

Sources of Social Support and Its Role in The Prevention of Diseases Among the Older Adults

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Abstract

Social support is a critical factor in helping older adults prevent diseases and reduce health risks as they age. The connection between social networks and health outcomes highlights the importance of understanding how various sources of support contribute to disease prevention, particularly with the growing prevalence of chronic health conditions among older adults. This study aims to examine both informal and formal sources of social support in mitigating health risks among Malaysian older adults. Using a qualitative case study approach, 24 older adults from *Pusat Aktiviti Warga Emas* (PAWE), an activity centre for older adults, were interviewed to gain detailed insights into their experiences. The study findings were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that family serves as the primary support system, providing emotional and practical assistance essential for health maintenance. Additionally, friends, neighbours, community organizations and government initiatives play complementary roles by offering social interaction, mutual aid and access to healthcare resources. These diverse support systems collectively enhance disease prevention efforts by promoting healthier lifestyles and mitigating health risks. The findings emphasize the need to strengthen these social networks to improve disease prevention efforts and enhance the quality of life for older Malaysians. Future research should explore the most effective forms of social support in promoting health and investigate the potential of digital platforms in broadening access to support, given their growing importance in this digital age.

Keyword: Older adults, prevention of diseases, role, social support, sources

INTRODUCTION

As individuals age, the importance of social support in promoting well-being and preventing diseases becomes increasingly evident, particularly in Malaysia. Social support encompasses the emotional, instrumental and financial assistance provided by family, friends and community organizations, which plays a vital role in enhancing the quality of life for older adults. Research indicates that social support

not only helps slow the decline associated with aging but also contributes significantly to healthier living conditions (Liu et al., 2020). This interplay between social networks and health outcomes underscores the need to investigate the role of social support sources in disease avoidance and risk reduction among older adults, especially given the rising prevalence of chronic health issues in Malaysia. Furthermore, studies show that a significant percentage of older adults in Malaysia suffer from chronic illnesses, such as hypertension and diabetes, which are exacerbated by a lack of social support (Sharoni et al., 2015).

In addition to physical health concerns, mental health issues such as depression are prevalent among older adults, with local studies indicating a depression rate between 6.3 to 13.9 % (Mukhtar & Oei, 2011). Financial support is often linked to mental health, as those with low incomes or unemployment are more likely to experience depressive symptoms (Zuelke et al., 2018). This underscores the need for effective social support systems that address both the physical and emotional needs of older adults to prevent health deterioration. The ability of older adults to navigate these challenges often hinges on the availability of both formal and informal support systems.

In Malaysia, social support for older adults comes from various sources, including family, friends, community organizations and government agencies. Family members are typically the primary support providers, playing a critical role in helping older adults maintain their health and well-being (Rashedi et al., 2013). However, informal support from friends and neighbours also significantly contributes to disease avoidance, while formal support from governmental agencies complements these efforts. Studies have shown that the quality of social networks affects the overall well-being and health outcomes of older adults (Litwin, 2010), yet there remains a gap in understanding the full range of social support sources available to them.

Zainuddin et al. (2022) highlight the importance of strong social support in preventing disease among older adults, particularly in the face of challenges posed by modernization and urbanization. Increased social interactions and networks contribute to better mental and emotional health, which in turn reduces stress, a key factor in disease prevention. Additionally, social support fosters a sense of belonging, reducing isolation and loneliness, which are linked to various health issues, thus promoting a healthier and more fulfilling ageing process. However, as Mohd et al. (2020) discovered in a systematic review of 282 articles, fewer than ten studies have specifically examined the impact of social support on health outcomes among Malaysian older adults, highlighting the need for further research in this area.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to address the roles of both informal and formal social support sources in disease avoidance and risk mitigation among older adults in Malaysia. By examining the contributions of families, neighbours, friends, community organizations and government initiatives, this research aims to provide insights that inform policies and strategies designed to support older adults in achieving successful aging. Understanding the influence of social support on health outcomes can help stakeholders implement effective interventions that address the diverse needs of the aging population, ultimately promoting a healthier and more sustainable future for Malaysia's older adults.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social support plays a crucial role in promoting the well-being of older adults, particularly in preventing diseases and enhancing their quality of life. Studies have shown that social support can slow or modify trajectories of decline and prolong a healthy life (Liu et al., 2020). Support from family members, especially children, is vital in ensuring older adults maintain good health. Belanger et al. (2016) found that older adults receiving low support from their families are more likely to experience poor health outcomes. Slavchev & Vizev (2021) added that the family's support and involvement can help mitigate some of the challenges associated with aging, even if it cannot solve all the difficulties faced by older adults.

Family support also plays a significant role in addressing the physical and emotional needs of older adults. As they age, older adults require everyday care that involves not just assistance with daily tasks but also fulfilling their psychosocial needs. Paskaleva et al. (2018) highlighted that effective family interactions facilitate stress management, promote healthy behaviours and contribute to a sense

of security. They emphasized that family care and support, even in the most advanced stages of ageing, helps older adults maintain self-confidence and adjust to changing life circumstances. Communication within families often focuses on health-related issues, making empathy and patience essential in these interactions (Gammage & Nolte, 2020).

The integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has provided additional support for older adults and their caregivers (Czaja et al., 2018). Additionally, financial support is another key aspect of social support that contributes to the overall health and well-being of older adults. Lal et al. (2022) emphasized that higher financial support enables older adults to invest in their health, including regular medical check-ups and the use of health supplements, ultimately improving their quality of life.

Moreover, emotional well-being is significantly influenced by the support provided by family members and friends. Stephens (2018) explained that instrumental and material support from family has a profound effect on the emotional state of older adults. Emotional well-being, characterized by the intensity and frequency of positive emotions, contributes to a higher quality of life (Li et al., 2015). Support from children and extended family has been linked to lower rates of depression among older adults (Mohd et al., 2019). Chou et al. (2018) also found that family support plays a stronger role in mitigating depressive symptoms than support from friends.

In addition to family support, community-based services are crucial for providing older adults with comprehensive care. These services often include nutrition programs, transportation assistance and case management. In countries like China, Community-Based Supports and Services (CBSS) programs offer a variety of services such as wellness programs, nutritional aid and health education (Wang et al., 2013). Globally, there has been a shift toward community-based care, especially in mental health services, where treatment has moved from institutional settings to community facilities (Šiška & Beadle-Brown, 2020). This shift underscores the importance of a strong social support network in ensuring older adults receive the care and resources they need to maintain their well-being. Zainuddin et al., (2022) also noted that while family remains the primary source of support, other forms of support are essential to complement it. Urbanization and modernization have reduced traditional family-based support, making community services more important as older adults increasingly prefer to age in place.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach, using a case study design to explore the role of social support source in the disease prevention among the older adults. Qualitative research aims to provide a deeper understanding of complex phenomena (Korstjens & Moser, 2018), which aligns with the objective of the study. Case studies, which involve in-depth investigations of individuals or groups, are commonly used in qualitative research (Kitay & Callus, 2018). This method enabled the researchers to explore the real-life experiences of older adults and address “how” and “why” questions (Njie & Asimiran, 2014).

Data Collection

Interviews were the primary data collection tool, as they allow for the exchange of views and opinions (Abdulkareem, 2018) and are particularly suitable for elderly respondents who may have difficulties with written forms due to age-related issues (Gray, 2018). Interviews explored the frequency and adequacy of social support for the elderly, why it is challenging to obtain and how improvements can be made. In-depth interviews were chosen to collect detailed information (Parveen & Showkat, 2017), with questions developed from a literature review relevant to the study’s objectives.

Research Site and Sampling

The study was conducted at four (4) *Pusat Aktiviti Warga Emas* (PAWE), a senior activity center in Kuala Lumpur located at Cheras Baru, Seputeh, Batu and Putrajaya. This urban-focused study contrasts with previous research that emphasized rural areas (Mohamed, 2008), addressing the growing number of elderly residents in cities (National Population and Family Development Board Malaysia, 2016). Before conducting the interviews, the researcher collaborated with PAWE supervisors to identify potential respondents who met the selection criteria. The participants, older adults, were chosen based on the following requirements: (i) participation in PAWE for over 5 months (ii) age above 60 years (iii) good mental capacity and (iv) willingness to provide consent for the study. Six (6) older adult respondents from each PAWE were chosen for interviews based on the criteria established by the researchers. PAWE serves as both a community centre and a research site, providing a space for older adults to engage in activities that promote successful aging, such as avoiding diseases and maintaining physical and mental health. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 24 older adult respondents. The study also included three officers of the Social Support Division from the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia or *Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat Malaysia* (JKMM) and four supervisors of PAWE from each centre as key informants. JKMM officers and PAWE supervisors are both involved in activities and services related to the social wellbeing and social welfare of elderly in PAWE.

Interview Process

Interviews were conducted in quiet rooms at PAWE centres, lasting 30 to 40 minutes each. Respondents could choose between Bahasa Malaysia and English and interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented with written notes to avoid researcher bias (Renz et al., 2018). As a token of gratitude, elderly in PAWE who were interested in and voluntarily participated in this study were given food incentives such as flour, biscuit, coffee powder and tea. The study reached data saturation after 24 interviews, in line with the recommendation by Suen et al. (2014).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in the data related to social support and successful aging. This process began with transcription, followed by coding to highlight key themes from participant narratives (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The analysis was supported by Atlas.ti software, which facilitated the management of transcription and coding. Themes were developed based on these codes to present coherent qualitative findings. Respondents' confidentiality was maintained and participants were informed of their rights and the study's purpose before interviews, ensuring ethical standards.

RESULTS

The support role reflects the experiences of the older adults, supported by an officer from the JKMM Social Support Unit and PAWE supervisor. All support given were to help the older adults to avoid diseases and the risks of diseases have been reported below. This section investigates how their families, friends, PAWE and JKMM had a significant role in helping them to prevent diseases. In order to gauge the idea of structural function that provides support towards informants, the JKMM officer and PAWE supervisor reveals their services coordination, the way in which helped the older adults to prevent diseases. The study involved 24 older adult respondents, with the majority being Malays (75%), followed by Chinese (16.7%) and Indians (8.3%). A significant proportion of the respondents were female (79.2%), while 20.8% were male. In terms of age, 58.3% were between 60 and 69 years old, and 41.7% were between 70 and 79 years old. Regarding marital status, 45.8% were widowed, 37.5% were married and 16.7% were divorced. Among the 24 respondents, only 12.5% lived alone, while 87.5% lived with family members, including spouses, children or siblings. Specifically, 45.8% lived with children, 25% lived with a spouse and 8.3% lived with other family members such as siblings or grandchildren.

The Role of Family Support in the Avoidance and Risks of Diseases

This study found that financial, emotional and informational support from the family had been identified as valuable support to help older adults in avoiding diseases. In this study, the family has been defined as the spouse and children of older adults. Based on the interviews, the informants explained that the family offered financial support by providing money for the aged members to visit the doctors. The family provides supports to the informants financially for routine medical check-up in the hospital, to ensure that they were always in good health. As respondent 7 narrated that her children gave her money to cover all the cost of transportation for a medical check-up which indirectly helps her to avoid disease and other risks of disease. She mentioned the following:

“Children always provide money for medical check-up because they know that I use the money to pay for taxis and transportation to get there. This makes it easier for me to visit a doctor and I don't have to take a bus as I don't have a lot of energy to do so”.

(Respondent 7)

Children have also helped to send their parents to the hospital. As mentioned by Respondent 8, her children did not encourage her to go for medical care on her own, because they were concerned for her safety.

“Most of the time my children are driving me to the hospital. They don't want me to use public transport because I'm getting older, and something could happen to me. I know I'm loved by them”.

(Respondent 8)

In terms of emotional support, the family provided emotional support to older adults to avoid diseases and risks of diseases by encouraging them to eat healthy food, to follow a healthy lifestyle and showed their concern for the well-being of the older adult parents. As mentioned by Respondent 6, his children always encouraged him to eat healthy and stop smoking. He said:

“My children encourage me to eat nutritious food by buying all the healthy stuff for me. They're even telling me what I should eat and what I should stop eating”.

(Respondent 6)

Besides, as indicated by Respondent 5, children had often shown concern for her health by encouraging them to avoid diseases.

“My children always ask me about my health every time they call me to make sure I am in good condition”.

(Respondent 5)

Apart from that, advice and information on health were often shared by children to ensure their older adult parents were aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle to avoid diseases. Respondent 11 asserted that her children always provide her with health information and advice to take care of herself.

“Children also send me health tips and information through apps, phone calls and so on”.

(Respondent 11)

Overall, the family had played a significant role in encouraging older people to avoid ill-health and risk diseases by providing financial, emotional and informational support. It was impossible for older adults to go through regular medical check-up without enough money and would struggle to maintain a healthy lifestyle if they did not get emotional support from the family. By sharing health tips older adults could be aware of their health and cannot take it for granted.

The Role of Friends Support in the Avoidance and Risks of Diseases

Friends provide emotional and informational support to older adults in helping them to avoid diseases and risks of diseases. Friends play a role in encouraging older adults to stay healthy even in their old age. The condition and willingness of a friend to be healthy to some degree help older people to be more driven to improve health and avoid illness. Furthermore, respondents stated they were more excited to work and exercise with friends. The same state of mind and status of health in old age made them feel good doing things together and sharing thoughts for a healthy life. Respondent 11 said that she was encouraged by a friend to lead a healthier lifestyle.

“We must have friends to support each other by spending time with other older adults to support each other. Otherwise, we're going to sleep all day and don't have an active lifestyle. Whenever we meet our friends, they share tips and motivate us to have a healthier lifestyle”.

(Respondent 11)

Similarly, respondent 13 claimed that friends made her feel more excited to exercise with them and she always looked forward to doing so because it was so much fun than doing it alone.

“I am more excited to exercise every time I am with friends, but it's very hard to do it on my own. It's more fun to work out with friends”.

(Respondent 13)

Age-related illness is always a concern for older adults, as it affects many people as they grow older. It makes older adults more aware of health care information. As older adults like to spend time with their friends, it allows information to be transferred from one to another. Friends have an important role to play in sharing information about health tips with each other to maintain good health in old age. Respondent 4 related her concern for health after listening to friends.

“I like to meet older adults and listen to their stories about how they are doing to maintain their health. This helps me to take care of my body”.

(Respondent 4)

Besides, Respondent 12 reported the same. He said the following:

“My friend and I often take part in PAWE activities and spend time with friends. They often offer good advice and information like sharing health tips”.

(Respondent 12)

The Role of Community Support in the Avoidance and Risks of Diseases

Community support, such as PAWE, enhances the avoidance of diseases among older adults through socialization and providing information. In terms of socialising support, various activities had been undertaken to ensure that older adults remained active, which indirectly helped older adults to avoid

diseases and risks of diseases. Respondent 6 stated that there were gardening activities in PAWE that helped older adults to be more active and healthier despite their old age.

“PAWE provides space for gardening activities that help older adults to become more active. we can’t remain sedentary too often because our age has increased. To stay healthy, we need to be active”.

(Respondent 6)

Similarly, Respondent 21 said that she received several health benefits by joining PAWE as programs and activities helped her to avoid diseases and the risks of diseases. She said the following:

“The Golden Age Day program taught me a lot of exercises that I can practice at home. I feel happy joining such program”.

(Respondent 21)

In terms of information support, PAWE had carried out regular health screening services and provided health talks to raise awareness among older adults about the avoidance of diseases to keep older adults healthy and aware of their health. Respondent 5 related how PAWE obtained the services of the University of Malaya Medical Centre (UMMC) to help them.

“University of Malaya Medical Centre has always been here to perform a medical check-up for older adults twice a month”.

(Respondent 5)

Besides that, PAWE provides information on health through regular courses. Respondent 11 stated that health information programs had been conducted at PAWE every month to enable older adults to take care of their health and to ensure that older adults received the right information regarding their health.

“Occasionally, nutrition programs have also been conducted at PAWE. The doctor was asked to explain nutrition and its importance to the health of older adults. They organised a one-day workshop on the program in Precinct 12”.

(Respondent 11)

As mentioned by Respondent 1, PAWE must continue to provide health knowledge to older adults, because not all older adults know how to overcome and avoid diseases.

“The information provided by PAWE offers an explanation or method for dealing with pain or what to do to prevent pain. This knowledge is very helpful for older people, as it can be applied at home”.

(Respondent 1)

Community entities such as PAWE provided socialising and informational support to older adults to avoid diseases and risks of diseases. It would be difficult for older adults to avoid the risks of diseases and diseases if they had little information about their health and a proper place for them to do activities and to remain active in their old age.

The Role of Government Support in the Avoidance and Risks of Diseases

The Government is responsible for formulating plans and initiatives to improve the health of older adults to a better level of health. Various programs had been introduced, both by the community and PAWE, as a means to help older adults. For example, the JKMM through PAWE organised several seminars and programs under PAWE, namely the "Golden Age Program" and "Senamas Program" as part of the activities in PAWE to encourage older adults to have a healthy lifestyle through regular exercise. A top officer from the Policy Unit of Older Adult in JKMM stated that this program had encouraged older adults to exercise in their old age. He mentioned that:

"In the Senamas program, we followed a model in Japan that introduced exercise using a chair that does not use the entire body, which is very good for older adults. Most of the older adults in Japan are too old to be able to jog and walk, so a chair exercise program has been set up. (Policy Unit)"

Apart from that, as a government agency, JKMM also encourages PAWE to hold health seminars to raise awareness among older adults. According to the Empowerment Unit under JKMM, seminars and talks are held as empowerment programs for older adults in the community. He stated that:

"While at PAWE, we have a seminar on empowerment for older adults. Often PAWE will work together to hold seminars and invite academicians to give older adults a health awareness talk". (An officer from Empowerment Unit)

Besides that, older adults often get advice and check-up of their health at hospitals every month. Regular medical check-up is necessary for older adults so that doctors to keep track of the health status of the older adults and take the necessary actions to avoid the diseases and risks of diseases among the older adults. Respondent 5 indicated that she had attended routine medical check-ups every three months in the hospital.

"The hospital has always advised me to take medicines to avoid the disease. They often take our blood tests to find out about our level of health. The doctor has always advised me to control my intake of meat because it is dangerous for my health".

(Respondent 5)

The role of social support to the older adults to avoid diseases has been revealed in the above section. It was found that their families, friends, PAWE and JKMM played a significant role in helping them to avoid diseases and risks of diseases. The family that included the spouse and children provided financial, emotional and informational support that was important to help older adults avoid diseases and risks of diseases. Besides the family, PAWE provided community support to avoid diseases among older adults through socialization and information support. Moreover, the support provided by the government plans and initiatives helped to improve the health of older adults to a better level. In addition, other government agencies like the JKMM organised several seminars and programs under PAWE, namely the "Golden Age Program" and "Senamas Program" as part of the activities to encourage older adults to have a healthy lifestyle.

Importance of Avoidance and Risks of Diseases

Older adults are often associated with illnesses in tandem with their increasing age. The increase in age makes them vulnerable to the threat of ageing-related diseases. Therefore, a life free from diseases and risks of diseases risk is highly desirable for older adults because these help them to carry out daily routines, be independent, travel and do things they desire. Respondent 15 indicated that the avoidance of diseases and the risks of diseases is important as it enabled her to perform her daily routines such as prayers, eating, travel and others.

“Health is the most important thing when we're old. When we're healthy, there's no problem with praying, walking or doing any kind of activity”.

(Respondent 15)

The above idea was also supported by Respondent 18, who mentioned that it was important to avoid disease and be healthy in old age as it helped to manage housework. It might not be possible to perform such a task without good health.

“I cannot cook if I get sick later. Who wants to take care of it all. That is why I want to take care of my health”.

(Respondent 18)

Respondent 10 added that avoidance of disease helped them to be independent in managing their daily lives and not to be dependent. The problem of dependence could become a burden to their families. Older adults preferred to manage their own lives, as such avoidance of diseases and risks of diseases were indeed crucial to them.

“I want to be a healthy person because I do not want to always rely on the help of children”.

(Respondent 10)

DISCUSSION

This study highlights the vital role that families play in helping older adults avoid diseases by providing financial, emotional and informational support. It was observed that children often contribute financial assistance, enabling older adults to access medical care and attend regular check-ups. This support frequently covers transportation costs to hospitals, aligning with the findings of Selvaratnam et al. (2012), who reported that financial aid from families is essential in facilitating medical visits and purchasing health supplements. Additionally, many children accompany their elderly parents to hospital appointments, offering both emotional and logistical support. In terms of emotional backing, family members encourage healthier lifestyle choices, such as quitting smoking and adopting balanced diets. Informational support is also provided by family members who share health tips through phone calls and messaging platforms like WhatsApp. However, Paskaleva et al. (2018) found that only 33% of older adults regularly discuss health-related topics with their families, indicating a limitation in the depth of informational support offered by relatives. In Asia, families remain the primary source of support for older adults, surpassing friends and neighbours in offering financial, emotional, and social support. Children and spouses play significant roles in caring for elderly parents, reflecting the practice of filial piety prevalent in Asian cultures, which emphasizes children's responsibility to care for their parents. Families, as close kin, offer a stronger bond and greater commitment compared to other support systems. This aligns with research by Wakui & Cheng (2022), which concluded that filial piety is a critical factor in enhancing the well-being of older adults.

Friends also play a key role in providing emotional and informational support to older adults. Emotional support is often given through shared activities like exercising or jogging, which help older adults stay active and healthy. Informational support, meanwhile, is exchanged during social interactions where friends share health tips, personal stories and advice. This finding aligns with Thompson et al. (2024) which emphasized the importance of friendships in promoting emotional well-being among older adults. Although family remains the primary source of support in Asia, modernization and urbanization have weakened traditional filial support norms (Zainuddin et al., 2022). The demands of modern life mean that many individuals are preoccupied with work, leading to reduced care for older adults. Declining birth rates have resulted in fewer children available to care for their

aging parents and increased participation of women in the workforce has left many older adults alone at home. In this context, friends serve as complementary support by helping older adults stay connected to the outside world, thereby alleviating loneliness (Fiori et al., 2020). Unlike family relationships, friendships are often formed based on personal preference rather than traditional norms or kinship ties. Friends play a crucial role in sharing stories, offering motivation and providing encouragement. Being of the same age, friends often better understand the health challenges of aging, creating a shared experience that fosters mutual encouragement.

Community support, such as that provided by the PAWE, is another critical element in helping older adults maintain their health. PAWE offers both social and informational support through organized activities that keep older adults physically active, such as gardening, which helps reduce the risk of diseases. This supports the findings of Zhang et al (2018) that community support enhances the quality of life for older adults by fulfilling their social and psychological needs, ultimately reducing the risk of illness. PAWE also organizes health talks and courses, inviting doctors to discuss medical issues and provide valuable health information. This form of informational support is crucial, as not all older adults possess the necessary health knowledge to understand complex medical terms, confirming the findings of Alavi et al. (2011) that community support helps older adults better manage their diets and overall health. In Malaysia, the family plays a central role in enhancing the well-being of older adults, providing essential care and support, in contrast to formal care options like nursing homes, which are seen as unacceptable and unfilial (Huang et al., 2012). In contrast, older adults in Western countries, such as the United States, are more reliant on formal support systems due to their stronger infrastructure (Poulin et al., 2012). Globally, community-based support like PAWE is increasingly preferred as it allows older adults to age in place—a key to healthy aging (Campbell et al., 2010). As modernization and urbanization weaken traditional family structures, community support systems have expanded to fill the gap in providing care for older adults, including in Malaysia. Structural changes such as increased migration, declining fertility and rising life expectancy have further driven the demand for community support, such as PAWE (Alavi et al., 2011). Similarly in China, for instance the government mandates the establishment of neighborhood committees in communities with 1,000 to 3,000 households (National Ageing Committee Office, 2014). With shifting demographics, including lower fertility rates and longer life expectancies, informal support is no longer sufficient, highlighting the growing need for robust community support (Li et al., 2017; World Bank, 2016).

Additionally, the government plays a key role in supporting the health of older adults through the creation of health-related programs and policies. The Senamas Program, initiated by PAWE, is one such initiative, offering exercise programs for older adults to encourage a healthy lifestyle and prevent diseases. The Golden Age Program is another empowerment effort that raises awareness about the importance of maintaining good health through regular physical activity. This aligns with the findings of Li et al. (2017), which indicated that formal support played a role in preventing "empty nest" syndrome among older adults by facilitating socialization and interaction with others. Furthermore, the government ensures that older adults receive regular medical check-ups, providing essential informational support to help them monitor their health.

Both formal and informal sources of support play a vital role in helping older adults prevent disease. This aligns with the findings of Zainuddin et al. (2022), who noted that while family remains the primary source of support in Asian cultures, additional support from friends, neighbors, communities and government agencies is also crucial for disease prevention. Stronger social support networks make it easier for older adults to maintain their health. As Malaysia is projected to become an aging population by 2030, it is essential to strengthen these support systems to ensure healthier and more successful aging for older adults.

CONCLUSION

The findings underscore the crucial roles of family, friends, community support and government initiatives in helping older adults avoid diseases and manage health risks. Families, especially spouses and children, offer essential financial, emotional and informational support, enabling older adults to access healthcare and maintain healthy lifestyles. This emotional backing is vital, encouraging older adults to eat healthily and avoid harmful habits, thus promoting proactive health management. Friends also play an important role by providing emotional and informational support. Engaging with peers motivates older adults to exercise and adopt healthier lifestyles, fostering a sense of community that enhances health outcomes. The study finds that sharing health tips and advice among friends promotes awareness of healthy practices and encourages mutual support. Community organizations like PAWE and government agencies such as JKMM offer structured programs and health services that further assist older adults in disease prevention. Through organizing activities, health talks and regular medical check-up, older adults can gain access to vital resources and information, empowering them to manage their health effectively.

This study concludes that to enhance the role of social support in disease prevention among older adults, it is vital to strengthen existing networks of family, friends, community organizations and government initiatives. The study also finds that families should be encouraged to provide emotional, financial and informational support through regular meetings or workshops focused on health and wellness. Introducing health education initiatives can help families promote healthy lifestyles and plan financially for medical care, ensuring older adults have access to necessary services. Community organizations like PAWE should continue to cultivate social connections among older adults by organizing structured activities that promote physical exercise, such as gardening, exercise classes and health seminars. Collaboration with local healthcare providers can further enhance the effectiveness of these initiatives by offering regular health screenings and wellness workshops. Additionally, creating a buddy system within the community can facilitate socialization and mutual support among peers. Finally, government programs through agencies like JKMM should expand health check-up and education tailored to older adults, ensuring their evolving needs are met effectively. Future research could explore the specific types of social support that are most effective in promoting health among older adults and studies might examine the role of digital platforms in expanding access to social support, given their growing prominence in this modern era.

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