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Dr. Noorlaili Tohit (Monash University)

Cultural Conceptualisations of Healthy Ageing

Older Malays in Malaysia:

'We want a peaceful life here and hereafter'



Presentation Overview

- Introduction
- Methodology
- Findings: Overview of healthy ageing concepts
- Findings: - Spirituality
 - Spirituality and other themes
- Conclusion



INTRODUCTION

- **This study aims to explore the healthy ageing conceptualisations and perceived influences on ageing well amongst relatively healthy older Malays, a major ethnic group in Malaysia.**
- **Part of a larger study on healthy ageing being conducted in Malaysia, China and Australia by the Healthy Ageing Research Unit at Monash University.**



INTRODUCTION

- **Healthy ageing definitions are mainly researcher/clinician derived**
 - These may be at odds with aspirations of older people
- **Emphasis on**
 - Physical health
 - Cognitive health
 - ADL independence
 - Psychological well being
- **Few studies on perceptions of older people or perceptions of older people from culturally diverse backgrounds**

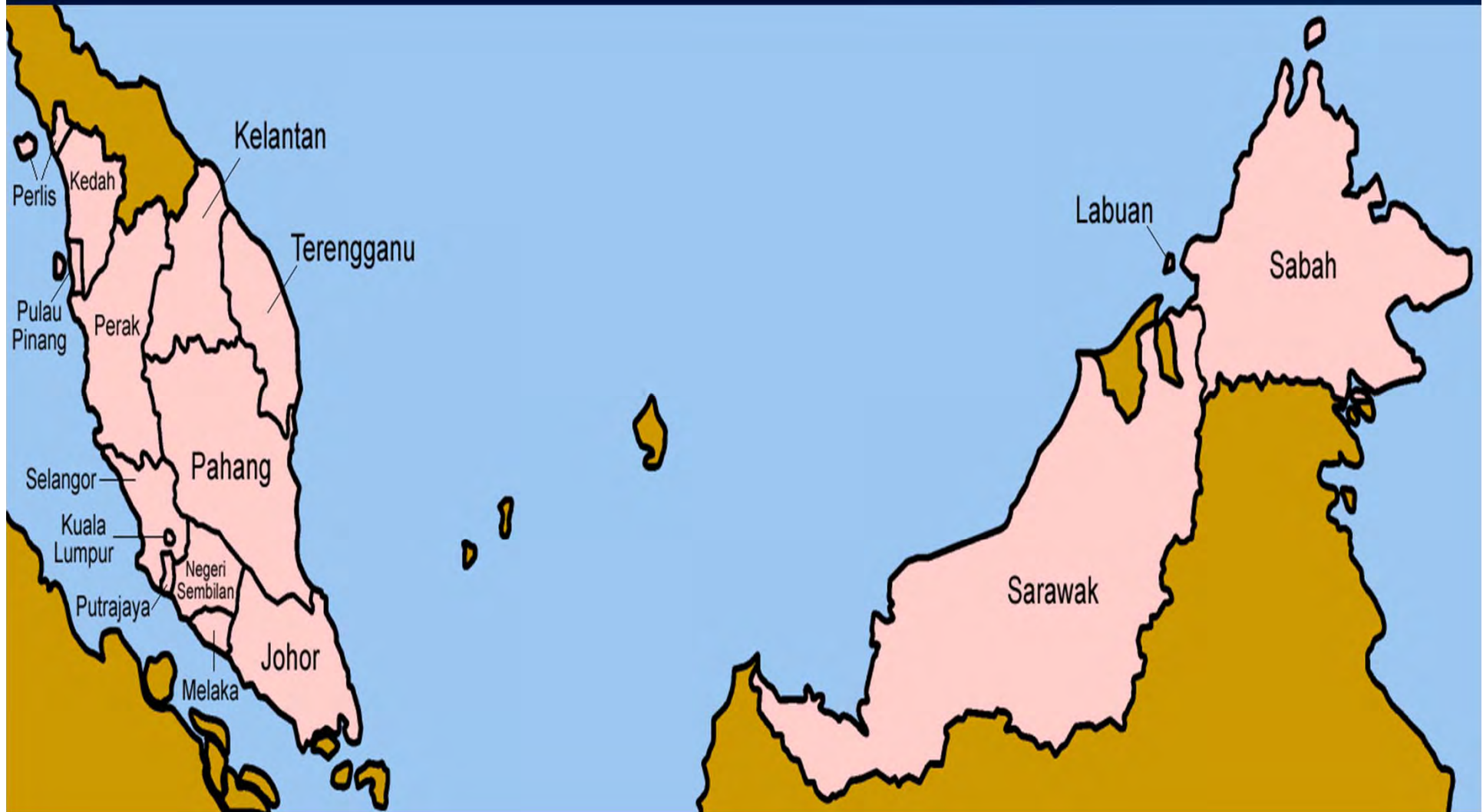


Malaysia

- a multi-cultural and multilingual country.
- In 2007, the population was 27.7 million.
- 6.6 % older people aged 60 and above in year 2000
- Life expectancy for year 2000-2005:
 - woman 75.5,
 - man 70.6



Malaysia



Malaysian Study

- **Study conducted in Selangor, the most populous state in Malaysia**

Population: 5 million (2007)

Malay 52.9%

Chinese 27.8%

Indian 13.3%

- **8 focus groups (n=38), separate men's and women's groups**
- **Age range 60 to 95 years**

Focus group method

Pilot study:

- older Malays in Melbourne (n=8)
- 2 groups, 2 individuals interview

Malaysia:

- 8 focus group interviews (n=38)
- Recruitment via community groups
- Interview audio taped and transcribed
- Thematic analysis, inductive approach



Focus group in older Malays

- **Separate men and women group.**
- **Focus group participants – not strangers, at comfort with each other.**
- **Some older Malays may want to contribute but not in a group or not with certain people.**
- **Homogenous but diverse.**
- **Arranged date or any time.**

ALWAYS BE PREPARED TO LISTEN TO THEM.



Focus group characteristics

| Group number | Gender | Predominant characteristic | Number of participants | Average monthly income in RM* (Range income) |
|--------------|--------|----------------------------|------------------------|---|
| 1 | Men | Traditional Malay village | 2 | 2000 (2000) |
| 2 | Men | Faith based group | 6 | 1417 (500-4000) |
| 3 | Men | Senior citizen association | 6 | 1833 (900-5000) |
| 4 | Men | Community group | 4 | 1815 (500-4000) |
| 5 | Women | Low education | 5 | 264 (20-500) |
| 6 | Women | Faith based group | 6 | 963 (400-2000) |
| 7 | Women | Senior citizen association | 6 | 1833 (300-4000) |
| 8 | Women | Medium educated | 3 | 2167 (1000-3000) |

Participants' characteristics

| Characteristics | Men (n=18) | Women (n=20) |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Mean age in years | 72.7 (Age range 61-95) | 66.6 (Age range 60-77) |
| Working status | 72% fully retired | 75% fully retired |
| Marital status: | | |
| - Married | 89% | 30% |
| - Widowed | 11% | 55% |
| - Single/separated | 0 % | 15% |
| House ownership | 89% | 75% |
| Living arrangement | | |
| - alone | 5.6% | 25% |
| - with spouse only | 11 % | 20% |
| - with spouse and children | 44.4% | 10% |
| - as above + grandchildren | 27.8% | - |
| - with children | - | 15% |
| - as above + grandchildren | 5.6% | 10% |
| - others | 5.6% | 20% |



What questions did we ask?

- **The questions focused on three broad themes:**
 - *How older people understand ageing and healthy (good) ageing,*
 - *What are older peoples' ideal expectations of a 'healthy (good) old age', and*
 - *What are older peoples' experiences of ageing.*



Overview:

MALAY HEALTHY AGEING CONCEPTS



What is good ageing for you?

(Zaki, aged 79): Always frequenting the mosque?

(Jak, aged 73): Well prepared to reach this [stage

(Yup, aged 63): More peaceful mind. At this level, we might be done, last time we had small children, schooling; now we are done, resting and peaceful.

Jak: Education and one more, religious guidance, ...those with higher education usually had stable position in the beginning and would be more secure [financially] at the end... with religious understanding and practice according to spiritual guidance, you get a more peaceful and organized life at this age.

(Aman, aged 78): It is difficult for me, you see, I do not have any other income, I have to work, I have to rely on my own sweat and tears, no peaceful life for me.



Overview: Malay healthy ageing concepts

- **Health, independence, faith and participation:**

“At this old age, we hope to be healthy, be able to care for ourselves, to perform good deeds and be active”

(Rima, woman, aged 66, group 6)

- **Health, participation, functional and financial independence:**

“remain healthy, do everything by yourself as long as you can and most importantly, must have money...must be sociable, must meet people, not stay in your house 24 hours”

(Miah, woman, aged 64, group 8).



Overview: Malay healthy ageing concepts

- **Health, faith, financial, family:**

“Health and strong religious faith, good health so you can do good deeds, strong faith motivates you to do that. One more thing, our financial status, we should have pension money or anything similar, so at this old age we do not have to go anywhere, or open up a stall or wandering around[to work] leaving the family...”

(Aji, man, aged 61, group 2).



Physical, social, emotional, spiritual and financial

The multidimensional concepts of healthy ageing:

“If I can cover the five components of happiness as I described earlier, i.e. physical, social in term of family and friends, emotionally not stressed, spiritually well developed, that is the safest, financial is not as [important], there are times when we do not have enough money but not as stressful...” (Mat, man aged 62, group 3).

Overview: Malay healthy ageing concepts

Six themes:

- **Spirituality**
- **Physical health and function.**
- **Family**
- **Peace of mind**
- **Financial independence**
- **Living environment**

Each theme was not a stand alone dimension, it intricately connected to each other.



Spirituality – the driving force

- as they aged, spirituality become increasingly central to their lifestyle and well being:

“We think of God more than anything else, we are more there now, we know we are going already, it is already Isya’ [night prayer], not Maghrib [dusk prayer] anymore, it is Isya’. We have nice friends, we attended many religious classes, and then you get to know (other) people. I think it [spirituality] comes naturally also...”

(Piah, woman, aged 65, group 8).



Spirituality – the driving force

- *“Religious guidance is a must; if there is any shortfall in life but with strong religious faith, it is manageable, should be controllable”
(Jak, man, aged 73, group 4).*
- *“If you want to be a useful and valuable person, you must follow what has been shown by the prophet and be obedient to his teaching, InsyaAllah you will never lost, that is our principle...”(Bidin, man, aged 95, group 1).*



Spirituality – personal development

- Continuous learning
- Intensified good deeds (*ibadah*)
- Remembering death
- Preparing others
- *“...so, there is something good about remembering death, it is coming, does the death angel forgotten me. So, if I feel lazy to go [to the mosque], what if I am gonna die tomorrow. That is the good thing (hikmah) about it...”*
(Aki, man, aged 74, group 2).

Spirituality – personal development

- Continuous learning as part of their active participation, while at the same time fulfilling their spiritual needs.
- The activities undertaken were all heading into one direction,

‘...to get more knowledge, to get closer to Allah, that is the real purpose in life’

(Ana, woman, aged 60, group 6).



Spirituality – personal development

- *Grateful and come to term with death*

“For me, at this old age, Alhamdulillah God give me sustenance, God give me longer life to be with my children and grandchildren, that is my priority. The second thing, if God has decided that my time has come, I am ready (ridho). The priority, healthy kin and kith, no bad luck for them...that is what I have been praying for”

(Daud, man, aged 79, group 1)



Spirituality – personal development

- This preparation however, does not mean to surrender enjoyment in life to wait for death to come,

“it is not that we just sit there and wait, we do other things too but we remember [death] more”

(Hani, woman, aged 60, group 7).



Spirituality and financial

- **Contentment in life and changes in priority.**

“...we are aware, at 62, 63 the age of the prophet, one more step to hereafter...we are aware material gains is not priority...no more 8 to 5 for me...to take the meaning of contentment from spiritual perspective, you have an old car, you use it, there is a desire to get a new one, but if you can't, it is okay, that is adequate. Similar to financial, I don't put high expectation towards family financial support by our children...”

(Mat, man, aged 62, group 3).



Physical health and function





Physical health and function

- **Health behaviour: physical activity, eat in moderation, fall prevention.**

- **Supportive resources despite limitation,**

'I do not feel it restricting, when I have free time, I do go out, and nobody stops me. My son-in-law drives me to the mosque, so I do not have any restriction. When I want to go to the clinic, my children give me a lift on their way to work, I take taxi home. With those resources, I do not have to worry' (Azmi, man, aged 85, group 2).



Spirituality and physical health

- Spiritual determination motivates for continuous engagement with life,

“Once we retired, we should strive to prepare for afterlife. So, one is health and another thing is strong religious faith, good health so you can do good deeds, strong faith motivates you to do that...”

(Aji, man, aged 61, group 2).

Spirituality and physical health

- Poor physical health may restrict their social and religious activities:

“If you have knee pain it is difficult for you to meet others, it is difficult to go for prayer congregation, have to do the prayer at home, have to find end of rows in the mosque, it is difficult to get around. Once you are bed ridden you will be unhappy, be it senior citizen or anybody”

(Ima, woman, aged 60, group 7).



Spirituality and physical health

- Ageing well despite sub optimal health and functional status:

“I am not strong enough to work, so religious activity is more important. Wake up at night for ‘tahajud’ [optional late night] prayer; we are encouraged to do the night prayers, if we cannot stand until the dawn, just for 2-3 hours would be enough. Recite the Kursi verses, the one easier to remember, I cannot see much to read the Quran, so just recite what I can recall,...that is my priority now”

(Daud, man, aged 79, group 1)



Spirituality and physical health

- Illness experience seemed strengthened their connection with God.
- Despite complains about their illness, they do express their gratitude to God as they consider their health situation comparatively acceptable, *“if possible we do not want any kind of illnesses, thanks to Allah for what He has given, Alhamdulillah I have only this [illness]...”* (Nori, woman, aged 72, group 5).

Family

- **responsibility towards their children and grandchildren as a lifelong commitment.**





Intergenerational relationship

- *Lia: When we feel we could not cope to look after the grandchildren, we are already old, the grandchildren all grown up, what else I am looking [for ?*
- *Rima: come] and live in this place [spiritual retreat]*
- *Ara: Since having great grandchildren, feel like to live peacefully without disturbance. When we want to perform good deeds (ibadah) not be disturbed, occasionally the children invited us to go back is acceptable.*
- *Rubi: Once we are old, we want to be on our own to perform good deeds (ibadah), till our time [come*
- *Anis: that] is the reality of older people, that's it.*
- *Lia: We don't know when would be our time.*



Preparing the family

- to ensure the children be well supported,

“There are 2 levels of educational achievement, good and not so good. If it is not that good, we have to develop their skill, we have to prepare them to which field they want, may be business, we have to support that...the one not so good, we have to help for their survival, so they can be good even without higher education”

(Zaki,man, aged 79, group 4)



Preparing the family

“All my children are married, I am happy to see that. I have nothing to worry about. All the children and grandchildren are well, that is what I have been praying for day and night. I pray that all my children and grandchildren are healthy, protected from bad luck and always in strong faith”

(Daud, man, aged 79, group 1).



Peace of mind



Spirituality and peace of mind

- Peace of mind seemed as the utmost goal.
- Is it a final outcome of a healthy ageing process or is it the actual meaning of healthy ageing?
- Needs spiritual guidance to attain this,
“Doing good deeds according to spiritual guidance, you get a more peaceful and organised life at this age”
(Jak, man, aged 73, group 4)

Peace of mind: what and when?

The meaning of peace of mind:

- **Happiness/ pleasure/enjoyment**
- **Nothing to worry**
- **No fear, nor grieve**

Situations lead to peaceful life:

- **Ability to concentrate on their spiritual endeavor.**
- **Not much responsibility in term of financial or family.**



Peace of mind:

Happiness/ pleasure/ enjoyment

- Ability to conduct good deeds (*ibadah*) as they wished generate a sense of peace and pleasure (*kenikmatan*)

Ana: ...during Ramadhan month was more enjoyable, going to the mosque at 3 am, no fear at all (aged 60, group 6).

Anis: that is 'kenikmatan' (aged 63, group 6).

Ana: that 'kenikmatan' we can't tell how, those experienced it will know...'



Peace of mind:

- **Nothing to worry**

“Should have nothing to worry, sometimes at this old age many things happen in the house, the wife keep blabbering, anything the husband does always not right. All of these disturb the mind. At this old age, we want a peaceful life, when we wake up in the morning for prayer, to read, no interference”

(Azmi, man, aged 85, group 2).



Peace of mind:

- **No fear, nor grieve**

“...Al Baqarah: 38 ... whoever follows My guidance, ‘walaah haufun alaihim walaah hum yahzanun’, there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve. Allah created us and He said that...,”

(Ali, man, aged 72, group 3).



Peace of mind – the challenges

- **Unsettled family and financial responsibilities affect their journey,**

“...this one causing me headache, ‘grandma give me money’, each time asking for money...”

(Ani, woman, aged 73, group 5)

“It is difficult for me, you see, I do not have any other income, I have to work, I have to rely on my own sweat and tears, no peaceful life for me”

(Aman, man, aged 78, group 4).



Conclusion

- **For this Malay community, spirituality was fundamental to healthy ageing.**
- **To attain the peace of mind was a very prominent aspiration.**
- **Make the best of what they have today and prepare for the future.**



Conclusion

- In promoting “healthy ageing” for the older people, should be aligned with the cultural expectations and requirements of the older people.
- Aware that individuals vary in their expectations and requirements.

THANK YOU.



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Living environment





Spirituality and the living environment





Living environment

- **Neighbourhood – accessibility, security, social network.**
- **A place to live in – own house, spiritual retreat, children's house.**
- **Living arrangement – with spouse, alone, with paid helper, with children.**



Neighbourhood – accessibility, security, social network.

- Supports their spiritual needs:

“I never married...After my mother died, I started to feel too insecure to go to the mosque at night. I hoped to find a place where I can feel closer [to God], nearer to the mosque without worrying about my security”

(Ana, woman, aged 60, group 6).



Neighbourhood – accessibility, security, social network.

- **Social network**

“... we go to the mosque every day, in the mosque all are friends, friends are all those in the mosque” (Atan, man, aged 71, group 2).

- **Neighbourhood watch**

‘...Rukun Tetangga should be re-introduced, during that time neighbours know each other, less thieves and robberies, easier work for police’ (Dan, man, aged 68, group 3).