

Full Length Research Paper

A study of filial piety practice in Malaysia: Relationship between financial well-being and filial piety

LooSee, BEH^{1*} and Jee Yoong, FOLK^{2*}

¹Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

²Institute of Post Graduate Studies, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

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The study examined children's filial responsibilities as contributing to retirement financial planning. There was a 53.9% return rate from 750 survey questionnaires. Seven hypotheses were analysed using hierarchical regression/ordinary regression/stepwise regression analyses. The results revealed that, from children's perspective, the more they were in contact with parents, the more support they would give them (with age as a predictor especially the above 50-year old groups). These views were not shared by parents. There was also a close relationship between parents and children's support. The study also showed a positive relationship between parents and children's expectations about filial obligations. To ensure the continuity of the filial piety practice requires the inculcation of children with such traditional values as part of their family life.

Key words: Extended family, filial piety, retirement planning, support exchange.

INTRODUCTION

There are many issues affecting the lives of the elderly in Malaysia. The aging problem is serious and compounded by consumption costs, older people's susceptibility to diseases, medical and healthcare costs, difficulty in obtaining government medical services in certain areas and the extended family systems erosion (Lan, 2001). Other critical issues include government's shift in economic landscape, policy changes and individual differences (Engel et al., 1990) all of which could affect people's healthcare, welfare and retirement resources. Older people require more medical care and visit care service centers six times per year (Da Vanzo and Chan, 1994). This study looks at financial wealth and financial planning from subjective perception, behavioral assessment and overall financial wealth and will also examine whether Malaysian parents will depend on children for inter-generational transfers etc under the filial piety concept.

Malaysians might be grossly unprepared for retirement as 38.2% of the total employed persons were not covered

by Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) or any other Pension Scheme (Kumar, 1997; Thillainathan, 2003). EPF is a direct contribution (DC) retirement savings scheme. It is non-inflation-indexed and has been made mandatory for those employees in the formal sector and voluntary for those self-employed, that is, in the informal sector. Both employer and employee are required to make compulsory contributions towards the fund, currently, at the rates of 12 and 11%, respectively calculated by reference to the monthly wages or salaries. There were doubts that the EPF lump-sum payments/pre-retirement withdrawal schemes would meet the contributors' needs at old age (Caraher, 2000) whilst pension payments are also not expected to keep pace with inflations. Some previous studies had examined filial piety as a means to provide care and income security for the elderly (Chan, 1991; Engel et al., 1990; Lillard and Willis, 1997). As traditional practices for children's upbringing, Confucius teachings (in line with filial piety) also serve to direct familial

*Corresponding author. E-mail:- lucybeh@um.edu.my.

relationships towards creating a tightly knit society, where male children respect parents and ancestors, and look after elderly parents (Ishii-Kuntz, 1997). A main idea of Confucianism is the cultivation of virtue and the development of moral perfection. One theme central to Confucianism is that of relationships, and the differing duties arising from the different status one held in relation to others. Individuals are held to simultaneous stand in different degrees of relationship with different people, namely, as a junior in relation to their parents and elders, and as a senior in relation to their children, younger siblings. This theme consistently manifests itself in many aspects of Asian culture even to this day, with extensive filial duties on the part of children toward parents and elders, and great concern of parents toward their children. Other ethnic groups in Malaysia like the Indians as part of the Hindu culture also practice filial piety. This study focuses on retirement planning strategy via filial piety. To the Indians, filial piety is of paramount importance and ties to the family and their community are extremely strong. The ethnic Malays also share the value of filial piety and Malay values accentuate obedience (Juri and Idris, 2008).

Objectives of the study

This study examines filial piety as a determinant in providing care and income security for the elderly people, from the Malaysian perspective.

This study would be useful for examining:

- (a) the filial piety obligation in Malaysia, and
- (b) the relationships between filial piety and financial well-being.

While the profile of personal financial wellness can indicate the level of financial wellness, it can also provide useful information to financial counselors, financial planners or financial practitioners. Apart from the useful knowledge about contribution from the filial piety aspect, the level of preparedness for retirement would also demonstrate the importance of financial matters that are constantly affecting our daily lives (Staten et al., 2002).

These cultural values of respecting the elderly are all embedded in the filial piety concept. The various ethnic groups may have their filial piety virtues enshrined in their traditional beliefs or culture. The study's main focus is on filial piety virtues being used as a proxy for financial planning adequacy for the elderly.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Family and local community both took care of the elderly (Chan et al., 2002; Lillard and Willis, 1997) with findings indicating: (a) family should be responsible for providing

care and security for the elderly (Lillard and Willis, 1997; Ogawa and Retherford, 1997) and (b) long-term care patients require support from family members, friends and community helpers (Phillips, 2000). Studies also indicated that children's intergenerational transfers were treated as partial repayments to parents for their early education (Lillard and Willis, 1997). However, filial responsibility was linked to the exchange theory asserting that relationships were governed by a norm of reciprocity and to the attachment theory in explaining children's emotional bond to keep in contact with parents (Cicirelli, 1989). Filial expectations were not always explicitly delineated at appropriate levels of support and assistance, and children were expected to help parents (Donorfio and Sheehan, 2001). There is a development of autonomy during adulthood but the relationship will develop into a more mutual reciprocal one like peers (Masche, 2008). It has been considered that the development of autonomy while altering the connectedness into a more peer-like, reciprocal form would continue into adulthood. During adolescence, experiences from interactions with peers would be transferred to relationships with parents.

Other studies indicated that daughters were more likely to take of parents and receive more credits for such family work (Blieszner and Hamon, 1992) and that most Singaporean parents co-reside with at least one of their children and receive financial support from all children (Chan, 1991). However, a higher parental income in Malaysia was associated with lower co-residency with children (DaVanzo and Chan, 1994). There has also been a decline in an adult child co-residence in U.S. (Ruggles, 2007). Yet, other research revealed that rich parents were able to induce children's co-residence (Bernheim et al., 1985), and that parents generally enjoy children financial support regardless of their residential status (Chan, 1991; Lillard and Willis, 1997).

Given the emerging nuclear family trends and other external factors, the traditional intergenerational relationships are affected by financial factors (socio-economic status, higher income) and structural factors (social network, parents' needs for assistance and living proximity) (Ikkink et al., 1999; Ishii-Kuntz, 1997). Thus, the first research question (RQ 1) is: *'How do the people perceive the question of intergenerational transfers from the filial piety perspective, given their own current family structure and financial commitment?'* This gives rise to three hypotheses: H1: *'The more frequently children are in contact with their parents, the more support they give them'* H2: *'Parents with financial resources are less likely to co-reside with their adult children than those with little financial resources'* and H3: *'The longer children are away from the parents, the lesser will be the level of filial support given to them'*. There was reciprocity between ageing parents' filial responsibility expectations and financial assistance given to children (Hanson and Sauer, 1985; Lee et al., 1994) and there are certain expectations

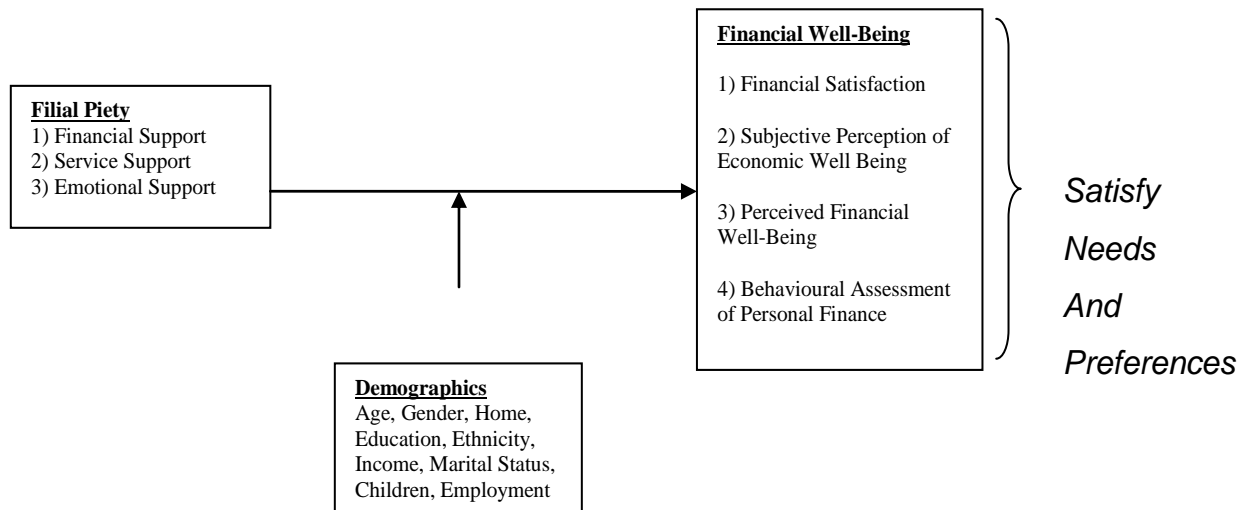


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

about children's filial responsibility (Hanson and Sauer, 1985). Hence, RQ 2: 'How do the people view the relationship of filial responsibility and financial assistance between parents and children?' and H4: 'The support given by parents to children influences the support they receive' Adult children are expected to give elderly parents assistance over their own needs (Seelbach, 1984) but are affected by geographical dispersion and small household units (Caraher, 2000) as well as urbanization, interregional migration etc (Lee et al., 1994). The parents bring up their children and are supported in old age by their adult children. This feedback is a special feature in Chinese culture. The Confucian promotion of filial piety was not only a reflection of this mode but an effort to consolidate it ideologically so as to make it an established code of behaviour in coordination with the constraint and guidance provided by the law and public opinion (Yuan, in Zeng et al, 1990:351). Hence, RQ.3: 'Do adult children carry out their filial responsibilities, given the aforementioned factors and changing circumstances?' and H5: 'There is a relationship of support exchange in opportunities between parents and their children'. Children do not always have an opportunity to give support, even if the norms are there. Although the parent-child relationship is a long-term relationship, this does not mean it is equally intense over time. It is weakest if children have their own family and work responsibilities. Arising from children's unconditional financial and emotional support to parents (Liu, 1986; Yang, 2000) is RQ.4: 'What do the people think of filial piety firstly in terms of filial responsibility to parents and secondly in terms of financial support, familial care and income security for retirement from the parents' perspective?' giving rise to two hypotheses: H6: 'There is a positive relationship between children and parents on expectations about filial responsibilities, on the premise

that children are obligated to provide their parents with support, if needed'; and H7: 'Adult children, with higher family income and higher level of filial obligation, will provide their parents with more support opportunity'.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 depicts factors affecting Malaysian elderly people's well-being and the inter-relationship between intergenerational support system and living arrangements under the filial piety concept:

The selected factors including economic conditions, demographic characteristics and cultural dimensions are expected to have a direct impact on the people especially the elderly, who are closely associated with the healthcare infrastructure and demographic trends i.e. age, gender, marital status, housing tenure, income, lifestyle status, number of young children and occupation. These demographic characteristics are also directly related to personal financial wellness including financial stability and financial resource adequacy (O'Neill, 1995; Kim et al., 2005).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed the quantitative method to obtain the relevant primary information. A 92 item questionnaire survey was distributed by Research Assistants to a random sample of 750 respondents from the Klang Valley, Malaysia's largest population centre. This yielded a 53.9% return rate.

Table 1. Results of scale development

Scale name	Cronbach Alpha (α)	KMO	Signi.	Resultant Subscale/[Questionnaire Item]
Financial Literacy	0.894	0.876	.000	LITEXPL - [Q.D3(a) to D3(e)]; LITKNOW - [Q.D5(a) to D5(e)]
Financial Well-Being	0.877	0.834	.000	FINSAT – [Q.B1(b)(c)]; SUBPERC – [Q.B8,B9]; PERWELL – [Q.B1(a)(d)(e)(f),B5]; BEHASS – [Q.B2(a)(b)(c)]
Filial Piety - Child	0.670	0.827	.000	SUPPO – [Q.E26,E6]; Need – [Q.E11 to E16]; FilObli – [Q.E18,E19,E22]
Filial Piety - Parent	0.713	0.714	.000	InstrSupp – [Q.E1A,E2A,E3A]; ParPerc – [Q.E17,E23]
Need for Assistance	0.899			No subscale – [Q.E11 to E16]
Support Exchange	0.760			No subscale – [Q.E7 to E10]
Parent with Financial Resources	0.610			No subscale – [Q.F1, B5(a), B8]

Measurement

From the 92 item questions in the questionnaire, two important groupings of questions relating to financial well-being and filial piety was factor analyzed to identify common themes. Variables that do not correlate or are too highly correlated are excluded. The latter is to avoid extreme multicollinearity.

Table 1 summarises the result of the scale development.

Financial well-being measure

Financial well-being is used as the dependent variable. Efforts were made on configuring constructs to measure subjective perception, behavior assessment, financial satisfaction, and perceived financial well-being. With Cronbach Alpha at 0.877 indicating high reliability and Factor Analysis Test using the rotated component matrix (KMO – 0.834), the study produced four separate components for hypothesis testing. These are:

- Financial Satisfaction Scale (Q.B1b, c) (Coded as “FINSAT”)
- Subjective Perception of Economic Well Being Scale (Q.B8, 9) (Coded as “SUBPERC”)
- Perceived Financial Well-Being Scale (Q.B1a, d, e, f, B5) (Coded as “PERWELL”)
- Behavioural Assessment of Personal Finance Scale (Q.B2a, b, c) (Coded as “BEHASS”)

Filial piety measure

Efforts were made to examine three domains of children's support: financial support, service support, and emotional support. In financial support, respondents were asked to indicate their financial support frequency. Service support cover questions on house visiting, transportation, repairs to home etc. In emotional support, the questionnaire items covered advice given on problem-solving, and personal and confidential matters. Filial obligation was examined from children and parents' perspective: (a) investigating the support provided for elderly parents by comparing explanatory variables against independent variables; (b) focusing on the effects of adult children's configuration, distance between residences, financial resources etc; and (c) concentrating on the interplay between those variables. In this assessment, five items were designed to assess their general knowledge of financial planning.

To measure their perspective of living expenses, housing,

loneliness, etc on the ‘Filial Piety – Child Scale’, the study revealed Cronbach Alpha of 0.670 which is an acceptable reliability (Nunnally, 1978) and the rotated component matrix (KMO – 0.827) and that the three components had separately fitted well. These are:

- Parents Support Scale (Q.E26, E6) (Coded as “SUPPO”)
- Parents Need Scale (Q.E11 to E16) (Coded as “Need”)
- Filial Obligation Scale (Q.E18, E19, E22) (Coded as “FilObli”)

In measuring the ‘Filial Piety – Parent Scale’, the Cronbach Alpha had shown 0.713 indicating high reliability. After applying the Factor Analysis Test using the rotated component matrix (KMO – 0.714), the research had revealed two components, which had fitted well separately (Table 1), thereby giving rise to the derivation of the two following scales:

- Instrumental Support Scale (Q.E1A, 2A, 3A) (Coded as “InstrSupp”)
- Parent Perception Scale (Q.E17, 23) (Coded as “ParPerc”)

RESEARCH FINDINGS

SPSS was used to analyze the data collected. The results of the descriptive analysis were tabulated in Table 2. This was followed by the multilevel regression analysis for Hypotheses 1 to 7 (Table 3).

For the present study, the respondents' demographic characteristics included gender, marital status, education, age, income, children, housing, and employment. From Table 2, the respondents were female 53.8% and male 46.2%. As a group, they were highly educated, with the largest combined group (71.9%) having some tertiary education and the second largest combined group (22.8%) with high school education, followed by 3.4% with a primary school education and 1.6% with no education. By age, 37.3% of the respondents were in their twenties, 30.2% in the (30-39) age group and 14.7% in the (40-49) age group, while the percentage in their fifties was 9.4% with a further 8.1% being over sixty years of age and the mean age of 31.5. As a group, the respondents had reported moderate income. By combined

Table 2. Descriptive profile of sample.

Description	Gender		Educational Status				Ethnicity			Employment Type			
	M	F	None	Prim	Second	Tertiary	M	C	I	Self	Public	Private	Other
Frequency	176	205	6	13	87	274	34	314	25	37	60	223	55
%	46.2	53.8	1.6	3.4	22.8	71.9	8.9	82.4	6.6	9.7	15.7	58.5	14.4
Description	Own Home		Marital Status			Children			Age Group				
	Yes	No	Single	Married	Other	0	1	≥ 2	20- 29	30-39	40-49	50-59	≥ 60
Frequency	243	138	191	174	15	215	38	128	142	115	56	36	32
%	63.5	36.2	50.1	45.7	3.9	56.6	10.0	33.4	37.3	30.2	14.7	9.4	8.4
Description	Income (RM)												
	< 2000	2000-2999	3000-3999	4000-4999	5000-5999	6000-6999	7000-7999	8000-8999		9000-9999			≥ 10000
Frequency	68	71	72	43	47	12	16	6		1			34
%	17.9	18.6	18.9	11.3	12.3	3.1	4.2	1.6		0.3			8.9

Table 3. Hypothesis results.

Hypothesis	Δ F	Δ R ²	Signi.	Significant variables
H1.1: From children's perspective, there is more support from the children who are in more contact with their parents.	8.246	0.172	.001**	DAge4,DAge5,FilObli1, SUPPO,Need
H1.2: From parents' perspective, there is more support from the children who are in more contact with their parents.	2.842	.027	.061	
H2: Parents with financial resources are more likely to co-reside with their adult children than those with little financial resources.	.071	.071	.790	DEduc,DAge2
H3.1: The longer the children are away from the parents, the lesser will be the parents need given to them.	5.112	.019	.010**	DAge4,AwayTime
H3.2: The longer the children are away from the parents, the less will be the filial obligation given to them.	12.047	.033	.001**	AwayTime
H3.3: The longer the children are away from the parents, the less will be the parents support given to them.	9.829	.030	.002**	DAge5,AwayTime
H4.1: The support given by parents to children influences the instrumental support they receive.	8.470	.376	.000**	Children,Ethnic,DMarr1,DAge2
H4.2: The support given by parents to children influences the support they receive from parents' perspective.	3.818	.122	.000**	Children,DEduc,DAge3, DAge4
H5: There is a relationship of support exchanges between parents and children and opportunities to give support.	8.421	.374	.000**	Ethnic,Children,Gender,DAge2
H6: There is a positive relationship between children and parents about filial responsibilities, sharing the view that children are obligated to provide support if their parents need it.	7.689	.369	.000**	Ethnic,Children,Home,DAge2
H7: Adult children with higher family income and high level of filial obligation will provide more opportunity for support to their parents.	(1)2.322 (2)0.232	.008 .001	.129 .631	Ethnic,Children,DAge2

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; (1) Model 1, (2) Model 2.

Table 4. Coefficient of the hierarchical regression analysis.

Model	Factor	B	SE B	β
1	FilOblig	.086	.057	.091
2	F1	.044	.091	.032

Model 1 : $\Delta R^2 = 0.008$ ($p = 0.129$); Model 2 : $\Delta R^2 = 0.001$ ($p = 0.631$).

categories, 68.6% of the respondents had personal incomes less than RM5,000 and 8.9% had personal income above RM10,000, with the largest group (18.9%) having a personal income of RM3,000 to RM3,999, followed by the next largest group (18.6%) with personal income between RM2,000 and RM2,999. The average number of financial dependents per respondent was one, while 10.0% of them had one dependant, 15.7% two dependants, 12.9% three dependants, 3.1% four dependants, and 56.4% no dependant. 63.5% of the respondents were homeowners, and 36.5% renters or staying with someone. Homeownership accounted for a large part of an individual's expenditure and, therefore, had a significant impact on their retirement planning. Married and single respondents were almost equal in number (approx. 50%), when married respondents were taken as inclusive of divorced and widowed respondents. Furthermore, the majority of respondents (58.5%) worked in the private sector; 15.7% were engaged in the public sector; 9.7% were self-employed and 14.4% in others (unspecified).

The results of the multilevel regression analyses are described below:

H1 dealt with children's contact with parents measured with two statements: *'If you are not staying with your parents, how often do you meet them?'* and *'How far do you stay from your parents?'* From parents' perspective, the contact was measured with two different statements: *'If you have an adult child, how far do you stay from your son/daughter?'* and *'How far do you stay from your own parents?'* In H1.1, only age was significant at 0.05 with older age group being more important predictor. From children's perspective, variables were significant at 0.01 ($\Delta R^2 = .172$, $\Delta F = 8.246$, $p < .001$) thereby rejecting the null hypothesis. In H1.2, no demographic characteristic significant was at 0.05 and variables from parents' perspective were insignificant at 0.05 ($\Delta R^2 = .027$, $\Delta F = 2.842$, $p = .061$) thereby accepting the null hypothesis.

H2 dealt with parents' financial resources as inducement for children's co-residence were measured with the financial resources scale indicating Cronbach Alpha at 0.637 i.e. fairly high reliability and no significant demographic characteristics at 0.05. Hence, the parents construct with financial resources was insignificant at 0.05 ($\Delta R^2 = .071$, $\Delta F = .071$, $p = .790$) leading to the null hypothesis being accepted.

H3 covered the filial obligations of the 'absentee'

children who are less filial and give less support to parents (Ikkink et al., 1999) thereby necessitating separate discussion of Parents Support (SUPPO), Parents Need (Need) and Filial Obligation (FilObl1). In H3.1, the Parents Need factor revealed no significant demographic characteristics at 0.05 except for the (50 - 59) age group. The overall regression was significant at 0.01 ($\Delta R^2 = .019$, $\Delta F = 5.112$, $p < .01$) leading to the null hypothesis being rejected. In H3.2, the FilObl1 factor showed the (30 - 39) and the (over 60) age groups as being significant at 0.05 and the overall regression also significant at 0.01 ($\Delta R^2 = .033$, $\Delta F = 12.047$, $p < .01$) resulting in null hypothesis rejection. In H3.3, the Parents Support factor showed only the (50 -59) age group as significant at 0.05 while the regression model was also significant at 0.01 ($\Delta R^2 = .030$, $\Delta F = 9.829$, $p < .01$) also leading to null hypothesis rejection.

H4 dealt with children's support given to parents on the basis of reciprocity as filial obligations, Filial Piety from parents' perspective comprising Instrumental Support (InstrSupp) and Parents Perception (ParPerc) was discussed in H4.1 and H4.2. In H4.1, the InstrSupport indicated gender, age, employment type and marriage being significant at 0.05 and the overall regression also significant at 0.01 ($\Delta R^2 = .376$, $\Delta F = 8.470$, $p < .001$) thereby rejecting null hypothesis. In H4.2, the ParPerc revealed the number of children, education level and age were significant at 0.05 with the overall regression being significant at 0.01 ($\Delta R^2 = .122$, $\Delta F = 3.818$, $p < .001$) thereby also rejecting null hypothesis.

H5 was measured with three items showing Cronbach Alpha at 0.963 indicating very high reliability. Employment type, age, gender and marriage were significant at 0.05 and the overall regression also significant at 0.01 ($\Delta R^2 = .374$, $\Delta F = 8.421$, $p < .001$) and, hence, the rejection of null hypothesis.

H6 revealed 0.907 on Cronbach Alpha. The regression results under the Parents Need further revealed children, age, ethnicity and home were all significant at 0.05 and the overall regression also significant at the 0.01 level ($\Delta R^2 = .369$, $\Delta F = 7.689$, $p < .01$). The null hypothesis was rejected

In H7, the regression results under Filial Piety (FilOblig) with Opportunity for Support (InstrSupp) indicated age, ethnicity and children as significant at 0.05. In Table 4, when FilOblig was added with the same dependent variable in Model 1, the results was not significant at 0.05 ($\Delta R^2 = .008$, $\Delta F = 2.322$, $p = .129$). When Children's F1 was added to the same dependent variable in Model 2, the results revealed the F change as more insignificant at 0.05 ($\Delta R^2 = .001$, $\Delta F = .232$, $p = .631$). As both filial piety and higher income was not significant, this led to the null hypothesis being acceptable. There was also no moderating effect.

Concluding remarks

The study had assessed the relationship with demo-

graphic characteristics and personal financial well-being measures. The result indicated that home ownership was positively related with subjective perception, perceived financial well-being and financial satisfaction and that married respondents had more financial obligations. Similarly, age was positively related with retirement funds but negatively with financial obligations, whilst older respondents had more retirement funds and less indebtedness. Using structural circumstances as determinants for children's support to parents in evaluating the giving and receiving of instrumental support, the study further disclosed more adult children favoring the traditional filial piety than those who merely gave 'lip-service'. Results also indicated that parents received more support, if they and children had endorsed the traditional filial piety practice and that (a) parents with financial resources were less likely to co-reside with their adult children, (b) relationship characteristics were important determinants of support exchanges in varying degrees, (c) more support could only be exchanged if parents or children themselves shared the opinion that children should give support to parents, and (c) children with higher family income and filial obligation might not necessarily give parents more support. Finally, Malaysian parents could generally count on children's financial support for retirement. Prominent researchers like Lusardi and Mitchell (2009) have provided evidence of widespread financial illiteracy and this is where our findings support for children's filial piety attitude can mitigate the parent's lack of sound financial planning.

IMPLICATIONS

A large number of studies carried out on Malaysia have tended to reflect the needs and interests of the researchers involved. So far, no study has been conducted for the sole purpose of guiding organisations in Malaysia to gain full advantage of the nation's diverse populations. Family institution was considered very important to the Chinese (Filial Piety). The head of the family is always viewed as the leader. Their aim to achieve success leads back to providing for their families' needs and being able to gain good social standing and status in the Chinese community.

The current EPF system in Malaysia does not allow a majority of retirees to retire comfortably and some may even use up their savings within three years of retirement. The filial piety virtues can have strong implications for policy makers in easing the burden of costs on caring for the elderly. Gradual erosion of the filial piety *per se* certainly requires some rethinking *vis-à-vis* Malaysian parents should (with school authorities' cooperation) inculcate in children the importance of filial piety and moral education including the virtues of humanity, righteousness, propriety and wisdom as a way of life. If this is lacking, then an alternative is to provide tax incentives to employers to hire retirees particularly for certain jobs

which are not too taxing instead of hiring young foreign workers which can be a big drain on foreign reserves. Such reliefs can be double tax relief for companies hiring retirees and a tax-free status for retirees that would offset their pay cut. The Government can also set up a website that lists companies wanting to hire retirees for ease of coordination.

Given the gradual erosion of the filial piety concept discussed earlier, no efforts should be spared to inculcate in children the importance of the filial responsibilities especially among family members as a tradition and way of life. One way to popularise the traditional cultural practice would be through the conduct of moral education as part of the school curriculum. This can complement educating the general public by facilitating educational forums to instill the positive benefits or incentives in learning to financially plan for their future.

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