

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Sustainable Communities in Promoting Active Ageing among Older Persons: A Case Study of the Activity Centre for the Older Persons (PAWE) in Jenjarom

Nur Amalina Aziz¹, Yarina Ahmad^{2*}, Azizan Zainuddin³, Nor Azira Ayob⁴, Siti Zulaikha Mustapha⁵, Shima Shazana Mohd Ali⁶, Amanda Mazalan⁷ & Nor Suziwana Tahir⁸

Abstract

Malaysia is recognised an ageing nation, with over 7% of its population aged 60 years and above, a figure predicted to rise to 15% by 2030. This demographic shift calls for proactive measure to address the needs of the growing ageing population. While facilities and infrastructure are in place, the support from community is essential. The main objective of this study is to explore the personal experiences of older persons participating in the social activities offered at the Activity Centre for Older Persons (PAWE) in Jenjarom, Selangor. A qualitative research method was employed, involving older persons who were participating in PAWE to explore the drives behind the older persons' participation at the centre. The findings demonstrated that: (1) emotional connection; (2) mitigating loneliness; and (3) social solidarity as the major drives. It is learnt that sustainable communities hold immense potential in empowering older persons to lead active and healthier lifestyles. The study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, which emphasizes the need for safe, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban environments—an essential consideration for nations with rapidly ageing populations.

Keywords: sustainable communities, activity centre for older persons (PAWE), older persons, active ageing

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- 1 Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Johor Kampus Segamat, 85000 Johor, MALAYSIA.
 - 2 Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, MALAYSIA
* Corresponding Author (Tel: +60134462149, yarina@uitm.edu.my)
 - 3 Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, MALAYSIA
 - 4 Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Seremban 3, 70300 Negeri Sembilan, MALAYSIA.
 - 5 Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Machang, 18500 Kelantan, MALAYSIA.
 - 6 Ministry of Education, Block E12, Complex E, Federal Government Administrative Centre, 62604 Putrajaya, MALAYSIA.
 - 7 Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, MALAYSIA.
 - 8 Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, MALAYSIA.



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Introduction

In Malaysia, 15% of the population is predicted to be over 60 years old by 2030. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) projected that one in six individuals worldwide would be over 60 years old by 2030. This has urged the need for improved social infrastructure and a silver economy to prepare for a dramatic shift in the demographic profile of older people (Santani, 2024). Therefore, ensuring accessible, inclusive, and sustainable development for older people is crucial from a social and economic standpoint. The World Bank Group reports that, as of 2023, Malaysia's old-age dependency ratio is projected to reach 43.3%, surpassing the global average of 40%. A heavy reliance on the old-age ratio will place a great deal of strain on the working population (15–64 years old) to sustain the nation's ageing population (World Bank Group, 2024).

Promoting active ageing is one strategy that could potentially be employed to lessen such reliance. This will support older persons in maintaining an independent, active, and productive lifestyle well into old age, thereby mitigating social isolation, depression, and ageism (Guido et al., 2022). Numerous studies and evidence have demonstrated how the idea of active ageing can improve the quality of life (QOL) and overall well-being of older people (Ayoubi-Mahani et al., 2023; WHO, 2022; Guido et al., 2022). Forming sustainable communities in neighbourhoods demonstrates a promising trend of increased participation from older people within the community. For example, in Malaysia, there are over 164 Activity Centre for Older Persons (PAWE) establishments in almost all states, with over 150,000 older participants (Bernama, 2023). Participants are provided with basic amenities, facilities, and flexibility to plan their day ahead of engaging and leisurely activities in the activity centre.

Despite the growing emphasize on active ageing and the proliferation of facilities such as PAWE, the efficacy of these centres in meeting the holistic needs of older persons has received insufficient attention. Specifically, little is known about how older persons personally experience and perceive the social activities provided by these centres or how such participation affects their sense of well-being, community connection, and autonomy. This gap in the literature highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the lived realities of older persons who participate in PAWE activities, especially in smaller communities where resources and support structures may differ from those in larger urban areas.

Literature Review

Activity Centre of Older Persons (PAWE)

Malaysia's commitment to promoting active ageing is based on the Tenth Malaysia Plan (RMK-11) and the 2011 amendment to the National Policy of Older Persons (Aziz and Ahmad, 2019). These policy initiatives are part of a larger effort to foster sustainable communities—environments that promote the well-being of all citizens, including the older persons, by providing accessible infrastructure, social support, and engagement opportunities. In accordance with this goal, the Malaysian government established Activity Centres for Older Persons (PAWE) in 2012 (See Figure 1). PAWE's primary goal is to encourage older people to stay active and socially connected, thereby promoting long-term community development (JKM, 2018; Bernama, 2019; Harian Metro, 2024). Sustainable communities encompass more than just physical infrastructure; they also include social networks and services that improve people's lives.

A PAWE centre, according to the Department of Social Welfare (2018), is “an activity centre of older people, which are created and authorized by the Director General in a particular community to conduct programs and activities for older people.” This definition emphasises PAWE's dual purpose: it is both a community-based hub for social engagement and a platform for active ageing. By changing the name from *Pusat Jagaan Harian Warga Tua* (PJHWT) to *Pusat Aktiviti Warga Emas* (PAWE), the government moved the focus from just taking care of the older persons to providing support that encourages them to be active, following the ideas of active ageing (WHO, 2022) and sustainable community plans (Ayoubi-Mahani *et al.*, 2023).

In 2018, the Department of Social Welfare issued specific guidelines for PAWE centres, which went into effect on January 1, 2019. These guidelines prioritize good governance, accountability, and service quality, necessitating collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local communities. Membership eligibility is straightforward: participants must be at least 60 years old and capable of self-care. This is to ensure that PAWE centres serve older people who can benefit the most from social activities and shared facilities without requiring full-time medical or custodial care.

Malaysia's focus on developing sustainable communities through PAWE is reflected in the government's goal of establishing one centre in each parliamentary constituency by 2030, for a total of 222 centres nationwide (Bernama, 2019). This ambitious target addresses the expected increase in the ageing population, ensuring that supportive infrastructure and social programs remain accessible to older people across the country. By emphasizing proximity and accessibility, the government recognizes the role of local communities in

promoting active ageing, which is consistent with research showing that neighbourhood-level engagement can reduce social isolation and improve well-being among older persons (Guido *et al.*, 2022).

In theory, sustainable communities have interconnected dimensions—social, economic, and environmental—which collectively improve residents’ quality of life (WHO, 2022). PAWE centres exemplify this vision through: a. promoting Social Inclusion where PAWE uses organized activities and communal spaces to strengthen social bonds, reduce loneliness, and encourage active participation; b. encouraging active ageing by tailoring programs to older persons’ interests and abilities, allowing them to maintain physical, mental, and social engagement (Ayoubi-Mahani *et al.*, 2023); c. fostering Community-Led Support where collaboration among government bodies, NGOs, and local residents ensures that each centre addresses community-specific needs and resources, enhancing resilience and sustainability.

In essence, PAWE’s establishment is more than a policy initiative; it is a concrete manifestation of Malaysia’s strategy to foster sustainable communities through active ageing programs. By ensuring that older people have access to social, recreational, and developmental activities, these centres demonstrate how local policies can align with broader theoretical and empirical frameworks that emphasize the importance of inclusive, community-driven support systems for ageing populations.

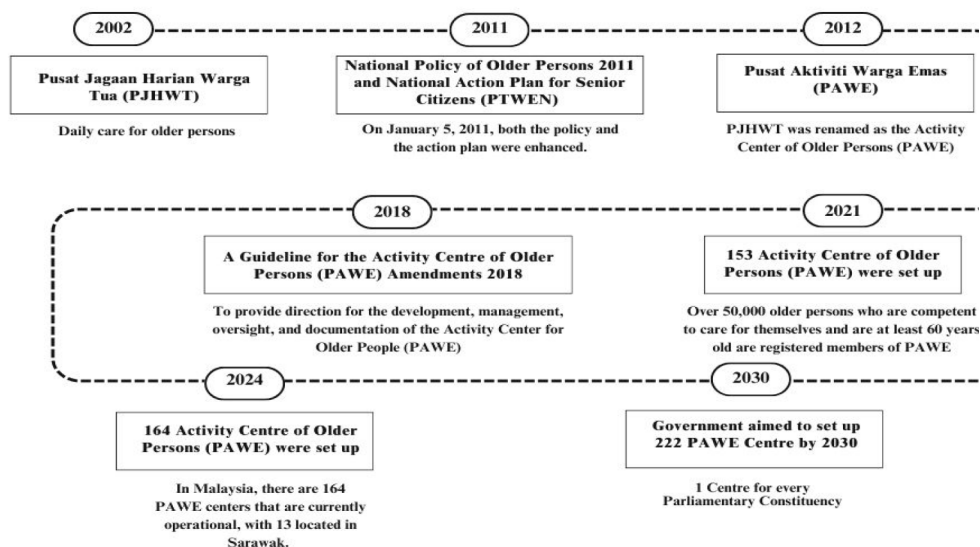


Figure 1: Self-Illustrated Roadmap for Establishing Activity Centres for Older Persons (PAWE) in Malaysia (Sources: Bernama, 2019; JKM, 2018; Harian Metro, 2024).

Global Focus from Active Ageing (2002) to Healthy Ageing (2021–2030)

Older people who face compulsory retirement are having difficulty adjusting to their smaller social networks, job loss and financial loss. According to Dang *et al.* (2022), a major life transition puts older people at risk for depression. The topic of changing roles of older people has long been discussed by Riley & Riley (1989), who faced the conundrum of insufficient social role opportunities and a mismatch between older people's capacities and strengths. Intervention from individuals and all social structures is necessary to help older persons readjust to their new roles. In 2002, the World Health Organization (WHO) introduced the concept of active ageing to combat ageism and social stigma. Active ageing refers to "the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security to improve people's quality of life as they age" (WHO, 2002). Definition of "active" includes on-going engagement in social, cultural, spiritual, and civic affairs, in addition to good physical health. The WHO, then, replaced the idea of Active Ageing in 2002 with a new Healthy Ageing (2021-2030) (WHO, 2020).

The shift in emphasis from the previous focus to health ageing stems from the lesson learned when the COVID-19 pandemic struck every country. Health has, therefore, gained priority, especially for older people. Prioritizing older persons' health is not a new concept. For instance, the United States has long maintained the Medicare program, which provides health insurance to people aged 65 and up (Centres for Medicare and Medicaid Services, n.d.; Glied, 2017). However, the WHO's Healthy Ageing initiative provides a more comprehensive, global framework that goes beyond medical coverage to address social, psychological, and environmental factors that promote an active and fulfilling life in old age. Healthy Ageing aims to build resilience and well-being among older persons in an ever-changing global context by incorporating lessons from existing national programs and recognising their diverse needs.

A key component of this approach is the preservation of functional ability, which includes decision-making, mobility, self-care, social connections, and community contribution. Both the earlier concept of active ageing and the subsequent healthy ageing framework emphasize the importance of multispectral action in ensuring that older persons remain a valuable resource for their families and communities (WHO, 2020).

Sustainable Communities

Sustainable communities are essential for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. In this context, they refer to both urban and rural

areas that are safe, inclusive, resilient, and environmentally sustainable (UN, 2015). These communities prioritize accessibility and inclusivity, allowing diverse populations—including the older persons—to thrive. They also encourage resource efficiency and environmental stewardship through green infrastructure and practices while attempting to strike a balance between modernization and cultural preservation.

The concept of sustainable communities is based on the need for supportive environments that cater to the unique needs of older people. Living in safe, accessible, green, and inclusive neighbourhoods can significantly improve the well-being of older people, who frequently face health, financial, and social challenges. To assist older persons in dealing with harsh conditions and extreme weather, the design of housing, activity centres, and public spaces should include features such as temperature regulation (Gaynor, 2020). Furthermore, government agencies, housing developers, and other stakeholders can work together to ensure that both physical infrastructure and community support systems offer older persons the emotional support, companionship, and sense of belonging they require.

Communities play an important role in improving the quality of life for older people by encouraging social interaction and decreasing isolation. Marzuki *et al.* (2023) noted that companionship, whether from friends, neighbours, or other community members, can help older persons cope with fears and difficult circumstances. In contrast, isolation has been linked to an increased risk of depression and dementia (Lowers *et al.*, 2023; Guarnera *et al.*, 2023). Melchiorre *et al.* (2024) demonstrate that friendships and support systems outside of family are critical for reducing loneliness, as older people may not always locate solace in family relationships. Suragarn *et al.* (2021) suggest interventions such as participating in various activities and forming new social networks (in person or virtually) to improve social contact among older people, giving them a sense of familiarity and belonging (Chen & Zhang, 2022).

Akhter-Khan *et al.* (2023) present a framework for understanding older people's social expectations, focusing on five key needs: (1) giving back to the community; (2) feeling important and valued; (3) sensing others' concern and dependability; (4) having access to social interaction; and (5) sharing significant experiences and interests. Meeting these expectations can help older people maintain an active lifestyle through meaningful social connections as they age.

By integrating green infrastructure, inclusive design, and robust social networks, sustainable communities can better serve older persons. In doing so, they align with the goals of SDG 11—promoting resilience, inclusivity, and environmental stewardship—while ensuring that older people maintain an active and independent lifestyle supported by both the physical environment and the social fabric of their communities.

Hence, this study fills that gap by focusing on the personal experiences of older people

who participate in social activities at the Activity Centre for Older People (PAWE) in Jenjarom, Selangor. By investigating their motivations, interactions, and the benefits and challenges they face, the study hopes to provide concrete insights into how sustainable community practices affect older persons' quality of life. These findings are critical for guiding improvements in active ageing programs and ensuring that sustainable community development meets the unique needs of Malaysia's ageing population.

Methodology

A qualitative research approach was employed in this study, which involved conducting in-depth interviews with older persons. The main purpose of this study is to investigate, using a phenomenological lens, the lived experiences of older people who participate in social activities offered by the Activity Centre for Older People (PAWE) in Jenjarom, Selangor. This approach allows the participants to reflect on the events and how they were experienced (Klinke & Fernandez, 2023; Neubauer *et al.*, 2019). In relation to this context of study, the lived experience of older people refers to the subjective meaning they attach to their daily interactions, activities, and sense of belonging within the environment provided by the PAWE.

Older persons often feel more at ease engaging in informal, relaxed conversations when discussing their experiences at the activity centre. Additionally, many older persons may need extra time to recall details or fully articulate their memories and past encounters. This reflective process is important, as it helps them not only connect with their personal history but also provide richer, more nuanced insights into how the activities impact their lives.

In addition, the study incorporated observation to corroborate and enrich the data gathered from the interviews. By observing the participants in their natural setting, the researcher could identify nonverbal cues—such as expression during the interview session (body language, facial expressions, and gestures). The social centre's physical layout and facilities, mode of transportation—that provided insights into the participants' genuine feelings. This approach not only helped validate or refine the information shared during interviews but also offered a more holistic perspective on how older persons experienced the activities.

Data Collection

Data was collected at the Activity Centre for Older Persons (PAWE) in Jenjarom, Selangor. The Department of Social Welfare (JKM) approved the data collection before an appointment was set up with the key person of the PAWE centre at the selected location in Selangor. The key person helped choose informants who satisfied the

inclusion criteria, including: (1) individuals 60 years of age and older; and (2) register as a participant at the PAWE centre. With the assistance of the supervisor in charge of the PAWE centre, the participants who involved in this study were arranged and gathered at a convenient location for the interviews inside the PAWE centre. Those informants who experienced cognitive impairment were excluded from this study.

The interview protocol for this study was carefully designed to capture rich, detailed accounts of older persons' motivations, experiences, and engagement in social activities at the PAWE centre. Drawing on a phenomenological approach, the questions were intentionally framed to elicit open-ended responses. This enables participants to share their personal experiences in their words. The protocol encompasses inquiries about the drivers that encourage them to join social activities, the specific activities they participate in at the PAWE centre, and how they became involved—whether through suggestions from children, friends, or other sources. In addition, probing questions were developed to examine deeper into significant points raised during the interviews, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives.

The duration of the in-depth interviews, which ranged from 20 to 45 minutes, was influenced by the participants' individual comfort levels and willingness to share. As older persons, some participants preferred to provide concise responses, requiring less time to express their thoughts. Others, who were more talkative or felt particularly comfortable discussing their experiences, naturally took longer to elaborate on their stories and reflections. This variability in communication styles and levels of engagement contributed to the wide range in interview lengths.

Sample Size and Data Saturation

In line with Morse's (1994, 2000) recommendations for phenomenological research, this study engaged six older persons who participated in social activities at PAWE. Although the sample comprised only six informants, their detailed narratives provided a wealth of first hand insights into the lived experiences of older persons in these activities. This depth of information was sufficient to fulfil the core objective of phenomenological inquiry: to capture the essence of the participants' experiences.

Data saturation was achieved when no new or unique themes emerged in subsequent interviews (Hossain *et al.*, 2024). As each interview progressed, the researcher carefully compared emerging patterns and categories across the participants' accounts. Once it became evident that the same themes were repeating—without any additional discoveries or contrasting perspectives—the dataset was considered saturated. Thus, despite the relatively small sample, the rich, in-depth accounts from these six older persons were both comprehensive and reflective of the broader phenomenon under investigation.

Data Analysis

The data gathered for this study were transcribed verbatim to ensure that every detail of the participants' stories was accurately captured. This meticulous transcription process entailed converting audio-recorded interviews into written text while preserving any words, pauses, or nonverbal expressions that could convey additional meaning. By transcribing verbatim, the study preserved the richness of the original conversations, which is critical for maintaining the integrity of the participants' stories.

This study's data was analysed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method that is well-suited for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns in data. Dawadi (2020) suggested six stages for conducting a thematic analysis: (1) familiarize yourself with the data; (2) create preliminary codes; (3) look for themes; (4) evaluate themes; (5) define and rename themes; and, finally, (6) prepare a report outlining the results.

Thematic analysis provided a structured yet adaptable framework for gaining a thorough understanding of the lived experiences of older people at PAWE. In the context of this study, the themes that emerged from the findings were analysed and managed by the NVivo software (version 14.0) to ensure that the interpretative process was thorough and reflected the complexity of the data. This analysis entailed carefully reading and re-reading the transcripts, coding text segments that were relevant to the study's research objective, and categorising similar codes.

The findings were presented according to the themes and subthemes that emerged from the analysis. These themes provided an organising framework for the study's findings, allowing for a clear and coherent narrative that conveyed the key insights derived from the data. Each theme was thoroughly discussed, with subthemes providing additional levels of comprehension and context.

Ethical Consideration

This study was conducted in accordance with the guidelines and standards established by the UiTM Research Ethics Committee (UiTM REC). Approval was granted on September 10, 2024, under the reference number 600-TNCPI (5/1/6) REC/09/2024(ST/MR/185). This ethical clearance ensured that all research procedures upheld the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

During the data collection, the interviewers provided clear explanations of the research objectives, methods, and potential risks and benefits to the participants. Informed

consent was obtained, ensuring that each participant understood their voluntary involvement and the right to withdraw at any point without consequence. Additionally, measures were established to safeguard confidentiality and anonymity, such as assigning pseudonyms or identification codes and storing data securely. By adhering to these ethical protocols, the study respected the dignity, rights, and well-being of older persons who shared their personal experiences in the course of the research.

Findings

The findings of the study focused on the demographic profiles of six participants, including components like age, gender, marital status, mode of transportation, health condition and how involved they were in the activity centre of older persons (PAWE). Key themes emerged from the qualitative data, which were explored through the statements of informants and 1 key person. Additionally, a few stories from the informants were included to enrich the study's insights.

Table 1: The demographic profile of older persons who participated in the PAWE centre

No	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Mode of transportation	Health Conditions	Attendance patterns	Duration of the activity centre visit
1	M1_72	Male	72	Married	Bicycle	Hypertension	5 times a week	Over 10 years
2	F2_74	Female	74	Married	Using a carpool	Not stated	5 times a week	Over 10 years
3	M3_78	Male	78	Married	Motorcycle	Heart disease, Gout	5 times a week	Over 10 years
4	M4_60	Male	60	Married	Using a carpool	Had an accident, and wheelchair use	3-4 times a week	Not stated
5	F5_60	Female	60	Divorcee	Car	Diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and wheelchair use	4-5 times a week	Not stated
6	F6_60	Female	60	Married	Car	Hypertension and diabetes	4-5 times a week	Less than 1 year

Six older persons were interviewed, with three male informants and three female informants making up an equal percentage of each gender. Three of the informants fell into the young-old age group (60–64 years old), two of the informants into the middle-old age group (65–74 years old), and one informant into the old-old age group (75 years and above). Each informant registered as a participant at the PAWE centre and began attending there regularly, four or five times a week. All informants resided in a neighbourhood close to the PAWE facility, and they all commuted there by car, bicycle, motorbike, and carpooling. According to a key person, the supervisor in the PAWE centre, most of the participants are drawn to visit and register at the centre after hearing about it through word-of-mouth. Furthermore, a key person from the PAWE centre was interviewed to obtain her opinions on the participants' daily activities and recommendations for enhancing the centre. In addition to conducting observations during the interview, the key persons also gave tours of the centre's amenities.

Table 2: The observation results

Items	Criteria	Observation
Expression in interview settings	displayed hesitation, pause, or any other kind of expression	At the activity centre, one male informant was well-known for being bright (observed in his facial expression) grinned and laughed throughout the interview.
The social centre's physical layout and facilities	Spaces and amenities, like dining rooms and classrooms, that are available to older participants	Amenities offered at the Activity Centre of Older People (PAWE) include a gym, dining area, lounge, kitchen, garden, and area for activities. There are also restrooms and showers, karaoke machines, and areas for participants to relax.
Mode of transportation	Take the family carpool, bicycle, own vehicle, or have the children drop participants off at the activity centre.	The majority of participants travelled to the nearby activity centre by bicycle.

Main Themes of the Study

Three main themes emerged from the qualitative data: (1) emotional connection; (2) mitigating loneliness; and (3) social solidarity.

Emotional Connection

All of the informants acknowledged that they had visited the PAWE centre regularly. Nevertheless, what was surprising was that the majority of respondents had been coming for more than ten years. The informants had been visiting the PAWE centre for many years, so they had grown familiar with the facility and felt content. Because they visited the facilities from morning to evening, four or five times a week, the informants regarded them as a second home. Therefore, the PAWE centre has become the first destination for informants and has added significant value to their lives.

“[...] every day I attend this centre. This is my home. This is my second home (M1_72)

I come here every day. 5 times a week. 2 days off. It has been 10 years. If I have nowhere to go, I have friends to talk with” (F2_74)

“[...] 5 times a week. It has already been over 10 years. If I do not come here, it will be hard. I think if I come to the centre, I can tell stories. After I finish telling stories, then I go home”. (M3_78)

“[...] 3 to 4 days in a week. Come here to talk with friends”. (M4_60)

“[...] I come here every day, from Monday to Friday. I have forgotten how long I have come here”. (F5_60)

“[...] Sometimes I come here for 4-5 days. It has already been 1 year since I have been here. They are all like my family. When we eat, everyone is here”. (F6_60)

The majority of older people who attend the PAWE Centre spend meaningful social time with their friends, a practice corroborated by a key person at the centre. Many older persons find themselves alone at home once their children leave for school or work. To avoid isolation, they come to the PAWE Centre to engage in activities and socialize with peers. The key person also noted a significant increase in participation compared to when the centre was first established, at which time it only served six people. Today, newcomers arrive voluntarily, seeking the supportive environment and companionship offered by the centre.

Mitigating Loneliness

The majority of informants emphasized how empty and lonely their own homes made them feel. Several informants stated that once their children start working, they will be left on their own. The feeling of emptiness gets worse by waiting for the day to pass without someone to chat with or something worthwhile to get done. Therefore, they manage to overcome their feelings of emptiness and loneliness by visiting the PAWE centre.

“[...] Come here and sleep. Staying home is difficult”. (M4_60)

“[...] If staying at home... Just endure staying here. Come here and sleep... at home. Even staying at home is difficult. It's lonely at home. There's no one at home”. (M3_78)

“[...] Come here... you can talk with friends. Coming here is much happier, have lots of friends and we are chatting. At home, there's just one person. At home, my only son working”. (F5_60)

“[...] Come here, there are many friends. Because I am retired. I am happy now. I have the time. I enjoy coming here. The days pass quickly, it's happy here. Come here, no more high blood pressure. I'm at ease. High blood pressure has decreased. I take medicine”. (M1_72)

“[...] I married someone from Singapore. I have returned to Malaysia. I'm old now and came back here. Renting here, there are many friends. I want to rest. It's happy coming here, I can talk with friends like this. At home, I am alone. Staying at home, there's nothing to do”. (F6_60)

For example, the informant M1_72 mentioned how much he enjoyed going to the centre regularly and expressed gratitude that it had managed to lower his blood pressure. Despite his old age, informant M1_72 appeared early in the morning to retrieve the keys and close the centre's gate. When asked about his day at the PAWE centre, he expressed

his thoughts with great enthusiasm, demonstrating his lively personality and optimistic outlook. Without expecting anything in exchange for his good work, he felt obligated to take care of the centre and his similar-aged friends. The observation's outcome also showed how content this informant was to discuss his regular activities at the centre. Another noteworthy story is about informant F6_60, who moved from Singapore to Malaysia after being split up from her family. Her newfound happiness came from regularly seeing her friends at the activity centre after learning about the PAWE centre. She would be alone at home without her children, who worked and resided in Singapore if she does not visit the PAWE centre.

SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

The majority of informants focused on their regular activities at the PAWE centre, such as engaging in light-hearted activities, cooking and sharing meals with others, entertaining themselves with karaoke, spending time conversing with others, and reading newspapers to stay informed about current events. An instructor of English classes also visited the centre to teach those who are interested in improving their language abilities. In addition, a few informants went out and bought food so they could prepare their friends' favourite meals, which they would then share at the centre.

“[...] Go here, there is an English class. The teacher comes today, on Friday. Sometimes there's exercise. Chatting with friends talks like this. Sometimes there's singing and exercise, later at around 5 pm, there's singing (laughs). Sometimes, we buy groceries to cook for people to eat. Sometimes, I read the newspaper during rest time. There's air conditioning, so it's enjoyable. Sometimes, I play a *Mahjong*”. (F6_60)

“[...] Exercise, singing. In the morning, I come at 8 to have breakfast. Later at around 12 or 1, I go back. Sometimes, I walk around Tesco or Jusco strolling. I keep myself healthy. Later I sleep for about 2 hours, then after waking up, come here to the centre to sing. Busy here, in the morning, I buy a few thing to eat with everyone”.
(M1_72)

“[...] Exercise. Chat with friends. Cooking”. (F2_74)

“[...] I come here, chat and share stories. When the stories are finished, I go

back home. I read the paper and sometimes exercise here". (M3_78)

"[...] Just exercise here. Come here, you can talk with friends. I had a stroke and can't do much exercise, or physical activity". (F5_60)

"[...] Chat. Just chatting". (M4_60)

In addition, key persons claimed that older people can benefit from the PAWE centre in several ways, including social, health, and economic advantages. Most importantly, they can relax and clear their minds at the centre with friends of a similar age. For instance, F5_60 had a stroke, which made it difficult for her to move around without a wheelchair. Despite her inability to engage in physical activities such as exercise, she continues to visit the centre. By interacting with others at the PAWE centre and talking with friends, she can get relief from her worry and anxiety.

DISCUSSIONS

Three key themes emerged from the qualitative data. These are emotional connection, mitigating loneliness, and social solidarity. These themes reflect the PAWE centre's central role in promoting the emotional and social well-being of older persons.

Emotional Connection

In term of "emotional connection", the findings revealed that all informants reported visiting the PAWE centre on a regular basis—some for more than ten years—indicating a strong emotional connection to the centre. Many described it as a "second home" where they spent the majority of their weekdays conversing, participating in activities, and providing mutual support. Some of the participants expressed how being at the centre helped them fill their time meaningfully and gave them a sense of belonging. The centre is more than a meeting place; it is also vital to their social and emotional lives.

These findings are consistent with broader research on the importance of emotional support for older persons. For instance, Ayoubi-Mahani *et al.* (2023) emphasize that psycho-emotional support—which includes affection, care, attention, and kindness—is an essential requirement for older people. Similarly, Akhter-Khan *et al.* (2023) see the desire for meaningful community engagement and shared experiences as critical in older persons' pursuit of emotional well-being. Participants' long-term involvement with

the centre demonstrates how sustained social environments can foster deep emotional ties, echoing the idea that older people thrive in consistent and familiar community settings.

Mitigating Loneliness

Further, a common theme among participants was a desire to “mitigate loneliness” and isolation at home, especially when children or family members were away at work or school. Several informants described feeling “empty” or “lonely” when left alone, which led them to seek companionship at the centre. For example, one of the participants explained that chatting with friends at the centre helps her days pass quickly, alleviating the negative emotions that come with being alone at home. Similarly, another participant stated that regular visits to the centre helped him reduce stress and even improved his physical health.

Lowers *et al.* (2023) and Campbell *et al.* (2023) discovered that strong social networks can reduce the risk of depression, anxiety, and cognitive decline in older persons. Chen and Zhang (2022) and Suragarn *et al.* (2021) emphasize the importance of community-based activities in providing older people with a sense of purpose and connection. The current study’s findings support these conclusions, demonstrating that regular interactions at the PAWE centre are an effective coping mechanism for loneliness. Furthermore, the fact that some participants experienced improvements in physical health (e.g., lower blood pressure) is consistent with Frampton *et al.* (2024), Juan (2024), and He *et al.* (2024), who link social engagement and light physical activities to improved well-being and reduced stress.

Social Solidarity

Finally, in terms of “social solidarity” the findings of this study revealed that the participants sought companionship and took part in collaborative activities such as cooking meals to share, taking English classes, exercising together, singing karaoke, and reading newspapers. The data show that collective involvement fosters a sense of unity and mutual support, which can be described as social solidarity. For example, one of the participants mentioned purchasing groceries to cook for others at the centre, demonstrating a desire to contribute to the communal experience. The combination of structured activities (e.g., language classes, group exercise) and spontaneous social gatherings (e.g., chatting, singing) emphasizes the centre’s role as a hub for social

solidarity.

Social solidarity among older persons is linked to stronger community ties and a greater sense of self-worth are associated with older persons. Gagliardi et al. (2020) emphasize that taking on communal responsibilities, such as caring for shared spaces or organizing group activities, can help older people remain resourceful and engaged in their later years. Contributing to meal preparation or assisting with centre operations (as noted by one of the participants, who arrives early to unlock the gates) helps older people feel more purposeful and connected. These activities are consistent with the broader idea that social participation fosters resilience, combats ageism, and promotes healthy ageing, as demonstrated by numerous gerontological studies.

Overall Discussions

The findings demonstrate how the PAWE centre serves as a microcosm of a sustainable community for older persons. Its regular social activities, emotional support, and collaborative culture help participants live an active and a fulfilling lives. This approach is consistent with the idea that sustainable communities must provide supportive environments tailored to the needs of older populations (United Nations 2015). The centre effectively combats social stigmas, loneliness, and anxiety by providing regular opportunities for emotional connection, collective engagement, and social solidarity.

Older persons who regularly visit the PAWE centre have developed strong coping mechanisms against isolation and negative emotions. Planning ahead for daily activities or communal tasks promotes anticipation and motivation, both of which are essential for maintaining mental and emotional health. These findings support previous research indicating that light exercise, social interaction, and community involvement can reduce stress and improve psychological well-being (Frampton *et al.*, 2024; Juan, 2024; He *et al.*, 2024).

The study also emphasizes the importance of alternative social support networks, particularly when family members are geographically separated or preoccupied with work. This conclusion is consistent with research by Lowers *et al.* (2023), Campbell *et al.* (2023), and Chen & Zhang (2022), which emphasize the importance of expanding social networks beyond immediate family to combat loneliness, ageism, and related health challenges. The PAWE centre provides older people with a type of “extended family,” providing emotional and practical support that would otherwise be unavailable.

Finally, older persons in this setting take on roles that help them feel more identified and purposeful, such as unlocking the centre, cooking for others, or simply providing

companionship. This aligns with Akhter-Khan *et al.* (2023), who state that older people thrive when they have opportunities for meaningful contribution and shared experiences. As a result, the PAWE centre's environment not only reduces loneliness, but it also actively promotes emotional well-being and a shared sense of responsibility.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the PAWE centre has played a pivotal role in establishing a sustainable community by effectively reducing isolation and loneliness, fostering social solidarity through shared activities, and enhancing both the emotional and physical well-being of its members. As more elderly persons experience these benefits, participation is likely to increase, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of engagement. This model demonstrates that when older persons engage in meaningful, community-based activities, they not only enrich their lives but also contribute to the vibrancy and resilience of the community as a whole. The study suggest that with continued support and active intervention from governments, non-governmental organizations, families, and community leaders, similar initiatives can be developed and sustained in other neighbourhoods. Such efforts ensure that older persons are not only encouraged to adapt to changing circumstances but are also provided with the necessary resources and support systems to remain active, socially connected, and healthy.

Therefore, a few recommendations should be considered to ensure that older people continue to lead active lives. The first recommendation is intergenerational mentoring, which means offering older people a role in wisdom-sharing programs with younger generations. This aligns with the three fundamental concepts of the PAWE centre: interactive, intergenerational, and local community (The Department of Social Welfare, 2018). Intergenerational intervention has been found to improve older people's well-being while also bridging the gaps between the young and old generations (Larsen *et al.*, 2024; Whear *et al.*, 2023). Particularly the younger generation can gain from the priceless experience, implicit wisdom, and transferable skills that older people possess (Harun & Mohd Rahmat, 2024). For instance, Malaysia is seen as a multiracial and multi-ethnic country that values a variety of traditional entertainment, crafts, cuisines, and heritage. These are all skills that have been handed down from previous generations, and it would be advantageous if older people could share their knowledge with people of all ages through mentoring programs in schools and universities. This might make it possible for older people to continue making contributions in their fields of expertise and take on a new role in the community as mentors (Campbell *et al.*, 2023).

Another suggestion is allocating space for gardening in the activity centre for older persons to foster a connection with the environment. Older people who have a close connection to nature will experience peace of mind, affection for the natural world, and

an awareness of their surroundings (Boavida *et al.*, 2023). Another study by Scott *et al.* (2020), claims that engaging in outdoor activities like gardening can help older people reminisce about their memories and past events. For instance, taking care of plants can foster responsibilities, and thereby facilitate an exploration of the role that older people serve to the environment. Aside from community and economy, older people can also make a significant contribution to the environment.

Finally, it is imperative to prioritize the promotion of sustainable cities and communities to ensure green and sustainable activity centres for older persons, housing, and old folk's homes. The quality of life (QOL) of older people can be improved by the combination of environmental and community intervention. Sustainable development of activity centres for older people, housing, and institutionalized settings are required in addition to sustainable communities. A green and sustainable activity centre building can shield older people from extreme weather, reduce energy costs and consumption, and foster a sense of community with nature. This can also help them be ready for any health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and keep them safe, active, and healthy. Perhaps the government, developers, and other relevant organizations could consider the older persons' need for green and sustainable housing, activity centres, and old folk's homes.

Limitation of the Study

Since the study only included a case study of the Activity Centre for Older Persons (PAWE), its findings cannot be generalized to the ageing population. Furthermore, only older people who had previously actively engaged in activity centre participation were included in this study. Perhaps more research can be conducted to explore sustainable communities in different contexts, such as among older indigenous and rural populations. This is to guarantee that no one is left behind and that those in need, especially the older people.

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