

# **The Attitude of Filial Responsibility of Malaysian Students towards their Elderly Parents.**

**WENDY YEE MEI TIEN (SKET, UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA)**

**PONMALAR N ALAGAPPAR, (SKET, UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA)**

**MAYA KHEMLANI DAVID (FAC. OF LANGUAGES & LINGUISTICS,  
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA)**

## **Introduction**

In recent years, the elderly segment of the population has grown in both absolute and relative terms across developed and developing countries alike and the problem of who should take responsibility and care for the frail, impaired and dependent has become a major issue. Since the 1970s, the promotion of the family as the key provider of elderly care has become prominent on the health care and social policy agenda (Heaton, 1999). This is to dispel the myth of the abandoned aged while reaffirming the importance of family role in eldercare (Cantor, 1975; Shanas, 1979).

Sociologically, filial responsibility reflects the generalized expectation that children should support their older parents at times of need (Cicirelli, 1988, 1990). Filial responsibilities as generalized expectations are relevant to people at all stages of life. However, at a practical level, filial responsibilities may change in response to personal circumstances that affect the ability to provide parental care. Nevertheless, according to the theory of cognitive dissonance, Finley, Roberts and Banahan (1988) suggested that generalized filial expectations may be adjusted in an attempt to reconcile the gap between the ideal and what is in reality.

Gerontologists hope that, by treating elderly persons with respect, the elderly can be cared for with propriety and compassion (Kyu-taik Sung, 2004). According to Dillon (1992) and Downie and Telfer (1969) (in Kyu-taik Sung, 2004), respect, which involves practical concern distinguished from simple feeling, is closely interrelated with care.

For older persons, food, shelter, health care and security are all necessities. But they have another cardinal need: the need to be treated with respect and care. Without respect and care, positive attitudes towards the elderly cannot exist among the younger generation and as a consequence the elderly cannot be treated with propriety (Kyu-taik Sung, 2004).

The consequences of disrespectful treatment of the elderly have been reported and in Malaysia, there have been reports of an emerging trend among adult children to abandon their parents in residential homes for the aged or of not supporting them (NST, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2007). This disturbing trend has captured the attention of Datuk Paduka Badruddin Amiruldin, a Member of Parliament, who believes that betraying the parents is an ultimate sin in any religion (ibid). These errant adult children tend to take the easy way out by sending their elderly parents to welfare homes or government – run homes (NST, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2007) or homes for the old (The Star, 17<sup>th</sup> April, 2007). Datuk Paduka Badruddin Amiruldin has

proposed a law similar to the one that Singapore has, the Maintenance of Parents Act introduced in 1995, which makes it a legal obligation for children to maintain their parents (NST, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2007).

Malaysian, Women, Family and Community Development Minister, Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil feels that the situation in Malaysia does not warrant such a law as this worrying trend mentioned by Datuk Paduka Badruddin Amiruldin could be due to isolated incidents caused by a group of minorities only. She believes that generally, Malaysia children still love and respect their elders (NST, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2007).

It is crucial that we understand the importance of children caring for their parents as it is estimated that Malaysia's aging population (60 and above) will increase to 2.3 million or 7.1 percent of the population by 2010 (NST, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2007) and will make up some 20 per cent of the population by 2050 (NST, 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2007).

Unfortunately, one cannot deny that there are signs of shifts in the way in which elder respect is expressed by young generations in East Asian societies. These signs of shift can mean that the young generation is becoming more individualistic in nature. As such, it is imperative that we look into the adult child-parent relationship in terms of care-giving and communal exchange. The question is do Malaysian children still believe it is their responsibility to care for and support their elderly parents ?

## **Literature Review**

The role of adult children in providing long-term support and care to their aging parents has become an area of interest in social gerontology and family studies in the last quarter century (e.g., Brody & Brody, 1989; Logan & Spitze, 1995; Silverstein & Parrott, 2001), yet the norms of filial obligation that guide these supportive behaviors are less well understood. A study was conducted in California to examine the strength with which adult children are expected to be responsible for their aging parents, and how this value changes across the life-span, over several decades of historical time, between successive generations, and in relation to one's generational position in one's family.

The results of the study indicated that the norms of young adults are relatively strong, when compared with midlife and old age. Similar findings were also noted by Guberman (2003). He found that the young were far removed from any need to care for the elderly, and thus presented a more idealistic view of care giving without considering the practical implications of what such responsibility may entail. On the other hand, older people may already need help or see themselves as needing help in the near future, therefore better appreciate the sacrifices involved. The results also found women were more consistent in expressing stronger filial norms than men from young adulthood to old age.

The study by Hamon and Blieszner (1990) on filial responsibility expectations among adult children –older parent pairs showed that the strength of filial responsibility norms in contemporary American society, both parents and adult children recognize certain filial

obligations to be fulfilled by adult offspring. Endorsement of the filial responsibility items also seems to reflect current trends in the American family. For one, the adults' children seem to be indicative of the importance of the emotive function of the family today. Second the older parents do find security in the thought that one's child will respond when needed. Thirdly, parents and children seem to have made adjustments to greater mobility among family members. Fourthly, adult children now provide affectional and emotional support and advice, and help parents learn of and utilize governmental resources that will prolong independent living. Finally, the difference with which parents and children endorsed the filial responsibility items might be associated with the existence of filial anxiety. The findings also support the idea that rolemaking between older parents and their adult children is a dynamic process that reflects changing family circumstances.

Kyu-taik Sung's (2001) study on elder respect: exploration of ideals and forms in East Asia explored the different forms of elder respect practiced by the Chinese, Japanese and Koreans. A set of 14 forms of elder respect emerged and is explained by multiple action forms. The distinction between these forms highlights specific ways in which parents and elders are respected by East Asians. All three of these East Asian cultures have been much influenced by Confucianist ethical conception of filial piety. Streib (1987) explains that the values, norms and roles associated with elder respect persist for many generations.

It was noted in Kyu-Taik Sung's (2001) study that there were differences in terms of respect for men and women, women (mothers) tend to receive more care deference the men (fathers) in East Asian societies in general. This may be due to the symbiotic and unfettered relationship that children and mothers usually maintain in the East Asian family context. However, in other categories- mostly symbolic display of respect of linguistic, consultative, acquiescent, presentational, spatial, salutatory, and public respect- men tend to receive more deference than women. This seems due in part to the social structure in which men still dominate resources and social influence within and outside the family. Increasingly, the aged with resource and achievement tend to be treated with more respect, also in the form of symbolic display, than those without them.

This finding supports Streib's (1987) study on the differences between China and the United States in the terms of "traditional cultural patterns" e.g. "respect for the elderly and filial piety" of the Chinese and "low automatic respect" of Americans. Three major variables were selected to disaggregate the social and cultural context: (1) economic development, (2) social tradition, and (3) political controls, all of which have a profound influence on the situation of the elderly.

The findings showed that the security of Chinese elderly is based on the interaction between traditional family values, socialist ideology and material scarcity. The security of the American elderly results from an opposite set of variables: the interaction between capitalist ideology, material abundance, American family values of independence and self-reliance and a federal social security system. The United States and other developed societies have different mosaics from the Chinese. Americans generally value the main tenets of their culture: individualism, free choice, privacy, youth, sexuality and free enterprise.

Kyu-Taik Sung's 1994 study compared the filial motivation of Koreans caregivers with those of American caregivers and identifies the cross-culturally equivalent, as well as country specific types of filial motivations. The results yielded that both groups cited "affection/love", "repayment/reciprocity", and "filial responsibility/obligation" as major forms of motivation. Despite cultural differences, there are salient similarities between the two groups in the relative emphasis on these qualitative dimensions of parents care.

On the other forms of filial motivations, the two groups are dissimilar. For Koreans, filial respect, family harmony and filial sacrifice emerge as an outstanding form of motivation. These forms were not cited by the Americans, which shows a cross-culturally equivalent filial motivation as well as country-specific ones. The Korean-specific filial motivations-respect, family harmony and sacrifice-possibly reflect the impact of the strong influence of the Korean cultural tradition upon the minds and attitudes of the Koreans, the tradition associated with respect for the elderly, family cohesiveness, and dedication of self for family well-being, which together indicate a behavioral culture rooted in the values of filial piety. Clearly these dimension constitute "traditional cultural patterns" which Streib (1987) has outlined as a major determinant that influence the situation of the elderly.

Research by Whitbeck, Hoyt and Huck (1994) investigated the effects of early family experiences on the quality of the adult child-parent relationship and on the extent of instrumental and emotional support provided to the elderly parent by their adult parent. The analysis was based on adult children's reports regarding 1,135 aging parents. The findings indicated that the propensity of adult children to provide instrumental support (e.g., transportation and health care when parents were ill) and emotional support was indirectly affected by the influence of the early parent-child relationship on contemporary filial concern and relationship quality.

The emerging or changing trends of the culture due to modernization indicate a new trend, a move from collectivist society to a more individualistic society. In response to the changes, the younger generation is faced with a change in priority thus, resulting in changing family relationships.

A number of different theorists point to high levels of individualism in our society which works against the notion of responsibility and obligation to others (de Vaus, 1996). Among these is the postmodernist analysis of society which portrays a society that is highly fragmented, where the individual is supreme and morally sovereign, and the 'free floating' individual takes precedence over relationships and obligation to others. In this postmodern society, duty, obligation and responsibility to others give way to unbounded narcissism, values are abandoned in the pursuit of instant gratification, truth does not exist and there are no absolute rights or wrongs but only a relativistic morality (de Vaus, 1996).

David de Vaus (1996) in his article on children's responsibilities to elderly parents said that an analyses of the modern society explains why people do not see the elderly members as their responsibility. Confronted with this picture of relativistic, amoral, hedonistic individualism, it is hardly surprising that some people despair about the

willingness and capacity of future generations to care for elderly members of society (Johnson (1995) in de Vaus, 1996)

The theory of individualism vs responsibility is also supported in a study by Heying Jenny Zhan, Guangya Liu and Xiping Guan (2006) in Tianjin, China. The authors studied the attitudes of Chinese elderly parents and their family members towards institutional elder care. The findings indicated that the traditional patterns of filial care for elderly parents at home may be changing. At the macro-level, economic reforms, urbanization, and welfare reforms are forcing more individuals and businesses to be self sufficient and self-reliant. At the micro-level, families are reducing in size partially due to one-child policy, yet family member's responsibilities are increasing. As urbanization take place, the family size is reducing and geographic distance increasing, adult children are becoming increasingly unavailable for direct care at home due to work-related responsibilities. The majority of the elders (56%) expressed that their children's busy work schedule and unavailability for care were the major reasons that they moved into an elder home institution (ibid).

Lasch (1979) (in de Vaus, 1996) also paints a pessimistic picture of a society characterised by a loss of community and the rise of asocial individualism. The patterning of these behaviors is related obviously to the emphasis on youth and vigor, and the fragility of the marital and family ties is correlated with individual choice and sexual freedom (Streib, 1987).

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to

- (a) determine the Malaysian student's responsibility towards their elderly parents
- (b) determine if religious affiliation, place of residence, gender, age, ethnicity and living arrangements make a difference in the student's attitude with regard to their responsibility of supporting their elderly parents.

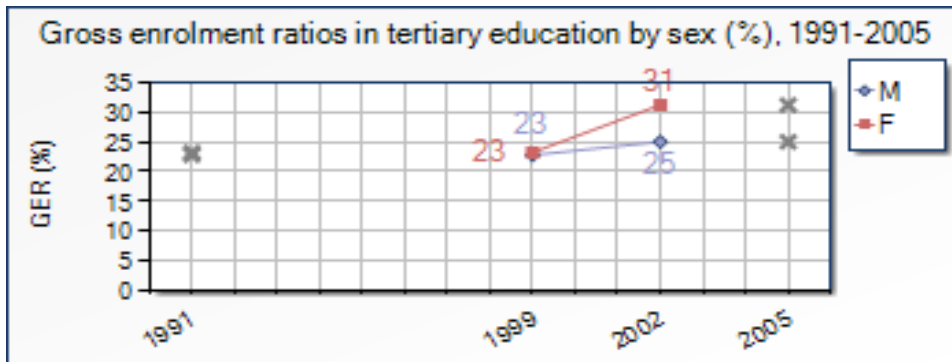
## **Methodology**

### **Sampling**

As this is an exploratory study, the targeted population for this study included students from both a Private Institution of Higher Learning (IPTS) and a Public Institution of Higher Learning (IPTA) in Malaysia. Due to the large numbers of such institutions in the country, the researchers focused on only two institutions of higher learning, Taylor's University College, representing the Private Institution of Higher Learning and University of Malaya, representing the Public Institution of Higher Learning for the sampling. A total of 400 students from both the institutions were sampled and randomly chosen. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), populations of over 100,000 require a sample size of at least 384 respondents.

96 failed to return the questionnaire or returned incomplete questionnaires. 306 questionnaires were completed and returned, of this number 152 were from respondents between the age of 16 to 19 years and 154 were between the ages of 20 to 26 of years. There were more female students (205) than male students (101). This reflects the current female dominated population in the universities in Malaysia. Based on the gross enrolment ratios in tertiary education (shown in graph 1, there were more females (31%) in tertiary education than males (25%) (UIS Statistics, 2005).

Graph 1 : Gross enrolment ratios in tertiary education by sex(%), 1991-2005



In terms of ethnicity, 123 of the respondents were Malays, 151 were Chinese, 17 were Indians and 15 of other ethnicities i.e. Bumiputera Sabah, Bumiputera Sarawak and others. The Indian ethnic group being the third largest ethnic group in Malaysia was under represented both in Taylor's University College and University of Malaya as such the findings cannot be used as a representation of the Indian community in Malaysia. This also applies to Bumiputera Sabah, Bumiputera Sarawak and other ethnic groups where, the number of students were too small and insignificant to be included in the analysis..

### Instrumentation

The questionnaire used for in this study was adapted from Dinkel (1944), Lane (1964), Drake (1957), Wake, B.S. & Sporkowski, J.M. (1972), and de Vaus (1996). In addition, the authors have also added 3 relevant statements (please see Appendix A) to the questionnaire based on the ideas and theoretical framework used in this study. Due to the cultural differences some of the questions have been reworded and 3 questions included to suit local conditions. The questionnaire was piloted to ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument (please see Appendix B).

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. Part A measured the general attitude of the students towards the elderly while Part B measured the filial responsibility of the students towards supporting their elderly parents. The third part measured the demographic variables of the respondents with a view to determine if a relationship existed between ethnicity, age, gender, religion and place of residence and attitude as well as responsibility towards supporting the elderly parents.

Part A consisted a total of 40 statements that measured the attitude of the students towards the elderly with a four point Likert scale ranging from unfavourable, not sure, favourable and very favourable. Part B consisted of 21 statements with a five points Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree which measures the responsibility of the students towards supporting the elderly. The analysis and discussion for this paper will only focus on Part B, the filial responsibility of students towards their elderly parents.

A pilot test was conducted. The instrument was pilot tested for its validity before it was used for the final data collection. Validity helps to determine the appropriateness of the instrument. It is concerned with the extent to which the instrument measures what it was designed to measure (Wiersma, 1991). A total of 43 students from both Taylor’s University College and University of Malaya were involved in the pilot test. All the statements in the questionnaire were checked for accuracy of language used and to ensure each statement in the questionnaire was understood by the respondents.

The greatest problem identified during the pilot study administration was that the students did not understand of some of the words used in the questionnaire. For example, they did not understand words like ‘grouchy’, ‘miserable’, ‘self-reliant’, ‘meddle’, ‘are in the way’, ‘are out of step with the time’, ‘quarrelsome’, ‘squabbling’, ‘turmoil’, ‘bossy’, ‘fussy’, ‘crabby’, ‘financially’, ‘keep getting in the way,’ ‘stubborn’ and ‘nuisance’. Following the comments from the students, the authors edited and rephrased the sentences and used synonyms or other words to retain the semantic significance (please see Appendix B). This was to ensure greater clarity and specificity and to help the respondents understand and interpret the statements clearly.

The reliability of the instrument was also checked before it was used for the final data collection. Reliability is a central concept in measurement and it basically refers to consistency; both internal consistency and consistency over time (Punch, 1998). Reliability was measured using the SPSS Cronbach alpha test because according to Miller (2002), Cronbach’s alpha is one of the most widely used and appropriate reliability tools used in descriptive research. The  $\alpha$ -coefficient for the pilot test was 0.801, but it improved to 0.867 for the final data collection (see Table 1). Such high  $\alpha$  coefficient (the maximum value for  $\alpha = 1$ ) indicated that the reliability of the instrument was acceptable.

**Table 1: Reliability statistics**

<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items</b>	<b>N of Items</b>
.867	.867	21

The questionnaire was administered in classrooms, where the authors explained the voluntary nature of the participation and assured them of the confidentiality of the information provided.

## Results and Data Analysis

The results of the study were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). These results were divided into five different categories based on the Likert scales used eg: 1 = Lowest responsibility, 2 = Low responsibility, 3 = Moderate responsibility, 4 = High Responsibility and 5 = Highest responsibility.

**Table 2: Mean score for the overall responsibility of the students towards the elderly**

<b>N</b>	<b>Valid</b>	306
<b>Mean</b>		77.3039
<b>Std. Deviation</b>		11.67381

Table 2 shows that the mean score for the overall responsibility of the students towards the elderly is high (77.3 out of a total of 105).

**Table 3: Categories for overall responsibility**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
<b>Lowest responsibility</b>	2	.7	.7
<b>Low responsibility</b>	7	2.3	2.3
<b>Moderate responsibility</b>	72	23.5	23.5
<b>High responsibility</b>	178	58.2	58.2
<b>Highest responsibility</b>	47	15.4	15.4
<b>Total</b>	306	100.0	100.0

The results in Table 3 also indicated that in general, more than half (73.6%) of the students have high responsibilities towards their elderly parents. This result is very encouraging. Only 3.0% of the students have low responsibility towards the elderly parents. This suggests that the sense of filial responsibility is still very strong among these students and that the concept of elder respect is deeply rooted in the social structure of Malaysian society, making the bonds of extended families strong.

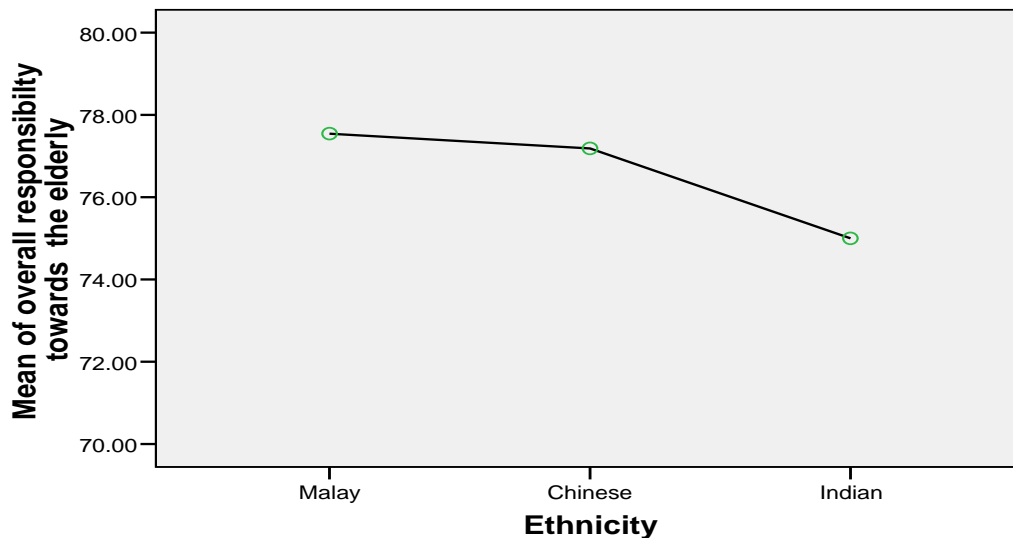
In order to determine if ethnicity, religious affiliation, place of residence, gender, and age made a difference in the students' responsibility towards the elderly, several statistical analysis such as independent t-test and analysis of variances were conducted.

**Table 4: Overall responsibility towards the elderly by ethnic groups**



Ethnicity	Mean	Mean Square	Standard Deviation	F	Df	p-value
Malay	77.5447		9.35130			
Chinese	77.1854	48.451	13.03912	.351	2	.704
Indian	75.0000		14.86186			

**Graph 1: Overall responsibility towards the elderly by ethnic groups**



The results of ANOVA test in Table 4 revealed that there was no statistical significant difference at  $p < .05$  in the overall responsibility of the students towards their elderly parents between the three ethnic groups  $p = 0.704$ . This was also illustrated in graph 1 where there was no significant difference in the slopes shown. Although the mean value for the Malay students (77.54) were highest as compared to the Chinese (77.19) and Indian students (75.00), the differences were not significant. This indicates that the overall responsibility towards their elderly parents was almost the same across the three major ethnic groups.

**Table 5: Overall responsibility towards the elderly by age groups**

Age Groups	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	p-value
Age 16 to 19	152	77.5066	12.37922			
Age 20 to 26	154	77.1039	10.97005	.301	304	.763

An independent sample t-test was conducted to identify if there is any significant difference between the two age groups in their overall responsibility towards their elderly parents. The results in Table 5 revealed that there was no significant difference in the overall responsibility towards their elderly parents between the two age groups;  $t(304) = .301$ ,  $p = .763$ . The mean values for both the age groups were almost the same. This suggests

regardless of the students' age, their sense of responsibility towards their elderly parents is the same.

**Table 6: Overall responsibility towards the elderly by gender**

Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	p-value
Male	101	76.0099	12.50959	-1.363	304	.174
Female	205	77.9415	11.21608			

The results of the independent sample t test in Table 6 revealed that there was also no significant difference when compared between males and females  $t(304) = -1.363, p = .174$  in the overall responsibility towards the elderly parents. Although the female students had a higher mean value (77.94, which indicates higher responsibility) as compared to the male students, such differences were insignificant. This suggests that both the male and female students involved in this study have a similar sense of responsibility towards the elderly.

**Table 7: Overall responsibility towards the elderly by place of residence**

Place of residence	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	p-value
Urban	220	3.8636	.74610	.471	289	.638
Rural	71	3.8169	.66138			

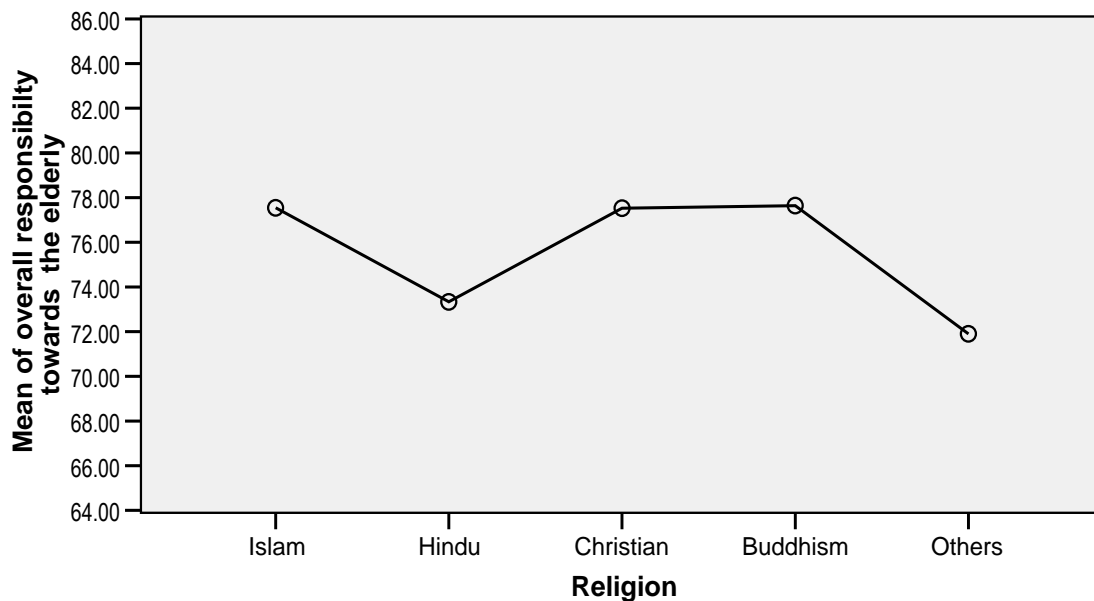
According to the modernization theory (Cowgill & Holmes, 1972), the more a society is modernized, i.e. the processes that cause societies to evolve from rural to urban, the lower the status of the elderly thereby putting a heavy strain upon the bonds of the extended family. However, based on the results obtained from this study, there were no significant differences between students who stayed in the urban and rural areas in the overall responsibility towards their elderly parents. The mean value for overall responsibility towards their elderly parents for students who stayed in the urban areas was very similar to those who stayed in the rural areas. This suggests that the process of urbanization did not affect the students' overall responsibility towards their elderly parents.

**Table 8: Overall responsibility towards the elderly by religion**

Religion	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F	df	p-value
Islam	123	77.5447	9.35130	.909	4	.459
Hindu	12	73.3333	17.47379			
Christian	40	77.5250	12.54936			
Buddhism	106	77.6415	12.83091			
Others	10	71.9000	14.32519			

Table 8 revealed that though the students involved in this study embraced different religions, they all have the same sense of responsibility towards their elderly parents. The results of ANOVA test in Table 8 indicated that there was no statistical significant difference at  $p < .05$  in the overall responsibility of the students towards the elderly when compared across the five different religions ( $p = 0.459$ ). This was also illustrated in Graph 2 where there was no significant difference in the slopes shown. These results suggest that regardless of religion, the students' sense of overall responsibility towards their elderly parents is high. This could be attributed to the philosophy of filial piety that each of their respective religions preach, where elder respect and care are stressed.

**Graph 2: Overall responsibility towards the elderly by religion**



**Table 9: Overall responsibility towards the elderly by living arrangements**

Religion	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F	df	p-value
Father only	5	73.80	9.23038	1.048	9	.402
Mother only	19	73.74	9.21859			
Both parents	258	70.65	11.46079			
Guardian	7	64.43	8.48247			
Grandmother	3	62.67	6.42910			
Both grandparents	2	72.50	4.94975			
Parent and grandmother	9	69.67	9.24662			
Mother and grandparents	1	91.00	.			
Stay alone	1	70.00	.			
Mother and grandmother	1	78.00	.			

Out of a total of 306 students the majority (258) are still staying with their parents. Only small numbers are staying with a single parent or with their grandparents. 5 students are staying with their father only while 19 are staying with their mother only. 7 students are staying with their guardian, 3 students are staying with their grandmother, 2 students staying with grandparents, 9 students staying with their parents and grandmother, 1 student staying with their mother and grandparents, 1 student staying alone and 1 student staying with their mother and grandmother.

Although the majority of the students stay with their parents and only small numbers stay with their grandparents, this has not affected the students' overall responsibility towards their elderly parents. Comparing the differences in mean value, students who are staying with their grandmother recorded the lowest mean value followed by students who are staying with guardians. Based on the sample used in this study, the differences in mean values recorded are statistically insignificant. This means that regardless of the living arrangements, it has not affected the students' overall responsibility towards their elderly parents.

## **Discussion**

Based on the findings of this research, it is apparent that students still believe that it is their responsibility to care for the elderly. Asian culture is strongly embedded with the concept of "filial responsibility" i.e. children are duty bound to care for the elderly. This is supported by Kyu-taik Sung's (1994,2001 and 2004) research on elder respect, which showed that people of East Asia live in a society influenced by the tradition of filial piety, where elder respect and parent care are stressed.

Family members intimately share experiences throughout all or most of their lives. Over time, family relationship histories evolve, made up of shared oral traditions regarding family events, relationship patterns and behavioural expectations (Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Huck, 1994). Malaysians being a collectivist society is rich with this tradition. This is supported by the findings of this research that indicated that 97% of the students believe it is the child's moral responsibility to look after their elderly parents under any circumstances or condition.

The demographic variables such as gender, age groups, ethnic groups, religion, place of residence and living arrangements did not influence the student's responsibilities towards their elderly parents. Although studies have shown that women in general account for 70 – 90% of the family eldercare, as the societal image of care giving is largely the female endeavor (Levande, Herrick & Sung, 2000; Miller & Cafasso, 1992), both the male and female students in this study have demonstrated almost equal responsibility towards the elderly. This is also in sharp contrast with the notion of 'care giving daughters' (Briggs, 1998) which emphasized that woman's experiences as key to understanding the gendered nature of family eldercare (Brody, 2004, Lang & Brody, 1983, Montgomery, 1992).

Such contrast in the results of this study could be due to the age groups involved. The respondents in this study were mainly students aged between 16 and 26 years old. Based on the research conducted by Daphna and Merril (2000), the norms of filial responsibility among the young adults were relatively stronger, when compared with those in their midlife

and old age. This was supported by Guberman (2003) where he suggested that this could probably be due to the fact that the young were far removed from any need to care for the elderly, and thus they were presented with a more idealistic view of care giving without considering the practical implications of what such responsibility entails.

The theory of modernization (Cowgill & Holmes, 1972) asserted that the process of modernization over the years have resulted in a lower status of the elderly and the declination of responsibility of the young towards the elderly. The results in this study have demonstrated no difference in the overall responsibility towards the elderly regardless of place of residence; urban or rural. This is an interesting contrast between the East and the West (Wong, 2005). In the eastern society, most of the older persons lived with their children. For example in Hong Kong, 56.8% of the elderly lived with their children, with or without their spouse, in 2001 (Fung, 2003), which is comparable to South Korea, Japan and mainland China (Arnsberger, Fox, Zhang & Gui, 2000; Campbell & Ingersoll-Dayton, 2000; Levande et al., 2000). Only 11.3% of all non-institutionalized older people lived alone in Hong Kong, compared with 30% in the United States (Administration on Aging, 2002; Fung, 2003). Such contrast between East Asian societies and the US has been attributed in part to the high reverence for filial piety in Confucian cultures (Wong, 2005).

The western values emphasise dominant themes such as youthfulness, equality, free choice and independence and in contrast, the eastern values of authority patterns of the elderly, the respect and deference of the young to the old, the close patterns of daily living throughout their lifetime interact in such way family units have a more cohesive quality. This reflects a kin-bound integration that is not found in more developed societies (Streib, 1987).

The traditional basis for elder respect is in the religious teachings of all religion. A significant aspect of religion is the sense of community, often implicit within religious settings is providing support and social integration (Fletcher, 2004). Support of aged parents is in fact, a form of family solidarity, that parents should respect and assist when in need. This is a provision of all religions (Dinkel, 1944). Similarly, Malaysians are very much influenced by the eastern culture bonded by religious beliefs and philosophies. All the major religions (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and etc.) in Malaysia preach the importance of filial piety.

The results in this study have indicated that despite the challenges faced by globalization and modernization, Malaysian students still abide by the eastern culture and philosophy of looking after and being responsible for their elderly parents. Even highly educated urbanites see strong family bonds as both natural and important and scoff at the notion that strong family bonds may not be very “modern”.

## **Conclusion**

This study signifies that the Malaysian society is still a caring society that is mindful of the way the elderly are treated. Malaysian children fully understand their responsibility and what is expected of them in terms of elder care. A need of a law to make it mandatory for children to take care of their elderly parents is uncalled for in Malaysia.

## Caveats and Suggestions

The sample in this study was only limited to students from 2 institution of higher learning (Taylor's University College and University of Malaya). Hence it is not a good representation of the entire student population in Malaysia. However, the sample size for this study was enough to represent the population (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970).

The other limitation is that the other major ethnic groups are not represented. This is because there were limited number of Indian students in both Taylor's University College and University of Malaya. Therefore, the Indian students were poorly represented in this study. Besides, the Bumiputeras from Sabah and Sarawak too were poorly represented in this study as there were not many Bumiputera Sabah and Sarawak students in both these institutions as well. Nevertheless, these samples were chosen as this was an exploratory study in Malaysia and it was an initial study to adapt the instrument from Dinkel. Future research shall focus on a bigger sample size that represents the population ratio in Malaysia as this will give a representative picture about the attitudes of the younger population towards the elderly.

Another limitation of this study was this study only focuses on the students but the other youth population at large was not targeted. In order to develop a better understanding on the filial responsibility of the young (youth) towards the elderly, future studies can include youth from different fields and from all walks of life.

## References

[Administration on Aging, \(2002\)](#). A profile of older Americans. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Arnsberger, P., Fox, P. Zhang, X. & Gui, S. (2000). Population aging and the need for long term care: A comparison of the United States and the People's Republic of China, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 15, pp. 207–227.

Briggs, R. (1998). *Caregiving daughters: Accepting the role of caregiver for elderly parents*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

[Brody, E. M. \(2004\)](#). *Women in the middle: Their parent care years* (2nd Ed). New York: Springer Publishing Company.

Brody E. M., & Brody, S. J. (1989). The informal system of health care. In F. Eisdorfer, D. A. Kessler, & A. N. Spetor (Eds.) *Caring for the elderly: Reshaping health policy* (pp. 259-277). Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

- Campbell, R. & Ingersoll-Dayton, B. (2000). Variations in family caregiving in Japan and the US. In: Susan Orpett Long, Editor, *Caring for the elderly in Japan and the U.S.: Practices and policies*. London: Routledge.
- Cantor, M. H. (1975). Life space and the social support system of the inner city elderly of New York city. *The Gerontologists*, (15) pp 23 – 27.
- Cicirelli, V. G. (1988) A measure of filial anxiety regarding anticipated care of elderly parents. *The Gerontologist*, 23(4) pp 478-482.
- Cicirelli, V. G. (1990). Family support in relation to health problems of the elderly. In T. H. Brubaker (Ed.), *Family relationship in later life*. (pp. 212-228). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Cowgill, D. O & Holmes, L. (Eds.), (1972). *Ageing and Modernization*. New York: Appleton Century-Crofts.
- Daphna, G. & Merril, S. (2000). *Norms of Filial Responsibility for Aging Parents Across Time and Generations*. LA: University of Southern California. Retrieved on 16 January 2008 from <http://paa2006.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=60228>
- Darke, T.J. (1957) Some Factors Influencing Students' Attitudes toward Older People. *Social Forces*, 35(3) pp 266-271.
- David De Vaus (1996) Children's Responsibilities to Elderly Parents. *Family Matters*, 45, pp 16-21.
- Dinkel, M.R. (1944). Attitudes of Children toward Supporting Aged Parents. *American Sociological Review*, 9 (4) pp 370-379.
- Finely, N.J., Roberts, M.D., & Banahan, B.F. (1988). Motivations and inhibitors of attitudes of filial obligations towards aging parents. *The Gerontologist*, 28 (1) pp. 73-78.
- Fletcher K. Susan (2004) Religion and life meaning: Differentiating between religious beliefs and religious community in constructing life meaning. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 18 (2) pp 171-185
- Fung, H. W. (2003). *Older persons in Hong Kong: Past, present, and future* (unpublished). Paper presented at the 21st population Census Conference Kyoto, Japan.
- Guberman, N. (2003). Beyond demography: The norms and values of family solidarity in theory and in practice. Paper presented at the 56th Annual Meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, San Diego: California.
- Hamon R.R. & Blieszner.R (1990) Filial Responsibility Expectations Among AdultChild-Older Parent Pairs. *Journal of Gerontology*, 45(3), pp 110-112

Heaton, J. (1999). The gaze and visibility of the carer: A Foucauldian analysis of the discourses of informal care. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, (21) pp 759 – 777.

Heying Jenny Zhan, Guangya Liu & Xinping Guan (2006) Willingness and availability: Explaining new attitudes toward institutional elder care among Chinese elderly parents and their adult children. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 20 pp 279-290

Krejcie, R.V. & Morgan, D.W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. *Educational & Psychological Measurement*, 30, pp 607-610.

Kyu-taik Sung (2004) Elder respect among young adults: A cross-cultural study of Americans and Koreans. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 18 (2) pp 215-230

Kyu-taik Sung (2001) Elder respect: exploration of ideals and forms in East Asia.. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 15 (1) pp 13-26

Kyu-taik Sung (1994) A cross-cultural comparison of motivations for parent care: The case of Americans and Koreans. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 8 (2) pp 195-209

Lane, B (1964). Attitudes of Youth toward the Aged. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 26 (2) pp 229-231

Lang, A. M & Brody, E. M. (1983). Characteristics of middle-aged daughters and help to their elderly mothers, *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 45 (1983), pp. 193–202.

Levande, D.I., Herrick, J. M. & Sung, K. T. (2000). Eldercare in the United States and South Korea: Balancing family and community support, *Journal of Family Issues* 21 (2000), pp. 632–651.

Logan, J. R., & Spitze, G. D. (1995). Self-interest and altruism in intergenerational relations. *Demography*,(32) pp 353-364.

Miller, A. S. (2002). Gender and religiousness: Can socialization explanation be saved? *American Journal of Sociology*, 107, 6, 1399-1424.

Miller, B. & Cafasso, L. (1992). Gender differences in caregiving: Fact or artifact?, *The Gerontologist* 32 (1992), pp. 498–507.

Montgomery, R. (1992). Gender differences in patterns of child–parent caregiving relationships. In: J. Dwyer and R. Coward, (Eds), *Gender, families, and elder care*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Punch, K. F. (1998). *Introduction to social research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. London: Sage Publication



Shanas, E. (1979). The family as a social system in old age. *The Gerontologist*, (19) pp 169 – 174.

Silverstein, M., & Parrott, T. M. (2001). Attitudes toward government policies that assist informal caregivers: The link between personal troubles and public issues. *Research on Aging*, 23(3), pp 349-375.

Streib, F.G. (1987) Old Age in Sociocultural Context: China and the United States. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 2 (1) pp 95-112

Wake, B.S. & Sporkowski, J.M. (1972) An Intergenerational Comparison of Attitudes Towards Supporting Aged Parents. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 34 (1) pp 42-48.

Whitbeck, L., Hoyt, R.D. & Huck, N.S. (1994) Early Family Relationship, Intergenerational Solidarity, and Support Provided to Parents by their Adult Children. *Journal of Gerontology*, 49(2) pp S85-S94

Wiersma, U.J. (1991). Validity of an assessment center in a Dutch company. *Gedrag en Organisatie*, 6, 474-82.

Wong, M. H. (2005). Gender and intimate caregiving for the elderly in Hong Kong. *Journal of Aging Studies*, (19) pp 375 – 391.

### Newspaper Cuttings

Act a blessing for the aged. *New Sunday Times (Prime News)*, Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2007 pg. 17.

Better Care for elderly. *New Sunday Times (Nation)*, Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2007 (pg 26).

Day-Care Centres for the Elderly Proposed. *New Sunday Times (Prime News)*, Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2007 pg. 9.

Tan Choe Choe, No More Abandoned Parents. *New Sunday Times (Prime News)*, Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2007 pg. 16-17.

Tan Choe Choe, Suppressing Human Trafficking. *New Sunday Times (Prime News)*, Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2007 pg. 8-9.

The Star online – News. It's logical to leave parents at old folks home. *The Star*, Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> April, 2007. Retrieved on the 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2007.  
<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2007/4/17/focus/17423520&sec=focus>



Ref. No.

--	--	--	--

# **HOW GRADUATES FEEL ABOUT THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARDS THE AGED?**

**SKET**  
**Seksyen Kokurikulum, Elektif Luar Fakulti & TITAS**  
**Bangunan SKET,**  
**50603 Kuala Lumpur**

**Note: We are grateful for the information provided and guarantee that any such information provided will not be disclosed.**

**DEMOGRAPHY**

Please tick (√) at the item most appropriate to you.

1. Gender :     Male         Female
2. Age : \_\_\_\_\_ Years
3. Ethnicity :  
     Malay         Chinese     Indian         Bumiputera Sabah  
     Bumiputera Sarawak     Others
4. Religion  
     Islam         Hindu         Christian     Buddisim     Sikhism  
     Others: Please state: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Place of residence:  
     Urban area (City)         Rural area
6. Where were you staying for the past 5 years:  
     Urban area (City)         Rural area
7. Who were you staying with:  
     Father only                       Mother only                       Both parents                       Guardian  
     Grandmother / Grandfather                       Both grandparents
8. How many brothers and sisters do you have : \_\_\_\_\_

# WHAT ARE YOUR ATTITUDES TOWARD THE AGED?

## PART A

*Encircle 1 = Unfavourable, 2 = Not Sure, 3 = Favourable, 4 = Very Favourable to indicate your answer.*

### Do you feel that persons over 60 to 65

- |  |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1. are careless about their table manners?               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. make bad patients when ill?                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. feel secure/safe?                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. are arrogant/like to control?                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. do not like changes?                                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. are cheerful?   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. get easily upset?                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. are easy to care for when ill?                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. respect a person's need for privacy?                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. are always complaining?                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. like to gossip?                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. like to be always looked after?                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. feel miserable/unhappy most of the time?             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. are good company?                                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 15. accept suggestions readily?                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 16. are critical/disapproving of the younger generation? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

17. seldom get upset?	1	2	3	4
18. feel other people must manage their business for them i.e. need to be taken care of?	1	2	3	4
19. feel that their children neglect/do not bother about them?	1	2	3	4
20. are fussy/choosy about food?	1	2	3	4
21. are very stubborn/do not change their mind?	1	2	3	4
22. are independent?	1	2	3	4
23. interfere in other people's business	1	2	3	4
24. are very helpful around the house?	1	2	3	4
25. are not secure?	1	2	3	4
26. approve/have a good opinion of the younger generation?	1	2	3	4
27. prefer to support themselves?				
28. are in the way and cause problems for others?	1	2	3	4
29. are easy to get along with?	1	2	3	4
30. find ways to take care of themselves?	1	2	3	4
31. do not keep up with the current trend/style?	1	2	3	4
32. are often sick?	1	2	3	4
33. are old fashioned?	1	2	3	4
34. are a nuisance (problem) to others?	1	2	3	4
35. are not useful to others?	1	2	3	4
36. are not useful to themselves?	1	2	3	4
37. like to give advice?	1	2	3	4
38. do not understand young people?	1	2	3	4

39. are lonely? 1 2 3 4
40. do not like working with young people? 1 2 3 4

**PART B**

*For questions below, please select the answer most applicable to you:*

*1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral*

*4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree*

1. Children are expected to support their aged parents A.1 B.2 C.3 D.4 E.5
2. Aged parents should understand they have to stand on their feet (be independent) without help from children. A.1 B.2 C.3 D.4 E.5
3. Parents have a right to live with their children if they wish to. A.1 B.2 C.3 D.4 E.5
4. Children should stay in close contact with their aged parents A.1 B.2 C.3 D.4 E.5
5. Parents should help grown children if they need money A.1 B.2 C.3 D.4 E.5
6. Children do not have to help their aged parents if it makes life difficult for the children. A.1 B.2 C.3 D.4 E.5
7. Children should excuse any problems that aged parents may cause at home. A.1 B.2 C.3 D.4 E.5
8. Children should put up with any inconvenience (difficulty/trouble) in their family life in order to help aged parents. A.1 B.2 C.3 D.4 E.5
9. Even if aged parents interfere a lot in family affairs and their marriage children should give them a home. A.1 B.2 C.3 D.4 E.5
10. No matter how crabby (bad-tempered), critical, and interfering aged parents are, children should give them a home. A.1 B.2 C.3 D.4 E.5
11. Children should be willing to give a home to an aged parent who is extremely jealous. A.1 B.2 C.3 D.4 E.5
12. Aged parents who keep getting involved in everything the children do should not be given a home by their children. A.1 B.2 C.3 D.4 E.5
13. If aged parents are unpleasant, children should not give them a home. A.1 B.2 C.3 D.4 E.5

14. If aged parents are a nuisance (a source of annoyance/trouble) in the home, children should refuse to open their house to them.      A.1    B.2    C.3    D.4    E.5
15. Children should not give a home to aged parents who are quarrelsome/ argumentative/difficult to get along with      A.1    B.2    C.3    D.4    E.5
16. Aged parents who interfere with family affairs should be put out of your home.      A.1    B.2    C.3    D.4    E.5
17. Children should not take care of aged parents if it results in quarrels and upset all the time.      A.1    B.2    C.3    D.4    E.5
18. Children should be willing to give a home to an aged parent who interferes and is a busybody      A.1    B.2    C.3    D.4    E.5
19. Children should be willing to share their home with their aged parents.      A.1    B.2    C.3    D.4    E.5
20. Parents who are financially well off can live on their own.      A.1    B.2    C.3    D.4    E.5
21. Parents who are healthy and fit do not require any assistance (help) from their children.      A.1    B.2    C.3    D.4    E.5