

The Impact of Housing Needs on the Quality of Life Older People: A Pilot Study in Terengganu, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

By the year 2030, it is believed that the older population will rise in number in Malaysia. This has serious implications to the needs and quality of life of the people. The research was carried out to establish the interrelationship between housing requirements and the quality of life among the older individuals on the basis of a pilot research of 120 respondents whose age was 60 years and above. Quantitative survey design was used and questionnaire instrument included sections of demography, housing requirements, and quality of life using the OPQOL-35 instrument. The level of housing needs, descriptive analysis revealed that the level was high (Mean = 4.0, SD = 0.58), and the overall quality of life among the respondents were also high (Mean = 136.51, SD = 17.04). The results of Pearson correlation analysis revealed that the quality of life of older adults and their housing needs had a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$). The results support the idea that the access to safe, comfortable, and elder-friendly housing is one of the key factors in enhancing the quality of life of this group of the population. Thus, more housing policies, the delivery of facilities that are elderly-friendly, and enhanced community support are needed to be ready to make the transition to aged-nation.

Keywords: quality of life, housing needs, older adults, OPQOL.

INTRODUCTION

The increased number of the aging population is a widespread trend that affects both advanced and developing countries. By 2030, Malaysia will have about 15 percent of its population aged 60 years and above thus reaching the United Nations (UN) criteria of an aged country. This population change has significant impacts on various industries such as social protection policies, family structures and the public systems of healthcare. The growth of the elderly population creates the need to establish long-term care centers, expand medical services and establish sustainable community support systems (World Health Organization, 2022).

The elderly have a high vulnerability to diseases that can compromise physiological processes and reduce the ability of the elderly to undertake their daily chores. As a result, such a condition often creates augmented dependency, disability and increased socio-economic challenges on families and society in general (Md Abdul Salam et al., 2022).

Housing is a critical aspect in the life of older adults. A house is not just a physical environment but a social environment that helps older people to live conveniently and in a safe environment. The residential conditions of the aged should be located in secure places, which are close to health care centers, social facilities and supportive communities to maintain comfort and enable healthy socialization (Tan & Lin, 2020). Older people who live in inappropriate housing have a higher chance of being involved in accidents, psychological stress, loneliness, poor health and lowering their quality of life. Living in a peaceful and habitable environment has a positive effect on their quality of life especially in the emotional and psychosocial realms. Studies have shown that elderly individuals who stay at their homes in appropriate environmental and sociocultural settings get direct gains to their general welfare (Oswald and Wahl, 2004).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualising Quality of Life

Quality of life refers to physical, psychological, social and environmental aspects. The quality of life of a person is determined by their satisfaction with the living conditions, safety, autonomy, social relationships, and health according to the definition of the OPQOL (Bowling & Stenner, 2011). A housing factor is an important determinant that greatly influences the mental health and socialization of the elderly. The deterioration of quality of life is also common when elderly people suffer physical impairments, their spouses are no more, their health is worsening, or they live in an inappropriate or unsafe place (Chan et al., 2011).

Empirical data can actually determine certain dwelling features, which impact various dimensions of the quality of life of older adults. A comprehensive evidence on the association between dwelling characteristics and mental well-being indicates that older adults living in larger, higher-quality homes of good bathing facilities and clean energy sources have superior mental health outcomes. These features lead to security, comfort, and independence thus minimizing stress and psychological pressure which can be experienced due to inadequately maintained or unsafe homes (Sharifi et al., 2024). Equally, the holistic housing and environment models recognize an extensive variety of characteristics: spatial organization, community connection, and access to physical activities, which are linked to health, individual satisfaction, and social networks. This literature underlines the fact that the physical quality of houses or the external environment contribute to the well-being of older adults in an interdependent manner (Mulliner, et al., 2020).

Theoretical Foundations

The Ecological Theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) states that physical surroundings have a direct impact on the safety, behaviour, and psychological well-being of an individual. In the framework of elderly individuals, housing has served as one of the main areas of assistance that has a direct impact on their ability to execute daily tasks. The risk of injuries, including falls, can be increased when the home environment is not appropriate, especially in the bathroom and kitchen, as these are the most dangerous environments where elderly people can experience domestic accidents (WHO, 2021). The falls pose a leading cause of severe injuries, disability, and loss of autonomy among the elderly population.

The environment of the home must be safe and age friendly in order to maintain the functional independence of the older adults. Experimental research proves that an environmental risk such as slippery floors, insufficient lighting systems, uneven surfaces, and lack of handrails contribute heavily to the probability of falls and mobility constraints (Pighills et al., 2011). Empirical research evidence suggests that alleviating the risks of falls and enabling safer ageing in place by modifying the home environment through installing grab bars, non-slip floors, and better lighting (Stephens et al., 2019). These adaptations in the environment are beneficial not only physically, but also in the development of self-confidence and independence in performing the routine duties.

Moreover, the appropriateness of housing is critical in protection of psychological and social welfare. Elderly people living in safe, convenient, and conducive conditions have higher chances of reporting higher levels of life satisfaction and reduced anxiety (Wahl and Oswald, 2010). A house that allows movement, comfort, and social interaction will allow the older adults to maintain their habits and social roles which are the basic elements of well-being. In its turn, inappropriate accommodation can trigger social isolation, stress, and deterioration of psychological resilience, thus having a negative impact on the overall quality of life (Sixsmith, 2013).

Evidence from Malaysia and International Settings

Empirical studies conducted in Malaysia indicate that the demands of the older people population are becoming more complex due to the changes in the family systems and the development of the increased lifespan. Housing was also found to be a critical factor that determines the quality of life of older adults, especially in terms of safety, comfort, and social support (Tan & Lin, 2020). Abdul Mutalip et al. (2023) also emphasize that individuals aged over 60 that live in a stable community environment supported by strong family ties and proper housing conditions report higher rates of overall well-being. Similarly, Sulaiman et al. (2021) revealed that older

adults who lived in age-friendly neighbourhoods where the facilities were conveniently located showed better health results and enhanced social interaction.

Research in Kelantan about older people which have lived in their own homes and it has shown better quality of life compared to those in institutional settings which underscoring the importance of appropriate housing conditions in promoting physical and psychological wellbeing (Hami et al., 2022). Besides, community participation and living in age-friendly neighbourhoods have also been linked to higher quality of life among Malaysian seniors with urban dwellers often reporting higher levels of satisfaction compared to their rural peers (Johani et al., 2018).

In addition to that, participation in community programs and living in age-friendly communities has been linked to higher quality of life among Malaysian elderly, and urban dwelling elderly tended to be more satisfied than rural ones. .

The same observations are supported in international studies, which have found that housing suitability is a universal determinant of the quality of life in later life. Research studies carried out in Japan and South Korea have shown that safe and flexible housing conditions contribute to autonomy, functional and psychological well-being among the elderly (Kawaguchi et al., 2024). The number of falls, the loneliness rate, and life satisfaction are also lower among elderly people living in supportive domiciles in the Western world in Australia and the United Kingdom (Aplin et al., 2024). The aggregate domestic and international evidence supports the importance of housing as a determinant of the quality of life of older adults.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design and Data Collection Method

This study employed a quantitative survey research design. A pilot study was conducted to examine the suitability of the questionnaire instrument and to determine preliminary data patterns. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents who met the criteria, namely individuals aged 60 and above, residing in the study area, and able to understand the information provided. The actual study sample consists of 1200 respondents. For the purpose of the pilot study, 120 respondents were selected, in line with the view of Johanson & Brooks (2010), which recommends using approximately 10% of the actual study sample size, especially when the population and main sample size are large.

The research instrument was developed in the form of a questionnaire comprising three sections: Section A, which covers demographic information; Section B, which focuses on housing needs; and Section C, which examines the quality of life of older adults. Section B includes housing needs adapted from previous studies and refined according to the context of elderly housing in Malaysia. Section C evaluates the quality of life of older adults based on eight dimensions adapted from the OPQOL-35, which include overall quality of life, health, social relationships, control over life, home and neighbourhood, psychological and emotional well-being, financial circumstances, leisure and activities, and religion. Sections B and C were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Data collection was carried out through the distribution of physical questionnaires and structured interviews to assist respondents who had difficulty reading or seeing. Each interview session took between 30 and 50 minutes and respondents were given an explanation about the purpose of the study along with assurances of data confidentiality. The interview method was chosen because it is suitable for older adults who may require assistance in answering the questionnaire.

Data Analysis Method

The data collected from 120 respondents were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Descriptive statistics were applied to summarize demographic characteristics, levels of housing needs and quality of life of older people. This included the calculation of mean scores and percentages for each item in the questionnaire. To test the study hypotheses, inferential analysis was conducted. Pearson's

correlation was used to determine the relationship between housing needs and quality of life of older people. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed through Cronbach's Alpha test, which demonstrated excellent internal consistency for both scales: housing needs (15 items, $\alpha = 0.905$) and quality of life of older people (35 items, $\alpha = 0.947$). These values indicated that the instrument was highly reliable for measuring the constructs of interest.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This table I shows the demographic profile of the study respondents involving 120 senior peoples. In terms of gender, the majority of respondents were female, 80 (66.7%), while 40 (33.3%) were male. Based on age, the largest number of respondents were in the 65 to 69 year old category, which was 43 (35.8%), followed by the 60 to 64 year old category, which was 29 (24.2%). Next, respondents aged 70 to 74 years old, 25 (20.8%), 75 to 79 years old, 14 (11.7%) and 80 years and above, 9 (7.5%). In terms of marital status, the majority of respondents were married, 73 (60.8%). Respondents who were widowed or widowed were 40 (33.3%), while single and divorced respondents recorded a very small number, namely 3 (2.5%) and 4 (3.3%), respectively. Based on religion and race, all respondents were Muslim and consisted of Malays, which is 120 people (1000%). In terms of employment history, 48 people (40%) of the respondents were found to have never worked while the rest had worked in the public sector, 30 people (25%), the private sector, 12 people (10%) and self-employed, 30 people (25%).

For monthly income, the majority of respondents were in the RM1,000 and below category, which was 31 people (25.8%), followed by the RM1,001 to RM2,999 category, which was 37 people (30.8%). Respondents who did not have a fixed income were 48 people (40%), while only a small number of respondents had an income of RM3,000 and above, which was 15 people (12.5%). In terms of income sources, the majority of respondents depended on pensions, 26 people (21.7%) and child or family assistance, 29 people (24.2%). In addition, there were also respondents who received EPF or savings, 15 people (12.5%), government assistance, 16 people (13.3%) and other sources, 19 people (15.8%). Based on place of residence, most respondents lived with their spouse, 40 people (33.3%) and lived with their spouse and children, 35 people (29.2%). While the respondents who lived alone were 17 people (14.2%). In terms of location of residence, the largest number of respondents came from urban areas, 65 people (54.2%), followed by rural areas, 53 people (44.2%) and others, 2 people (1.7%). In terms of type of residence, almost all respondents lived in their own homes, which was 119 people (99.2%), while only one respondent (0.8%) lived in other residences.

Table I Demographic Profile Of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	40	33.3
Female	80	66.7
Age		
60–64 years	29	24.2
65-69 years	43	35.8
70 – 74 years	25	20.8
75 – 79 years	14	11.7

80 years above	9	7.5
Marital Status		
Single	3	2.5
Married	73	60.8
Divorced	4	3.3
Widow	40	33.3
Ethnicity		
Malay	120	100
Employment History		
Public Sector	30	25
Private Sector	12	10
Self-Employed	30	25
Unemployed	48	40
Monthly Income		
No income	38	31.7
Less than RM1000	31	25.8
RM1000 – RM2999	37	30.8
RM3000 and above	14	11.7
Source of Income		
None	15	12.5
Pension	26	21.7
EPF/Savings	15	12.5
Government Assistance	16	13.3
Children/ Family Contributions	29	24.2
Others	19	15.8
Living Arrangement		
Living alone	17	14.2
Living with Spouse	40	33.3

Living with Spouse and Child	35	29.2
Living with Child	27	22.5
Living with caregivers	1	0.8
District		
Kuala Nerus	27	22.5
Kuala Terengganu	70	58.3
Marang	23	19.2
Type of Residential Area		
Urban	65	54.2
Rural	53	44.2
Others	2	1.7
District		
Own House	119	99.2
Others	1	0.8

Level of housing needs of the elderly people

The results of the study in table II indicate that the level of housing needs of the elderly peoples is high with a majority of 94 people (78.3) of the respondents whereas 26 people (21.7) are at middle level with no other respondents being at the low level. That overall high mean value (Mean = 4.08, SP = 0.58) further supports the conclusion that, the housing aspect is a need that is very crucial in the lives of elderly peoples. This observation reveals that the elderly give special priority to safety, comfort and appropriateness of housing with regards to the fluctuation in physical and psychological competence that accompanies the aging process. Housing is not only a shelter, it is also one of the major environment that impacts on the quality of life, emotional status and degree of independence of older adults.

The results of the research are consistent with the prior ones that underline safe and elderly-friendly homes as one of the central requirements during aging. The World Health Organization (2021) reports that living environment can help lessen the threat of injury, promote self-sufficiency and psychological well-being of the elderly peoples. Another study by Golaant (2011) also indicated that seniors consider housing requirements as being an important factor since it is associated with physical security and a feeling of belonging.

We can also associate this finding with the Hierarchy theory by Maslow in which housing falls under the basic needs (physiological and safety). This requirement among the seniors is even greater because their health risks are greater in terms of mobility, balance, and chronic ailments that demand safer and more appropriate living conditions. The average standard deviation (SP=0.58) of the means demonstrates that the housing needs of the respondents were homogenous meaning that the significance of this factor is shared by the majority of seniors belonging to any socioeconomic group. This goes to back up the point that housing is not a personal problem but it is a universal need among the seniors.

Table II Level Of Housing Need For Older People

Level of Housing Needs	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Low	0	0	4.0794	0.57960
Moderate	26	21.		
High	94	78.3		
Overall	120	100		

Level of Quality OF Life Older People

Table III shows the quality of life of the older adults used in this study; a total of 120 respondents were used. According to the findings, all respondents (100%) were rated as high quality life with none of them falling in the low category. It means that, in general, the elderly individuals of this sample have a positive attitude towards their life situation. The mean score of 136.51 with a standard deviation of 17.04 shows that the quality of life regarding the respondents is always high. The average standard deviation also indicates less variation on the responses, which means that there is a relatively low level of life satisfaction.

These results suggest that most respondents are happy with the quality of their life, as major aspects of it, including health, housing, social support, financial stability, emotional well-being, and community integration are satisfactory. This aligns with the definition of quality of life that is by the World Health Organization (2023), quality of life is the subjective assessment of the place in life of a person in the world in the context of their culture, values, goals, and expectations. The findings on the topic are consistent with the study conducted by Abdul Mutalip et al. (2023), who stated that the levels of well-being are more likely to be expressed by Malaysian older adults with solid family support and stable community settings.

This tendency is also corroborated by the other empirical research. Indicatively, Bowling and Dieppe (2005) state that quality of life in old age depends on social relationship, autonomy, and psychological well-being as the key determinants of quality of life. Likewise, Fernandez-Ballesteros et al. (2019) point out that older adults residing in affirmative social settings have an improved emotional control mechanism and a higher level of life satisfaction. In a Malaysian study, Ng et al. (2021) also demonstrated that older individuals who had a variety of sources of income and stable living conditions had a high quality-of-life score, especially in such domains as social engagement, emotional stability, and living environment. On top of this, Chan et al. (2019) observe that living with the family members offers them emotional security, shared duties, and better social interaction, which are closely associated with better well-being among older people in Southeast Asia.

Combined, these results confirm once again that positive living conditions, financial stability, healthy family bonds and availability of community connections are critical to maintaining high quality of life in elderly people. The similarity in the responses to the sample also shows that these are the factors that lead to universally experienced well-being in this ageing population.

Table III Level Of Quality Of Life

Level of Housing Needs	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Low	0	0	136.5083	17.0353
High	120	100		
Overall	120	100		

Correlation Between Housing Needs towards Quality of Life Older People

Table IV presents the Pearson correlation outcomes between the Quality of Life and Housing Needs in older adults. The analysis showed that there was a positive strong correlation ($r = 0.724$, $p < 0.001$), whereby the better fulfilment of housing needs is related to an improvement in the quality of life. It implies that as long as the aged people stay in homes that are safe, comfortable, accessible, and conducive to their functional capacities, their general well-being is likely to improve. This relationship is also statistically meaningful and, most importantly, it is unlikely to appear due to some chance occurrences, which are confirmed by the extremely high p-value ($p < 0.001$). The 120 respondents are also a good sample size that strengthens the statistical findings and improves its credibility.

This robust correlation coincides with a considerable amount of literatures that prove that the housing conditions are highly significant concerning the well-being and the quality of life of the elderly. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2018) said that one of the determinants of healthy ageing is accessible and age-friendly housing, which plays an important role in physical, emotional, and social well-being. On the same note, Oswald and Wahl (2005) point out that the home environment makes up a major psychological anchor among the older adults in that it shapes their autonomy, safety and satisfaction of life.

Moreover, a study by Ibrahim, Din and Ahmad (2019) carried out in Malaysia also proves the fact that older people who are residing in safer and more comfortable housing show much greater levels of well-being and less psychological distress. This further supports the idea that housing should be more than a physical building, which is a crucial aspect of a healthy ageing process.

The high correlation observed in the current study, on the whole, is aligned with international and local results, which allows concluding that the quality of life among older adults is the primary factor that should be improved after improving housing conditions.

Table IV Relationship Between Housing Needs And Quality Of Life Of Older People

Variables	Quality Of Life Older People	
Housing needs	Pearson Correlation	0.724**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	<.001
	N	120

Note: Significance at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The results indicate that housing requirement is an important factor in sustaining and enhancing the living standards of the elderly. The right and adequate housing does not only offer safety and comfort, but it also offers social and community contact, which has proven to boost the psychological well-being and act as a defense mechanism against mental problems in old age. Hence, more affordable age-suited housing and enhanced support systems in the community are the key measures to ensure healthy, active and rewarding aging.

CONCLUSIONS

The research of this paper highlights the central importance of housing to determine the quality of life in older adults. Proper, safe, and age-related housing became a primary factor of physical, psychological, and social wellbeing. Elderly individuals living in facilities that address their functional requirements expressed well their life satisfaction, emotional stability and autonomy. Housing is not just a physical shelter but a social and supportive environment which promotes the community involvement, socialization and involvement in meaningful activities. In addition, the housing status is closely associated with the social and communal participation, which functions as the protective factor against the psychological distress and social detachment. Considering these findings, policymakers, city planners and community groups should be keen on creating and

providing age friendly housing and supportive community infrastructure. By making sure that the older adults are able to live in safe, comfortable, and socially enabling residential set-ups, it will improve their quality of lives, engage in healthy aging processes and be in a position of sustaining activities, engagement, and independence. The longitudinal effects of housing improvements on quality of life should be examined in future research to enhance the policy and practice structures of ageing societies and investigations conducted on a wide range of geographical and socioeconomic settings should be conducted.

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