

# Loneliness Among Older Malaysians

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# Outline of presentation

- Background
- Objective
- Methodology
- Results
- Discussion
- Conclusion

# Background

- Loneliness is a perception where “people can live rather solitary lives and not feel lonely, or they can have many social relationships and nevertheless feel lonely” (Hawkley et al., 2008).
- “Feeling lonely is a phenomenon that is a universal lived experience that is significant to health and quality of life” (Karnick, 2005).
- Persistent loneliness or extreme cases of loneliness may lead to higher risks of psychological disorder, mental health problems, depression or suicide.

# Background

- Adult children's more frequent contact, care and affection have been found to lessen the experience of loneliness among older persons.
- Perceived quality of relationships had a stronger association with loneliness.
- Loneliness among older persons tends to be greater in communal societies where living alone is uncommon and where there are higher expectations for social contact

# Objective

- To examine factors influencing the feeling of loneliness among older Malaysians
  - Hypothesis: Loneliness among older persons varies according to socio-demographic characteristics, health and physical condition, community participation, and various forms of family support.

Family support defined as support provided by adult children to older parents: co-residence, monetary support, paying of bills, food/ other necessities, housework.

# Methodology

## Data

- 2004 Malaysian Population and Family Survey (MPFS-4).
- Three separate senior samples (Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak) merged
- Confined to Malaysian citizens of Malay, Chinese, Indian and other Indigenous groups, aged 60 and above and had children (n = 1791).

## Dependent variable

Loneliness - ordered variable (*1 = never lonely, 2 = sometimes lonely, 3 = always lonely*).

## Independent variables

Background and socio-demographic, health and physical limitations, community participation and family support

# Methodology

Independent variables – Socio-demographic variables  
[Categorical]

- Age (60s, 70s, 80s+), sex (*male, female*), ethnicity (*Malay, Chinese, Indian, Indigenous*), marital status (*currently married, widowed-divorced-separated*), place of residence (*urban, rural*), educational level (*no schooling, primary, secondary and above*), work status (*still working, no longer working*) and number of sources of income (*none, 1-2 sources, 3+ sources*).

Sources of income: (1) any inheritance (house, company, land, etc.), (2) savings in the Employees Provident Fund, (3) pension, (4) rewards/remunerations, (5) savings in bank, (6) savings in 'tabung haji', (7) share investments, and (8) insurance.

# Methodology

Independent variables – Health /physical limitations [Categorical]

- Number of illnesses (*none, 1 illness, 2+ illnesses*), number of physical limitations (*none, 1-2 limitations, 3+ limitations*).

Illnesses: (1) high blood pressure, (2) diabetes, (3) heart disease, (4) arthritis, and (5) asthma.

Limitations in daily activities: (1) self-feeding, (2) bathing, (3) getting dressed, (4) going to toilet, (5) exercising, (6) daily housework, (7) attend religious gatherings, and (8) grocery shopping

Independent variables - Community participation [Binary]

- Religious activities, leisure activities - sports/ neighborhood watch / NGOs activities



# Methodology

Independent variables – Family support [Binary]

- Co-residence, monthly monetary support, monthly help in paying bills, monthly provision of food / other necessities, monthly help in housework

## **Analytical Strategy**

1. Bivariate associations - levels of loneliness with socio-demographic characteristics, health and physical condition, community participation, and family support.
2. Ordinal logistic regression - to assess the relationship between levels of loneliness and factors of socio-demographic, health and physical condition, community participation, and family support. Data weighted according to 2010 population census.

# Results

Percentage distribution of respondents by levels of loneliness, according to selected socio-demographic characteristics, ( $n = 1791$ ).

Variables/ categories	Never lonely (n= 835)	Sometimes lonely (n= 582)	Always lonely (n= 374)	Total	n
<b>Age Group **</b>					
60s	49.5	31.5	19.1	100	1154
70s	44.2	33.5	22.4	100	523
80s+	28.9	38.6	32.5	100	114
<b>Sex **</b>					
Male	54.6	28.9	16.5	100	710
Female	41.4	34.9	23.8	100	1081
<b>Ethnic group **</b>					
Malay	41.2	37.3	21.5	100	814
Chinese	68.0	23.4	8.6	100	440
Indian	57.1	24.7	18.2	100	77
Indigenous	34.1	33.9	32.0	100	460
<b>Marital status **</b>					
Currently married	54.7	30.6	14.7	100	945
Widowed/divorced	37.6	34.6	27.8	100	846
<b>Residence **</b>					
Urban	56.8	28.9	14.3	100	771
Rural	38.9	35.2	25.9	100	1020

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$

# Results

Percentage distribution of respondents by levels of loneliness, according to socio-demographic characteristics and health ( $n = 1791$ ).

Variables/ categories	Never lonely (n= 835)	Sometimes lonely (n= 582)	Always lonely (n= 374)	Total	N
<b>Education level **</b>					
No schooling	38.1	34.1	27.8	100	939
Primary level	52.5	33.4	14.1	100	653
Secondary +	67.3	22.1	10.6	100	199
<b>Work status</b>					
Still working	49.3	30.6	20.0	100	454
Not working	45.7	33.1	21.2	100	1337
<b>Sources of income **</b>					
None	37.6	35.6	26.8	100	447
1-2 sources	47.1	32.2	20.7	100	942
3+ sources	55.5	29.9	14.7	100	402
<b>Illnesses **</b>					
None	55.3	29.6	15.1	100	483
1 illness	44.4	31.7	23.9	100	599
2+ illnesses	42.6	35.1	22.3	100	709
<b>Physical limitations **</b>					
None	51.4	30.4	18.1	100	1207
1-2 limitations	37.5	36.7	25.8	100	349
3+ limitations	35.3	37.0	27.7	100	235

# Results

Percentage distribution of respondents by levels of loneliness, according to community participation and family support ( $n = 1791$ ).

Variables/ categories	Never lonely ( $n= 835$ )	Sometimes lonely ( $n= 582$ )	Always lonely ( $n= 374$ )	Total	n
<b>Religious activities</b>					
Yes	46.6	34.0	19.4	100	977
No	46.5	30.9	22.6	100	810
<b>Leisure activities</b>					
Yes	46.5	33.1	20.4	100	824
No	46.7	32.0	21.3	100	967
<b>Monetary support **</b>					
Yes	50.5	32.0	17.4	100	986
No	41.9	33.0	25.1	100	805
<b>Paying bills *</b>					
Yes	48.6	33.9	17.5	100	954
No	44.3	30.9	24.7	100	837
<b>Food / other necessities</b>					
Yes	47.2	33.2	19.5	100	1188
No	45.4	31.0	23.5	100	603
<b>Housework *</b>					
Yes	46.6	34.8	18.6	100	1102
No	46.7	28.7	24.5	100	689
<b>Co-residence **</b>					
Yes	50.3	33.1	16.6	100	1124
No	40.5	31.6	27.9	100	659

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$

# Results

## Results of Ordinal Logistic Regression on Higher levels of Loneliness

Attributes	OR	95% CI
<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>		
Age group (ref: 60s)		
70s	0.99	(0.79 - 1.24)
80s+	<b>1.70</b>	<b>(1.14 - 2.54)</b>
Male	0.95	(0.75 - 1.20)
Ethnicity (ref: Malay)		
Indigenous	1.25	(0.90 - 1.73)
Chinese	<b>0.36</b>	<b>(0.28 - 0.46)</b>
Indian	<b>0.52</b>	<b>(0.34 - 0.77)</b>
Married	<b>0.51</b>	<b>(0.41 - 0.64)</b>
Urban	0.81	(0.65 - 1.00)
Edu level (ref: No Schooling)		
Primary level	0.83	(0.67 - 1.04)
Secondary +	0.81	(0.57 - 1.17)
Still working	0.99	(0.78 - 1.27)
Income sources (ref: None)		
1 – 2 sources	<b>0.71</b>	<b>(0.56 – 0.89)</b>
3+ sources	<b>0.57</b>	<b>(0.43 – 0.77)</b>

# Results

## Results of Ordinal Logistic Regression on Higher levels of Loneliness (Cont.)

Attributes	OR	95% CI
<b>Health</b>		
Illnesses (ref: None)		
1 illness	<b>1.47</b>	<b>(1.15 – 1.87)</b>
2+ illnesses	<b>1.65</b>	<b>(1.30 – 2.10)</b>
Physical limitations (ref: None)		
1 – 2 limitations	1.16	(0.90 - 1.49)
3+ limitations	1.13	(0.84 - 1.52)
<b>Community engagement</b>		
Religious activities	<b>0.77</b>	<b>(0.62 - 0.96)</b>
Leisure activities	1.00	(0.81 - 1.24)
<b>Family support</b>		
Monthly monetary	<b>0.79</b>	<b>(0.64 - 0.98)</b>
Monthly help with payment of bills	0.99	(0.78 - 1.25)
Monthly provision of food/necessities	0.85	(0.66 - 1.11)
Monthly help with housework	0.95	(0.74 - 1.21)
Co-residence	<b>0.67</b>	<b>(0.53 - 0.84)</b>

test of parallel lines -  $\chi_{24}^2 = 33.01, p = 0.104$

# Results – further analysis

## Interaction effect

- Ethnic x Religious activities

Calculation of probability

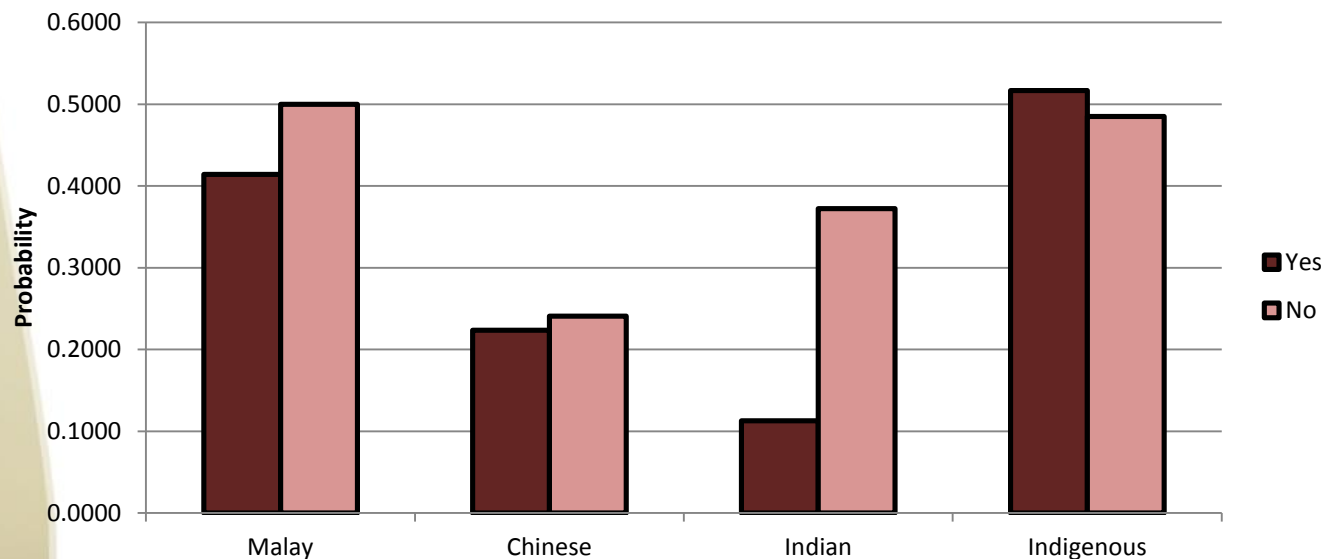
$$Z = \text{logit}(Y) = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_k X_k.$$

$$P(Y = 1) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-Z}}$$

## Interaction effect : Ethnic x Religious activities Probability

Ethnic group	Religious activities	
	Yes	No
Malay	0.4144	0.5000
Chinese	0.2236	0.2410
Indian	0.1129	0.3722
Indigenous	0.5170	0.4850

**Estimated Probability of Higher Levels of Loneliness  
by Ethnic Groups and Participation in Religious  
Activities**





# Discussion

## **Chronic diseases**

- Associated with higher levels of loneliness
- Restrict mobility and deter from forging relationships
- Can be prevented through active and healthy lifestyles

## **Ethnic differentials**

- Malay older persons higher odds of feeling loneliness than Chinese and Indians
- Distress due to discrepancies between ideal and perceived social relationships.
- Litwin, 2010 - comparison of social networks between Mediterranean and Non-Mediterranean countries

# Discussion

## **Religious activities**

- Effects apparent among Malays, Chinese and Indians
- Opposite effect in Indigenous groups (Iban, Kadazan, Bidayuh, Melanau... )

## **Financial resources**

- Sources of income and monetary support from children are important

## **Co-residence with children**

- Alleviate loneliness
- Provides companionship
- Provides platform for the continuation of support

# Conclusion

## **Encourage and promote :-**

- Healthy diet and lifestyle among Malaysians from all age groups to contain the debilitating effects of NCDs
- Active and productive aging
- Religious activities for older persons
- Co-residence with parents



**Thank You**