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Some Socioeconomics Characteristics of Older Population in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Demographic aging has been a twentieth century phenomenon. As the number and percentage of the older population continues to increase, the need for extensive and current information on this older population increases. This article aims at analyzing some aspect of social and economic aspects of demographic aging in Malaysia. Secondary data in this discussion is taken from the report of Population and Housing Census of Malaysia and various books on the demographic aging in Malaysia. This paper describes some aspects of the demographic aging in Malaysia in terms of ethnic variations, state level proportions, age structure, marital status, educational attainment, and employment status.

Key words: Demographic Aging; Demographic Structure; Older Population; Population

Introduction

In recent years the older population has been increasing worldwide. Unlike in the West where older population aged 65 years and above is well above 15% of total population, in developing countries this proportion is still very small. It is worldwide recognized that, if the population aged 65 years and above account for 7% or above of the total population of a society or country, that society is considered as an aging society. In 2050, the proportion of this category of population in all developing countries will reach 7%, and thus at that time the world as a whole is said to be an aging world.

Although the size of older population has been growing for centuries, the number of the world’s older persons has increased dramatically since 1950. In 1950 there were only 205 million persons aged 60 years and older throughout the world. In 2000, the number of persons aged 60 years and older has increased to about 606 million (United Nations, 2001). It is projected that there will be more than 1 billion people aged 60 years and above by the year 2025, and this figure will reach 2 billion by 2050 (United Nations, 2002). In 1990, 26 countries had older populations aged 65 years and above of at least 2 million, and by 2000, 31 countries had reached the 2-million mark (Kinsella and Velkoff, 2001). Projection to year 2030 indicates that more than 60 countries will have 2 million or more (Kinsella and Velkoff, 2001), while in the year 2040, there will be 72 countries will have two million or more people aged 65 years and over (Kinsella and Wan He, 2009). In the global context, the pattern of population aging varies considerably between nations. Although developed nations today have relatively high proportion of older persons in their population, the most rapid increases are in developing world (Kinsella and Wan He, 2009). 77% of the world’s net gain of the older persons aged 65 years and above from July 1999 to July 2000 (615 000) occurred in developing countries (Kinsella and Velkoff, 2001). Started in the more developed nation in Europe and North America by the turn of the twentieth century, the rate of population ageing in developing countries began to rise in the early 1960s and has continued to increase. The process has recently become apparent in much of developing countries, and in the near future all countries will be facing a process, known as population aging.

According to major geographical areas, Europe is part of the world which has the largest older population, while Africa on the other hand, have the smallest proportion of older population. Africa is also the slowest parts of the world to obtain the status of ageing society globally. In 2000, Europe has 14.3% population of this age in population structure, and is expected to continue to be a global leader in population aging in decades to come. Even in 2025, in 10 of the population, there will be more than one person aged 75 years and over in Europe (Kinsella and Taeuber 1993). In 2000, it is expected that Europe is the continent with the largest number of elderly people in the world. As the percentage of the older population continues to increase, the
need for extensive and current information on this older population increases. This article attempts to review some of the socioeconomic characteristics of older population in Malaysia. To meet this objective, it reviews some published materials and highlights some of its socioeconomic characteristics.

Materials And Methods

This article utilizes secondary data as its main devices. Secondary data, data that have been collected by others, in this discussion is taken from the report of Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, 1991 and 2000, as well as various sources related to the Malaysian population and the older persons in Malaysia. One of the important sources is Population Ageing Trends in Malaysia, a monograph series, a product of the 2000 Census, written by Pala (2005). This monograph presents findings on the trends in population aging in Malaysia. In the words of research methods, this study employed content analysis design. Content analysis is defined as any technique for making inferences by objectively identifying specific characteristics of messages (Shaughnessy and Zechmeister, 1990).

Results And Discussion

In line with the increasing in older population worldwide, this trend is also observed in the demographic structure in Malaysia. The increasing of older population in a society can be analyzed through a number of related aspects. Among the aspects that has always been analyzed in understanding the increasing of older population in community include the number of older people, the median age, the question of the dependency ratio, aging index, and geographic distribution of this population. These aspects are discussed in this paper.

Ethnic Variations:

Malaysia is a multiethnic society. The formation of this multiethnic society has originated since the mid-19 century. After the British gained control of Malacca, Penang and Singapore in the middle of the 19th century, there has been a gradual process of the formation of a multiethnic society in Malaysia. In 1826, the Chinese population in Malacca for example was estimated to be 25,000 people, of which 16% was Chinese. The population in Penang was estimated 30,000 people, where 28% was Chinese (Tengku Anuar, 1991). There are four major ethnic groups: the Bumiputra, Chinese, Indians, and Others. Each ethnic group has distinct demographic features (Pala, 2005). The Chinese have the highest percentage of older persons aged 60 years and older with 8.8% in 2000. In 1991 the figure was 7.6%. It is expected to increase to 12.0% (2010), and is projected to increase further to 16.6% (2020). The Bumiputra and Indians are also experiencing the same phenomenon, but at a slower rate (Pala, 2005).

State Level Proportions:

There are 14 states in Malaysia. The proportion of older persons varies between states. According to Census 1980, the highest proportion of older persons was Perlis (7.6%), followed by Malacca and Penang in the second (6.7%), while Negeri Sembilan and Perak in the third rank (6.55%). In 1991 Census, Perlis was still the highest (7.9%), followed by Perak (7.8%), and Malacca (7.7%). Penang and Kedah were also two states which had proportion of older persons above 7 percent. In 2000 Census, the highest proportion goes to Perak (9.4%), followed by Perlis (9.2%), and Malacca (8.2%). Penang and Kedah, according Census 2000, were two states had proportion of older persons of 8 percent compared to 7 percent according to earlier Census. Thus, according to Census 2000, there were seven states in Malaysia; Kedah, Kelantan, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, Perak, Perlis, and Penang had proportion of older persons above 7 percent (Pala, 2005).

Age Structure:

Examining the age structure the world over has shown that when a country has reached a certain level of socioeconomic development, it would eventually experience a low level of mortality and fertility, which when maintained over a period of time would result in the increase in the proportion of older persons (Abdullah Malim Baginda, 1987). The age structure of the population for the past four censuses between the 1970-2000 censuses reveals a significantly decreasing proportion of population in the younger ages, and at the same time, an increase in the older age group (Pala, 2005). In 1970, the proportion of age group 0-14 was 44.9%, has declined to only 33.5% in 2000. For the age group 15-59, this proportion was 49.9% (1970), has increased to 60.2% (2000), while for the age group 60 and above, it has increased from 5.2% in 1970 to 6.3% in 2000. Thus, the proportion of older persons has increased significantly for the past four censuses.
Marital Status:

In most population widowhood is normally higher among female than male aged (Masitah and Nazileh, 1988). A look at marital status patterns for older persons reveals that widowhood is high among older couples, and the 2000 Census shows that close to one in every three older persons were classified as widowed (Pala, 2005). Based on the 2000 Census, the proportion of currently married was 62.9%, while 32.8% widowed. In terms of gender differentials, the proportion of widowed males is lower than female widowed (11.3% widowed males, compared to 45.5% female widowed). This is due to the fact that, among other things, besides women live longer, women tend to marry men older than themselves.

Educational Attainment:

As all the older persons in Malaysia were brought up before Malaysia gained independence, the education attainment of these persons is quite low. The proportion of older persons who never attended school was declined since in the past three decades. Masitah and Nazileh (1988) in their study found that the proportion of the respondents not having formal education among females was 73.7%, while among the males was 17.7%. The 2000 Census revealed that 51.3% of older persons had received no schooling at all (Pala, 2005), compared to 75% in 1970. For those who attended school, the majority of them were only at primary level (37.4%), while only 2.2% had received tertiary education. In terms of gender differentials, the proportion of elderly females with no schooling was 65% compared to only 36.4% for males (Pala, 2005).

Employment Status:

Very often quite a high proportion of older persons have to continue working during their old days to meet their needs, but generally the proportion of those still in the labor force will decline considerably with the increasing age. The older persons account for only a small proportion of the overall labor force (Pala, 2005). In the 2000 Census, only 22.8% of older persons aged 60 years and older is still in the labor force. According to censuses, the employment status is categorized into four categories, namely employer, employee, self-employed, and unpaid family worker. According to 2000 Census, the highest proportion was in self-employed category (66.8%), followed by employee (25.9%), employer (4.1%) and unpaid family worker (3.2%).

Conclusion:

Following the increasing of population aged 60 years and over in Malaysia, the need to gather information about this particular population is felt necessary. From secondary sources, it was found that the highest percentage of older persons in Malaysia is the Chinese. The Chinese are concentrated in the states of Kedah, Kelantan, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, Perak, Perlis, and Penang. As all the older persons in Malaysia were brought up before Malaysia gained independence, the majority of them had received no schooling. For those older persons who reported still in the labor force, the highest proportion was in self-employed category.

References