Elderly Population

(Findings from the Fourth Malaysian Population and Family Survey, 2004)

The total population of the elderly (aged 60 and above) in Malaysia has reached 2 million, that is 7 percent out of the total of 27.6 million population. This percentage is higher compared to some ASEAN countries like Brunei (5%), the Cambodia (5%) and Philippines (6%). However, it is low as compared to countries like Singapore (15%), Thailand (11%) and Indonesia (9%). The proportion of the elderly is expected to exceed 10 percent around the year 2025. Declines in fertility and mortality and higher life expectancy have contributed to the increase in the proportion of the elderly.

Findings from the MPFS-4 focussed on living arrangements, elderly care, loneliness, community involvement, economic activities, sources of financial support and health status of the elderly. Data for this study was drawn from responses of a total of 1,866 elderly (1,081 in Peninsular Malaysia, 353 in Sabah and 432 in Sarawak).

On the other hand, elderly men living alone are more prominent in Sabah and Sarawak. Elderly living alone is higher in rural areas. Even though the percentage of the elderly living alone is small, the study shows that three out of four elderly aged 70 years and above have health problems such as arthritis, high blood pressure, diabetes and coronary complications. Hence, proper care and attention need to be given to this age group.

Almost half of the elderly felt that staying in old folks home is justifiable if they are living alone, having limitations to physical activities or relatively poor. More than half of them agreed to be sent to a day-care centre while their family members are at work. This kind of arrangement is highest among the Chinese.

Elderly Care

More than half of the elderly expected their children to take care of them when they are ill. However, elderly males preferred their spouses to take care of them as compared to female. There are no discernible differences among ethnic, region and strata (urban/rural).

Loneliness

The percentage of elderly feeling lonely is higher among females as compared to males in all region. This feeling increases with the increase in age, higher among widow/widower and those who are separated or divorced. It is also higher among the Bumiputras as compared to other ethnic.

Living Arrangements

The study shows that 75 percent of the elderly were living with other family members, 15 percent with their spouses and the remaining 10 percent living alone. In Peninsular Malaysia, the percentage of elderly living alone is much higher among the women.
Community Involvement

Not many of the elderly were involved in social programmes or activities. The finding shows that less than 10 percent of them are involved in numerous non-governmental organisations’ activities. However, more than half of them are involved in religious activities as well as the neighbourhood/rukun tetangga activities.

Economic Activities

About 30 percent of the elderly are currently working. It is higher among males and among those who resided in the rural areas. Among those aged 60-64 almost 40 percent of them are still working. For those aged 65-69 and 70+ almost 30 percent and 16 percent of them are still working respectively. The percentage of elderly working decreases with the increased in age group. More than 70 per cent of the elderly in Sabah and Sarawak are involved in agriculture and fishery sector while almost half of the elderly in Peninsular Malaysia are involved in this sector.

Among reasons for elderly not working:
- 0 Old age
- 0 Health problems
- 0 Fully retired
- 0 Sufficient income

Income and Financial Support

The average income of the elderly in Peninsular Malaysia (RM773.00) is doubled as compared to that of Sabah (RM373.00) and Sarawak (RM358.00). The average income is higher in urban areas and among males. The average income of the Chinese elderly is much more higher as compared to other ethnic.

Most of the elderly have savings in banks and Tabung Haji as compared to shares, co-operatives or insurance. Less than 10 percent of the elderly invested in insurance schemes. Majority of them expected monetary assistance from various sources such as pensions, Employees Provident Fund (EPF), own savings and remittances from their children. However, more than 25 percent of them stated that they had never received any financial assistance from their children who are not staying with them.

Health Status

One out of every four elderly perceived that their health status is not satisfactory. Major health problems faced by the elderly are osteoarthritis, high blood pressure, diabetes, asthma and cardiovascular diseases. Nearly two-third of the elderly in Sabah (63.3%) suffered from arthritis as compared to less than half in Peninsular Malaysia (46.3%) and Sarawak (48.3%). Generally, the percentage of those suffering arthritis is highest in rural area and among females. High blood pressure among the elderly is highest in Sabah (45.6%) followed by Sarawak (39.9%) and Peninsular Malaysia (36.5%) and predominant among females and those in urban area. The percentage of elderly with diabetes in Peninsular Malaysia (19.1%) is almost doubled as compared to Sabah (10.1%) and Sarawak (10.0%). Asthmatics is highest in Sarawak and more so among males. About 10 percent of the elderly suffered from cardiovascular disease and this is true for all region.