Factors Related to Frequency of Family Support of Older Rural Muslim

Wan-Ibrahim, W. A., Zainab, I., and Asyraf, H. A. R.

School of Social Development, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia
Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia
Faculty of Social Development, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, 21030 Kuala Terengganu

ABSTRACT

There are several factors that set limits for the potential availability of family support for older persons. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the factors related to the frequency of support of older persons from adult children. The design used in this study was a combination of the sociological method of face-to-face interviews, and the anthropological method of participant-observation. Results show that there were five factors determined the frequency of support the older persons receive. Those factors which discussed in this paper were number of children, geographical distance, marital status of adult children, living arrangement, health status of elderly parents and economic conditions of adult children. All these factors have been expressed by informants as the main barriers for the older persons getting support from their adult children.

Key words: Elderly; older population; population aging; demographic changes

Introduction

The world’s population is undergoing a profound transformation, particularly in terms of age structure. The age structure of population of all societies globally has been shifting to older ages in a process popularly known as population aging. In 2005 the number of the world population aged 60 years and above was 673 million. According to the 2006 Revision (United Nations, 2007a) this figure is expected to triple, increasing to 2 billion by 2050. The share of older persons living in developing countries is expected to rise from 64% in 2005 to nearly 80% in 2050. In the Development in Aging World (United Nations, 2007b), United Nations estimates in 2005, 21% of the population in developed countries was aged 60 years or over. This proportion is projected to rise to 32% in 2050. In developing countries, on the other hand, only 8% of the population was aged 60 years or over in 2005. This proportion is expected to reach nearly 20% by 2050. Thus, the population aging is not only occurs in developed countries, but also in developing countries as well. This is due to the fact that the transition from higher to lower levels of fertility and mortality, couples with the improvements in sanitation, medicine and health-care, have made the majority of the people in the world live longer.

The family continues to be a major source of interpersonal support (Chappell, 1990), and in the words of Kendig, Hashimoto and Coppard (1992), the family is the primary caregiver to the older persons, and this social fact transcends culture, politics, and economic circumstances. Especially in developing countries where the coverage for social and financial security of the majority of older persons is limited, family-based support is extremely crucial. Family support, or social support, can be defined in a variety of ways (Antonucci, 1985). Tolsdorf (Antonucci, 1985), for instance, defined social support as any action or behavior that functions to assist the focal person in meeting his or her personal goals. Kendig, Hashimoto and Coppard (1992) also defined support as aid rendered to meet specific needs of older persons in terms of financial, instrumental, and emotional. Although the importance of family in providing support for older persons can not be denied, the family nowadays faces challenges from within and outside to fulfill the task (Masithah and Nazileh, 1988).

Thus, what accounts for the willingness of adult children to fulfill the needs of the elderly parents? There are several factors, such as demographic, level of economic, political as well as cultural factors that set limits for the potential availability of family support (Kendig, Hashimoto and Coppard, 1992). The purpose of the present paper is to explore the reasons behind the frequency of family support of older Muslim in rural Malaysia.
Material And Method

Materials for the present paper was originated from a survey conducted to determine the factors affecting the well-being of older rural Malaysians in the district of Limbongan, Kelantan, Malaysia. The design used in that survey was a mixed method approach, that is a combination of quantitative and qualitative method. Samples of that study was older people aged 60 years and above number 214 living in rural areas. They were selected as respondents using simple random sampling technique. Some of these respondents were selected as participants for the qualitative approach. The present paper presents the results of the qualitative information derived from unstructured interviews with some selected participants.

Results And Discussions

Socio Demographic Profile:

The majority of the respondent was the elderly man. Their average age was 68 years, while median and mode of age were 67 and 60 years respectively. The age of oldest respondent was 95. 40% of the respondents was in 60-64 years category. In terms of marital status, three respondents were never married. The respondents currently married were 143, four divorced, and 64 respondents are widow/widower. In the category never married, there are two elderly male, and one elderly female. Male respondents who currently married outnumber female respondents (112 male compared to only 31 female respondents). In terms of academic, the educational attainment or educational level of the respondents is very low. More than half was never attend formal school (58%). Around one-third has an elementary school. The elderly woman who did not attend formal school was higher than the elderly man.

Factors Behind the Frequency:

In the survey conducted, twenty percent of respondents reported they did not receive any support at all from family. From 79.8% of the elderly who receives support from family, 53.0% receive it once in a while (sometimes), and 26.8% receive it always in three weeks before the study. The frequency of support the elderly receive also differs considerably. Based on information from key informants, there were factors related to the frequency of support the elderly respondents receive, and these include number of children, geographical distance, marital status of adult children, and living arrangement of elderly parents.

Number of Adult Children:

In developing countries where the majority of older persons do not covered by social and financial security, the number of children plays a critical role. Adult children are valuable (Chen, Kuo and Chung, 1982), and they can serve as sources of support in later life. They are asset for material well-being of older persons. The contribution children make to social and economic well-being of their parents is commonly cited as a reason why parents in developing countries so often have larger families (Clay and Haar, 1993). It was found that one of the important factors that also contributed to differences in the frequency of family support in study area is the number of adult children the older persons have. The more adult children the older persons have, the more likely they will receive family support more frequently.

Geographical Distance:

Another important factor determining the frequency of family support is geographical distance between the older people’s house with the sources of support, particularly their adult children. Hashimoto and Kendig (1992) in an article points out that geographical distance is one of the factors in the availability of support. This factor undoubtedly becomes a barrier for older people to get support. The respondents who live nearer with their adult children reported were given support by their adult children more frequently. The nearer the adult children is, the more likely these adult children come to visit older parents more frequently. Since there was some of older respondents did not have adult children living nearby, they were likely not to receive support prior the survey. One of the participants told that all of their children have their own house and did not come to visit them because they were living quite far.

Marital Status of Adult Children:

Marital status of adult children also plays important roles in the frequency of family support. Children generally will send money to their parents once a month and usually at the beginning of the month. Unmarried sons who are working and living outside the district will immediately send money to their parents when they
get their salary. The pattern of sending money to older parents is slightly changed when the son is married and has their own responsibility. Married sons send money to elderly parents generally based on need, although some are still continuing this delivery as they were single. In this case if the elderly respondents have only adult children that have been married, then the consequence is, in terms of money, these elderly will not necessarily get support every month in term of money. These adult children also not necessarily come to visit the elderly parents every month. These children, because they have their own responsibilities, have to also taking care of their own family, and this will likely to decrease the frequency of visiting older persons at home.

Living Arrangement:

The frequency of family support is also related to living arrangement of older persons. Although families are widely acknowledged to provide most of the caregiving receive by older persons (Keth, 1995), the pattern of living arrangement of the elderly parents plays a critical role. Thus, other factor that is worth noting is that whether adult children living in the same household with the elderly parents. If the elderly respondents live in the same household with their adult children, the probability they will get support every day is high. It is easier for the children to provide support for their parents who live together in the same household. Wenger (1992) points out that older person who live with their adult children on the whole receive a high level of care.

Spouse, an important element in living arrangement, is particularly important for family support. Various studies outside Malaysia have shown that spouses are the most committed to care (Wenger, 1992). Information from participants also shows that marital status of older persons is also an important factor in determining the frequency of family support. Participants agree that some of the respondents who live alone, or did not have spouse will likely not to get support as married elderly do. This is particularly true because, as husbands and wives, they tend to rely on each other for support and care.

Conclusion:

Family is the primary caregiver to the older persons, and this social fact transcends culture, politics, and economic circumstances. In developing countries where the coverage for social and financial security of the majority of older persons is limited, family support is extremely crucial to older persons. The purpose of the present paper is to analyze the factors behind the frequency of family support of older persons from adult children. The frequency of family support received by respondents in the study varies considerably. Analysis indicated that there were four factors determined the frequency of support the older persons receive. Those factors which discussed in this paper were number of children, geographical distance of adult children, marital status of adult children, and living arrangement of elderly parents. All these factors have been expressed by participants of the study as the main barriers for the older persons getting support from their adult children.

References