

Older People in Rural Community: A Neglected Group?

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Abstract — Although various definition has been put forward to explain what is meant by population ageing, a term which is widely used in writing related to the current debates in global population and development, is particularly revolved around an increase in the proportion of older people in the population structure. This paper presents the results of a single-case study regarding why rural older person has become a neglected group. The main objective is to explore why rural older person has become a neglected group. This study is using a single-case study design. One research participant, a former university professor who has been written intensively on population ageing, has been purposively selected to give her views why rural older person has become a neglected group. The results of the study revealed that there are five logical reasons why rural older person has become a neglected group in rural community, namely: (1) migration of young generations; (2) poverty in rural areas; (3) involvement of women in labor force, (4) drug addictions in rural community, and (5) the ageing of rural community. All these reasons are discussed in this article.

Keywords — Population ageing; Older population; Social support; Rural-urban migration

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the results of a single-case study regarding why rural older person in Malaysia has become a neglected group. As other nations all over the world, the number of older persons in Malaysia has increased dramatically [1]; [2]; [3]; [4]. Following the global population is currently in the process of population ageing [5], every corner of the world has been experiencing a significant increase in the number and proportion of older persons aged 60 and above [6]. Following advancements in public health and medical technologies, population ageing is a success story of a human's struggles to combat a global disease [6]. Over the past two centuries, many deadly diseases have been cured, resulting the average age of the population increased exponentially. Coupled with the rapid decline in global fertility, the process of population ageing has taken place all over the world.

Around the world, the increased in age is not accompanied by an increase in the level of health. Although the age of the population has increased, the level of health has not necessarily increased. Due to the increasing in the number of the elderly in the community, and due to their health status is not improving, the question of care is becoming more urgent. The elderly in rural areas facing caregiving problems due to lack of care resources available. Because the majority of adult children have migrated to cities, of

late, rural areas in Malaysia facing severe problems of caring for the elderly. In line with the above issue, the aims of this article are: (1): to discuss the growth of older persons in rural Malaysia, and (2): to explore why rural older person has become a neglected group through the eyes of a research participant.

II. RELATED WORK

We are now living in the age of population ageing. Although various definition has been put forward to explain what is meant by population ageing, a term which is widely used in writing regarding current debates in global population and development, is particularly revolved around an increase in the proportion of older people aged 60 years and older in the population structure [7]; [8]; [9]. As has been discussed in various opportunities, the world's population is now in the process of a very rapid demographic change. The available literature shows that the world demographics are undergoing rapid changes in terms of population growth, declining fertility, increasing age at first marriage, increasing unmarried population, increasing women's participation in formal employment, increasing elderly population, and various other changes.

Although there is a clear difference between population ageing in developed countries and population ageing in

developing countries, one common point is that, all countries all over the world are currently going through a process called population ageing [5]. This process has now become a prominent process as compared to other demographic processes, and it is expected to continue to be a prominent issue in the coming centuries. As far as the data available, the world now has a luxury of the ageing population [5]. The latest projection shows the number of the world older population has increased dramatically, where it reached 900.9 million (2015), and will be reached 2092.0 million in 2050 [6]; [10] (Table 1).

Table 1: Distributions of Elderly Population, 65 Years and + (1950-2025)

Year	World		Developed		Developing	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1950	127 808	5.1	63 566	7.6	64 242	3.8
1960	160 067	5.3	80 250	8.5	79 817	3.8
1970	200 137	5.4	101 007	9.6	99 120	3.7
1980	263 986	5.9	130 858	11.5	133 129	4.0
1990	327 633	6.2	145 614	12.1	182 018	4.5
2000	424 516	6.8	172 820	13.7	251 696	5.0
2005	475 952	7.1	185 644	14.4	290 319	5.3
2015	597 804	7.8	210 735	15.9	387 136	6.1
2025	828 164	9.7	257 028	19.0	571 136	8.0

Source: "Asian Population Studies Series; No. 108 [11]"

III. METHODOLOGY

The writing of this article was originally taken from a study conducted using a single-case design. A case study is a study that is used to generate an in-depth and multi-facet understanding of a complex issue in a real-life context [12], while a single-case research design is a design that is used a single case to be observed repeatedly during a certain period of time [13]. The reason why this study uses a single-case design is to answer a question that has been hovering in to most people in Malaysia. An obvious question in rural society in Malaysia today is, the question of care for the elderly because their sources of care have migrated to cities far from where they live.

Therefore, to answer this question, a research participant who is believed to be able to elaborate on this question was selected. Another reason is because this study is not meant to explore the relationship between various variables, instead it is intended to find a qualitative answer why the elderly in rural areas is said by most parties in Malaysia to be in a state of a neglect? To answer this question, it is reasonable for this study to use a single-case study design.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion in this section is focused on two aspects; (1) the growth of older persons in rural Malaysia, and (2) why the rural older person has become a neglected group.

The Growth of Older Persons in Rural Malaysia

The population of Malaysia is undergoing a process, called population ageing. In 1980, this category of the population amounted to 745,152, and increased to 1,068,531 in 1991 [14]; [15]. In terms of percentage, the population aged 60

and over increased from 5.7% in 1980 to 5.9% in 1991 (Department of Statistics, 1973; 1983; 1995). It is expected to increase to 6.6% in 2000, and reach 11.3% in 2020 [11]. A prominent aspect of the ageing population in Malaysia is its geographical distribution. The distribution is unbalanced where more elderly was found in rural areas than in urban areas. In 1980, for example, out of 475,407 people aged 65 and over in Malaysia, a total of 291 881 people (54.7%) lived in rural areas, compared to 215,526 people (45.3%) living in urban areas [14]. In 1991, the population aged 65 and over had increased to 657,401 people. Of this number, 357,015 people (54.3%) lived in rural areas, and another 300,386 people (45.7%) lived in urban areas [15]. These data illustrate that, from the population census that has been conducted, the majority of the elderly in Malaysia is concentrated in rural areas.

Why Rural Older Persons, a Neglected Group?

One research participant has purposely selected to get a detailed picture of why the rural older person has become a neglected group. According to our research participant, there are five reasons why rural older person has become a neglected group, namely: (1) migration of young generations; (2) poverty in rural areas; (3) involvement of women in labor force, (4) drug addictions in rural community, and (5) rural community itself is ageing.

Migration of Young Generations

One of the reasons why the elderly in Malaysia, particularly for the elderly in rural community has become a neglected group is because of the rural-urban migration among the younger generation. The traditional roles of younger generation in rural areas as caregivers, or helpers in the paddy fields, or on farms, have changed because of migration, leaving elderly people in the traditional villages.

This rural-urban migration gained momentum when the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced in 1971 to boost development in Malaysia. At that time with many new urban centres being created to be the centre of economic growth, the opportunities for jobs have been widely opened. Many raw material processing plants have been established to meet the demands of exporting products. These plants needed workers which has eventually spurred rural-urban migration.

As employment opportunities in rural areas were extremely limited, young generation migrated to urban centres to meet the demand for employment. Many rural outstanding students also have been brought to the cities to continue their secondary education in boarding schools which are considered as elite schools, provides ample opportunities to the outstanding rural students, has further increased the number of young generations migrating to cities.

With the combination of various other social and economic push factors available in rural areas, has eventually attracting the young to the cities leaving elderly parents in the village. Currently, rural areas are increasingly

underpopulated, many houses are left uninhabited, and the majority of residents are elderly.

Incidence of Poverty in Rural Areas

Poverty is another problem of the villagers which makes why the elderly is seen as neglected. Poverty is still a rural problem in many developing countries [16]. Poverty in rural areas in Malaysia is not a fiction. Families affected by poverty in rural areas nowadays are not only elderly-led families, but many adult-led families. This poverty is common in rural areas in developing countries. Many governments in developing countries, including Malaysia, do not focus properly on rural development which can lift rural people out of poverty. The government does not give priority to rural areas in national development programs because most of the country's income is derived from big traders in cities. Focusing on rural development does not benefit the country much in terms of national income.

Reports from various poverty studies around the world show that rural poverty is strongly related to the opportunities for decent works that offers a reasonable income [16]. The agricultural sector itself is also no longer competitive due to the lack of manpower from the younger generation. The younger generation who is still in rural areas is no longer interested in agriculture due to various social and economic barriers. Besides the limited employment opportunities in the agricultural, employment opportunities outside agriculture sector are also practically non-existent. Studies show employment outside agriculture is important to bring the villagers out of poverty [16]. Thus, the government efforts are necessary to help the rural poor to create economic chains for them to diversify their agricultural products and help them to be involved in non-farm activities. Without such efforts, the rural people will continue to live in poverty that limits families to give priority of care to their elderly parents which ultimately makes the elderly in rural areas seen as neglected.

Involvement of Women in Labor Force

The involvement of women in work outside the home is another reason why the elderly in rural areas are neglected. With the launching of the NEP in 1971 many employment opportunities outside the home that require women as workers have been able to be created in the cities. The situation is seen as sleepy rural women who are dreaming for jobs offering a reasonable salary have been pushed pillows to them. Since then, job opportunities for women have opened up widely. Coupled with the increased in the level of education, making women in rural areas have been directly involved in employment outside the home.

The involvement of women in employment outside the home, however, is limited to employment in cities. Rural areas are still the same, that is, lack of suitable employment opportunities, forced rural women migrated to cities that are geographically, far from their elderly parents. We can certainly think about the implications of this woman's involvement in work outside the home. Women are primary caregivers. What would have happened if this

primary caregiver had migrated? The simple answer is, the welfare of rural elders is neglected. For women who do not migrate, their role increases. The role of women in rural areas is no longer just to manage their own households, but they are also as employees in the government sector, and at the same time, they have to divide their time to provide care to their elderly parents and managing their own household. All these circumstances also give color to why the village elderly is seen as a neglected group.

Drug Addictions in Rural Community

The involvement in drug addiction among the younger generation that is now prevalent in rural areas has also to some extent made the elderly in rural areas neglected. Adult children who are still living with elderly parents who are expected to be caregivers of elderly in rural areas are those who are dropped out and do not have suitable job. What is happening is that, the majority of these adult children are now, due to the lack of job opportunities, are involved in drug addictions. Drug addiction is a big problem in rural areas in Malaysia today. Many elderly parents facing problems because the children they hope to be caregivers, have turned into a burden to them. There is news in the daily newspapers that show the elders in rural areas are frequently been abused by their children involved in drug addictions. While other children who are educated, high-ranking and high-income, all live far away in the cities who return to visit them only once a month, and this has further complicated the elderly care by adult children.

Rural Community Itself is Ageing

Besides rural to urban migration of younger generation, another recent development in rural areas is the rapid ageing of the rural population that putting the care of the elderly facing a problem. Caring for the rural elderly is the responsibility of adult children. When the villagers themselves turn into old people, they are no longer a source of care, instead they themselves need care from others. So, in the process of such a rapidly aging population, who can be given the responsibility to be the caregiver of the elderly? Can the government fully shoulder this responsibility? For the time being, the government only provides nine nursing homes throughout Malaysia which only accommodates about 3000 elderly people from all over Malaysia. The elderly people who have reported having children are not given the opportunity to stay in these nursing homes, while existing children often pose problems to the elderly themselves.

V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

There are two main issues have been discussed in this paper: the growth of older persons in rural Malaysia, and why the rural older person has become a neglected group. The ageing of the rural population is in line with the ageing of the general population. Although the proportion of the elderly is still small, its number is increasing. One of the characteristics of population ageing in Malaysia is that, the majority of the elderly is residing in rural areas. From the research participant point of views, there are five main

reasons why rural elderly has become a neglected group; rural-urban migration; poverty; women in the labor force, drug addictions, and the ageing of rural communities.

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