



## SOCIAL VULNERABILITY FACING OLDER PERSONS INVOLVED IN INTERNAL MIGRATION DURING THE PANDEMIC

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## ABSTRACT

The vulnerabilities of elderly persons have been receiving attention around the world in recent times especially those who are involved in migration and endured the Covid-19 lockdown. The migratory process of the elderly persons is a complex phenomenon and requires emphasis on a different perception of age-related migration cause, consequences, and pattern. There is limited research that fully assess the vulnerabilities facing migrated elderly persons especially against the backdrop of the pandemic. This study focuses on the Sarawak elderly persons who migrated to Johor following their children and relatives. FGDs was conducted with NGO stakeholders related to Sarawakian community and subsequently pilot in-depth interviews were conducted with 3 older in-migrant persons residing in the District of Pasir Gudang, Johor. Thematic analysis was performed on the FGDs and pilot in-depth interview data. The key findings revealed that loneliness, financial dependence, language barrier and healthcare issues are among the major concerns; and they came up with various coping strategies to manage these challenges. The study also revealed interesting challenges brought about by the restrictions during the Covid-19 lockdown.

**Keywords:** *Elderly Persons, Migration, Social Vulnerability, Covid-19, Coping Strategies*

## RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

1. The results from the findings revealed that the challenges elderly person felt after migrating is challenging especially considering their age factor. They are more likely to feel lonely and isolated after migrating due to financial dependent, being apart from love ones and having to leave the daily activities and adapt with the current environment.
2. Nonetheless, the elderly are now unwillingly having to isolate themselves due to the pandemic. Facing this issue, it increases the vulnerabilities for elderly person while they are trying to be resilient with existing issues related to aging. Feeling vulnerable due to age, experiencing the sense of helplessness and coping with the built up stress due to lockdown are additional emotional stressors for older people. Therefore, the mental well-being of the elderly are significantly affected.
3. Elderly persons' coping strategies during the pandemic lockdown is crucial for their well-being. Therefore, the research is to discover how elderly persons deal with the external factors, while making peace with their internal factors.

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## Research Objectives

The research on migratory process has little emphasis on different perceptions of age-related migration cause, consequences and pattern especially involving elderly persons (Caidi et al., 2020). More in-depth study that fully assess vulnerabilities facing migrated elderly persons and their coping strategies especially during and post pandemic are needed (Ciobanu et al., 2016). Therefore, the study aims to identify the challenges facing Sarawakian elderly person living in Johor Bahru for more than five years. This study investigates the myriad of challenges encountered by three elderly Sarawakians before and during the pandemic and the ways they overcome those challenges. It is crucial to

understand elderly persons emotional well-being as part of their holistic wellness especially for those who take part in inter-state migration. In addition, the study will include specific discussion on how the pandemic and also the prolonged lockdown had impacted them as older persons. Elderly persons have been identified as the most vulnerable section of the society to the Covid-19 threats (Chung et al. 2020). Hence, the main objective of the study is to build a framework which describes migrated elderly persons' vulnerabilities and coping strategies during the pandemic.

## **Methodology**

This study incorporated a qualitative design with Thematic Analysis approach to research. We adopted Tey (2014) method of determining internal migration by estimating the older migrant place of origin or place of residence 5 years ago and destination in Johor. In the analysis, the older in-migrants are defined as older persons who have lived in another state (as in this case, Johor) five years ago. Qualitative data is apt for the contextual understanding of personal experiences and allows for the processing of instrumental narratives. Three (3) older migrants are selected in this study. The criteria sampling focusing on elderly person aged 60 years old and above (United Nation, 2019) who has migrated to Johor Bahru from Sarawak. In-depth interview was conducted to have a better comprehension on the challenges faced and how the elderly persons cope, specifically, during this Covid-19 pandemic.

## **Results**

The findings from these three elderly participants are a part of a larger study. The key findings include the common constant concern and challenges that they faced post migration during the pandemic. The elderly persons worry about their death and funeral, especially when they are financially dependent on other working family members. In addition, they deal with intense loneliness being far from original villages in Sarawak, foreboding sense of helplessness and fear of abandonment. The three elderly participants also shared their uneasiness with regard to healthcare and medical check up facilitation especially during this pandemic. All three participants expressed that being homebound due to Covid-19, particularly in an unfamiliar environment is quite stressful. However, they managed to adapt and cope by connecting with friends and relatives using technology, for instance by video calling or chatting. All three are comfortable engaging in online face-to-face conversation with others. Apart from that, they kept themselves occupied by engaging in hobbies and social activities within their neighborhood. They obeyed the government Covid-19 guidelines as they viewed the importance of an elderly among the young families within the Sarakian community leading by example to curb the spread of the corona virus.

## **Findings**

The findings suggested that the participants are vulnerable as they discussed issues such as mortality and funeral, sense of loneliness and missing far away relatives, financial dependence, health related concerns and even fear of abandonment. Covid-19 lockdown

also added to further vulnerabilities as the participants were confined to their homes. Interestingly, instead of succumbing to the pressure of aggravated loneliness due to social distancing, they keep themselves occupied with hobbies and social activities. This study is crucial because the findings are derived from the actual lived experiences of the elderly persons who represent the vulnerable segment of society during Covid-19.

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### Author's Biography



**Dr. Helen @ DrHT**, is a Director of Strategy Management at the Strategy and Corporate Affairs, Office of the Vice-Chancellor and lectures strategy at AHIBS UTM. She holds a PhD in Management, MBA (Strategic Management) and an LLB (Hons). Passionate about strategy, she invented the Strategic SWOT Origami, unveiled during her TEDxUTM talk in 2020; and developed the Strategic Risk Mitigation Plan (SRMP) during the Covid-19 crisis which earned a research grant. Accepted to the ExecProgram in Leading with Big Data Analytics in NUS (Singapore) in 2020. Welcomes discussion on wide ranging global issues including gender and ageing.



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