.

3.3 Activity Centre for the Older Persons (PAWE)

Activity Centre for the Older Persons or *Pusat Aktiviti Warga Emas* (PAWE) are centres that allow the elderly to be involved in community and recreational activities with no charge for senior citizens who attend the programs. This development program has been established under National Policy for Older Persons and Plan of Action For Older Persons since 2001 (Noraida Ibrahim, Zarina Mat Saad, Fatimah Zailly Ahmad Ramly, 2016).

PAWE involves strategic cooperation between the ministry and other government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Objectives of this activity centres are expanding facilities for the welfare and development of senior citizens, provide space for senior citizens to feel appreciated through the sharing of experiences and skills, encourage the participation and cooperation of various parties, provide an alternative to the senior citizens group from the low-income families category and to improve the quality of life of senior citizens in line with the concept of active and productive.

The various activities are such as religious programs, recreation programs, therapy and rehabilitation programs, health seminar and training (Pusat Aktiviti Warga Emas (PAWE), 2018). The previous administration had planned to ensure that PAWE is available in every parliamentary constituency and since March 2020, 129 or so have been set up (Jason Loh Seong Wei, 2021).

3.4 The Basic Types of Elderly and Senior Citizen Settlements.

There are four categories for common housing and facility options available for the elderly population in Malaysia such family home (ageing in place), elderly care, medical, facility and retirement village (Ainoriza Mohd Aini, Nooraisyiah Murni and Wan Azriyati Wan Abd Aziz, 2016). Family home (ageing in place) are the most common choices among the elderly based on many surveys but some of them will end up at other alternative options.

Elderly who chooses to stay in family home or ageing in place can remain and continue living within the community and at the same time have some level of independence as compared to living in residential care (Wiles, J. L., Leibing, A., Guberman, N., Reeve, J., & Allen, R. E., 2011). Elderly who experience certain health conditions and hence require extra attention and assistance will choose elderly care. Besides, elderly care institution is community housing built for the senior citizens who are less fortunate either financially childless or even abandoned (Barry, U., & Conlon, C., 2010). An elderly who suffering from severe health conditions such as Alzheimer and Dementia is commonly treated in a medical facility. The ability to house and treat the elderly who have severe health conditions are among the main features that differentiate the medical facility from other types of facility option available for the elderly (Ainoriza Mohd Aini, Nooraisyilah Murni and Wan Nor Azriyati Wan Abd Aziz, 2016).

Demand for retirement villages in Malaysia is steadily increasing because of the changing lifestyle of seniors who are becoming more independent. Retirement village is a residential community or housing complex designed for seniors who are generally able to live independently and care for themselves. Assistance from home care agencies and basic medical facilities is allowed in some communities and social activities and opportunities are often provided. Residents of retirement villages generally have the freedom to enjoy their own lifestyle without needing to adhere to a strict diet or schedule (Jotham Lim, 2020). The property developers in Malaysia have targeted the emerging demand from silver-haired market by offering retirement residential. One of the challenges for the developers are to provide housing feature and environment that favour elderly market as house is a basic human need.

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 voluntarily, whether on a long-term or temporary basis (Yuen Meikeng, 2017).

3.5 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).

3.5.1 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.

3.5.2 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.

3.5.3 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.

3.5.4 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.

3.5.5 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 into 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.

3.5.6 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 centers, 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).

3.6 The residential support facilities for senior citizen: A Comfort and safe housing as a choice.

The developer addresses ageing in place on two different levels: within the home itself and in the community. At the home level, they incorporate step-free access in places such as bathrooms and have wide doorways that allow wheelchair access. They also careful with the choice of floor materials to reduce the chances of slips and falls. Their fittings and wares also take into consideration the ergonomics for people of all ages, such as the height of switches and sockets, and using levers instead of knobs for doors. On the community level, they incorporated universal design concept in its townships, such as covered walkaways and link bridges that allow for safe and comfortable travel between buildings. The developer has also installed lifts in strategic location and accessibility ramps. The sidewalks and pavements within the company's township are built wider and there are plenty of pedestrian crossing for the elderly and disabled.

Regarding the requirement of most people to live their retirement years in neighborhoods that are safe and supportive of their overall health and well-being, with good access to amenities, they have ensured all their township and integrated developments have easy access to healthcare in case of emergencies. Besides, the developer had many closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras in the common areas to keep the environment safe. 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).

Under the Physical Guidelines, retirement villages and other settlements must include elderly-friendly elements such as suitable height levels of electrical switches and windows for wheelchairs users as well as pedestrian crossings with sufficient walking time. Senior citizen settlement must also be easily accessible and reached by public transport and close to facilities such as hospitals, parks and shop lots. The location of facilities should be within reach and easily accessed with a network of interconnecting footpaths, safe, convenient and without any obstacles (Yuen Meikeng, 2017). 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)

Housing must fulfil the needs for the daily activities for the ageing people and provide them with the feeling of satisfaction, security, comfort and independence (Ainoriza Mohd Aini, Nooraisyiah Murni and Wan Azriyati Wan Abd Aziz, 2016). Number of researchers suggested that the elderly population mainly experience risk and problem since they occupy old houses and neighborhoods which can threaten their mobility, comfort as well as their safety (Robinson, H., 2012). The ageing population needs housing that will not only facilitate their mobility and comfort but is also safe for them. Besides, between the elderly and their environment, the elderly is generally satisfied with their living environment which makes them feel the sense of attachment and comfort in their current living area (Philips, J., Walford, N., & Hockey, A., 2011)

4. Conclusion

Aging population worldwide are increasing every year. Many countries now are having aging housing development that change the designs of the resident and provide services to the aging that live independently, so that aging can live independently in a safe and comfortable environment. Aging people may feel comfortable in live in an area with good security, it will make them feel safe and secure as many youngsters nowadays are not living with parents. As our society now are living in sandwiched generations, where adult children to cope with caring for both the younger offspring and their older parents at the same time, the needs to seriously look at the safe housing for elderly is now demands great attention. Having the right policy can help the country respond to the challenges of population ageing and secure potential benefits to provide comfort and safe housing for elderly as a choice.

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