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An Age-based Analysis of the Perceptions of Ageing and Successful Ageing in Malaysia

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An Age-based Analysis of the Perceptions of Ageing and Successful Ageing in Malaysia

Erratum

Corrected university address of the first author

Age-based Analysis of the Perceptions of Aging and Successful Aging in Malaysia

Persepsi tentang Penuaan dan Penuaan yang Berhasil di Malaysia berdasarkan Analisis Berbasis Usia

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ABSTRACT

Given that ageism could have detrimental effects on the aging society, knowing how people of different age groups perceive aging and successful aging is important. This study collected data from 648 respondents aged between 18 and 80 years old for an age-based analysis of the perceptions toward aging and successful aging. The findings revealed that generally, being healthy, happy, and physically active are considered important aspects of successful aging. Regardless of age, health is perceived as the most fundamental part of life. Both the psychosocial and health factors are critical aspects of successful aging. Hence, it is critical to look into the provision of better healthcare and public facilities for older adults, to find ways to reduce negative attitudes toward older people and to assist older adults to live successfully at old age.

Original Article

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ABSTRAK

Oleh karena penuaan membawa efek merugikan kepada masyarakat yang menua, adalah hal yang penting bagi kita untuk mengetahui bagaimana orang-orang dari kelompok umur yang berbeda memandang penuaan dan penuaan yang berhasil. Studi ini mengumpulkan data dari 648 responden berusia antara 18 hingga 80 tahun untuk menganalisis persepsi penuaan dan penuaan yang berhasil berdasarkan analisis berbasis usia. Hasil temuan menunjukkan bahwa secara umum kesehatan, kebahagiaan, dan aktif secara fisik dianggap sebagai aspek-aspek penting dalam penuaan yang berhasil. Semua responden tanpa memandang usia menganggap kesehatan sebagai aspek yang paling mendasar dari kehidupan. Faktor psikososial dan kesehatan adalah aspek penting bagi keberhasilan penuaan. Oleh karena itu, sangat penting untuk memperhatikan penyediaan layanan kesehatan dan fasilitas umum yang lebih baik untuk orang dewasa yang lebih tua dan menemukan cara untuk mengurangi sikap negatif terhadap orang yang lebih tua demi membantu mereka hidup dengan sukses di usia tua.

1. Introduction

The world's population is aging rapidly as a result of extended life expectancy and decline fertility rate (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], 2020). Globally, it is expected that the older population aged 60 years and over will outnumber those aged between 10 to 24 years by 2050 (UN DESA, 2017). Aging is becoming a universal phenomenon; therefore, the need to develop a successful aging society turns out to be much more important than ever before. It is essential to gain a better understanding of people's perceptions of growing older and the meaning of successful aging as well as to identify the challenges associated with aging to promote a successful and quality aging society.

Successful aging is a multidimensional concept that no one definition can capture its exact meaning (Whitley et al., 2020). Hence, several terms have been used interchangeably with it such as active aging, healthy aging, positive aging, and productive aging. Generally, successful aging is an umbrella term used to reflect the well-being at old age, which is inclusive of physical and functional as well as psychological and social well-being.

Developing a successful aging society has been the goal of many governments, particularly in countries that are already experiencing aging populations such as Japan, the United States, and the United Kingdom. In Malaysia, the 2010 census showed that the older population (aged 65 years and over) was only at approximately 5.0% of the total population; however, the number is projected to increase significantly to 14.5% by 2040, whereas the

population growth rate is projected to decrease from 1.8% in 2010 to 0.8% in 2040 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2016). Since the share of the older population is growing faster than the younger population, Malaysia will soon become an aging nation.

This study is conducted to explore public perceptions of aging and to identify key dimensions of successful aging in Malaysia, particularly elements or dimensions that are considered important to live successfully at old age. This study performs the age-based analysis to examine how people of different age groups develop their perceptions of aging, and whether there is a significant difference in how they view aging and successful aging. The findings would provide useful insights into what constituted successful aging across different age groups.

Perceptions of Aging and Successful Aging

Studies on perceptions of aging received increasing attention because perceptions could play an important role in influencing successful aging, particularly in terms of physical, mental health, and longevity. Studies had indicated that positive self-perceptions of aging can affect the cognitive and physical functioning of older people positively, whereas negative self-perceptions of aging led to worsening health and mortality (Demakakos et al., 2007; Levy & Meyers, 2004; Levy et al., 2002; Moser et al., 2011; Uotinen et al., 2005). A study by Levy et al. (2002) revealed that old people with positive self-perceptions of aging lived on average 7.5 years longer. Another study by Moser et al. (2011) showed that a negative perception of aging has a strong association with difficulties in basic activities of daily living, such as feeding, bathing, waking up or lying on bed, and instrumental activities of daily living such as housework, shopping, and managing money, besides declining mental insight (Robertson & Kenny, 2016).

Previous studies on aging had focused mainly on the meaning of aging to older people and their attitude toward aging (Chopik et al., 2018; Demakakos et al., 2006; Levy et al., 2002; Rashid et al., 2012). Although it is important to understand the views of older people, it is equally important to assess the perceptions of various age groups on aging, as the public's views may affect the perceptions of old people or older individuals as a group (Demakakos et al., 2006; Levy et al., 2002). Also, individuals develop their perceptions of themselves getting old many years before they become older through the internalization process (Levy et al., 2002; Moser et al., 2011). Hence, collecting the perceptions of aging at different age levels is important.

How do people develop their perceptions of themselves getting old? Studies had pointed out that socioeconomic, health, and psychological well-being such as the level of intellectual and health functioning, trust and feeling of usefulness, level of social contact, and loneliness may

affect the perceptions of aging (Blazer & Hybels, 2004; Cheng et al., 2009). Lane et al. (2019) found that social capital, especially neighborhood social capital, has an important impact on the health and well-being of older people. Using the data from the Health and Retirement Study, Yeo and Lee (2019) also identified a significant relationship between participation in social activities and life satisfaction among older adults. In another study conducted by Moser et al. (2011), the findings showed that low income, living alone, sickness, and depression were closely related with a negative perception of aging, whereas gender, age, and education level did not show a significant relationship with self-perception of aging.

Zanjari et al. (2016) examined the perceptions of successful aging among Iranian elders. Their study revealed the importance to understand the multidimensional nature of aging and multilevel interaction between individuals, family, and the environment to develop successful aging. Social well-being is the most prevalent dimension of successful aging, followed by psychological well-being, physical health, spirituality and transcendence, financial security, and an elder-friendly environmental and social context.

This study categorized the respondents into three age groups: young adults (age below 35 years), middle-aged adults (age between 36 and 55 years), and older adults (age above 55 years) to examine various issues related to aging, including perceptions toward aging and self-perceptions of growing older as well as successful aging in Malaysia.

2. Methods

Before the study, ethical approval was obtained from the University's Ethics Committee of Scientific Research. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire from people aged 18 years and above living in Malaysia. The questionnaire collects key information related to the perception of aging, which includes respondents' opinions toward older people, self-perception of aging, and critical aspects in developing successful aging. Besides questions related to perceptions of aging, the respondents were also asked to provide other related information for further analysis, for instance, to rate the sufficiency of the income, life satisfaction level and physical health condition in comparison with others of the same age, and activities they undertook for the past 12 months.

Perceptions of aging were assessed by asking the respondents to indicate their feelings toward old people on the basis of a five-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*) on 10 characteristics. These 10 characteristics are "Wise", "Alert", "Active", "Experienced", "Enthusiastic", "Inspired", "Cautious", "Attentive", "Determined", and "Independent". The self-

perceptions of aging were gauged by asking the respondents to indicate how would they feel about themselves growing older. To examine people's viewpoints on successful aging, the respondents were asked to indicate which aspects would they consider as important to develop successful aging and issues that most worry them when they grow older. The various dimensions of successful aging were adopted from the Perception and Attitudes toward Aging and Seniors survey by Mathews and Straughan (2014), which include "being happy", "being healthy", "being physically active", "being financially independent", "having close personal relationships", and "contributing back to society." This study has added two other aspects, namely, "being spiritually intact" and "being respected" as studies have shown that spirituality and a sense of value are increasingly important for older individuals.

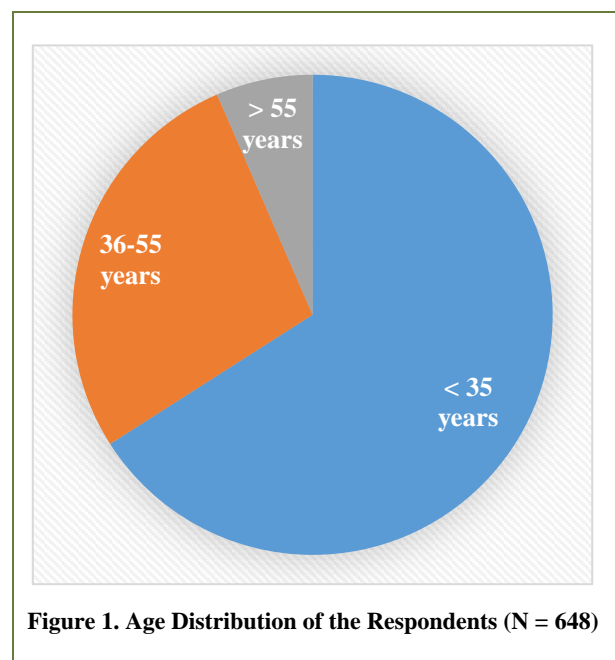
This study applied an exploratory approach to examine the issues related to perceptions of aging. Descriptive analysis and correlation analysis were conducted to examine the relationship between perceptions of aging with several dimensions related to socioeconomic, health, and psychological well-being of the respondents. The focus of the analysis is to compare the findings of the respondents of different age groups. The statistical significance level is determined at $p < 0.05$.

3. Results

A total of 648 participants were recruited in this study. As the interest of this paper is to analyze the responses of different age groups on aging and successful aging, the respondents were grouped into three age categories, namely, young adults (age below 35 years), middle-aged adults (age 36–55 years), and older adults (age 56 years and above). Figure 1 illustrates the age distribution. The average age of the respondents is 32.7 years, in which the youngest is 18 years old and the oldest is 80 years old.

The sample comprises respondents from different ethnic groups of Malaysia, of which 46.5% are Bumiputra, 43.7% Chinese, and 8.5% Indians. A total of 69.1% are female respondents. Approximately 18% of the respondents are students, and the majority of the respondents (75.1%) have tertiary education. More than 50% of the respondents received monthly income, which is less than RM2,000 (approximately USD 500), but only 16.2% of the respondents reckoned their income as very insufficient or insufficient to meet their current basic needs, whereas 45.7% of the respondents considered their income as sufficient or more than sufficient. For

physical movement, 81.0% of the respondents reported they can move freely, only 5.0% claimed very difficult or difficult movement, and 0.3% are unable to move at all. A total of 49.1% of the respondents revealed that their physical health condition is better or much better than others in the same age groups, whereas 42.0% perceived their current physical health condition as similar to others in the same age group. Generally, the respondents are considered healthy respondents and have physical mobility. When asked about their life satisfaction level, slightly more than half (57.0%) of the respondents indicated that they are either satisfied or very satisfied.



This study also collected data on the activities conducted by the respondents during the past 12 months when the survey was carried out. Generally, reading is the most common activity done by most of the respondents, regardless of age. It is followed by traveling, sport, social, or other kinds of club activities. The least popular activity among the respondents is to take part in political or community-based activities. Figure 2 shows the percentage of each age group and their participation in various activities. There are only two respondents who did not participate in any of the activities mentioned (21 and 55 years, respectively). For the older adults, playing word or number and card games are the least popular activities, whereas reading is a common activity where 86.6% of them said that they read books, magazines, or newspapers.

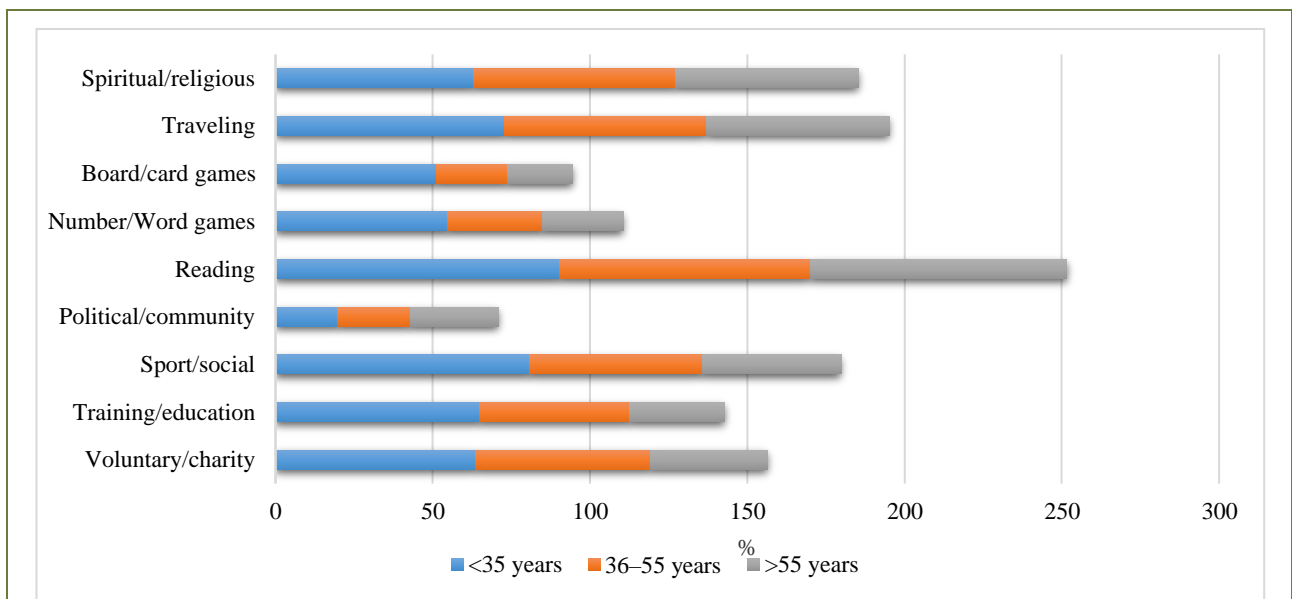


Figure 2. Activities Conducted by the Respondents

Table 1. Perceptions of Aging by Age Group

Description	Age group		
	<35	36-55	>55
Wise	3.55	3.35	3.30
Alert	3.45	3.31	3.14
Active	3.10@	2.92@	2.86@
Experienced	4.01*	3.78*	3.72*
Enthusiastic	3.41	3.10	3.09
Inspired	3.53	3.09	2.88
Cautious	3.63	3.23	3.14
Attentive	3.56	3.25	3.09
Determined	3.38	3.10	3.02
Independent	3.67	3.20	3.12
Average	3.53	3.23	3.14
Number, <i>n</i>	423	182	43

Note: * indicates the highest score for each age category. @ indicates the lowest score for each age category.

Perceptions of Aging by Age Groups

Feeling Toward Older People. A total of 10 adjectives were given to describe older people. A score of 1 is given if the respondent does not think that older people possess the characteristic mentioned, whereas a score of 5 indicates that the particular characteristic is highly associated with older people. As the adjectives indicated in this study reflect positive characteristics, a higher score would mean a positive perception of aging in general. Age-based analysis on respondents’ feelings toward old people is conducted, where the mean score is calculated for each of the descriptions as stated in Table 1.

rated highly by all age groups, whereas “Active” has the lowest scoring. This finding is consistent with several studies that suggested that older people gained experiences over time and the accumulated knowledge made them more experienced, independent, and wise (Rashid et al., 2012). Conversely, older people are generally perceived to have declined activeness with age. Another observation is that the middle-aged group and older adults share many similar expressions about old people where seven out of 10 characteristics (i.e., Active, Inspired, Determined, Enthusiastic, Alert, Wise, and Experienced) have the same ranking for these two groups of respondents, except for Cautious, Attentive, and Independent.

Table 2 ranks the characteristics in ascending order for each age group. As shown in Table 2, “Experience” is

Table 2. Ranking of Feelings toward Older People

Rank	Age group		
	<35	36–55	>55
1	Active	Active	Active
2	Determined	Inspired	Inspired
3	Enthusiastic	Determined	Determined
4	Alert	Enthusiastic	Enthusiastic
5	Inspired	Independent	Attentive
6	Wise	Cautious	Independent
7	Attentive	Attentive	Cautious
8	Cautious	Alert	Alert
9	Independent	Wise	Wise
10	Experienced	Experienced	Experienced

Table 3. How Do You Feel About Yourself When You Grow Older?

Statement	Score
Positive	
I look forward to growing old with someone I love #	4.89
I expect to be a loving, caring person #	4.86
I hope that I might look back on my life with a sense of satisfaction #	4.70
I will be able to accept the death of friends and loved ones as a natural part of life	4.12
Old age will be an enjoyable time of life	3.93
I don't feel there is much to be scared about becoming an older adult	3.91
Life can get better once you pass middle age	3.82
In my old age, I will be as enthusiastic about life as I am now	3.72
Old age brings satisfactions that are not available to the young	3.69
There is a lot to look forward to in regard to being old	3.44
I do not worry about the thought of becoming senile and losing my mind	3.28
Becoming frail is rarely an issue that concerns me	3.20
Negative	
I will worry about the loss of loved ones around me	4.32
I worry about dying and leaving behind those I love #	4.11
I am concerned about who will care for me if I become frail	4.09
I worry that I might become senile and lose my mind	4.08
I worry about becoming frail	3.90
I will regret the loss of strength and attractiveness	3.83
It worries me that I won't enjoy life as much as I do now	3.80
I worry about the loss of independence	3.70
I will become more irritable and grouchier than I am now	3.65
I won't like growing old #	3.61
I will become more set in my ways and reluctant to change	3.60
I won't feel as safe on my own as I do now	3.57
I find the thought of growing old depressing	3.50
I will be lonelier than I am now	3.37
Others may find me difficult to get along with	3.34

Reactions to Aging. Respondents were asked to describe their feeling or expectation of themselves growing older by using the Reactions to Aging Questionnaire (Gething, 1994). A total of 27 statements were presented, and the respondents were asked to report the extent to which they would agree or disagree with each of the statements using a six-point scale ranging from 1 (*disagree very much*) to 6 (*agree very much*). The 27 statements consist of 12 positive and 15 negative statements. The average score is calculated for each statement and ranked in descending order as shown in Table 3. Both the positive and negative statements revealed that the top concern of the respondents is to have someone they loved to grow older with them.

To have an overall view of the perceptions of aging, an index, that is, the Positive Aging Perception Index (PAPI) is constructed to represent the positive perceptions of growing older. To select relevant statements to be included in the calculation of the perception index, factor analysis was conducted. The factor analysis revealed that five statements are removed from the index calculation as these five statements did not fit into the categories of either positive or negative perceptions. Of the statements being removed, three are positive statements and two are the negative statements (as highlighted by # in Table 3). All 13 negative statements were re-coded in reversed order, and the index is calculated by taking the average of the 22 statements to represent the positive perception of growing old. The sample size is further reduced to 429 as only respondents who have answered all 22 statements will be included in the index calculation. Figure 3 shows the age distribution of 429 respondents, which did not display much difference from the distribution as shown in Figure 1. For the analyzes of the PAPI, the sample size is 429 instead of 648.

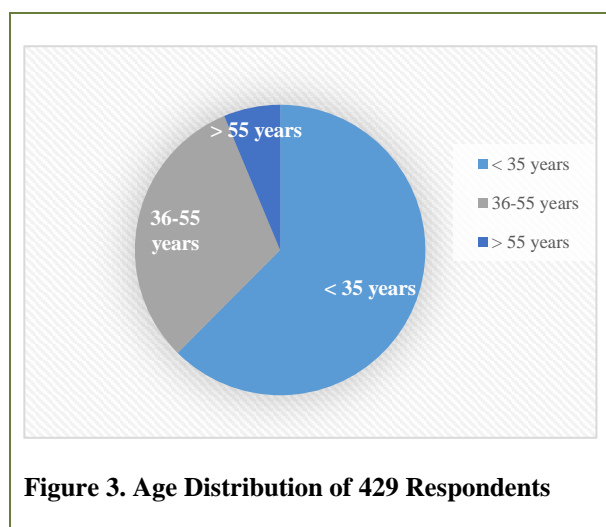


Figure 3. Age Distribution of 429 Respondents

Figure 4 shows that the PAPI follows an inverted “U” shape where the PAPI is the highest for middle-aged adults and the lowest for younger adults. The value of the PAPI for older adults is higher than those below 35 years. The findings show that younger adults are the least positive about aging. As age increases, there is an improved perception toward aging; however, the positive perception of aging started to decline when people grow older than 55 years.

Factors Contributing to Positive Perceptions of Aging. How do people develop their perceptions of themselves growing older? Correlation analysis was conducted to establish the relationship between the positive perception of aging and key personal as well as social factors. Personal factors included in this study are age, physical movement ability, income to meet basic needs, life satisfaction level, physical health when compared with others of the same age, and education level. Social factors are represented by activities participated by the respondents. Some of these activities involve social contacts or interaction with others such as participating in voluntary or charity works, sport, or social and club activities, taking part in political or community organizations, traveling, and religious or spiritual activities. Except for PAPI and age, which are continuous variables, other factors are measured on an ordinal scale (1 = *low level* to 5 = *high level*). Because of the measurement of the variables that are either ordinal or ratio, Spearman’s correlation is used in the analysis.

The findings as shown in Table 4 indicated that in terms of personal factors, for young adults, the only variable significant at 0.05 level is the life satisfaction level. For middle-aged and older adults, physical movement ability and life satisfaction level are the two significant factors contributing to the positive perceptions of aging. In terms of activities that would contribute to the development of positive perceptions of aging, only one activity has shown a positive and significant relationship with PAPI at 0.05 level, namely, traveling and for the older adults only. Older adults who like traveling and have traveled during the past 12 months when the survey was conducted are more positive in viewing the aging process. However, for the young and middle-aged adults, none of the activities listed is significant at a 0.05 level.

Develop Successful Aging. What are the important aspects of successful aging? In this study, successful aging is defined as meeting the following criteria:

- (a) not having a major chronic sickness
- (b) no physical functioning difficulty and is able to move around freely
- (c) able to think clearly, having good perception, memory, and learning ability

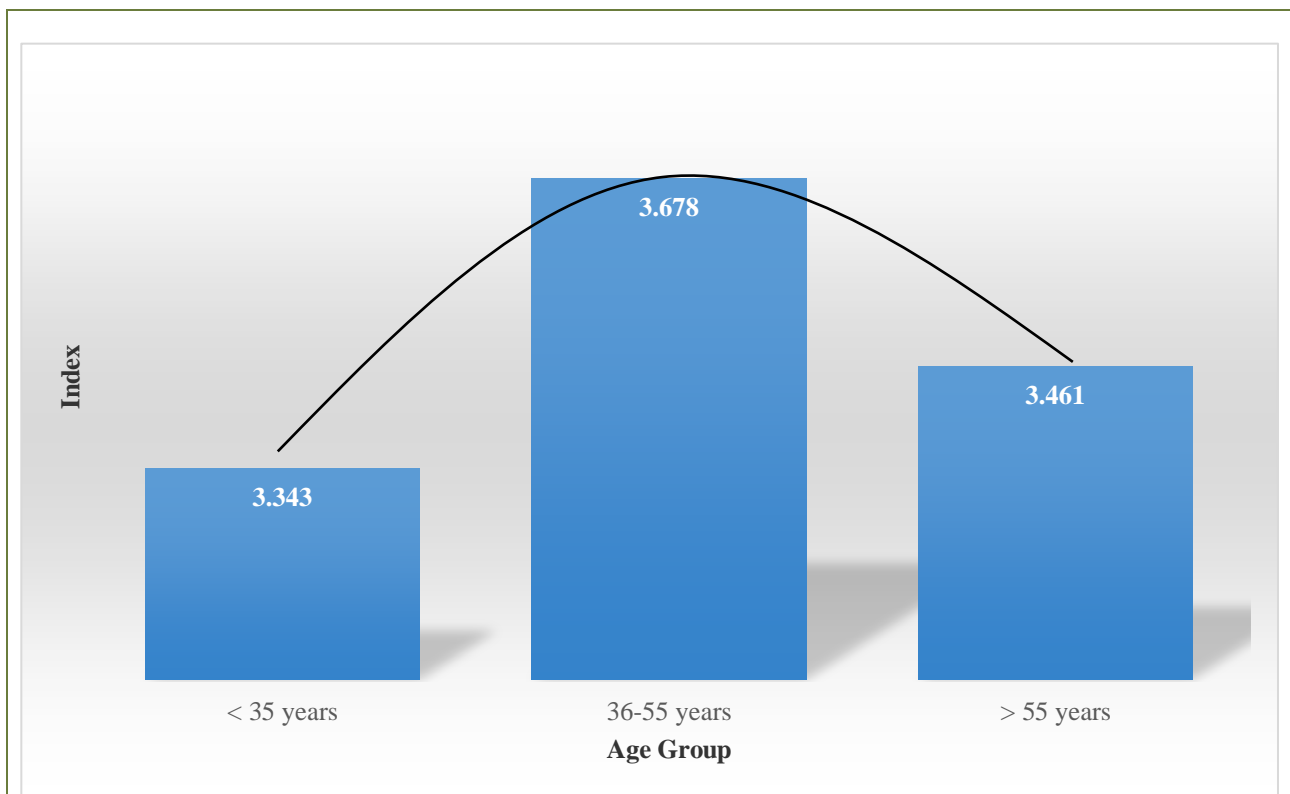


Figure 4. Positive Aging Perception Index (PAPI)

Table 4. Correlation Analysis with PAPI

	Positive Aging Perception Index (PAPI)		
	Young adults (<35)	Middle-aged adults (36–55)	Older adults (>55)
Number, <i>n</i>	268	134	27
Personal factors			
Age	0.060	-0.116	0.029
Physical movement ability	0.042	0.174*	0.390*
Sufficient income to meet basic needs	0.093	0.161+	0.341+
Life satisfaction level	0.120*	0.263*	0.425*
Physical health as compared to others of the same age	-0.041	-0.019	0.366+
Education level	-0.040	0.024	0.097
Activities			
Voluntary/charity	0.021	0.145+	0.321
Education/training	0.106+	0.101	0.292
Sport/social or club	0.032	0.086	0.162
Political/community	0.067	-0.062	0.224
Reading	0.051	-0.065	0.344+
Number or word games (e.g., Sudoku)	-0.079	0.021	0.282
Board/card games (e.g., chess)	-0.065	-0.039	-0.074
Traveling	-0.062	0.024	0.523*
Spiritual/religious	-0.023	-0.040	-0.136

Notes. The numbers are Spearman’s rho values. * signifies correlation is significant at 0.05 level. + signifies correlation is significant at a 0.10 level.

Table 5. Important Aspects of Developing Successful Aging

Successful aging aspects	Mathews and Straughan (2014)	Present study
Being happy	99.7%	97.2%
Being healthy	99.3%	97.8%
Being physically active	99.4%	94.1%
Being financially independent	98.5%	84.4%
Having close personal relationships	97.8%	82.5%
Contributing back to society	83.6%	79.0%
Being spiritually intact		84.1%
Being respected		86.6%
To know someone who is successful agers		74.7%
To have good role models to show me what is possible for older people to do		81.3%

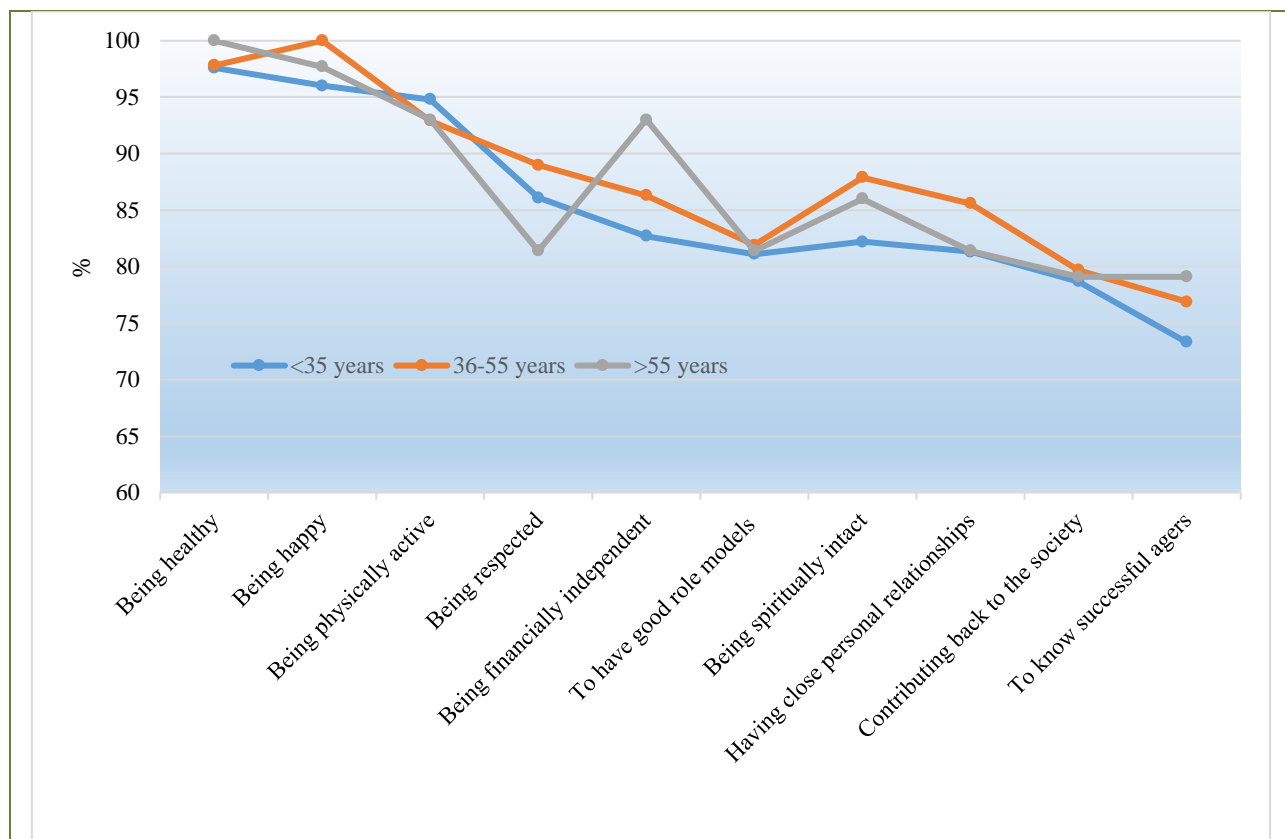


Figure 5. Important Aspects of Developing Successful Aging

The respondents were asked to select aspects that they would consider important in developing successful aging. A total of 10 aspects were given for consideration. “Being healthy” is the most popular option where 97.9% of the respondents (out of 661) chose “Being healthy” as an important aspect in developing successful aging, followed by “Being happy” (97.3%) and “Being physically active” (94.3%). The findings are quite consistent with the survey conducted by Mathews and Straughan (2014) where 99.7%, 99.4%, and 99.3% of

their respondents rated “Being happy”, “Being physically active”, and “Being healthy” as the three most important aspects of successful aging. Table 5 compares the findings obtained from this study and Mathews and Straughan (2014). “Being respected”, which was not included in the study by Mathews and Straughan (2014), was ranked the fourth most important aspect in developing successful aging in this study, more important than “Being financially independent”.

Age-based analysis as shown in Figure 5 illustrated that generally there are high levels of consensus among different age groups on what contributed to the development of successful aging “Being healthy,” “Being happy,” and “Being physically active” are consistently being rated as the top three important aspects to consider. The older adults also considered the importance of “Being financially independent”, and “Being spiritually intact” while for middle-aged adults, “Being respected”, “Being spiritually intact” are important aspects. For young adults, “Being respected”, and “Being financially independent” are important aspects for developing successful aging.

Respondents were asked to choose one issue that worries them the most when getting old, again, “Health” is highlighted as the most worrying issue (63.4%), followed by “Loss of family members” (19.6%), “Loneliness”

(8.7%), “Earning ability” (6.9%), and “Loss of friends” (1.3%). Although several studies have shown that earning ability and financial stability could be the concerns of many people when they grow older, in this study, only 6.9% chose “Earning ability” as the issue of concern. More recent studies have also indicated that being healthy is becoming a more important issue than a monetary matter.

A breakdown according to age groups also shows a convergent trend where health is the most worrying concern for most of the respondents regardless of their age, and the concerns on health issues increase with age, as illustrated in Figure 6. For the other issues, namely, earning ability, loneliness, loss of family members, and loss of friends, older adults are less worried about these issues when compared with young and middle-aged adults.

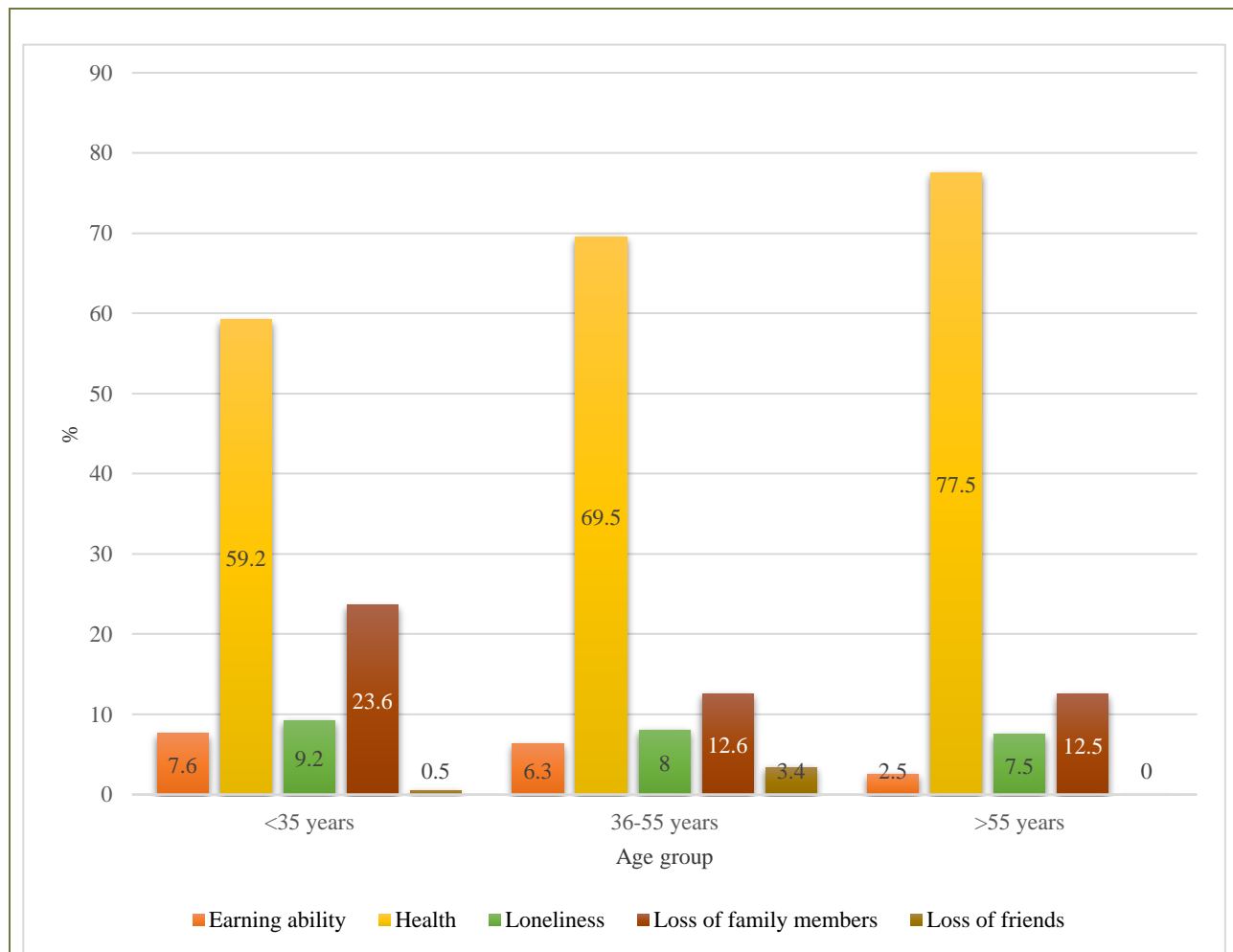


Figure 6. The Most Worrying Issues When Getting Old

4. Discussion

This study described the perception toward aging among Malaysian samples. Although older people are stereotyped as having negative or unattractive personalities such as weak, inflexible, unproductive, and dull, which creates a burden to the family, our study found otherwise. This is in line with studies that described older people in positive manners as experienced, wise, and enthusiastic (Abrams & Houston, 2006; Hummert et al., 1994; Magd, 2003; Weiss & Zhang, 2020). Besides examining how people view aging and older adults, there are also studies to gauge older adults' perception of aging. The study by Rashid et al. (2012) revealed that old people see aging as an accumulation of experiences that contribute positively to the development and adaptation in older age. Their study showed that the perceptions of aging among older adults are more positive than negative. After all, growing old is not necessarily a life hindrance.

In analyzing how aging perceptions may change as people age, this study asked the respondents to indicate how would they describe older people, based on 10 characteristics associated with older people. The findings as shown in Table 1 indicated that the average scores given by younger respondents are higher than older respondents. The scores decrease with age, which indicates that when people grow older, they are less positive about older people. However, the findings also highlighted that there is a high level of consensus among all age groups on how they feel about older people where "Experience" is rated highly by all age groups and "Active" has the lowest scoring as shown in Table 2. Older adults are generally regarded as less active but experienced people. Hence, how to make the best use of older people's experience is something worth further investigation.

The respondents were also asked to reveal how would they view themselves growing older. The PAPI is constructed to reflect the self-perceptions of growing older. The inverted "U" shape of the PAPI indicates that among the three age groups, middle-aged adults are the most optimistic about growing older. Young adults are less positive in seeing themselves growing older when compared with older adults where the PAPI of young adults (<35 years) are lower than older adults (>55 years old). The actual experience of growing old may contribute to a more positive view of aging as the older generation has more knowledge regarding aging than the younger generation. This finding is consistent with the survey conducted by Eurobarometer in 1995 where older adults have reflected their positive experiences of later life (Walker, 1999, as cited in Abrams et al., 2015).

This study provides practical implications for individuals to prepare for successful aging. Studies had pointed out

that personal factors such as age, gender, feeling of usefulness, health conditions, economic status, and life satisfaction and social factors particularly level of social contacts may affect the perceptions of aging (Blazer & Hybels, 2004; Cheng et al., 2009). The correlation analysis conducted in this study shows that both personal factors and social activities may affect the perceptions of aging. Physical movement ability and life satisfaction are closely related to PAPI for middle-aged and older adults, which indicates the importance of maintaining good health status as well as the quality of life in developing positive perceptions of aging. However, for young adults, only life satisfaction is closely associated with PAPI. None of the activities identified in this study has a significant contribution to the development of a positive perception of aging among young and middle-aged adults. Thus, future studies may look into other activities that could promote a positive attitude to aging among young and middle-aged adults. For older adults, maintaining good economic and health status as well as the quality of life is essential in developing positive perceptions of aging. Also, those who showed a higher PAPI are those involved more actively in traveling. It is crucial to encourage older adults to participate in activities, especially activities that will enhance their social connectedness and life satisfaction to improve their perceptions of aging.

The community and policymakers must work together to create more community-based activities to enhance older adults' social connectedness and reduce the fear of loneliness. Social facilities and community supports are beneficial for older adults, especially those without extended family support. As people are having a longer life span, policies may focus on how to utilize the experience of older people to benefit society. The provision of lifelong learning opportunities for older adults may encourage them to participate in social works or even the workforce to improve their financial and social independence.

The findings also revealed that regardless of age groups, the important aspects of successful aging are being happy, financially independent, active, being respected, and being healthy. The study has clearly pointed out that psychosocial and health factors are the critical aspects of successful aging; hence, there should be planned strategies to achieve these goals at an early age. Better healthcare and more public facilities should be made available to older adults. The findings also indicated that older people are less positive about themselves when they grow older. Finding ways to reduce these negative attitudes among older people may be an important goal in the provision of preventive health behavior to assist older adults to sustain good physical and mental health and improve their quality of life.

5. Conclusion

Self-perceptions or public perceptions of aging as well as successful aging is a popular research topic as the visibility of aging has increased because of an increased number of older people worldwide. Aging is becoming a universal issue. A better understanding of the aging population and perceptions of aging would lead to better policy actions to address aging issues to build a healthy and successful aging society. The study provides a better understanding of people's perceptions of growing older and the meaning of successful aging in Malaysia. Additionally, the study explored various aspects of successful aging to provide valuable insights on what would contribute to the development of a successful aging society in Malaysia. The findings revealed that all three age groups considered "Being healthy", "Being happy", and "Being physically active" as the top three important aspects of developing successful aging. When asked about what would be the most worrying issue when they are growing older, all age groups rated health as the most worrying issue. For older adults, maintaining good economic and health status as well as the quality of life is essential in developing positive perceptions of aging.

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