



## **ACTIVE AGEING AND HOUSING ENVIRONMENT CONCEPT AMONG ELDERLY MUSLIMS**

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### **Abstract**

Malaysia is expected to face ageing population in year 2030. This phenomenon is a challenge that hinders the provision of an excellent environment, including housing them. Active ageing refers to the process of improving the quality of life amongst the elderly in terms of health, social, physical, and environmental aspects. Provision of environment that is conducive and promotion of active surrounding highly influence the elderly to stay active. Nonetheless, literature pertaining to this particular topic area from the stance of elderly Muslims is in scarcity. Hence, the objective of this study is to determine terms associated to active ageing from the Muslim perspective and to identify the appropriate housing environment for them. Data collected from questionnaires distributed to 411 respondents residing in Johor were analysed quantitatively. The outcomes suggest that active ageing amongst elderly Muslims displayed positive effects on spiritual and religious activities. Upon providing housing for them, active ageing is essential so as to perceive active living and exceptional well-being.

**Keywords:** active ageing, muslim elderly, housing elderly, spirituality, religiosity

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Active ageing is a common term in a number of nations, such as Japan, United Kingdom (UK), and United States of America (US), which seem to better appreciate their seniors and the elderly contributions towards social, economy, and physical aspects for national development. As for the case in Malaysia, our elderly are not given much priority since they are always seen as incapable, weak, and helpless. Through provision of an environment that is conducive, the view towards active ageing among Malaysians is bound to receive a fresh perspective of living. Therefore, it is vital to classify those who experience active ageing since the environment and culture in Malaysia may differ from other countries, especially in terms of their spiritual aspect. The existing active ageing determinants do not exclusively specify the Muslim elderly. Thus, it is crucial to probe into this topic since the main focus of their activities may vary from other ethnicities in Malaysia. With that, this research introduces a new concept of housing for the elderly based on active ageing living perceived by various scholars, including the function of spiritual and religiosity domain in enhancing active living amongst Muslim elderly. Some aspects of the literature have detailed and tested these elements with least attention given to Muslim elderly (Tohit, Browning & Radermacher, 2012; Majid et al., 2013; Ahmad & Khan, 2016). Although Elsawahli, Ali, Ahmad and Al-obaid (2017) suggested the potential environment of active ageing, they failed to emphasise on Muslim. This study bridges the gap highlighted in a prior study by interpreting active ageing and housing features associated with spiritual and religious elements from the Muslim elderly perspective, apart from suggesting a housing environment that could potentially fit their needs and demands.

## **ACTIVE AGEING AND MUSLIM OVERVIEW**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defined ‘active ageing’ as the ‘process of optimising opportunities for health, participation, and security in order to enhance the quality of life as people age’ (WHO,2012). Accordingly, WHO categorized active ageing based on six determinants, which are health and social services, behavioural determinant, personal determinant, physical environment, social determinant, and economic determinant (Lai, Lein, Lau, & Lai, 2016). Active ageing is aimed at extending life expectancy and quality of life without giving burden to others. Meanwhile, the International Council on Active Aging (ICAA) illustrated active ageing as synonymous to “engage in life”. The engagement is towards wellness, emotional, environmental, physical, social, and spiritual, among others, regardless of age, socioeconomic status or health (ICAA, 2015). Successful ageing refers to multidimensional involvement that is inclusive of physical, functional, psychological, and social health (Phelan, Anderson, LaCroix, & Larson, 2004). In determining active ageing, the elderly should be physically active and indulge in biking, walking, and fitness trails, to name a few,

so as to gain strength, maintain flexibility, and increase endurance (An, S., Lee, Y. and Kim, 2013; Dahany et al., 2014; Sykes & Robinson, 2014). Paúl, Ribeiro, and Teixeira (2012) revealed that the economic determinants, physical environment, health, and social services are relevant to active ageing, which are also closely linked with personal needs, resources, and outcomes. Similarly, Boudiny (2013) supported this notion by encouraging participation amongst the in economic and social activities in order to remain active and independent. As for social terms, Bowling (2008) asserted that those ageing and are actively involved in leisure and social events are bound to increase their social relationships, apart from improving their active living.. Hence, being actively engaged in life events, such as participating in elderly club and community activities, enhances the health aspect amongst the ageing (Rattanapun, Fongkeaw, & Chontawan, 2009; Sutipan & Intarakamhang, 2017). Table 1 summarises the determinants and perceptions of active ageing outlined by varied scholars. Some essential criteria that interpret active ageing are social participation, health, physical ability without disability, as well as economy and financial stability.

**Table 1: Summary Active Ageing Determinants from Different Scholars**

Scholar's	*D1	*D2	*D3	*D4	*D5	*D6	*D7	*D8	*D9
Rowe & Kahn, 1997				/				/	/
Phelan et al., 2004	/			/		/		/	/
Mayhew, 2005				/		/			
Bowling, 2008	/		/	/	/	/			/
Rattanapun et al., 2009	/			/					/
McLaughlin, 2010.	/			/					/
Paúl et al., 2012	/	/	/	/		/			/
An, Lee & Kim, 2013					/				/
Boudiny, 2013	/	/	/	/	/	/		/	
Sidorenko & Zaidi, 2013	/		/	/		/	/	/	/
Dahany et al., 2014						/			/
Lai et al., 2016	/			/	/	/			
ICAA, 2015	/			/			/		/
WHO, 2012	/	/	/	/					/

*\*Notes: D1= Health, D2= Behavioral & Personal, D3= Economic, D4= Social Participation, D5 Independence, D6= Physiology & Mental Wellbeing, D7= Spiritual, D8= Productive, D9= Physical Ability*

For a Muslim to be considered successful in ageing, the sole act of praying is insufficient. Muslims should also focus on their health from physical and emotional aspects. This is because; good physical health is an important resource that can facilitate one's commitment to their spiritual activities as spirituality is fundamental for healthy ageing (Tohit et al., 2012). There is

continuous debate pertaining to the relationship between religion and health, however, it has been widely accepted that the overall well-being of people is enhanced by religious beliefs and practices (Ahmad & Khan, 2015). Despite being ill, lonely or depressed, the elderly, generally, will find the meaning and support of life spiritually (MacKinlay, 2006). The integration between spirituality, religiosity, and participating in religious activities has an effect on social, health and psychological well-being. It is important to comprehend this notion in providing better living for Muslim elderly since their religion and spirituality have a strong interconnection, hence appreciating the true meaning of healthy ageing (Abolfathi Momtaz, Hamid, Ibrahim, Yahaya, & Abdullah, 2012). A study by various authors revealed that being religious can increased life satisfaction and hinder depression, when compared to those elderly who disregard such activities. Religious activities may influence one's mental health and psychological well-being towards healthy living as a whole (Levin, Markides & Ray, 1996). Basically, religion referred as a personal or institutional system of organised beliefs, practices, rituals, or ways of worship; while spirituality describes the feeling of connectedness with a higher power or consciousness and the search for answers to questions about the meaning of life, of illness and other sufferings, of death, and the very purpose of life itself (Ahmad & Khan, 2016). This also reflects the interconnection between spiritually, religion, and their faith in promoting healthy life in adherence to Quran and Sunnah. Moreover, active ageing in Islamic principles has highlighted the relationship of the older with their neighbours by participating in society, such as visiting the ill neighbour, admonishing or greeting them in a good way, looking for each other's needs, and offer help when required (Al-Shabani, 2005). Ultimately, this encourages active interaction between neighbours and those social networks make the elderly feel better, healthier and, consequently, better equipped to deal with life stress (White et al., 1999). Overall, not many variances have been drawn between active ageing among western scholar and Muslim elderly in determining the essential elements and characters, such as in terms of social participation, health condition, and physical needs. As for Muslims, their spiritual is guided by religious belief that influences their way of living.

### **HOUSE FOR MUSLIM AND ACTIVE AGEING LIVING**

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a house is refers to shelter, which is a basic physiological need for humans, along with food, clothing, and water (Maslow, 1970). For Muslims, this function is expanded to spiritual needs. As stipulated in Surah Al Nahl 16:80 "And Allah has made for you from your homes a place of rest and made for you from the hides of the animals tents which you find light on your day of travel and your day of encampment; and from their wool, fur and hair is furnishing and enjoyment for a time." Indeed the use of house is referred to as its role in connecting human relationship and the creator in search

of blessing in life (Musa, Talib, & Dani, 2011). In precise, a house is a place for people to perform worship with comfort, in peace, and achieve spiritual needs. Islam also emphasises on the importance of home in attaining spiritual peace, hence the serenity, the space in home, the ability to accommodate, and the ability to respond to the spiritual needs of human beings are some major factors of a comfortable home (Manesh & Azizi, 2016). From Islamic view, a house refers to a place of expression and strengthening family relationships. According to Omer (2010), the house is believed to be part of the source of family happiness and fortune, together as a principle social institution and family development hub. As people aged, their house preferences may become more adaptable to modifications that can assist their declination of functional capacity in order to maintain a sense of well-being and independence (Oswald et al., 2007). A serene home environment should accommodate to both housing and health, which are significant in ensuring healthy ageing since most elderly are vulnerable to environmental challenges (Iwarsson, 2005). Similarly, the decision of housing preferences among the elderly was dictated by health and financial statuses (Ogilvie, 2011). However, their level of housing needs differs. The size of a house is closely associated with the size of its household. Large houses are difficult to maintain, especially when only one occupant is left once their children move out. The other argument is that housing for elderly reflects a higher attachment with the surrounding neighbourhood, such as a quiet neighbourhood, sufficient shopping facilities, proximity to downtown, and scenic environment (Kramer & Pfaffenbach, 2016). However, in terms of ability to own a house, the elderly nowadays possess some degree of wealth since the present generation is better educated and has greater financial resources, when compared to previous ones (Chan & Davanzo, 1996; Aini, Aziz, & Hanif, 2015; Kramer & Pfaffenbach 2016). They have different expectations in acquiring a house as they have experienced more education opportunities, emancipation, and participation (Jong, Rouwendal, Hattum, Jong, & Hattum, 2012). This phenomenon seems to affect their lifestyles and lead them to have varying housing preferences upon retirement. Residency is related to the existing sociocultural background of a person as mentioned by Rubinstein, and Medeiros (2003). The environmental gerontologists have asserted that as people aged, they increasingly become devoted to the place they live, simultaneously become more sensitive and vulnerable to their social and physical environment (Iecovich, 2014). With long-term duration residing at the same home, their attachment to familiarity, process, and housing is reflective of new meanings for those elderly (Oswald et al., 2007). This leads to the decision of not moving, but staying in the same pleasant environment throughout their lifespan (Aini, Aziz, & Hanif 2015). Hence, it is important to have such a good environment attached to elderly in housing choice. In discussing housing preferences among the elderly, the factors of sociocultural,

daily routine, health, and environment must be weighed in as they are closely linked together in providing suitable housing for them.

Overall, this study recognised the factors that can influence active ageing living through their housing environment. This is because; the elderly spends most of their time at home. Nevertheless, our national policy does not address the housing needs of the elderly and denies the needs of active urban elderly in the housing programmes specifically for Muslims. Hence, this study suggests the possible environment to encourage active living among those elderly by introducing viable housing environment that can fulfil their spirituality and religiosity aspects. Unfortunately, not many housing developments cater to this group, although Malaysia is known as an Islamic country where the majority of its people are Malays and Muslims. In response to this issue, several principles in Islamic values can be applied as the basis for developing housing suitable for Muslim living. As the focus amongst the elderly on religion may increase; preferences of faith and religion in housing environment and neighbourhood need deliberation.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to address the research objective, this research reviewed all the available literature from prior studies to identify the active ageing determinants and housing preferences amongst the ageing Muslims. The data collection had been mainly quantitative in nature obtained via questionnaire survey. This study used random sampling so that everyone was presented equal chance of being selected for this study. For the sampling, the researcher had to be precise in selecting the potential population. In this case, the researcher applied the Taro Yamane formula to use the size of the population in representing the respondents. The selected degree of confidence was 95% by assuming a 5% chance that the actual percentage was not within the selected confidence interval (Yamane, 1967). Smaller range gave greater precision in the end outcomes. Based on the total population in Johor with age 50 years old and above, it was determined that the total number of respondents for this study was at least 400. Hence, the detailed calculation of the sample size had been based on the following formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \quad * (n = \text{sample size}, N = \text{population}, e = \text{degree of confidence})$$

As for the location and sampling, this study focused on Johor as it has the second highest elderly population of in Malaysia. Respondents who were 50 years old had been selected for this study as they were bound to experience ageing and the preparation that they would need to think about to go through the next decade. As the WHO did not state the age number of active ageing, their determination was based on their ability to contribute to the nation's development,

thus this study did not limit on active ageing by pointing those in the young ageing group (60-70 years old), but instead incorporated a different ageing group of people. The sample examined the religiosity and ageing personality, as well as their connection to active ageing, specifically to housing and living environment. This research used the 4-point Likert scale (totally disagree, disagree, agree, and totally agree) to avoid respondents from giving neutral response. The choice to omit the neutral response may reduce bias and this study would be able to capture a clearer stance if the respondents agreed or disagreed with the statements. It also could speed up the process of answering the questionnaire as the scale had been limited to four options only. In fact, the survey in this study applied a relatively long questionnaire and the length may influence negative response rate; thus limiting the options may prevent inaccuracy of data collection (Cerin, Saelens, Sallis & Frank, 2006). The data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). For nominal data, they were analysed by using frequency table and category proportions by percentages, while the ordinal data were arranged in scale to evaluate the views of the respondents on active definitions, characteristics of housing, as well as spiritual and religious of housing elements, for Muslim living. The data were analysed using rank order median and standard deviation that assessed the level of agreement by the respondents.

## **RESULTS AND FINDING**

### *a) Demographic profile of respondents*

This section reports the results of the survey analysis. As presented in Table 2, the demographic information of the respondents is listed in terms of gender, age, marital status, employment, living arrangement after retirement, and house ownership. This profile demonstrates mostly equal participants in male and female respondents; the average age of the group was below 55 years old, mostly married, and employed. Although some of them appeared to be retirees from their previous job, they were still working subject to their capability of age and to fulfil their free time by operating small businesses, farming, being self-employed, and so on. In terms of living arrangement, Muslim elderly chose to stay with their children and partner, instead of staying alone. It shows that Muslim family bonding is still in strength, in fact, in Islam; the responsibility to taking care of elderly parents falls under their adult children.

**Table 2:** Demographic background

<b>Demographic variable</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	202	49.1
Female	209	50.9
<b>Age</b>		
50-55 Years old	148	36
56-60 Years old	101	24.6
61-65 Years old	70	17
66-70 Years old	51	12.4
71 Years old and above	41	10
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	331	80.5
Single	23	5.6
Widow	57	13.9
<b>Employment</b>		
Employ	203	49.4
Not employ/Retired	208	50.6
<b>Living arrangement after retirement</b>		
Alone	31	7.5
Couple without children	87	21.2
Couple with children	231	56.2
Children without couple	43	10.5
With other retiree	14	3.4
Others	5	1.2

*b) Housing for Muslim elderly*

Subsequently, this research investigated the housing criteria selected by the Muslim elderly in regard to active living. Table 3 demonstrates the different responses regarding housing impact on elderly people in physical and its surrounding, social environment, as well as spiritual and religious context. Most of them (91.5%) favoured small houses for better management and handling. The placement of houses should be close to the market for easy shopping. However, a handful of them (4.4%) strongly disagreed and disagreed towards the mentioned aspects. The other elements, such as sufficient facilities to all residents, prioritisation of safety and security, disability features, and housing location, were viewed as important elements to influence active and independent living among the elderly in their neighbourhood. The least mean score recorded for this physical attribute referred to provision of public transportation. As discussed in the literature review, since the younger generation of elderly is more educated, financially stable, and possesses high self-reliance, private vehicles were opted over public transport. As for housing from the social point of view, the respondents agreed that long attachment to the neighbourhood made them feel comfortable with the community, hence no intention to move. Their participation

in communities, neighbourhoods, and family is believed to assist them in experiencing active ageing. Meanwhile, housing from spiritual attributes indicated that maintaining privacy amongst the Muslims was strongly agreed with the highest mean score (mean=3.57) among others. Private space and time are significant in protecting the honour of elderly women especially, and make them feel comfortable to stay. Similarly, 208 respondents strongly agreed that the facilities and provision of space for religious activities are important for the comfort of their religious knowledge and education. Hence, the use of mosque or *surau* as the centre of community and perceiving more religious and charity activities are also significant amongst the elderly Muslims in maintaining Muslim belief and encouraging active living.

**Table 3:** The distribution on respondent’s feedback on housing context

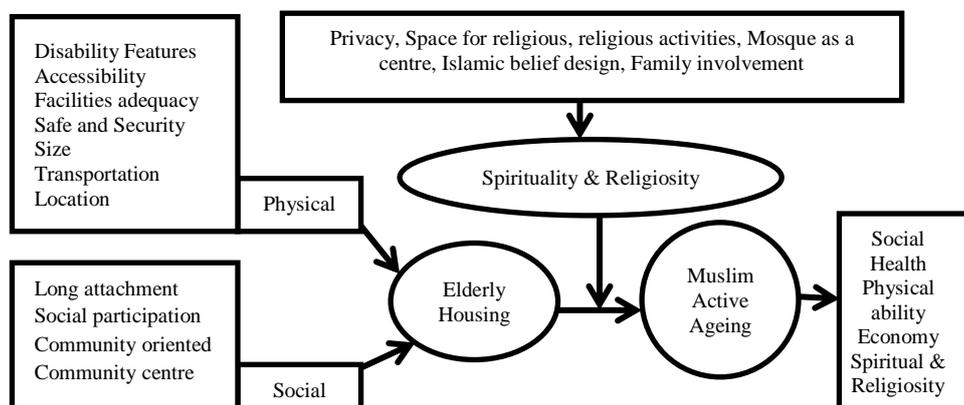
<b>Housing Physical</b>	SD	D	A	SA	MEAN
	%	%	%	%	
Small house is more manageable	0.2	8.3	54	37.5	3.29
Accessibilities to facilities	0.5	3.9	51.1	44.5	3.4
Adequate Facilities	0.2	4.6	54.5	40.6	3.36
Safe and security prioritisation	0.2	6.6	57.7	35.5	3.28
The provision of public transport	2.4	18.2	53.5	25.8	3.03
Disability feature	0	4.6	50.6	44.8	3.4
Housing location	1	18.5	49.9	30.7	3.1
<b>Housing Social</b>					
Community-based design	0	5.6	49.4	45.0	3.39
Social participation	1.7	1.0	48.9	48.4	3.44
Long attachment to the neighbourhood	.2	2.7	44.8	52.3	3.49
Community centres	1.2	1.2	59.6	38.0	3.34
<b>Housing spiritual</b>					
Space for religious activities	2.9	3.6	42.8	50.6	3.41
Mosque as a community centre	3.6	6.3	48.2	41.8	3.28
Designs based on Islamic beliefs	2.9	14.8	36.5	45.7	3.25
Private space for personal privacy	.7	9.2	21.9	68.1	3.57
The involvement of family	2.4	7.3	59.9	30.4	3.18
Religious activities & charities	1.7	10.0	48.9	39.4	3.26

\*Notes: SD = strongly disagree, D= disagree, A= agree, SA= strongly agree, n= frequency number

**DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION**

This study had implicated the housing for elderly in the context of physical and social environment, as well as spiritual elements through the lens of elderly Muslims. The physical attributes, such as smaller housing, accessibility, transportation, adequate facilities, disability features design, and location of housing, may influence active living as higher percentages were retrieved to support this idea. As such disability features and accessibility to the facilities,

merchandise, and clinic were considered as the most important physical factor in defining the home environment for active elderly. As mentioned earlier, the perception of the elderly towards home is no longer for the purpose of wealth, but for protection and sustainability of the present. As people aged, their ability is constricted. Therefore, it is necessary to design a home that can support their inability someday, such as large bathroom space, handrails, and non-slip floors. Similarly, respondents also support the idea of housing aspect in social contexts, such as social participation, community-based design, and establishment of the community centre, to make them feel more 'liveable' and support their ageing life. The main purpose of this social environment is to strengthen their social interaction and to improve their social bonding in maintaining their well-being with the community. In Islam, housing and neighbourhood should be portrayed as a social centre and to foster their relationships. Generally, the physical and social domains mentioned above are helpful in defining suitable housing for elderly. Hence, with additional spiritual and religious elements, it may make the term 'housing' for the active ageing living among Muslims achievable. Among the elements, the privacy attribute plays an important role as it protects the dignity of elderly women, aside from assuring that they stay comfortably while maintaining their social relation to others. Islam also stressed out on this particular privacy matters in housing arrangements prior to development of housing. Privacy, which can be in the form location of openings, sleeping places and separation area, windows, and so on, should be considered in the planning and design process. If the residents feel comfortable living in the house, they are bound to feel happier and healthier, thus an active life. There was also a higher percentage for providing religious space for religious activities and religious education. In normal circumstances, this space is usually equated with the use of the prayer room in the mosque or surau in their residential area. Meanwhile, some respondents thought that the space should be isolated and a special place for them to worship more comfortably. For example, Muslims can learn al-Quran in private with other Muslims in special spaces. If more space for religious activities is provided, more religious activities can be implemented and this will help them in becoming more active. Studies also showed that Muslim elderly were more attracted to religious activities, instead of other activities, such as leisure, exercise, and walking. Yet, there is no obligation to create isolation of this space because some mosques are equipped with special spaces for religious activities without disturbing the existing prayer space. Overall, this study had proposed a conceptual framework of this housing environment for Muslims active living as in Figure 1. This figure indicates the elements of physical and social environment contexts of housing associated with spiritual and religiosity that can perceive Muslims experiencing active living in terms of their social, health, physical, economy and spiritual needs.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual framework of Housing environment for active ageing Muslims

## CONCLUSION

Similar characteristics have been drawn in preserve housing determination from western scholars and from the stance of Muslim elderly. Most of the scholars only mentioned the physical environment and social factor when considering the housing design, while excluding the needs amidst Muslims. The fundamental idea of housing is to fulfil needs, and to offer a place that is safe and comfortable to occupy. Meanwhile, for Muslim elderly, housing appears to be not limited to fulfil the basic needs alone, but also emphasises on spiritual and religious activities, importance of strengthening relationship among family members and neighbours, modesty, and privacy. It was agreed that both housing and the environment can influence active living amongst the elderly. Nevertheless, the existing housing environment in Malaysia caters to the multiracial residents although Muslims make up the majority of the Malaysian population. Therefore, this study proposes suitable housing and environment by considering their special needs, such as accessibility, transportation, safety and security, elderly-friendly facilities, and community centres. In order to cater to their spiritual needs, the housing should provide the following: privacy, religious space, and mosque as a centre of community. The Muslim view towards a home is not only as a shelter and to meet basic needs, but it is also a place of worship. Therefore, the environment should reflect their will, especially in terms of the comfort of performing worship at any time. However, the extension of the housing genre, design, and implementation towards all the elements should be enhanced and addressed in the next research. Hence, phenomenological approaches in detailing the variables are recommended to look at their perspectives appropriately and the view from the stakeholder and developers as the implementer that needs to be deliberated precisely.

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