

## Tangible and Intangible Alimony to Aging Parents among Adult Children: A Systematic Review

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### Abstract

The gradually increase of life expectation within ageing society will have an impact on the burden and dependent on children in terms of care, health needs, emotional and social support as well as finances from adult children is the most important factor in the survival of the elderly. This article aims to explore the tangible and intangible alimony to aging parents among adult children. Articles retrieved related to the concept of tangible and intangible alimony to the older person were identified through Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). The findings of this SLR found that 20 articles related to the theme of older person alimony could be extracted as the majority of the articles concentrated on tangible support. The main research gap that emerges is that the aging parents long for intangible support such as emotional support, social activities, biopsychosocial and health information, chit-chat and companionship to avoid loneliness. This phenomenon appeared post COVID-19 pandemic when most aging experience loneliness and depression. This article proposes that community-based intangible support can be utilized in urban and rural areas in an Asian setting. Further research is need to study how intangible support elements for older parents can be successfully implement through the family and community based social work approach.

**Keywords:** Tangible, Intangible, Alimony, Aging Parents, Adult Children

### Introduction

Population in the world are living longer, according to United Nations (2019) the ageing population is increasing significantly worldwide between 1950 and 2050. United Nations (2019) has defined an ageing nation when 15 percent of the country's population are aged 60 to 65 years and over. Meanwhile in Malaysia, the National Policy for Older Persons categorized those aged 60 and above as the ageing population. Malaysia is now heading towards an ageing nation, whereby the Department of Statistics Malaysia DOSM (2020) reports that the current aging population is at 5.8 million (15.3%) and is expected to increase yearly. The aging parents who live with adult children or live alone usually receive assistance

from adult children, including financial assistance, food preparation, household hygiene, washing clothes and transportation (visiting relatives or hospital/clinics appointment). Aging parents in Malaysia still depend on adult children, relatives and friends for such help. The immediate family members are the first choice for seeking help and support for the aging living in the community setting (Alavi & Arifin, 2022, Fauziah et. al., 2012; Alavi et al., 2011). The relationship between helping and caring is to observe helping as relating to the task and caring to the process of providing support for others. It is very clear-cut that tangible support is a task, for example, providing information or arranging a specific service as one of the outcomes of intervention. Caring involves the intangibles of a personal relationship without necessarily making an outwardly observable difference (Cheetham et al., 1992). The role of the family in providing social support to the aging found that the types are divide into two. Support received are health care, care during illness, daycare, leisure, communication, where to complain and others.

### **Literature Review**

The elderly parents who live with adult children or live alone usually receive physical support; it is the provision of mobility equipment, communication equipment, transportation, shelter, food, home furnishings, clothing and financial assistance. Among the least accepted are leisure and the most accepted are donations of money, food and so on. The findings of the study also show overall the aging are very satisfied with the support or help from their family. The findings of this study also found that the type of support most expected by the aging is social support that is visiting, financial support and loving relationship with family in Malaysia (Samah, 2006). However, changing of family structures in the modern societies, decrease in the family size and geographical distance among children tend to reduce intangible and tangible support alimony towards the aging parents have dramatically weakened traditional norms of filial piety and the structure of intergenerational transfers in China (Liu et al., 2017).

In Malaysia, older person tends to depend on their children for support as they age and become frail. The elders expect continuous financial assistance and social support from their children for their sustenance (Nor & Ghazali, 2016). Their financial position seems to be the subjective determinant of their well-being (Osman & Ismail, 2018). Previous researchers have deduced that older persons in Malaysia, especially those living in rural areas are highly dependent on their children for financial support (Teh et al., 2014). This is proven by research conducted in 2008, that 50% of aging parents receive financial support from their children every month (Yusoff & Buja, 2013). Meanwhile, a survey conducted in 2011 showed that 675,000 citizens aged 60 and above have been abandoned and deprived of receiving financial support from their children. Although the abandoning of aged parents in Malaysia is not rampant, it is a new phenomenon, which may become an acceptable practice in the future and this is a cause of concern (Ali & Arshad, 2014). Similarly, about 60% of Thai aging parents receive financial support from their adult children, implying them as the main source of financial security for the older people in Thailand (Theerawanviwat, 2014). Abdul Mutalib et al (2017) narrated that getting groceries for daily consumption; home maintenance and repair and monthly utility bills settlement among the Malay older people can be demanding both financially and physically. Since formal income support such as pension is not widespread in Malaysia, the aging income security depends much on the non-formal sources, especially children. More effective incentives and programs need to be design to encourage children to support their aging parents (Masud et al., 2006).

Previous researchers such as Nor et al (2021); Ibrahim and Mohd (2012); Salleh and Husin (2014); Sulaiman (2015); Mohd and Azahari (2017); Nawi et al (2019) have done various studies on financial support to aging parents. Old-age financial protection has become a key focus of policy interest and research efforts in South-East Asia, including Malaysia. In developed countries, the combination of strong social security systems, well-developed capital markets, and small households contribute to higher living standards for the aging. Due to demographic, social and economic changes, there is a need for an effective system of income provision for the aging (Khan et al., 2017). Past studies show that most adult children in Malaysia take responsibility for providing financial support to their parents despite facing various dilemmas and financial constraints (Alavi et al., 2011; Chan & DaVanzo, 1996). Nevertheless, there are a small number of research being done on the specific types of alimony given to aging parents by their adult children.. Finally, social work practice recommendation will be discuss to propose that adult children will increase level of tangible and intangible transfer to their aging parents.

### ***Filial piety among adult children: Asia and West Approach***

Adult Children need to serve their parents when they are old and help them when they are in need and protect them with love and respect. This responsibility arises from society's perception that parents have the "right" to be cared for and adult children are "responsible" to exercise it (Chong & Liu, 2016). Therefore, filial responsibility may be an important issue adult children must encounter as they approach middle age while anticipating the needs of their aging parents. The relationship approach follows from the fact that parents made sacrifices while raising their children. After receiving all the benefits, adult children are thus indebted to their parents. Adult children take up the responsibility to "reward" the sacrifices of their parents, to eliminate feelings of indebtedness and to reciprocate the care one's parents have given (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Stein, 1993). Filial obligations or social responsibilities is a virtue emphasized in many cultures about treating parents well and meeting their needs in the later stages of life.

Filial responsibilities can be view in two phases; while their parents are still alive and after their death. When parents are alive, filial responsibilities are manifest by serving them, helping them with daily chores, and treating them with respect. Whereas filial responsibility after parental death is closely related to maintaining friendship with parental peers and praying for parental well-being (Kasim & Kasim, 2001; Xie & Yan, 2001). In the Malay society, the nature of respect for parents in daily relationships is shown in several ways; using gentle, polite and courteous conversational language, without hurting their feelings (Harun, 1993). In most Asian and Western societies, middle-aged adult children have a special duty towards their elderly parents; but not for just anyone. It is common for individuals to make great sacrifices to provide for their elderly parents, as they believe that it is their duty to do so, which they would not oblige to do for others (Keller, 2006). Cowgill (1986) defines "filial" as being associated with or involving a son or daughter and "piety" is defined as devoting duty and devoutness. Sung (1995) defines filial piety as respecting and caring for elderly parents. Ho (1987) cites that for the Chinese society, filial piety is a principle that shapes the pattern of socialization and sets of how an individual should behave towards parents, including the living, the dead and the deceased ancestors. The conception and awareness of filial duties will make adult children develop special bond with their parents (Keller, 2006).

Therefore, this article will analyze the types of tangible and intangible alimony provided continuously by adult children to their aging parents, by comparing the studies done in Malaysia and abroad. The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method was used, which allows the review of relevant literature through a highly rigorous and 'systematic' process by using keywords relevant to the study. In addition, each search step performed can be replicated or reproduced by other researchers (Jamaludin et al., 2020). Through SLR, direction for subsequent studies along with any research gaps can be identified (Shaffril et al., 2018). In fact, to build a knowledge base and the phenomenon that exist around the keywords of their respective literature studies (Kamal & Hussin, 2020) and lack of studies in the gerontological social work and gerontological counselling to serve the aging and their family in the hospital and community setting (Adnan et al., 2020; Alavi et al., 2020). This article will conduct a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of the tangible and intangible alimony to aging parents among adult children

### **Methodology**

The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method is used to obtain data sources related to the scope of the article based on PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis). According to Okoli (2015) PRISMA method is widely used in the social sciences, to help researchers obtain quality data sources through keywords. This approach explains the limitations and depth of the study, thus optimizing the researcher's time. Shaffril et al (2018) regarded SLR to have a more transparent and wider range of articles for a specific field of study. There are four processes in the PRISMA method that need to be implemented to obtain elements of transparency and consistency; they are identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion (Gillath & Karantzas, 2019).

### ***The Search Strategy***

Primarily the researchers will select 2 online databases namely Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). All of these databases contain the latest scientific and empirical studies from various fields such as social sciences, political sciences, engineering, anthropology, law, business management, agriculture and biological sciences (Shaffril et al., 2018). The process begins by identifying the appropriate keywords or synonyms to obtain articles that are closely related to the field of study. Then next is to begin the search string with Boolean Operators as in Table 1 for more focused and productive results.

Table 1

*Search Engine and Search Strategy*

Search Engine	Search Strings	Results
<i>Scopus</i>	TITLE-ABS-KEY ( ("older parent*" OR "elder parent*" OR "aging parent*" ) AND ( "financial support" OR "non-financial support" OR "monetary support" OR "tangible support" OR "intangible support" OR "intergenerational support" ) )	111 articles
<i>Web of Science (WoS)</i>	TS=( ("older parent*" OR "elder parent*" OR "aging parent*" ) AND ( "financial support" OR "non-financial support" OR "monetary support" OR "tangible support" OR "intangible support" OR "intergenerational support" ) )	136 articles

As a result, the researcher managed to get as many as 247 articles that consist of Scopus has 111 articles and WoS has 136 articles. However, only 177 articles were taken for the next process, as the others were redundant.

**Screening Process**

At this stage, researchers need to refine the selection based on specific criteria such as the inclusion and exclusion criteria to obtain relevant articles for the study, as shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2

*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
<b>Document Type</b>	Journal	Book Chapter in book Conference articles Seminar articles
<b>Field</b>	Social Sciences Social Work Gerontology	Engineering Philosophy Politics Anthropology Psychology Medical Rehabilitation
<b>Language</b>	English	Non-English
<b>Year of publication</b>	2016 to 2021	less than 2016
<b>Country / Territory</b>	Worldwide	None

After determining the appropriate criteria, researchers only chose articles from journals; articles or chapters from books, seminar articles and conference articles were excluded. In addition to that, only articles from the fields of social sciences, social work and gerontology were selected, as these fields are closely related to the ongoing study. The articles selected were in English from around the world and published between the year 2016 to 2021. Finally, after the screening process, only 53 articles were selected while the remaining articles will be used as additional references when needed.

### **The Flow Chart of SLR**

At this stage, the eligibility of the article that answers the research questions needs to be ascertained. Therefore, the researchers only focused on articles that mentioned tangible and intangible alimony received by aging parents from their adult children. The selection of articles at this stage is carried out with great care by referring to the full title, abstract and the content of the article for the 53 articles that have been screened. At this stage, the researchers select articles that align with the questions. After going through all these processes, the researchers found that only 20 articles were relevant to the study. All the processes for article selection in SLR through the PRISMA method are described in Figure 1 below:

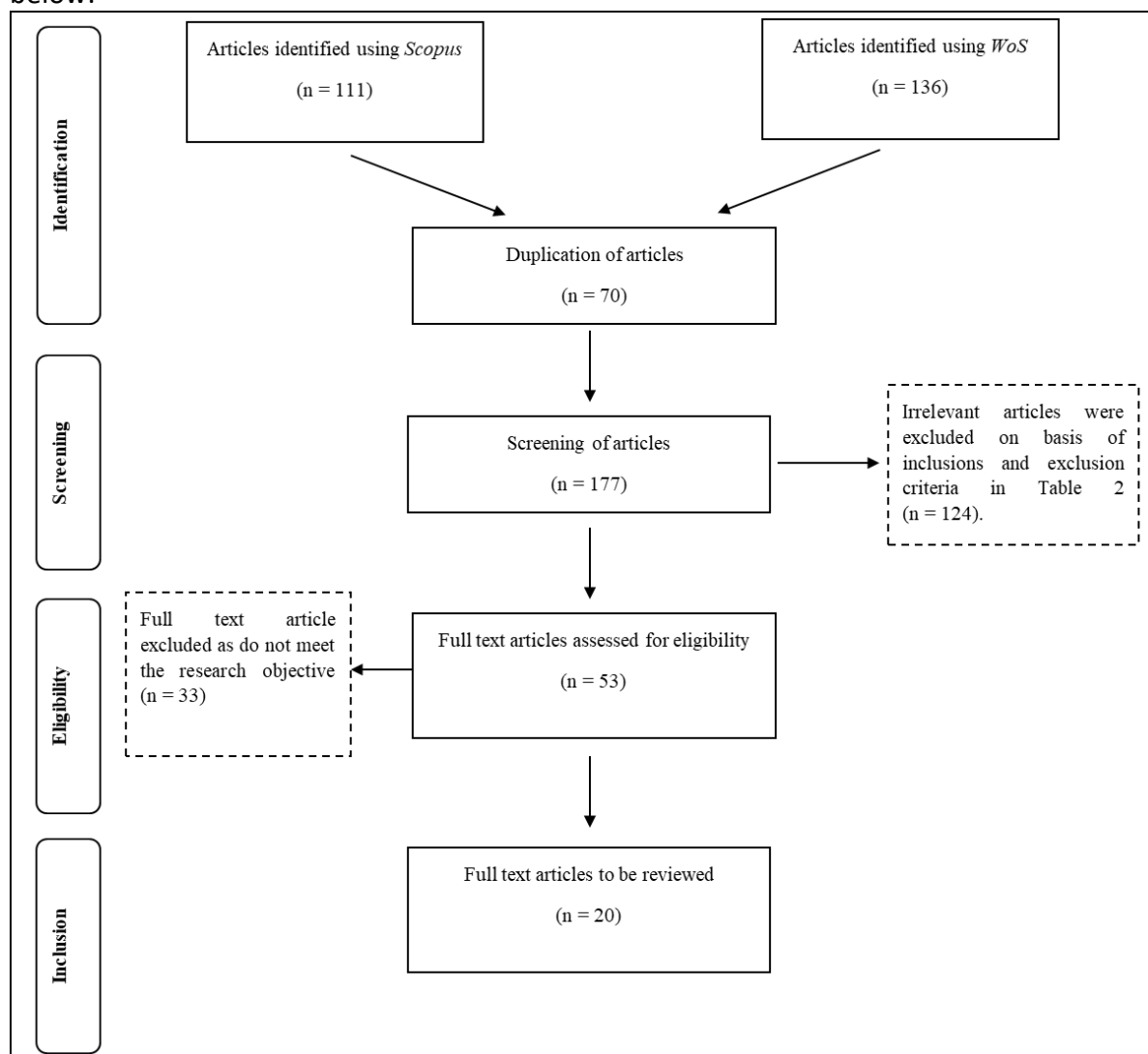


Figure 1. Flow Chart of the Systematic Review Process

### Findings and Discussions

In this section, the tangible and intangible alimony received by aging parents from their adult children will be analyze in detail through descriptive and thematic analysis from the 20 selected articles. Based on the PRISMA inclusion process, the descriptive analysis examines the location, design, Methods and source of data of the study as shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3

#### *Descriptive Analysis*

Author(s)	Publication Year	Location	Methodology	Research Method and Source of Data
Brasher	2021	China	Quantitative	Method : Survey Data : The Chinese Survey of Family Dynamics
Akinrolie et al.	2020	Nigeria	Qualitative	Method : Interview Data : Social Constructivism Paradigm
Aires et al.	2019	Brazil	Qualitative	Method : Interview Data : Primary Health-Care Units (PHCU) admission records
Liu et al.	2019	China	Qualitative	Method : Interview Data : China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS), 2011 - 2012
Gao et al.	2019	China	Qualitative	Method : Interview Data : China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) Follow-up Questionnaire
Peng et al.	2018	Hong Kong	Qualitative	Method : Interview Data : Hong Kong Panel Survey for Poverty Alleviation, 2015
Lee et al.	2018	Hong Kong and South Korea	Quantitative	Method : Survey Data : Thematic Household Survey Report No.40 and Survey on the Actual Condition of Elderly 2017
Zheng and Di	2018	China	Quantitative	Method : Survey Data : China General Social Survey of 2006
Tosi and Oncini	2018	Italy	Quantitative	Method : Survey Data : ISTAT Survey Family and Social Subject 2003
Pei and Cong	2018	China	Quantitative	Method : Survey

Author(s)	Publication Year	Location	Methodology	Research Method and Source of Data
				Data : Longitudinal Study of Older Adults in Anhui Province, China 2001 – 2015
Grujters	2018	China	Quantitative	Method : Survey Data : China Health and Retirement Survey (CHARLS) 2011
Floridi	2018	Italy and South Korea	Quantitative	Method : Survey Data : Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe 2013 and Korean Longitudinal Study of Ageing 2014
van den Broek et al.	2017	Netherlands	Qualitative	Method : Interview Data : Netherlands Kinship Panel Study
Polenick et al.	2017	America	Qualitative	Method : Interview Data : The Family Exchanges Study in 2008
Liu et al.	2017	China	Qualitative	Method : Interview Data : China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) 2011–2012
Evandrou et al.	2017	United Kingdom	Qualitative	Method : Interview Data: National Child Development Study (NCDS)
Bordone and de Valk	2016	Northern, Central and Southern Europe	Quantitative	Method : Survey Data : Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe
Kim et al.	2016	America	Mixed Method	Method : Interview and survey Data : The Family Exchanges Study
Fingerman et al.	2016 or 2011	America	Qualitative	Method : Interview Data : The Family Exchange Study
Lee	2016 or 2017	South Korea	Qualitative	Method : Interview Data : Korean Longitudinal Study of Aging



From this table, it is shown that Asian countries dominated the research on alimony to aging parents, whereby 7 studies were conducted in China, 3 in South Korea and 2 in Hong Kong. While in western countries such as the United States had 3 studies followed by 2 from Italy and 1 each from Britain, Northern Europe, Central and Southern Europe, the Netherlands, Brazil and Nigeria. In terms of the methodology, the 11 qualitative types of research used the interview as the method for data collection, while 8 quantitative studies with survey and mixed-method type research with both interview and survey methods were carried out. All the past researchers used secondary data in this study which is the data analysis that has been performed by other parties. In this regard, four (4) studies in China used data sources from the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) while two (2) studies in South Korea used data sources from the Korean Longitudinal Study of Aging and studies in America used the data from The Family Exchange Study.

### ***Thematic Analysis***

Based on the findings from the 20 articles, researchers deduced that tangible and intangible alimony to aging parents among adult children can be categorized based on the theme of Intergenerational Support Scale (ISS) (Chai et al., 2020) as in Table 4 below

Table 4

#### ***Thematic Analysis on The Funding Concept of Tangible and Intangible Alimony***

Author(s)	The Funding Concept of Tangible and Intangible Alimony to Elderly Parents Among Adult Children					
	<b><u>Tangible</u></b>		<b><u>Intangible</u></b>			
	<b>Financial Support</b>	<b>Practical Assistance</b>	<b>Emotional Support</b>	<b>Socializing</b>	<b>Giving Advice</b>	<b>Chit-Chat</b>
Brasher (2021)	√					
Akinrolie et al (2020)	√					
Aires et al (2019)	√	√	√	√		
Liu et al (2020)	√					
Gao et al (2019)	√					
Peng et al (2019)	√		√			
Lee et al (2018)	√					
Zheng and Di (2018)	√					
Tosi and Oncini (2020)		√				

The Funding Concept of Tangible and Intangible Alimony to Elderly Parents Among Adult Children						
Author(s)	<u>Tangible</u>		<u>Intangible</u>			
	Financial Support	Practical Assistance	Emotional Support	Socializing	Giving Advice	Chit-Chat
Pei and Cong (2020)	√					
Grujters (2018)	√					
Floridi (2020)	√	√				
van den Broek et al (2019)	√					
Polenick et al (2017)	√	√	√	√	√	√
Liu et al (2017)	√					
Evandrou et al (2017)	√	√		√		√
Bordone and de Valk (2016)		√				
Kim et al (2017)	√	√			√	
Fingerman et al (2016)		√	√		√	
Lee (2017)	√					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>

Table 4 shows that most adult children are more likely to provide tangible alimony to their aging parents compared to the intangibles. This is confirm with 17 studies on financial support and 8 studies on practical assistance. On the other hand, number of intangibles alimony are as follows; 4 studies on emotional support, 3 studies on social activities, 3 studies on giving advice and 2 studies on chit-chat. In addition to that, the researchers also determined the tendency factors that compel adult children to provide financial support to aging parents, based on the following sub-themes shown in Table 5 below:

Table 5

Thematic Analysis on Tendency Factors for Funding Financial Support to Elder Parents among Adult Children

Author(s)	Tendency Factors for Providing Financial Support to Elder Parents				
	Filial Piety	Reciprocal	Altruism	Parents's Health	Others
Brasher (2021)	√		√		
Akinrolie et al (2020)		√			
Aires et al (2019)	√				
Liu et al (2020)					√
Gao et al (2019)			√		
Peng et al (2019)	√				
Lee et al. (2018)	√				
Zheng and Di (2018)					√
Pei and Cong (2020)		√			
Gruijters (2018)	√	√			
Floridi (2020)		√			
van den Broek et al (2019)				√	
Polenick et al (2017)	√				
Liu et al (2017)				√	
Evandrou et al (2017)		√	√		
Kim et al (2017)				√	
Lee (2017)					√
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>

Here in Table 5, shows 6 studies that adult children provide financial support to their parents out of respect and reciprocity; the virtues of Filial Piety that emphasized in many cultures by treating parents well and meeting their needs in the later stages of life. Meanwhile

5 studies on reciprocal factors in providing financial support to older parents. Studies by Brasher (2021); Gao et al (2019); Evandrou et al (2017) disclosed that adult children are provide with generosity and altruism. They are 3 studies that discussed adult children providing financial support in the concern of their parent's healthcare. Meanwhile, there are 3 previous studies by Liu et al (2020); Zheng and Di (2018); Lee (2017) that show that adult children mostly provide financial support to their parents based on the spouse's motivation and stable marital status.

### ***Discussion***

With reference to the descriptive and thematic analysis that has been carried out, the adult children of Asian countries namely China, South Korea and Hong Kong, have a special duty towards their aging parents but not to just anyone. It is common for individuals to make great sacrifices to provide for their aging parents, as they believe that it is their duty to do so, which they would not oblige to do for others (Keller, 2006). Cowgill (1986) defines "filial" as being associated with or involving a son or daughter and "piety" is defined as devoting duty and devoutness. Sung (1995) defines filial piety as respecting and caring for aging parents. Ho (1987) cites that for the Chinese society, filial piety is a principle that shapes the pattern of socialization and sets how an individual should behave towards parents, including the living, the dead and the deceased ancestors. The conception and awareness of filial duties will make adult children develop a special bond with their parents (Keller, 2006).

Adult Children need to serve their parents when they are old and help them when they are in need and protect them with love and respect. This responsibility arises from society's perception that parents have the "right" to be cared for and adult children are "responsible" to exercise it (Chong & Liu, 2016). Therefore, filial responsibility may be an important issue adult children must encounter as they approach middle age while anticipating the needs of their ageing parents. Due to Asia's high population density, which accounts for 88 percent of the total original population, America is no exception in this sense (Choy, 2018). However, similar studies are still lacking in other western countries such as Northern Europe, Central and Southern Europe, Italy, the Netherlands, Britain, Brazil and Nigeria due to their free lifestyle and thinking (Ismail et al., 2009). 11 out of 20 studies adopted qualitative research type to understand the subject in depth. Meanwhile, only 8 studies were conducted in quantitative research type and 1 study on mixed-method methodology. 12 studies were conducted through interviews that allowed the researchers to delve into the feelings, views, opinions and attitudes of respondents in the study (Fox, 2006). As for the survey, there were 8 studies conducted by past researchers. Overall, the secondary data obtained in the studies managed to provide answers on why and how such a phenomenon happens.

In reference to the thematic analysis shows that adult children are more likely to provide tangible alimony to their aging parents than intangibles. From the total of 20 studies analyzed, 17 studies showed that adult children are very inclined and comfortable to provide financial assistance to their aging parents as it is the easiest form of support, and according to Canda (2013) it is the main element of filial piety in a family. This statement is consistent with the study by Brasher (2021); Aires et al (2019); Peng et al (2019); Lee et al (2018); Gruijters (2018); Adnan et al (2020); Polenick et al (2017) that adult children tend to provide financial support with the sense of responsibility, respect, love and affection for parents (Tan et al., 2019). Adult children at their career peak tend to have high commitment and job advancement. As such,

they are unable to spend quality time with their ageing parents. Thus, providing financial support and practical assistance is much more comfortable and affordable (Nawi et al., 2019). According to Nor et al (2021), as the aging advance into old age, they expect financial support from family members, especially their children. This is supported by Fingerman et al (2011) that the relationship between adult children and aging parents is interdependent and reciprocal in all aspects of support, especially financial assistance.

Based on the same analysis showed that adult children are less likely to provide intangible alimony such as socializing, exchanging views or spending time with aging parents; similar findings from the study done by (Fingerman et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2017; Evandrou et al., 2017) Polenick et al., 2017; Aires et al., 2019). According to Hassan et al (2013), aging parents desperately crave assistance and emotional support from their children. This is consistent with the research done by Chong and Liu (2016) that the aging parents reported certain expectations from their adult children in terms of emotional and companionship assistance. Figure 2 shows the funding concept of filial piety related to providing tangible and intangible support among the adult children for the elderly care.

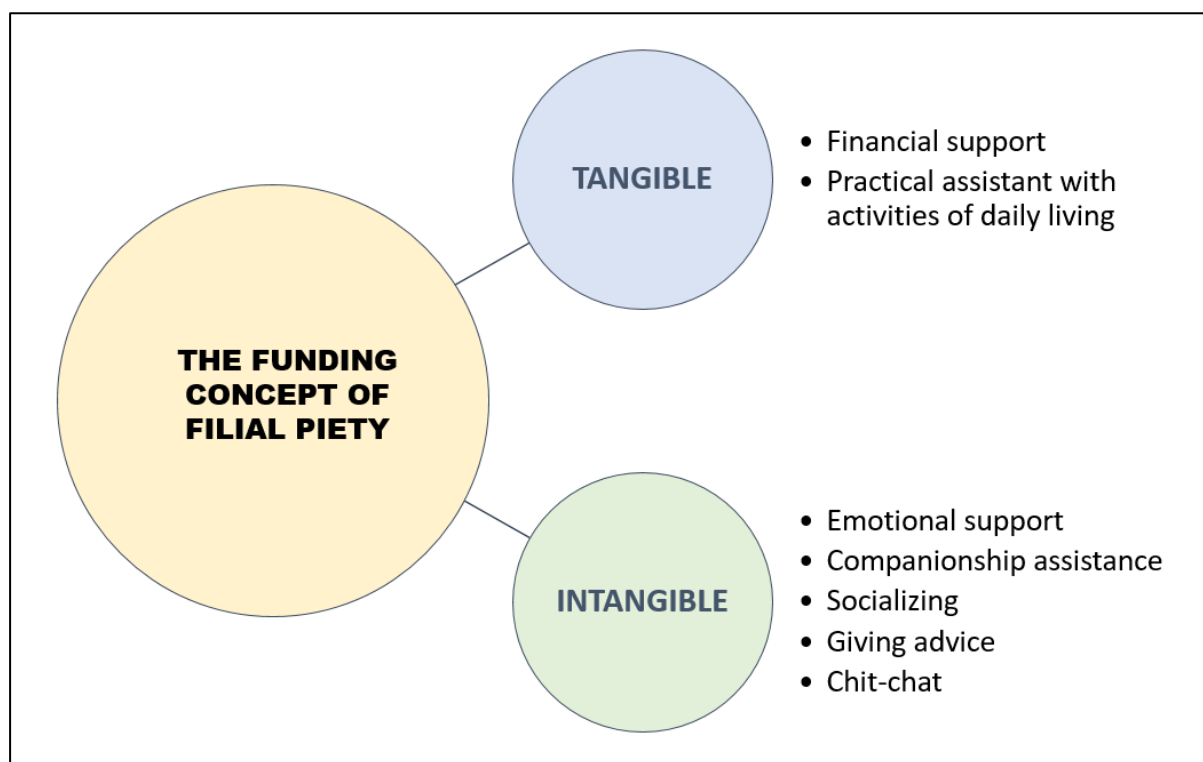


Figure 2: The funding concept of filial piety

### Conclusion

The growing literature in the field of ageing research and well-being of the older adults become important and relevant to current ageing population evolution. Based on the systematic review, there is a wide disparity between the number of researches done on tangible and intangible alimony. Often, not many intangibles issues are revealed, as children feel they have discharged their responsibility well by providing financial assistance to their parents. This study suggests that the intervention and cooperation from various sectors, especially from the Government and the Non-Government Organization (NGO) are very crucial in creating awareness, advocacy, and outreach program within the community on the

importance of providing intangible support to older parents, especially in this challenging time. In addition to that, social workers play an important role in encouraging and enhancing senior citizens emotionally, socially and physically in leading an independent and satisfactory life. Typically, social worker will not attend to any issues in the caregiving among adult children and their parents unless there are cases of financial neglect and abuse reported. Hence, social workers can be mediator, observer and good listeners in balance it out by having family meeting to achieve an agreement together for achieve on the tangible and intangible alimony. Practice gerontological social workers are still lacking in the community to serve family with caregiving issues in Malaysia. It is important to do further research on potential of gerontological social work profession can be extended to improve quality of life in the intergenerational support among the aging, family and community.

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