

## Social support by communities for older adults in Malaysia

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Positive developments in the socioeconomic field have led to a reduction in mortality and fertility rates and an increase in the lifespan of individuals. This has reduced the young population and increased the old population. Senior citizens are being neglected, and loneliness is getting worse every day because of these circumstances. Therefore, in order to address the problem, there is a pressing urgency to identify how to provide support to older adults so that they can continue their daily lives easily without any problems or obstacles that can limit their activities. Social support refers to support in terms of emotions, friends, information, care, and management.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** A total of 397 questionnaire forms were distributed by purposive sampling to older adults aged 60 years and above in the Perak state and analyzed using descriptive statistical tests to obtain frequency, mean, and percentages for Social Science (SPSS) software.

**Findings:** The results of the study showed that the older adults majorly agreed with the form of social support which was provided by the community. However, based on the social support, older adults are more likely to feel accompanied by neighbours, friends, or individuals. The study discovered that older persons prefer to be to be actively involved in the society, since this also enables them to deal with severe difficulties, circumstances, and fears. This preference is demonstrated by the total degree of social assistance provided and the daily activities of the older adults.

**Conclusion:** The availability of social support indirectly contributes to the well-being of older adults by addressing the neglect and loneliness they may face, enabling them to maintain active and fulfilling lives. It promotes active aging by fostering social connections, enhancing mental and emotional health, and empowering older individuals to participate fully in society.

**Contribution to Literature Review:** Social support, encompassing community support, emotional support, peer support, and information support, contributes significantly to the well-being of older adults. These forms of support help address the issues of neglect and loneliness faced by older adults, enabling them to actively age and lead fulfilling lives. The literature highlights the importance of social support systems in promoting the well-being of older adults and emphasizes the need for comprehensive support from various parties to meet the growing needs of the aging population. The literature on social support for older adults has important policy implications for promoting their well-being and addressing the challenges they face such as strengthening community support systems and encouraging peer support programs.

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**Keywords:** Community, Older adults, Social support.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Older adults who have good life welfare are those who have positive support, especially support from a social perspective. Every older adult desperately needs some form of social support because it safeguards older adults in dealing with challenges involving emotional problems, and problems in their daily lives. Social support can enhance coping mechanisms, boost self-esteem, improve quality of life, and raise self-control and life satisfaction. (Şahin, Özer, & Yanardağ, 2019). To help older adults live a happier and a more prosperous life, their quality of life has been carefully researched since a few decades ago (Bourassa, Memel, Woolverton, & Sbarra, 2015; Czaja, Boot, Charness, Rogers, & Sharit, 2018; Mohd, Nordin, Yuen, Hairi, & Hairi, 2020). This includes social support, which allows older adults to live more comfortably and be energized to carry out their daily routines. Older adults may feel more confident in their ability to continue living if they receive social support that is considerate and strategic. Hence, the issue of how to help older individuals live their everyday lives without difficulty or obstacles that can restrict their activities emerges. There are several forms of community support that can help older adults in their lives and social support is among the important needs of the community in managing older adults.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Community support refers to friends, neighbours, organisations, and other individuals, excluding family members (Chadborn, Craig, Sands, Schneider, & Gladman, 2019). In terms of context, support rendered to communities of older adults that enables older adults who are ageing and prosper in their lives (Greenfield, 2018). In addition, communities refer to small groups of communities located in a particular area (Brooks-Cleator, Giles, & Flaherty, 2019; Greenfield, 2018). Communities are groups that play an important role in helping older adults in the absence of their children or spouses (Zhang et al., 2021). These communities consist of neighbours, friends and communities close to older adults.

On the other hand, in countries like in the European region, friendship and community unity provide the utmost assistance needed for older adults (Morton-Chang, Majumder, & Berta, 2021). This community is divided into two groups; small communities (village or neighbourhood) and large communities (state or country) (Liu et al., 2015). In addition, according to prior research, social support and social networks are frequently strongly associated to community support. Social support refers to the quality of social relationships that sustain emotions. In contrast, social networks refer to the nature of the structure that characterises a set of relationships.

Social support is defined as aid encompassing feelings, friends, and knowledge. It is the most crucial element of the community that is caring for the elderly needs. It is the primary responsibility of adult children to fulfil older adults' needs for support and assistance Alavi and Mahbob (2017). However, the responsibility is not only that of the children or family members, as with the increase in the number of older adults, this matter has required and involved the comprehensive support of various parties. According to the study of Lee, Cho, Cho, and Park (2019) social relationships and adequate support are quite important for the well-being of older adults.

The next most important social support is emotional support. It is a form of mental or emotional support for older adults such as compassion, empathy, concern, listening, and trust. Emotional support is provided to release negative feelings or thoughts of older adults (Brooks-Cleator et al., 2019) due to the empty nest syndrome. Older adults living alone are often associated with empty nest syndrome, (Zhang et al., 2021). This syndrome refers to a deep sense of loneliness among older adults, especially those who live alone after their children move out from home or no longer have a life partner (Liu et al., 2015). Therefore, older adults who left alone are in need of emotional support. Older persons' physical and mental health has been found to be strongly impacted by emotional support. (Liu et al., 2015; Liu, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). Additionally, receiving emotional support boosts older persons' self-esteem and enables them to participate fully in society. (Greenfield, 2018; Sandoval, Tamiya, Lloyd-Sherlock, & Noguchi, 2019). Some older adults desperately need someone, such as friends or neighbours, in order to get support while dealing with problems, difficult situations and worries. Their needs can be understood and recognised as emotional support (Liu, 2019). Usually, When someone wants it, or when they have issues to discuss, questions to ask, or other requirements specific to each person's circumstances, they may feel the need for emotional support. (Greenfield, 2018).

In addition, the next form of social support is peer support. Peer support reflects the internal desire of older adults accompanied by others (Miao, Wu, & Sun, 2019). Older adults often have a great need to talk to someone to make them feel less lonely, especially if they live distant from their children or don't have a spouse. (Liu et al., 2015). The need for such support has increased along with rapid economic growth (Greenfield, 2018). For example, rising living

standards and the need to continue living have led children to move out from home to continue living by working. As such, they often have no time to look after their parents and are forced to leave them at home alone. Many senior citizens are said to face loneliness as a result, which makes them look for and require companions or co-workers to spend their leisure time with. Liu et al. (2015); Miao et al. (2019); Liu (2019) and Zhang et al. (2021). This situation suggests that companionship support is important for the well-being of older adults (Sandoval et al., 2019). According to Liu (2019), In Hong Kong, domestic workers known as "home helpers" are a significant support and occasionally considered as "family experts." This unique situation that has emerged in Hong Kong shows a new form of intimate support for older adults. The emotional support mentioned above is an exception; elderly people often prefer to make acquaintances without any expectations. They regard these friendships as part of their daily lives. Therefore, friendship support has become increasingly important in modern society.

Last but not least is the information support which is the support from the social form to the older adults. Information support provides valuable information that can be used to solve problems (Liu, 2019). Information assistance, in contrast to economic support, does not assist with finances but aids elderly people in resolving their issues. (Greenfield, 2018). Information support serves as a facility which provides older adults with help and guidance, such as the knowledge and skills needed to resolve stressful situations (Tremblay & Noguees, 2019). Due to their role in problem-solving, advise, cognitive guidance, feedback, and direction are also classified as forms of information assistance. (Tremblay & Noguees, 2019). Today, older adults are often encouraged to live independently. If older persons were better aware of the services, programmes, healthcare, and help available for their benefit, they believe they might live in a more affluent environment. (Naah, Njong, & Kimengsi, 2020). Older adults are unaware of the forms of support available and how to gain access to existing support. They often face problems with the usage of English, and high technological advancement makes it difficult for them to understand and learn the subject (Liu et al., 2015; Liu, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). In this regard, the reviewer feels that information support can be beneficial in helping the older adults.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study aims at studying the social support of the community towards the older adults by focusing on the support required by older adults in Perak state. Older individuals in the area were surveyed using a quantitative approach, or review method, to get their opinions. Purposive sampling, which is non-random since it concentrates on certain traits and is in line with the objective of the study was used to choose the respondents. This study was only conducted for older adults 60 years and above and did not include other age group residents in Perak state. A total of 397 questionnaire forms were circulated covering questions divided into several sections such as the demographic profile of the respondents, the form of community social support received by older adults and the daily activities of older adults with the community. The questionnaire uses a Likert scale namely "strongly disagree", "disagree", "uncertain", "agree" and "strongly agree". The data obtained from the results of the questionnaire will be analyzed through the use of *Statistical Package for Social Science* (SPSS) software. The assessor utilised descriptive statistical analysis, and the number of frequencies, and percentages were determined using statistical tests in this study.

### 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents obtained in Perak state. The investigative have drawn responses from 397 older adults in all. 167 respondents were female, while 229 men completed the survey. There are five different age categories for older adults: those between the ages of 60 and 64, 65 and 69, 70 and 74, 75 to 79, and those 80 and over. Based on the results, it was found that older adults aged 60 years to 64 years recorded a total of 201 people while 65 years to 69 years recorded a total of 99 people. Additionally, respondents who were 70 to 74 years old reported as many as 68 persons, 75 to 79 years old reported as many as 22, while respondents who were 80 years of age and beyond reported as little as 7 people. Next, in terms of marital status shows, most respondents are already married, and they are as many as 296 respondents (75%). 67 respondents (17%) are widow, 22 respondents (5%) widower and 12 respondents (3%) not married.

In terms of education, most of the older adults received education till their lower and middle school levels, and they are 300 respondents. 73 respondents earned diploma or degree-level education, while 11 respondents acquired master's or doctoral level education. However, up to 13 respondents said they had never attended school. The results of the study also showed that the older adults are still actively engaged in work, especially self-employment,

which accounts to 176 respondents (44%). Thirty respondents (8%) worked in government sector and 24 respondents (6%) in private sector. However, almost half of all older adults were found to be unemployed, which is 167 respondents (42%).

Additionally, the bulk of older persons (155 respondents) earn MYR 2001 or more per month, followed by MYR 1501 to RM 2000 (66 respondents), MYR 1001 to RM 1500 (66 respondents), and MYR 201 to MYR 1000 (63 respondents), in that order. However, there are older adults who still have a monthly income of less than and equal to MYR 500, which is as many as 50 respondents. However, the household income shows that as many as 339 respondents are from the B40 bracket i.e. earning less than MYR 4850.00, while 46 respondents are from the M20 bracket i.e. earning MYR 4851 to MYR 10,959.00 and 12 respondents are from the T20 bracket i.e. earning MYR 10,960 and above. In addition, the number of family members who live together shows that a majority of 327 respondents live with 2 to 5 people, but there are still those who live alone, which accounts for 34 respondents and there are also those who live with 6 to 9 people, and they are around 28 respondents and 8 respondents live with more than 10 people.

**Table 1.** Demographic profile of respondents.

Category	Percentage (%)	Frequency
<b>Sex</b>		
Men	58	229
Women	42	167
<b>Age</b>		
60 years - 64 years	51	201
65 years - 69 years	25	99
70 years - 74 years	17	68
75 years - 79 years	5	22
80 years and above	2	7
<b>Marital status</b>		
Unmarried	3	12
Married	75	296
Widow	17	67
Widower	5	22
<b>Education stage</b>		
Never attended school	3	13
Rendah School	76	300
Diploma/Diploma	18	73
Master/Phd	3	11
<b>Type of work</b>		
Government sector	8	30
Private sector	6	24
Self-employment	44	176
Miscellaneous	42	167
<b>Total monthly income</b>		
Less and equal to MYR 500	13	50
MYR 501 to MYR 1000	16	63
MYR 1001 to MYR 1500	16	63
MYR 1501 to MYR 2000	17	66
MYR 2001 and above	39	155
<b>House contents income</b>		
B40 - Received income less than MYR 4850.00	85	339
M20 - Received revenue of MYR 4851 to MYR 10,959	12	46
T20 - Receive income of MYR 10,960 and above	3	12
<b>Number of family members living together</b>		
Living alone	9	34
2 to 5 people	82	327
6 to 9 people	7	28
10 people and above	2	8

#### 4.2. Forms of Community Social Support Received by Older Adults

Based on the analysis of the study that has been carried out, the results obtained in [Table 2](#) show that the social support given by this community has shown a good response and the majority of older adults agree with the social support. [Table 2](#) shows that the highest min value is 3.71, which shows that respondents agree with the statement asking neighbours or private people to accompany them together to visit sick or dead friends. The next statement, which has a minimum value of 3.56, demonstrates that the elderly folks are willing to enlist the assistance of neighbours or other individuals in order to join them for a feast. In addition, two different statements obtained the same min value which is 2.87 and the statements are “I will ask for help from neighbours or individuals to accompany me to complete tasks at the bank” and “I ask for help from neighbours or individuals to accompany me out to buy grocery” where the statement shows that older adults have a desire to be accompanied by others, especially older adults who live alone and who are not married, those who lost spouses and children who have moved out of the house. This causes them to find friends so that they can be actively involved in the community, as it also allows them to deal with problems, difficult situations and worries. In addition, it also allows older adults to eliminate the sense of loneliness faced by them because with the presence of others, they can spend time together if they need someone.

In addition, for the statement “I ask for help from neighbours or individuals to buy grocery”, the majority of senior citizens disagree, and the min value is 2.71. In addition, the statement “I ask for help from neighbours or individuals to send friends to visit” shows that the min value is 2.63 and this shows that the respondents do not agree with the statement. Even the statement “I will ask for help from neighbours or individuals to send me to complete tasks at the bank” shows that respondents do not agree, and the min value is 2.59. The following two statements, “I ask neighbours or individuals to take me to the feast gathering” and “I ask neighbours or individuals to take me to the children's house,” likewise demonstrate that respondents do not agree with them. The respective minimum values for these statements are 2.52 and 2.18.

This happens because they feel that it will be inconvenient for others and they prefer to go together with neighbours or individuals who have the same activity to do at the same time. However, there are also older adults who need such support, because they do not have the ability to move to places such as older adults who already do not have good physical health, those who have no partner and those who live alone.

Finally, the last statement is “I will give bank cards to neighbours or individuals for the purpose of withdrawing retired money or donation money” shows a minimum value of 1.74 and this means that the respondents strongly disagree with the statement because they feel that matters involving money is not something that should be taken lightly even though it involves individuals who are close to them. In addition, the source of income received by older adults is not a large amount and it is only enough to fulfil the needs of their daily lives. In fact, older adults are also unable to work and cannot generate income due to their deteriorating physical health.

The overall results of the study show that it is in line with the study conducted by [Suwarni, Soemanto, and Sudiyanto \(2018\)](#) that social support from friends, neighbours or the local community directly or indirectly influences the life quality of life of older adults because as age increases, it will deteriorate their physical capabilities. It has been demonstrated that providing older persons with strong, direct social support from the community can enhance their psychological well-being by lowering their levels of loneliness and sadness. In reality, this assistance also helps keep elderly people's spirits up and gives them compassion when participating in social events. In addition, this support also has a profound effect on older adults who are dealing with empty nest syndrome because the absence of children and spouses has caused them to lose the source of affection, so older adults only have friends, neighbours and the community to be friends with, to talk to and do activities to solve the loneliness experienced by them ([Cao, Qian, & Yang, 2020](#)).

Apart from that, according to [López-Cerdá, Carmona-Torres, and Rodríguez-Borrego \(2019\)](#) it is found that having social support is very helpful for older adults in their lives because it serves as a protection against problems faced by older adults such as loneliness, pressure and depression. In fact, older persons need social support more than any other type of care because they prefer to be accompanied by someone they can confide in when they need assistance. This is especially true with support from friends or neighbours. ([Mohd, Yunus, Hairi, Hairi, & Choo, 2019](#)). In addition, friends are also the closest individuals after family members and friends are also one of the individuals needed by older adults to express feelings and share stories about what they are going through ([Sreedevi, Unnikrishnan, Karimassery, & Deepak, 2017](#)). According to [Sreedevi et al. \(2017\)](#) Social support from friends enhances older individuals' social life, particularly for those who have health issues and physical limitations that

prohibit them from travelling. Therefore, the results of this study show that older adults feel more comfortable receiving support from neighbours or friends in their daily activities.

**Table 2.** Forms of social support received by older adults.

Statement	Statistics min
I will ask for help from neighbours or individuals to drive me to the bank to complete tasks at the bank.	2.59
I would ask for help from neighbours or individuals to accompany me to complete tasks at the bank.	2.87
I will provide bank cards to neighbours or strangers for the purpose of withdrawing pension money or donation money.	1.74
I sought the help of neighbours or individuals to buy goods.	2.71
I will ask the help of neighbours or individuals to accompany me out to buy goods.	2.87
I will ask neighbours or individuals to take me to a 'kenduri' gathering.	2.52
I will ask a neighbour or individual to accompany me to a gathering and be with me at the gathering.	3.56
I will ask help from neighbours or individuals to bring me to visit my friends.	2.63
I will ask neighbours or individuals to accompany me to visit sick/dead friends.	3.71
I will ask neighbours or individuals to drive me to my children's homes.	2.18

#### 4.3. Older Adults Daily Social Activities with the Community

Table 3 shows the daily activities carried out by older adults with the community in their area. Based on the table, the results of the study show that the majority of older adults are satisfied with the activities carried out. The min score for the statement "every day I take time for gardening while chatting with neighbours" is 4.17 which is a high score and overall, the respondents strongly agree with the statement. This is because during the field period, most of the older adults often spend time with their neighbours, and gardening or planting trees is one form of the hobbies that is often done to fill the field period which helps eliminate the feeling of loneliness.

Meanwhile, for the statement "I always take part in communal work activities carried out in my place of residence" shows the min value for these activities is 4.13 and it is high, which proves that the respondents strongly agree with their daily activities. This situation occurs because communal work activity is one form of activities carried out by members of the community consisting of various age groups and nationality to complete work or problems voluntarily in groups. The link between the young and the old can be established and strengthened through this community labour activity. The majority of young people are materialistic and egocentric, and they lack the time to socialise with their neighbours and the elderly in the area. This has indirectly led to the involvement of older adults in communal works which at the same time has allowed them to have a good welfare.

In addition, the min value for the statement "I and my friends often share views about the farming activities run by us" is 3.39 and is a modest value but the respondents still agree with the statement. Following the opinions of the older adults, they said this farming activity is one form of activity that they can regard as therapy because it allows them to eliminate the feeling of desolation caused by the absence of a spouse or children who have moved. In fact, the older adults also feel their lives become calmer with the activities when they do this and at the same time, it also helps fill the free time of the older adults with activities like this.

Next, Table 3 shows that the min score for the statement "every evening, I will ensure that gym activities are carried out with the local community" is 3.08 and this value indicates that it is at the simple level. The majority of the respondents somewhat agree with this statement. However, not all older adults are able to do this gymnastic activity because of the constraints caused by the physical factors that degenerate due to their increasing age. The gymnastic activities that older adults often do mostly involve physical activities that are of different intensities as compared to those in the younger age groups such as walking. This walking exercise is a form of activity that is easy, effective and very suitable for elderly people. Apart from increasing stamina, it can also help strengthen leg muscles and joints which can prevent osteoporosis.

Finally, the min score for the statement "every week, my neighbour and I will plan to go fishing together" is 2.90 which is a modest score. Most of the older adults are less agreeable with fishing activities because according to them, this fishing activity only looks interesting to those who have always made fishing as a hobby. But for the older

adults who go for fishing daily, they feel it is a great form of therapy to relieve stress and they feel satisfied when they get their catches. In fact, there are also among the older adults who make fishing as a source of their side income when they sell fishes to their friends, neighbours or restaurants they are keen to buy their catch.

Overall, it shows that older adults often do social activities together with the local community. This is because according to [Sombuling, Ading, Seok, Kimong, and Zakaria \(2017\)](#) the involvement of older adults in social activities will increase the range of social relationships and will help older adults to communicate with the community indirectly, allowing cognitive functions to function actively. In fact, according to [Sharifian, Manly, Brickman, and Zahodne \(2019\)](#) involvement in social activities has a very positive influence on the memory power of older adults, and this shows that older adults who are heavily and often involved in social activities have a better level of memory power than older adults who are less involved in social activities. Other researchers also said that older adults who have a high social network and are active in social activity engagement will have a low risk of cognitive decline as compared to older adults who have a low social network and are not active in social engagement ([Huang, Liu, & Bo, 2020](#); [Zhang, Liu, Sun, & Dong, 2019](#); [Zhou, Zhang, Fan, Deng, & Jiao, 2022](#)).

Furthermore, according to [Fu, Li, and Mao \(2018\)](#) the kinds of social activities older persons engage in have an impact on their cognitive performance. Hobbies, athletics, and social interaction with friends are examples of social activities that have a good effect on cognitive performance. ([Fu et al., 2018](#)). Older adults who involve themselves in hobbies (such as fishing, farming or other hobbies) can allow them to have more complex and sophisticated thoughts and can indirectly strengthen the mental ability of older adults which helps them in prevention of cognitive decline ([Zhu et al., 2022](#)). According to [Fu et al. \(2018\)](#) the involvement of older adults in social activities in the form of sports such as gymnastics, can help older adults to maintain their cognitive function to be normal and at the same time ensure the state of their health in terms of physical and mental.

Apart from that, interacting with friends is also one form of maintaining a good cognitive state, for example activities such as doing hobbies with friends, exercising with friends and spending time together at leisure. Such interactional activities can form a wide social network and can reduce the risk of older adults from dementia. In fact, those with these extended social networks also have more opportunities to access various forms of health-related information for older adults, and this should have a positive impact on health-related behaviours that may reduce older adults' risk of experiencing cognitive decline ([Rutter et al., 2020](#); [Siette, Georgiou, Brayne, & Westbrook, 2020](#)). In addition, interactions with friends also allow older adults to have a stronger sense of purpose and emotional state which indirectly boosts their neurohormones ([Marseglia, Wang, Rizzuto, Fratiglioni, & Xu, 2019](#)). To maintain optimal cognitive function, it is also important to encourage older adults to maintain their social networks through interactions with friends ([Fu et al., 2018](#); [Rutter et al., 2020](#); [Siette et al., 2020](#)).

Overall, it demonstrates the critical importance that older persons' everyday social interactions have in sustaining their cognitive abilities, particularly their thinking, learning, memory, and communication abilities, all of which will alter as they age.

**Table 3.** Daily social activities of older adults with the community.

Statement	Statistics min
Every evening, I would ensure that gymnastic activities were conducted with the local community.	3.08
I always take part in the communal work activities carried out in my neighbourhood.	4.13
Every day, I take time for gardening while chatting with neighbours.	4.17
Every week, my neighbour and I would plan to go fishing together.	2.90
My friends and I often share our views on the farming activities that we run.	3.39

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, community social support received by older adults shows that older adults really need individuals such as friends or neighbours who can accompany them in a situation or problem that allows older adults to have support so that it can ease their burdens, lessen their loneliness, and keep senior citizens from feeling under strain from living alone. The daily activities of older adults also show that older adults often interact with their neighbours and friends due to their inclined desire for a company. Overall, this study demonstrates the importance of community-based social support systems for older individuals' ability to live fulfilling lives and delay the onset of active ageing.

In addition, This study also demonstrates the importance of community social support and the need for a wider range of it depending on the requirements of older individuals. This is to ensure Malaysia is ready to become an aging country in 2030. The researcher hopes that future studies can focus on other urban and outer urban areas because each area has its own form of social support and it can also increase the number of studies regarding forms of community support which would serve as a reference for a wider group of researchers.

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#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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#### AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

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