

## IN PURSUIT OF SUSTAINABILITY, THE GREY POWER DILEMMA: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

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### ABSTRACT

*Malaysia is one of the nations that will experience an aging society by 2030, when 15% of the population will be 65 years and older, in addition to a longer life expectancy of 76 years on average. By 2030, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include health and wellbeing. This qualitative inquiry aimed to explore personal and situational factors affecting both the elderly and caregivers' daily routines. The term "situational factors" refers to all externalities (infrastructure; facilities; accessibility and availability; policy; governance) that have a direct or indirect effect on changes in individual behaviors, whereas "personal factors" refers to internal factors (demographic factors; family dynamics; self-efficacy; social norms; knowledge and experience) that have a direct or indirect effect on changes in individual behaviors. There is a shortage of literature on these components and their interactions: personal and situational factors, the link of these aspects to senior wellness, and the caregiver-elderly caring relationship, which the qualitative inquiries would be able to shed some light on what can be helpful to reciprocate the dilemma bewitching the elderly-caregiver dynamic. It is also expected that this research could help towards developing a future ecosystem for the elderly and their caregivers in Malaysia and similar emerging countries.*

Keywords: Aging population, sustainable, caregivers, personal factors, situational factors

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### INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is one of the nations in jeopardy of becoming an aging society due to the rapid increase in the number of senior people in a country and the shift in the demographic composition. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), based on the MyCensus 2020, 32.4 million people were recorded living in Malaysia in 2020 (DOSM, 2022). DOSM operates the country's official portal. In terms of age structure, the population aged 65 and above increased from 5.0 percent in 2010 to 6.8 percent in 2020 (DOSM, 2022). Following these statistics, the older population in 2020 is growing by around 1.8 percent compared to 2010. According to the National Senior Citizens' Policy, a country's population is considered aging when the proportion of senior people, defined as those aged 65 and above, reaches 15% of the total population. The National Policy for Older Persons (Dasar Warga Emas Negara) (2011) also observed that Malaysia is transitioning to an aging population quicker than industrialized countries, in line with international trends. The Malaysian ageing population is expected to double from 7% to 14% in 28 years compared with Sweden which would take 112 years for the same progression, based on data from United Nations in 2007 (Dasar Warga Emas

Negara, 2011). In fact, according to United Nations projections, Malaysia will be classified as an aging country by 2030, when 15 percent of the population will be 60 years or older (Dasar Warga Emas Negara, 2011).

In addition, the average life expectancy in Malaysia, based on previous census, has increased from 71.2 years in 1991, to 72.2 years in 2000, to 74.1 years in 2010 and 75.6 in 2021 (DOSM, 2022). Based on World Health Organization data in 2018, the average life expectancy for Malaysia is 75.3 years, with men predicted to live up to 73.2 years and females up to 77.6 years (worldlifeexpectancy.com). Considering Malaysians' longer life expectancy, it is estimated that the elderly in Malaysia may live an average of (75.6 – 55) 20.6 years after retiring at the age of 55, or 15.6 years if they retire at the age of 60, based on existing retirement norms.

Malaysia as an emerging country, still focus on the needs of the younger population, and thus the support for the elder generation is still lacking. However, the population is quickly ageing at a greater speed compared to other developed countries. Thus, countries like Malaysia, are facing a situation where both younger and elderly populations need attention from both the government and the society at large. This suggest a need to ensure the right infrastructure and policy exist to support the elderly, however, some feel that though policies might exist, but little is done to implement them (The Star, 2022). The report noted that the government could be facing the issue of the ageing population and the impact this has on social welfare and healthcare, and the need to change the taxation system in future (The Star, 2022).

In summary, not only is the number of the elderly increasing but so is the life expectancy of the elderly population as well. In other words, Malaysia's grey power (a term used to describe the nation's aging population) influences the country that lasts between 15 and 20 years for each cohort. As this section of the population grows, it can greatly impact the country. Malaysian society will thus be responsible for determining whether the potential effect would be favorable or detrimental.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Elderly Wellbeing / Subjective Wellbeing Among the Elderly*

Specifically, Chen (2019) observed that, when considering subjective wellbeing, the emotional approach consists of two aspects: despair and pleasure, both of which are important from the perspective of the elderly. The results of the author's study, which focused on living arrangements, showed that in promoting the wellbeing of the elderly, the elderly should be given the option of choosing their living arrangement, according to the findings. Similarly, the findings of Samsudin, Abdullah, Ismail, Hassan, and Ahmad (2019) showed that in a study of pre-elderly people concerning living arrangements, respondents prefer living alone. In contrast to previous research, which has shown that the elderly prefers to live with their family members, particularly in Asian families, where the literature suggests the elderly prefer to live with their family members. In a recent study, Grossi et al. (2019) observed a shift toward Positive Technology (PT), promoting cognitive, physical, emotional, and social wellbeing. Positive Technology (PT) is defined as technology that promotes cognitive, physical, emotional, and social wellbeing. In their study, they concentrate on physical therapy (PT), which focuses on the wellbeing of the elderly. According to the authors, there is a substantial mismatch between the availability of technological systems and the demands of the senior population in general (Grossi et al., 2019). In a review of the field of subjective wellbeing among the elderly, Dominko and Verbic (2018) noted that there has been a significant increase in research over the last ten years and further globalization of the field. The authors anticipate that more authors from the science areas will join and lead to research in development. Furthermore, the authors pointed out that research in this area ranges from gerontology, which is typical, to other areas in different multidisciplinary contexts, such as psychology, occupational health, social sciences, rehabilitation, and even business economics and sports sciences, among other areas of interest (Dominko & Verbic, 2018).

The findings imply that the domains of subjective wellbeing in the elderly or old wellbeing have potential study topics to be examined, particularly when combined with social and technological related areas and the interdisciplinary character of the research (Dominko & Verbic, 2018).

### *Personal and Situational Factors*

Urbanization and technological advancement have grown widespread to improve many people's living conditions (Jarocka & Wang, 2018). Some may see it as a godsend, as it will make their daily routines more manageable and smoother. However, specific segments of the population, such as the vulnerable community, particularly the grey power, and the old community, will need some adjustment time to adjust to the changes in their daily routine. The current technological and urbanized environment is regarded as far-reaching, and it may have an overwhelming impact on this vulnerable group (Jarocka & Wang, 2018). To achieve sustainable wellbeing, the government and its agencies should concentrate on the overarching factor contributing to a more conducive environment for the elderly. The responsible parties can contribute back to the nation's building and are adaptable to rapid changes in technology and urban landscape with ease. Following A-Jalil et al. (2016), the overarching variables that might lead to enhanced wellbeing for these disadvantaged groups include situational and personal aspects that could impact their wellbeing. Those externalities (infrastructure, facilities, accessibility and availability, policy, governance) that directly or indirectly impact individual behavior are situational variables (Bloom, Jimenez, & Rosenberg, 2012). Internal variables (demographic variables, family dynamics; self-efficacy; societal norms, knowledge, and experience) that have a direct or indirect impact on changes in an individual's behavior are referred to as "personal factors" (Bloom, Jimenez, & Rosenberg, 2012).

### *Situational Factors*

Infrastructure, which refers to public amenities or private amenities accessible and available to this community, such as a community center that serves the grey power demographic, are examples of situational factors contributing to improved wellbeing for the grey power community. Residential development that is tailored to the needs of the grey power demographic is another example (Naden, 2017). The friendliness of the infrastructure to grey power wellbeing is characterized by features such as voice-operated teller machines, railings, ramp walkways, caregiver facilities, mobility help, and other associated amenities for the grey power population. Another situational factor that may influence grey power wellbeing is accessibility and availability. Accessibility and availability factors such as intelligent devices should be elderly-friendly; public and private amenities that are physically accessible to the elderly; the availability of community support centers that provide activities that are suited to vulnerable communities; and the availability of jobs that are relevant to grey powers who are still capable of working and providing services (Bloom, Jimenez, & Rosenberg, 2012).

Social services offered to transition pensioners (public and private) after retirement and readiness for socio-economic changes are discussed. However, according to a study on policy and governance (Goldman et al., 2018), the direct impact of policy and governance on grey power is not conclusive. Most developed countries, including Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United States, have very well-developed policies and governance for this demographic. Japan is the only country that does not have well-developed policies and governance for this demographic (DeMasters, 2017). It has been discovered that situational circumstances that provide and are considered necessary have benefited many older citizens' lifestyles and the aging process (Goldman et al., 2018). They tend to be self-sufficient and independent due to the accessibility and availability of several perks and advantages from infrastructure and facilities tailored to and control their requirements (Goldman et al., 2018). Situational variables may be considered to have a direct and indirect impact on the wellbeing of grey power; however, in Malaysia, even though the proportion of the population over the age of 65 is rising every year, this is still thought with little regard to detail (DOSM, 2020).

### *Personal Factors*

Those who influence human behavior are affected by various personal elements, each of which has two components (attitudinal and personal capabilities). As defined by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Norm Theory (Ajzen, 1991), attitude variables include perceptions, predispositions, beliefs, and norms that may include religion and culture. Attitudinal components have been deduced from the TPB and the Norm Theory (Kahneman & Miller, 1986). According to the notion, individuals act reasonably and are conscious of the consequences of their actions. Furthermore, TPB argued that when people's behavior changes (in terms of attitudes and personal capacities), there is a valid behavioral basis for this shift (Dehi & Mohammadi, 2020). Personal capabilities, which Stern et al. (1999) refer to as task knowledge in the TPB, are another component of personal characteristics to take into consideration. According to these ideas, individuals can do fundamental and easy jobs (Dehi & Mohammadi, 2020). Specifically, Bandura (2010) said that self-efficacy varies from one person to another. The elderly are more susceptible to environmental circumstances, inducing their self-efficacy for their day-to-day activities (Won, Bae, Byun & Seo, 2020). Stern (2000) includes education, previous experiences, and the economic and social position of families as additional factors of personal capacities to capture personal capabilities as thoroughly as possible. Those additional personal skills characteristics are essentially a reflection of the demographic background of the home. In some studies, demographic factors such as age, income, and education substantially influenced. In others, they were inconsequential and comparable to other demographic factors such as the kind of neighborhood, socio-economic background, and property type, among others. It is noteworthy to note that personal characteristics in the grey power community fluctuate throughout time due to their aging stages (Liu & Kwon, 2020) and their dependency on situational elements that surround them (DeMasters, 2017). When it comes to grey power wellness, the interaction between situational and individual characteristics has seldom been examined in one study setting (Dehi, & Mohammadi, 2020; Goldman et al., 2018).

### *Relationship with a Caregiver*

The personal and environmental elements that influence the elderly are discussed further in the preceding section. Another problem that has to be addressed is the issue of carers who are tasked with supporting the elderly. As stated by the research, the caregiver connection is essential. It may be helpful to consider the following scenario to show the interaction of the personal, situational, and caregiver aspects: These three characteristics are shown in a newspaper article with the help of an example. Certain private companies have recognized the need for the elderly or the old. They have attempted to establish a retirement sanctuary where their requirements may be satisfied in a luxury setting in a peaceful atmosphere. The expense of these sanctuaries, on the other hand, is prohibitively expensive, and they are most likely to be limited to the elite and wealthy segments of Malaysian society. It would cost a minimum of RM1 million ringgit to reserve a room and RM2,000 per person per month without considering any related costs and levies to run these retirement homes for the elderly for up to 30 years (Chan, 2019).

Based on the high costs charged, several outsourced tasks expected to be compensated include the round-the-clock care required for the elderly, especially if they are no longer healthy or capable of living independently. It suggests that we should take a closer look at the role played by carers and caregivers, who, for the middle- and lower-income segments of society, play a critical role in the care of the elderly. Moreover, they typically do so for little or no compensation (if they are family members) or for short periods at industry-standard wages. Worry for caretakers or caregivers of the elderly was identified as a reason for concern in the National Health Policy for Older Persons. This cause was recommended to be given enough attention (National Health Policy for Older Persons).

It suggests a dyad interaction between the elderly and their carers. These interactions, like those between a buyer and a vendor or a teacher and a student, must be investigated in tandem to understand the dynamics better. The term "caregiver relationship" has been proposed in the literature. "Ultimately, the caregiver connection has been employed as a likely inadequate proxy for what we are truly interested in, the quality of a relationship," writes the author, Ornstein (2017). It is a particularly critical problem at a time when definitions of families are constantly changing" (p.4, 2017).

Therefore, the study aims to understand better the challenges confronted by the elderly, who, together with their carers, are attempting to live the best life possible. Moreover, given their economic conditions and family dynamics, they would need to maintain their overall wellbeing. In this way, the general goal of this study is to determine "What are the challenges the elderly and their carers experience" and "How society might help reduce those concerns from their point of view" while seeing this research field through the lenses of personal and situational aspects. In addition, the study investigates the relationships between personal and environmental variables and the welfare of the elderly.

As a result, by examining personal and social wellbeing factors, this research intends to investigate the issues that are faced by the elderly, in collaboration with their caregivers, and identify the factors that contribute to these issues, as well as how society can assist by implementing new policies and programs.

**METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative method is applied first in a mixed-methodology approach. The data collected consolidated themes using semi-structured interviews and a phenomenological interviewing approach (Roulston, 2010). Huy (2011) suggest that qualitative research provide understanding of the process that occurs within the natural settings and the association between constructs and outcomes. The phenomenological interviewing approach requires respondents with grey power wellbeing experiences such as careers, elderly support agencies, volunteers; the elderly themselves share views and interpretations from probes derived from a priori themes. Interviews can be formed from structured or semi-structured interviews; this method of inquiry allows attitudes, beliefs, and anecdotal data from respondents to be compiled intensively (Longhurst, 2003). The focus of these interviews will be to build an understanding of the current situation faced by the elderly and their caregivers. The supporting agencies (public, private, NGOs) will support the information and give the context that the elderly and caregivers face and possible reasons. Data were analyzed based on themes and possibly new information that might lead to a new concept/variable/input.

**PRELIMINARY RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

A thematic analysis-based phenomenological interviewing method (Roulston, 2010) was employed in this research, and the themes identified in the a priori literature were underlined throughout the interviews. The interviews were semi-structured and used a phenomenological technique. The researchers inquired about respondents' experiences, and narratives followed probes drawn from a priori themes to get insight into their thoughts and feelings. The reorganization of topics according to the frequency with which they arose throughout the interviews was also investigated. In the preliminary phase, the demographic was mixed between elderly and carer/caregivers (Table 1).

**Table 1: Demographic Profile**

Respondent	Gender	Age	Status	Occupation	Location
E1	Male	63	Elderly	Retiree	Kedah
E2	Female	61	Elderly	Retiree	Kedah
E3	Female	56	Elderly	Retiree	Kedah
C1	Female	28	Caregiver	School clerk	Kelantan
C2	Female	28	Caregiver	Accountant	Selangor
C3	Female	37	Caregiver	Immigration Officer	Selangor

The overarching objective for the qualitative inquiry is to understand the situational and personal factors sustaining elderly wellbeing among the elderly and caregivers. The main themes highlighted during the interviews are that elderly respondents are central to their social support among their age group and that being important and relevant to their committee is considered necessary. The themes are focal on personal factors such as social norms aligned with previous literature that stresses the elderly community is attuned to the feeling of self-belonging and kinship (Russell, Storti & Handy, 2022). Moreover, situational factors focus more on the accessibility and availability of the infrastructure and facilities. These particular factors affect their mobility to and from the vicinity, which is very important to those living alone without a carer or caregivers (Luo, Macdonald, & Hülür, 2022). There were mixed narratives when probed on the retirement facilities; some were open for the facility; however, the costs and allowances associated with the facility are potential drawbacks for the elderly (Martey, 2022). The elderly respondents were concerned that the programs offered by the local authorities and agencies were limited and did not convey the needs of the elderly community. Which back to the first theme of "that being meaningful and relevant to their committee."

Being aware of the unique requirements of the elderly community is becoming more critical as the population of the elderly community continues to expand. Environmentally facilitating situational factors that foster social support systems are beneficial to the elderly regarding health and independence. It also provides them with the opportunity to process adverse events through social interaction, allowing them to progress through the developmental task of ego integrity versus despair. Government must recognize the need for social support for the elderly, screen for support deficits, and give suitable choices to boost support networks to prevent social support deficits in the elderly from occurring (Luo et al., 2022; Russell et al., 2022). A flourishing environment is nurturing and improves the possibility for health and development (Tan & Lee, 2022). This technique goes above and beyond the typical survival environmental evaluation of safety and function (Shang, 2022; Tremethick, 1997).

In retrospect to the caregivers, the themes were more on situational factors that were accessible and available for them to care for the elderly without forgoing their livelihood. The importance of providing elderly care centers that support transit and daily elderly care for a specific duration is vaguely available in urban settings and almost non-existent in suburban and rural settings. The cost and allowances were provisional to support them as a carer. They argued the non-existence awareness/training program for them to participate and involve as carers/caregivers, which they found equally crucial in caring for and managing the elderly at home. Furthermore, some carers agreed on the mental health issues they faced daily in caring for the elderly at home. A study by Gallagher et al. implied social participation, possibly through increased social connection and a sense of belonging among carers, is considered helpful in mental health issues among caregivers (2022).

Furthermore, Lauritzen, Sørensen, Pedersen, & Bjerrum mentioned that caregivers' degree of knowledge regarding elderly health was partially satisfied, resulting in a stronger feeling of self and pleasure on their side. According to the participants, maintaining joint decision-making in financial concerns was a sign of mutual respect and reciprocity. Being familiar with peers and elderly support coordinators was seen as an opportunity for emotional and social support. Support group sessions became necessary to support their needs, which prompted caregivers to continue providing care (2022).

The nature of the caregiving relationship, between the caregiver and the elderly, is also a complex relationship, as well as dynamic (Ornstein, 2017) and the author suggest that this emotional relationship needs to be studied in the context of the environment surrounding it, including culture and norms between the family members (Ornstein, 2017).

The qualitative inquiry did address the overarching objective on situational and personal factors that were bewitching the dynamic between caregivers and the elderly. However, it was a preliminary approach to understand the narratives within the elderly community based on situational and personal factors. The study is still ongoing to further understand the narratives between different age groups such as the 40s, 50s; 60s; 70s, and above, which will be counter-examined with a quantitative approach to generalize the senior community in Malaysia.

## CONCLUSION

The findings indicated elderly respondents were predisposed to personal factors than situational factors; however, without forgoing the importance of situational factors. In contradiction, caregivers were predisposed to situational factors than personal factors. Similarly, caregivers also accept the requirement of personal factors in supporting their elderly care. The results might assist in better understanding each aspect that determines the importance of situational and personal factors in elderly wellbeing. The difference between the focus of more on personal factors rather than situational factors will be further investigated as the research is further analysed. Would the difference be a significant factor or would the findings be mixed? What would this signify in the day-to-day caregiving relationship? Would the findings lead to a development of a unique variable concept? In addition, how would the findings affect the impact of grey power? Thus, the qualitative study triangulated with the quantitative method will clarify the future sustainability of grey power framework.

This study may be of value in Malaysia and other nations striving to raise their elderly wellbeing inclusivity. While the research goals were attained, this initial part of this study was based on six interviews. Therefore, this research needs to be cross-examined with the work-in-progress quantitative design in completing the mixed methodological approach (Qual-Quan) to generalize the findings for bigger groups.

The limitation of this research is that the research focus on the elderly and caregivers and with the elderly interviewees, some who could be of ill health and with some possible aspects of dementia, thus the understanding of questions and response to answers would be provided by caregivers. However, to put aside partial dementia elderly respondents would be putting aside issues that could be of particular significance. Thus, this research would need to take this particular aspect into consideration in the analysis of findings and conclusions.

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