

STAYING ENGAGED: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE PURSUITS AND DESIRED OF SENIOR CITIZENS AFTER RETIREMENT

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Abstract: Retirement, often seen as a peaceful stage of life, depends on how retirees utilize their time meaningfully. This study explores the activities and desires of retirees in Kuching, Sarawak, through 8 semi-structured interviews with Chinese respondents aged 65 to 86. The researchers adopted thematic analysis as our approach, and social interactions emerged as a significant element in the current study. However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted and reshaped the efforts related to social engagements. Despite economic activities, monetary gain is not a top priority; instead, retirees find satisfaction in artistic and cultural endeavors, prompting further inquiry. Our study also uncovers retirees' longings, revealing a desire for external support driven by empathy and a yearning for cultural experiences, indicating a desire to preserve cultural heritage. These findings lay a foundation for tailored activities for retirees and merit further investigation especially after retirement.

Keywords: Retired elderly, Activities, Longings, COVID-19, Ageing

INTRODUCTION

Embarking on retirement symbolizes a transformative shift in an individual's existence, indicating the conclusion of a career and the beginning of a new chapter filled with opportunities for leisure, personal growth, and reflection. In Malaysia, a multicultural nation known for its vibrant diversity and dynamic economy, retirement represents a stage where individuals aspire to enjoy the fruits of their labor while maintaining financial security and health issues (Bauer and Eichenberger, 2021). Research has consistently

demonstrated that retirement is often associated with negative impacts (Shai, 2018), particularly on physical health attributed to the aging process. Engaging in regular exercise emerges as a critical factor in maintaining overall health and well-being during retirement (Bertoni *et al.*, 2018).

With an aging population and shifting demographics, retirement planning has become increasingly pertinent in Malaysia. As life expectancy rises and societal structures evolve, there is a growing emphasis on preparing for retirement to ensure a comfortable and fulfilling lifestyle during the golden years.

Mental Health Issues Among the Retired Elderly

Despite the commonly held belief that retirement is an opportunity to unwind and have fun, it may not lead to fulfillment for every retiree, especially among older men who face significantly higher rates of suicide on a global scale. In the US, males aged 65 to 74 exhibit suicide rates of 24.7 per 100,000, peaking at 40.5 for those aged 75 and above. Similarly, Malaysia records high suicide rates among the elderly, reaching 36.71 per 100,000 individuals aged 85 and above. Depression prevalence remains consistently high among the elderly across various countries. Additionally, the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease increases with age, with significant prevalence rates observed among older age groups. Health complications in old age may hinder meaningful activities, exacerbating issues like loneliness, cognitive decline, and mental health challenges among retirees.

The Significance of Engaging in Activities

While aging's challenges cannot be fully halted, they can be delayed through activity engagement. Studies by Rolland *et al.* (2008) and Poey *et al.* (2017) demonstrate the benefits of physical and social activities in delaying cognitive decline, while Lim *et al.* (2009) and Thaithakul *et al.* (2022) highlight their protective effects on cognitive health and subjective well-being, respectively. Retirees commonly transition into routines focused on physical and social activities post-employment, as noted by Ekerdt and Koss (2015) and Kristensen *et al.* (2023). Failure to navigate this transition can lead to loneliness and associated issues, as outlined by Giné-Garriga *et al.* (2021). Despite staying active, retirees may still experience unmet desires, influenced by factors like physical limitations and lack of companionship, as observed by McAvoy (1979). This study aims to fill the gap in understanding post-

retirement life, focusing on the activities and longings of retired individuals in Kuching, Sarawak, which remains largely unexplored. With Kuching's accessibility and lack of prior research in the area, it serves as an ideal location for this investigation, with two primary objectives, to understand the daily routines and the engagement of the retired elderly and to explore the needs and longings of the retired elderly.

METHOD

Research Design

Employing a qualitative methodology and descriptive design, this study involves conducting semi-structured interviews. Longhurst (2009) highlights the effectiveness of such interviews in exploring complex behaviors and sensitive issues. Semi-structured interviews are chosen to delve into activities, longings, and satisfaction among retired individuals. Main questions are prepared in advance to cover these topics, with additional follow-up questions to gather more insights and foster natural conversations.

Sampling Strategies and Participants Selection

Convenience sampling was employed for its cost-effectiveness and accessibility. This method involves selecting subjects nearest to the researcher who are willing to participate. To mitigate potential bias, only individuals not directly related to, or friends of the researcher were included. This measure was taken to ensure that the obtained data is diverse, rich and adhered to the research objectives.

Dworkin (2012) recommends a range of 5 to 50 respondents for in-depth interview studies. In accordance with this guideline, we selected 8 respondents after collecting sufficient data. This study sampled eight respondents, adhering to predefined criteria. Firstly, they had to be aged 65 years or above, aligning with the World Health Organization's definition of elderly individuals. Furthermore, participants were not involved in either part-time or full-time employment, though occasional paid work was acceptable if it did not constitute their main source of income. This measure was implemented to ensure that daily routines, needs, and longing were unrelated to work commitments. Thirdly, they needed to have adequate hearing and speaking abilities to facilitate interviews.

Research Location

Kuching, Sarawak was chosen as the research location. Kuching city is the capital of the state of Sarawak and is the most populated area in the state with an estimated 711,500 citizens as of 2020 (The Official Portal of Sarawak Government, 2020), which eases sampling. To the researcher's knowledge, studies investigating the activities and longings of the retired elderly have yet to be conducted in Kuching.

Interview Protocol

Interviews are conducted in English, Mandarin (and dialects) or a mix of both in accordance with the interviewee's comfort. Interviews are split into three parts, Part A (demographic information), Part B (current activities and hobbies), and Part C (longings). Additional questions are asked to make interviewees feel more comfortable and engaged, while also gauging more information about how they conduct activities and their feelings or opinions.

Main questions for Part A include: "What is your current age and marital status?", "How many children and grandchildren do you currently have?", "What was your career before retirement?" and "What are your current sources of income?".

Main questions for Part B include: "What are your current hobbies and activities?", "How often do you conduct these activities?", "Do you usually do these activities alone or with others?" and "Did you pick these activities up after retirement?".

Main questions for Part C include: "Are there any activities or events that you hope to join?", "Are these events commonly available in Kuching?", and "What type of activities are you more inclined/willing to join?".

Procedure

Potential interviewees were initially contacted via messages and phone calls to explain the study. Once an interview was agreed upon, a suitable date and location were arranged. Prior to each interview, introductions were made, and consent for recording was obtained. Video and audio recording devices, such as a laptop and smartphone, were utilized for transcription convenience. Interviews typically lasted between 30 to 90 minutes, during which main questions were posed alongside additional probes. Following each interview,

recordings were transcribed digitally. Patterns within responses were identified, categorized into themes, and analyzed for data interpretation.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data from the interviews undergo thematic analysis, a method that identifies patterns in collected data and connects them with existing concepts for interpretation (Ibrahim, 2012). The steps that involve is, 1) Familiarization with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, and 5) defining and naming the themes. A modified Coding followed an inductive approach, beginning with observation, analysis, and the development of themes for each research objective based on the responses. Having gathered responses from all eight participants, we have amassed sufficient data to address our research objectives. Analysis revealed repetitive themes with no new information emerging, indicating that data saturation has been achieved. To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, we adopted a method called member checking, which involves verifying the accuracy of findings by seeking feedback from participants. These involved researchers verifying the identified themes with the participants during a follow-up session to ensure no vital information had been overlooked. Figure 1 shows the thematic analysis model developed by Maguire & Delahunt (2017).

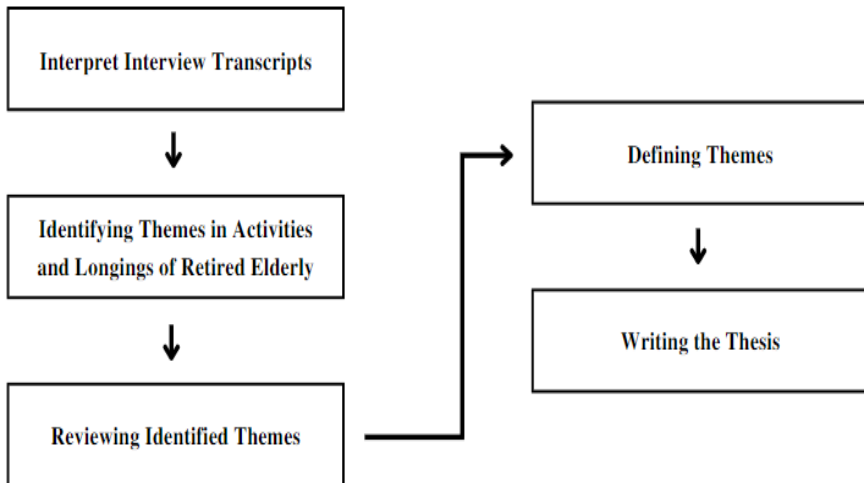


Figure 1. Framework of Thematic Analysis

Results

Demographic Data

The demographic data of respondents (Table 1) indicate an age range of 65 to 86 years, predominantly male (87.5%). Most were married (75.0%), with one widower and one never-married respondent. Nearly all had children and grandchildren, except for one respondent who never married and another with no grandchildren. Religiosity levels varied from moderate to high, with the majority identifying as Christians or Catholics (62.5%), followed by Chinese Folk Religion believers (25.0%), and one Muslim (12.5%). Income classifications align with Department of Statistics Malaysia's (2020) criteria: B40 (low income), M40 (average income), and T20 (high income), defined as below RM 3720, between RM 3720 and RM 8649, and RM 8650 and above, respectively.

Table 1: Demographic Data of Respondents

Respondents	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Previous Career(s)	Religion/Religiosity	Children/Grandchildren	IBR	CI
R1	Female	65	NM	Teacher	C/ High	0/0	Upper Average	Average
R2	Male	76	M	Teacher	CFR/ Moderate	4/7	Upper Average	Upper Average
R3	Male	76	M	Statistics assistant, car salesman	C/ Moderate	2/2	Low	Low
R4	Male	83	M	Statistics officer	C/ High	3/5	Low	Low
R5	Male	79	M	Clerical worker	C/ Moderate	2/4	Low	Low
R6	Male	86	M	Teacher, professional artist	CFR/ Moderate	2/7	Lower Low	Lower Low
R7	Male	70	M	Navy officer, insurance manager, radio advertisement salesman	C/ High	1/1	Low	Low
R8	Male	70	W	Marketing and management expert	I/ Moderate	3/0	High	None

*NM = Never Married, M = Married, W = Widower

*C = Christianity/ Catholic, CFR = Chinese Folk Religion, I = Islam

*IBR = Income Before Retirement, CI = Current Income

Theme 1: Social Activities

The social activities of retired elderly individuals can be categorized into two primary themes: interactions with family members and interactions with friends. Within the theme of social activities with family members, the presence of children and grandchildren can significantly impact the frequency and nature of these interactions. Respondents who have children or grandchildren reported engaging in regular social activities with them, highlighting the importance of inter-generational connections in their social lives.

R7, who had a daughter who lived in another city, described regular visits to the daughter if the flight ticket was cheap.

R1, who did not have any children, instead mentioned she has many nieces and nephews, whom she reportedly contacts very often.

However, respondents also indicated that their younger family members may be unavailable or busy, thus reducing these social interactions.

Social interactions with friends typically involve frequent gatherings with peers of similar age and are a common occurrence. Sharing meals, such as breakfast or lunch, with friends appears to be a popular leisure activity among the retired elderly.

Theme 2: Hobby-based Activities

Respondents also mentioned staying occupied through participation in various hobby-related activities. Gardening is highly popular, as 6 (R1, R2, R4, R5, R7 & R8) out of 8 respondents (75.0%) reported engagement in the hobby to varying degrees of passion. This trend is also noted by R1, who stated that many retirees cultivated plants as a hobby. Respondents expressed joy and pride in watching their plants grow.

Another popular hobby is traveling, mentioned by 4 respondents (50.0%). R1 mentioned her numerous travels to many different countries.

R5 shared his passion for traveling, albeit on a budget-friendly scale. He mentioned that he has developed a new appreciation for exploring the outskirts of town, a hobby he only discovered after retiring.

Theme 3: Physical Activities

Numerous respondents participated in physical activities, and some notably reported dedicating more time to these pursuits after retirement.

Vigorous physical activity emerged as a distinct subtheme within the broader category of physical activity. Half of the respondents (R1, R3, R5, R8) reported engagement in intensive activities such as hiking and badminton. R1 described hiking on occasion and has been to several hiking spots.

R3 and R5 described engagement in vigorous activity when they first retired but eventually stopped as they became older. R5 added more context to why he stopped.

The second identified subtheme is light physical activity, which is also mentioned by half the respondents (R1, R2, R3, R4). Brisk walking is commonly reported by respondents and is mentioned by R3, who stopped engaging in vigorous physical activity.

Theme 4: Religious Activities

Most respondents described participating in religious activities. R8 reported going to the mosque occasionally. Interestingly, every Christian or Catholic in this study (R1, R3, R4, R5, and R7) participated in a significant amount of church activity and considered themselves moderately or highly religious. R7 responded passionately when asked how often he goes to church, stating the following when asked how often he goes to church. While involvement in religious activities is high, little elaboration was given by most respondents, which may suggest a lower significance.

Theme 5: Economic Activities

Although more than half of the respondents participate in economic activities, responses indicate that these activities are not their main sources of income. R6, who was a professional artist, describes selling his works when asked if his pension is satisfactory.

The retired elderly may engage in economic activities, but as respondents suggest, are not their main source of income. Economics activities may be related to their past career or interests, such as with R1 and teaching, R3 with cars and R7 with radio advertising.

Table 2: Themes in Activities of the Retired Elderly

No	Themes/ Subthemes	N (%)	Example transcripts
1	Social Activities	8(100.0%)	
a.	With Family	5 (62.5%)	<i>Try to bring grandsons to the shopping mall just to pass time. I look for colleague, classmate, and relative for tea. ... my grandchildren will take me out for breakfast</i>
b.	With Friends	7 (87.5%)	<i>I have tea once a week with my former classmates. I go for breakfast with my former classmates, friends and teachers. I have a few groups of friends. One group is with senior citizens made up of professionals. We get together every week and have dinner sometimes</i>
2	Hobby-Based Activities	7 (87.5%)	
a.	Gardening	6 (75.0%)	<i>I also do gardening as leisure. I like the feeling of seeing my hard work grow. Yeah, gardening, growing vegetables. A lot of retirees go into gardening. So right now, I come back to farming/gardening. I had the background; I was born in the countryside.</i>
b.	Travelling/ Sightseeing	5 (62.5%)	<i>I went to the Balkan States in 2019, 2018 I went to Israel. Then the pandemic came. I mean like Japan, Korea, Vietnam, I've been. Driving to the countryside. Sightseeing and visiting places, coastal area, out-country, kampung-kampung and so on. I normally travel with my family la</i>
3.	Physical Activities	6 (75.0%)	

a.	Vigorous Physical Activity	4 (50.0%)	<i>I go hiking; I've been to Bengoh Dam, I've been to Gunung Serapi" I play badminton very frequent(ly). One week about 4 times. One session about 3 hours. After retirement, I was very sporty. Swimming, badminton, table tennis...</i>
b.	Light Physical Activi	4 (50.0%)	<i>Now probably go for brisk walking Because I exercise every day, ligament exercises, jogging I walk 5 miles every day</i>
4.	Religious Activities	6 (75.0%)	<i>All that I follow. Even MCO I also go (to church), don't care one. Every Sunday, holiday (I go to church) I have my own activities. Church activities. Occasionally I go to the mosque.</i>
5.	Economic Activities	5 (62.5%)	<i>I do give tuition now, but that is not my main source of income. Then, you can say I am now a freelance salesman. Vehicles. Radio advertising. For Ai FM, Sarawak FM, Sabah FM.</i>

Themes of Longings of the Retired Elderly

Some respondents expressed longings for activities and improvements, particularly on the unavailability of certain activities, or the absence of additional support. Four distinct themes emerged from the current data in this study.

Longings for External Support

Three respondents expressed a desire for external support for the retired elderly. Specifically, R2 and R7 emphasized the essential of providing living spaces that go beyond just medical care, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive and supportive environment that addresses the diverse needs of older adults. While R2 believed that associations or organizations have the capability and could provide these retirement places, R7 perceived it as his responsibility to develop such an environment. R1 perceived a need for organizations that provide companionship and travel opportunities to the elderly.

Longings for Culture-Related Activities

Several respondents expressed a strong desire to delve deeper into Chinese culture and heritage. Specifically, R2, R4, and R8 demonstrated a keen interest in reconnecting with their cultural roots, focusing on the aspects of literature, culture, and history. R2’s interest is not only reflected in his continued efforts in promoting Chinese cultural values, but also his desire in exploring China’s classical culture.

Similarly, R8’s also showed an interest in Chinese culture, as reflected in his hobby of collecting excerpts from Chinese literature, and his response when asked the type of activity he hoped to join.

Longings for Exhibitions, Conventions and Events

Several respondents expressed a strong desire to attend exhibitions, conventions, and events that align with their personal interests. R6, who devoted the better part of his life in pursuit of fine arts, showed interest in art exhibitions, but believe it as a rare occurrence in Kuching.

R3, a car and music enthusiast, demonstrated a keen interest in participating in car and music-related conventions. When asked about his interest in car competitions or related events, he responded positively with but expressed some concerns. He also described looking forward to visiting Audiovisual shows. R4, who talked passionately about his past hobby in photography, also replied positively when asked whether he liked photography exhibitions.

Longing for Hobby-based Activities

R1 and R2 expressed enthusiasm for participating in activities centered around their hobbies, specifically gardening and cooking. While R2 did not specify the type of gardening activity, R1 described it as “some tips on gardening skills”. However, R1 also acknowledged information can be obtained through the internet, stating the following when asked if she desired a workshop on the hobby.

Table 3: Longings of the Retired Elderly

Theme	N (%)	Example transcripts
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<p>Longing for External Support 3 (37.5%)</p>	<p><i>Now that people live longer, there are more elderly. These associations have money and land. They can set up living spaces for the elderly to let them plant vegetables and have spaces to interact with each other. Sometimes it can be pretty lonely. There are no organisations to help these elderly to maybe bring them for trips to visit places. Because some of them cannot drive, or they don't know how to go. And the other one I think, which is a serious need, is a lot of old people sometimes have trouble with technology. A lot of apps, (they) don't know how to use, and (they have) nobody to ask</i></p>
<p>Longing for Culture- Related Activities 3 (37.5%)</p>	<p><i>I am more interested in China's classical culture. The changing dynasties and the records of important figures including Confucius, Laozi and Zhuangzi, and also from other dynasties are worth our understanding.</i></p>
<p>Longing for Exhibitions, Conventions, and Events 3 (37.5%)</p>	<p><i>If I see exhibitions with great pieces of art, I will feel happy. However, these occurrences are very low, especially in Kuching. Last time KL every year got this AV show. Where all these big companies display their audio, and video equipment. I used to go there la. That's an activity I look forward to.</i></p>
<p>Longing for Hobby- Based Activities 2 (25.0%)</p>	<p><i>[What type of activity would you be more inclined to join?] Personally, cooking, gardening. Some tips on gardening skills.</i></p>

Discussion

As indicated by the results, retired elderly individuals engage in a diverse range of activities; however, they still express desires for additional activities and support. This section offers potential explanations for the themes that were identified.

Activities of the Retired Elderly

Theme 1: Social activities.

The high participation rate and frequent engagement in social activities reinforce the activity's significance to the retired elderly. Ejechi (2015) found social participation among Nigerian academics to increase after retirement, inferring that social activities enrich the abundance of free time during their retirement. The high frequency can also be connected to the positive impacts

of social activities with subjective well-being (Ramia & Voicu, 2022; Adams *et al.*, 2011) as implied by the respondents' avoidance of solidarity. Respondents seem to enjoy regular interactions with grandchildren, which helps increase the variety of social activities and reduces depression (Yang & Yin, 2022). Notably, in-person social gatherings and meetups seem to hold significant importance for retired elderly individuals, as evident in the frequent mention of "lim kopi" or "coffee gathering" among respondents. Two respondents also explicitly expressed their willingness to spend money on social activities, suggesting that money may enhance the experience.

Theme 2: Hobby-based Activities.

Gardening appears to be a highly popular leisure activity among retired individuals. A trend possibly amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic's restrictions, as noted by Egerer *et al.* (2022). Engaging in gardening allows retirees to connect with nature, unwind, engage in physical activity, and even grow their own food. Respondents in our study echoed these sentiments, describing gardening as a reflective activity that brings satisfaction despite its close to nature. Vroom's expectancy theory (1964) suggests that expending energy on meaningful activities can be enjoyable, possibly explaining the allure of gardening. While travel is often seen as desirable, it may not always be feasible due to financial constraints. Interestingly, some low-income respondents expressed an interest in travel, indicating personal preference regardless of financial limitations. Nonetheless, accumulated wealth and pensions could play a role, as suggested by respondents who hinted at the financial requirements of travel. Additionally, travel offers retirees the opportunity to engage in new experiences and cultural enrichment, as reflected in their enthusiasm for exploring diverse cultures and literature from other countries.

Theme 3: Physical Activities.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022) recommend older adults to aim for at least 150 minutes of light or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity per week. However, our findings reveal that only 75.0% of respondents engaged in any form of physical activity, suggesting a gap in meeting these guidelines among retired individuals. While vigorous activity was reported by 4 respondents, only 2 continued to participate, with age possibly influencing activity levels. Younger respondents (aged 65- and 70-

years-old) were more likely to engage in vigorous activities, while concerns about age and overexertion deterred others. Light activities like brisk walking and jogging appeared more feasible for retired elders, potentially fostering social connections, as noted by one respondent who mentioned having "jogging buddies." Physically active respondents emphasized the importance of exercise, citing its benefits for gait, walking, self-esteem, and emotional well-being. Previous research supports the positive effects of physical activity on self-confidence, emotional resilience, and combating ageism (Oloo *et al.*, 2018; San Román-Mata *et al.*, 2020; Klusmann *et al.*, 2012). Our findings suggest a need for elder-friendly facilities in public spaces, with enhancements such as accessible transport, mobility assistance, and natural environments, which could positively impact physical activity levels among retired individuals (Yung *et al.*, 2016).

Theme 4: Religious Activities.

Religiosity has been previously found to be highly beneficial to the elderly, providing a sense of well-being and comfort (Oliveira & Menezes, 2018) while also reducing functional limitations (Benjamins, 2004) among other benefits. In the current study, responses suggest religiosity helped strengthen mental fortitude in old age. Respondents expressed gratitude towards the Higher powers for their good health (My salary is from the top) and successful retirement (So this retired life very good la. God is good la). Furthermore, religion may also help them cope with life, as one respondent stated seeking guidance from Jesus after their parents' passing. While not explicitly stated by respondents, participation in church activities may also provide them with companionship in later life (Malone & Dadswell, 2018).

Theme 5: Economic activities.

Some retired elderly may engage in economic activities but do not see profit as the main draw. Paid work during retirement may instead be another method the elderly employ to keep themselves occupied. Previous studies support this notion. Soumerai and Avorn (1983) found retired elders working part-time to have improved life satisfaction and self-perceived health. Sewdas *et al.* (2017) strongly support our results, finding financial benefits to be secondary motivators, but purpose in life to be highly significant when choosing to work post-retirement. Interestingly, economic activities described by respondents

had flexible work hours, and were only minimally participated in, implying that it is not as significant compared to other activities that they may have.

Longings of the Retired Elderly

Theme 1: Longing for external support.

Some respondents expressed a need for additional support, particularly in terms of care and technical assistance. Interestingly, those who voiced this longing were not necessarily in need themselves but were advocating for their less fortunate peers. For example, R1's desire for companionship groups arose from her observations of lonely elders. Similarly, R2 and R7 expressed a desire for improved retirement facilities without directly identifying themselves as in need. These responses underscore the significance of external support for the elderly, as noted by Bruggencate *et al.* (2018). Ageism may contribute to reluctance in seeking external assistance among retirees (Canvin *et al.*, 2018), highlighting the significance of emotional empathy in addressing these needs, especially as individuals age (Beadle & de la Vega, 2019). Additionally, R1 mentioned the necessity of support in understanding technology, an issue she herself faced. Limited digital literacy among the elderly can hinder access to telehealth services and socialization opportunities, especially crucial during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Martins Van Jaarsveld, 2020).

Theme 2: Longing for culture-related activities.

Some respondents, being Chinese themselves, expressed a keen interest in learning about Chinese culture. This interest often translates into active participation in cultural activities, as noted by R2 and R8. Previous research has indicated the benefits of visiting museums in reducing dementia risks (Fancourt *et al.*, 2018). Respondents frequently emphasized the value of learning from Chinese culture, including insights from historical figures and literature. Moreover, the desire to pass down cultural teachings suggests a sense of generativity, a concept proposed by Erikson (1963) involving the concern for guiding future generations. This longing for cultural enrichment may represent a desire to enhance personal identities and contribute to generativity. The pursuit of cultural roots, or "xun gen" (寻根), may be particularly significant among Overseas Chinese, such as Malaysian Chinese,

who attach importance to their ethnic identity due to historical discrimination, as observed in respondent R8's situation, who married into a Malay family.

Theme 3: Longing for exhibitions, conventions, and events.

Some retired elderly may long for a convenient place to keep up with personal interests and hobbies. As most of Malaysia's events are not held in Kuching, one respondent stated travelling annually just to participate in them. Undeniably, organisers would usually host events in populous areas, and with Kuala Lumpur at an estimated 1.75 million citizens (Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal, 2021), events generally happen around the area. This causes some difficulty for the elderly of Kuching, particularly with transport. One respondent expressed reluctance in joining an activity if transport is not provided, which could be exacerbated with air travel. Apart from availability, the quality of the event may also be criticised, as one respondent stated, "great pieces of art are rarely seen in exhibitions in Kuching. However, these complaints may not be as significant as they stem from a single respondent. Such events can still be greatly beneficial for the elderly, as visiting exhibitions was previously found to positively impact subjective well-being (Brajša-Žganec *et al.*, 2011).

Theme 4: Longing for hobby-based activities.

A minority of respondents displayed interest in joining activities based on their hobbies, specifically gardening and culinary. Intriguingly, gardening has been adapted into therapy in recent years as horticultural therapy. Park *et al.*'s (2016) study on gardening interventions showed promising results, helping Korean elders maintain their physical health while improving their cognitive functioning and preventing depression. Properly guiding the retired elderly in their hobbies may further deepen these interests, leading to greater engagement and fulfilment. R1's preference of a physical workshop over searching for information online may also indicate that direct or face-to-face interactions are more engaging for the retired elderly.

Conclusion

Retirement success hinges on active engagement in various activities. Prior to our study, little was understood about the pursuits of retired elders in Kuching.

Our findings reveal a diverse range of activities, with social engagement emerging as a consistent preference, emphasizing its importance in combating social isolation. Surprisingly, monetary concerns appear less significant, as retirees prioritize spending on activities rather than pursuing side incomes. Although retired elders in Kuching express a strong preference for outdoor and face-to-face activities, there is an increasing necessity to enhance their digital literacy skills to ensure their active participation in the modern, technology-driven world. Contrary to common perceptions, retirees are more active and empathetic than portrayed, often expressing concern for others. Our study suggests that enhanced external support, new experiences, and personal enrichment could enrich retirement experiences. Notably, the involvement of retired elders in arts and cultural activities presents a promising area for future research.

Informed Consent Statement

The participants provided informed consent by agreeing to be respondents during the interview.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Ethics Statement

This study was approved by the Faculty of Psychology and Universiti Malaysia Sabah, under course PA31206, Academic Exercise.

Author Contributions

Nathan is the main author, data collection and Hon is the monitoring the study, provide feedback and editing the themes.

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Data Availability Statement

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in their entirety in this published article itself. Ethics approval, participant permissions, and all other relevant approvals were granted for this data sharing.

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