

Examining Quality of Life and Depression in Malaysia's Aging Population: A Socio-demographic Study using CASP-12 and GDS

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ABSTRACT

The study examined data obtained from the Ageless Cognitive Assessment, 2021, to explore the relationship between Quality of Life (QoL), depression, and socio-demographic characteristics in Malaysia's elderly population. Its objective was to analyse the associations between these variables. The data were collected using the CASP-12, a tool for assessing the QoL, and the GDS, a metric for measuring depression, among 897 participants aged 60 and older from three cohorts (MELoR, TUA, and New Recruit). The Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney test were conducted to identify factors influencing the QoL and depression scores. The findings revealed a significant difference in the QoL ratings based on marital status ($p = 0.008$), while no significant differences were observed for ethnicity ($p = 0.717$) or sex ($p = 0.934$). Ethnicity significantly influenced depression levels ($p = 0.020$), whereas sex did not ($p = 0.661$). The results indicated that marital status significantly influenced the QoL, with single individuals demonstrating the highest mean rank and, consequently, greater QoL. Conversely, ethnicity exerted a more pronounced effect on depression, with the Malay ethnic group exhibiting the highest mean rank and elevated levels of depression relative to other ethnicities.

Keywords: CASP-12, depression, GDS, quality of life, socio-demographic factors

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INTRODUCTION

The elderly population in Malaysia is experiencing significant growth, leading to a heightened focus on their welfare (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). Quality of life (QoL) and specifically, depression, significantly impact the well-being and mental state of individuals in this group (Mutalip et al., 2020).

The current paper examines data from the 2021 Ageless Cognitive Assessment. The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between the QoL, depression, and other socio-demographic characteristics among the older population in Malaysia. We employ the CASP-12 scale, which assesses control, autonomy, self-realisation, and pleasure, to evaluate the QoL (Hyde et al., 2003). Additionally, we utilise the Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS) to quantify degrees of depression (Balqis-Ali & Fun, 2024). Analysing the influence of socio-demographic features on these variables could aid in formulating more effective policies and initiatives to enhance the well-being of the elderly. The study has 897 people who are 60 years old or older, selected from three cohorts: MELoR (Malaysian Elderly Longitudinal Research), TUA (Towards Useful Ageing), and New Recruit (Ageless Cognitive Assessment, 2021).

The aging population in Malaysia faces diverse challenges impacting their QoL and mental health. Studies by Jimenez et al. (2013) and Park et al. (2014) highlighted ethnic disparities in mental health among older adults, showing that different ethnic backgrounds result in varying mental health outcomes, particularly in depression. These findings underscore the need for culturally sensitive interventions tailored to the unique socio-cultural contexts of Malaysia's diverse ethnic groups.

Nurhasanah et al. (2022) reported that marital status does not influence the QoL, while Lee et al. (2020) found gender differences in the QoL among older adults. Together, these studies demonstrate the complex interplay of ethnicity, marital status, and gender in shaping mental health and the QoL outcomes. This highlights the importance of developing targeted, context-specific interventions to address the needs of Malaysia's aging population.

METHODOLOGY

This cross-sectional study utilised a comprehensive survey from the Ageless Cognitive Assessment that employed validated measures (CASP-12 and GDS) to evaluate the participants' QoL and degrees of depression. We enlisted a grand total of 897 senior citizens, all 60 years old or older, from three separate groups: MELoR, TUA, and New Recruit. The Ageless Cognitive Assessment gathered data through structured interviews and self-administered questionnaires, focussing specifically on QoL, depression, and socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, and ethnicity. As the data was not normally distributed, we used nonparametric tests such as the Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney test to assess the impact of socio-demographic characteristics on the QoL and depression ratings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study revealed several significant findings. The participants' QoL ratings showed a significant difference based on the marital status ($p = 0.008$), with single individuals

reporting a higher QoL compared to their married, widowed, or divorced counterparts. The mean rank of single individuals was 146.73, indicating that different marital statuses significantly impact the QoL, with single individuals demonstrating the highest mean rank and, consequently, greater QoL. These findings contrast with the results of Nurhasanah et al. (2022), who concluded that marital status does not affect the QoL in older adults.

In contrast, ethnicity exerted a more pronounced effect on depression levels ($p = 0.020$), with the Malay ethnic group exhibiting the highest mean rank (276.25) and elevated levels of depression compared to other ethnicities. These findings align with those of Park et al. (2013), highlighting that depression levels vary across different ethnicities among older adults, necessitating culturally tailored mental health interventions.

Moreover, there were no significant disparities in the QoL scores based on ethnicity ($p = 0.717$) or sex ($p = 0.934$), indicating that neither the ethnic background nor gender significantly influenced the QoL among the elderly. Similarly, no significant effect of sex on depression levels was observed ($p = 0.661$), suggesting that depression affects elderly men and women similarly.

Overall, the findings underscore the significant impact of marital status on the QoL and the crucial role of ethnicity in influencing depression levels among Malaysia's elderly population. These insights are essential for developing targeted interventions to enhance the QoL and address depression in this demographic.

CONCLUSION

This study emphasises the significant influence of marital status on the QoL and the effect of ethnicity on depression among Malaysia's senior population. These findings emphasise the significance of taking sociodemographic aspects into account when formulating policies and implementing intervention programmes that aim to enhance the well-being of the elderly population. Subsequent investigations should delve deeper into the root causes of these discrepancies and assess the efficacy of targeted interventions designed for various socio-demographic categories.

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