

## A Statistical Review on Religious activity and Spirituality in Maintaining Active Living among Muslim Elderly

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### Abstract

Active ageing enables people to realise their potential for physical, social and mental wellbeing in leading a healthy lifestyle. Malaysia has to classify the people who are under active ageing as the environment and culture may different from other countries especially for the Muslim elderly. The Muslim elderly people focus on their spiritual needs which led to the importance of their culture, belief, and religiosity besides the focus of being healthy, socialising, and being physically fit. Therefore the study is ideally aimed at giving introspection to the active ageing for the Muslims in Malaysia and the roles of religious and spiritual in their active living. A questionnaire survey has been conducted among 411 of Muslim elderly within 10 district of Johor. A descriptive analyses and Likert scale were used to tap the frequency level of active ageing determinants. Finding suggests that the spirituality and religious activity is important for Muslim elderly to pursue their active living. The main contributions of this study are the determination of active ageing for Muslim elderly and provide the guidelines to various parties for the improvement of a new policy that can cater the elderly people's needs, health care, social life, lifestyle, and facilities for a better living condition.

**Keywords:** Active ageing, Muslim Elderly, Spirituality, Religious Activities, Ageing

### Introduction

According to the National Policy for Older Person (2011), the definition of active ageing focuses on social factors which encompass their quantity, quality, and social networking in the society. For the context of their well-being, the policy emphasises the five dimensions namely health (healthy ageing), social (active ageing), economic (productive ageing), spirituality (positive ageing), and environment (ageing support). However, this policy can be generally used for all groups and it does not focus on the needs of Muslim elders. As a Muslim, the spiritual fulfilment is the core factor for healthy ageing and it can be achieved by performing worship, prayers, or any religious activities (Tohit, Browning, & Radermacher,

2012). Ibrahim et al. (2011) also mentioned that the Muslim elderly people are active in performing religious activities such as mass prayer, religious classes, *tahlil* recitation, and others. These activities were not mentioned in the active ageing determinants by WHO. Therefore, it is important to consider the Muslim elderly people's culture, environment, and needs to define active ageing. The classification of active ageing by WHO are divided into six determinants namely health and social services, behavioural determinant, personal determinant, physical environment, social determinant, and economic determinant (Lai, Lein, Lau, & Lai, 2016). This determination can be classified to elderly people who are active fit in physical activities such as biking, walking, fitness trails, and others for strength, flexibility, and increase endurance for their health purposes (An, Lee & Kim, 2013; Dahany et al., 2014; Sykes & Robinson, 2014). Besides that, other scholar's revealed that the economic determinants were also relevant to active ageing, which is associated with personal needs, resources, and outcomes (Paúl, Ribeiro, and Teixeira, 2012; Boudiny, 2013; UNECE, 2013). In terms of social, elderly people should be actively engaged with their life such as participating in elderly club and community activities to enhance healthy ageing and will improve their social relationships (Bowling, 2008; Rattanapun, Fongkeaw, & Chontawan, 2009; Sutipan & Intarakamhang, 2017). Furthermore, active ageing allows people to remain independent and achieve their potential regardless of their age by considering their level of need, mental and physical wellbeing, and social responsibilities that are allocated for them (Mayhew, 2005; Sutipan & Intarakamhang, 2017). The most frequently mentioned criteria by the scholars in interpreting active ageing are social participation, health, physical ability with the absence of disability, and lastly economy and financial stability. However, Sidorenko and Zaidi (2013) affirmed that active ageing is diverse and complex in terms of the policy and framework which are based on the place and culture. In relation to this study, it is significant to describe ageing and activate ageing from the Islamic perspective to close the gaps in this study. Therefore this study is objectively bringing the role of this religious and spirituality in perceiving the active ageing determination among Muslim.

### *Ageing Terminologies*

Ageing can be described by looking into two perspectives which are biological process (measured by the decline of the body's ability) and social passage (require constant adaption in which their traditional roles are often altered) (Hoglund, 1985). Ageing has been generalised as a period of loss such as the loss of physical ability, loss of peers, loss of employment and loss of security. An ageing person might experience various physical manifestations such as deterioration of physical functions, changes in appearance such as having grey hair and wrinkled skin, blurred vision, painful joints, difficulties in movement, and underlying diseases (Rattanamongkolgul, Sritanyarat, & Manderson, 2012). Another determination of ageing is the progressive decline in biochemical efficiency and physiological processes after the phase of reproduction in life (Harith et al., 2010). Interestingly, the ageing process in the beginning happens slowly and it started to increase rapidly throughout the years due to the natural process in human. In fact, the determination of ageing is not solid as it was defined differently around the world as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Summary of the Minimum Age of the Elderly People in the Selected Country/Organisations*

No	Country/ Organisations	Minimum Age	Remarks
1	United Nation World Assembly	Age of 65 years old and above	Categorised as the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young elderly (aged 65 – 74 years old)</li> <li>• Old elderly (aged 75 – 84 years old)</li> <li>• Eldest or very old elderly (85 years old and above)</li> </ul>
2	Korea	70 years old	The normal retirement age is 70 instead of 60 due to the improvement of health facilities and extended lifespan.
3	Canada	65 years old	Citizens are eligible for federal benefits such as Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Security Payments (William 2012)
4	Japan	65 years old	Due to the increase of their average lifespan and advancement in health and medical support, it is redefine to the age of 75 (Orimo, 2006).
5	Norway	67 years old and above	AFP (contractual early retirement scheme) allows workers to retire with full or partial pension from the age of 62 (Midtsundstad & Bogen, 2014).
6	Australia	65 years and above	The Aged Care Act does not specify an age when a person becomes an aged person. But the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) classified the elderly as a person who aged 65 years and above (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007)
7	WHO	60 – 65 years old	It depends on the setting, region, and country (WHO, 2016)
8	Thailand	50 year old based on the retirement age	The retirement age for women was in the range 45 – 55 years old, which is lower than men who are at 55 – 75 years old (Mishra & Shakraja, 2012).
9	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)	60 – 65 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Denmark, Portugal, and Switzerland – 65 years old</li> <li>• Belgium, France, Austria – 60 years old</li> <li>• Slovenia – 62 years old</li> </ul> This indicator is used to define the average age of exit from the labour force (OECD, 2015). The retirement age for women is generally around one to two years earlier than men.

Source: Author's Search 2017

For the Malaysian context, the determination of elderly people refers to the age range by WHO and UN which is 60 years old. However, the formal retirement age in Malaysia is 56 years old, and people who are older than this age are generally referred as elderly people (Selvaratnam & Tin, 2007). On the other hand, the retirement age and policy formulating towards ageing people are referred to the age of 55 years old and above (Sulaiman et al., 2005; Ong & Phillips, 2007). The retirement age of Malaysians was then increased to 60 years old following the Minimum Retirement Age Act 2012 which was initiated on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013.

Most of the healthy elderly people nowadays hope that they can continue with their service even when reaching the compulsory retirement age as the improvement in the standard of living and education have led to the increase of active and productive ageing (Ahmad, 2009; Ng, Tengku-Aizan, & Tey, 2011). The preparation for ageing also includes taking care of one's physical health, spiritual well-being, and also the preparation for death are some of the precautions that the elderly people have planned in advance to prevent themselves from being a burden to their children, neighbours, and community (Rattanamongkolgul et al., 2012). Thus, it is important for the elderly people to understand the concept of active ageing which will help them in the acceptance of growing old.

### **Muslim and Active Ageing**

The term of ageing in Islam refers to physical disability or weakness, greying hair, being forgetful, delicateness, and denying learning new information. As mentioned in surah Maryam (19:4), "My Lord, indeed my bones have weakened and my head is filled with white hair, and my Lord, I have never been ungrateful in my prayer to you". This verse highlighted physical weakness and greying of hair as the signs of ageing. However, these concepts should not be mistaken that Islam viewed old age as weak and greying hair as ageing reflects a person's series of transformation in terms of spiritual, maturity, wisdom, and sagacity (Bensaid, 2014). In order for a Muslim to be considered successful in ageing, the acts of worship alone are not enough. The Muslims should also focus on their health by being active physically and emotionally. This is because good physical health is an important resource that can facilitate a person's commitment to their spiritual activities (Tohit et al., 2012). In fact, even if the elderly person is ill, lonely or depressed, that person will find the meaning and support of life with the help of spiritual strength especially when they turn into older age (MacKinlay, 2006; Graeme et al., 2009; Ahmad & Khan, 2015). Furthermore, the integration between spirituality, religiosity, and participation in religious activities can affect a person's social, health, and able to influence the mental health and psychological well-being towards healthy living as a whole (Levin et al., 1996; Momtaz, Hamid, Ibrahim, Yahaya, & Abdullah, 2012). Moreover, active ageing in Islamic also highlighted the relationship of the elderly people with their neighbours (Al-shabani, 2005). These good practices will encourage active interaction between the neighbours and those social networks will make the elderly people feel better, healthier, and consequently, better equipped to deal with stress (White et al., 1999). Kalyani, (1997) stated that Muslim elderly people may participate in activities within their community not only to increase their self-esteem, but also to find opportunities for other social interaction among peers to meet their socioemotional needs. The concept of ageing from the perspective of social actors is demanding as there is the need to understand their needs and improve their lives within the society (Areff & Lyndon, 2015). The elderly people's satisfaction of life can be fulfilled by helping them to improve the quality of life such as interdependency to human and higher power (Masuri, 2016).

Above all, there are not many differences between active ageing from the perspective of western scholars and Muslim elderly in terms of social participation, health condition, and physical needs. In addition, the Muslims highlighted the need to focus on the quality of life including their spiritual strength and religion. In contrast, western and secular societies defined spiritual interpretation as something that is more than what is considered personal and it is determined by the individual. It may be based on experience and not bound by religious rules as it is free, broader, and more inclusive. Some of them may not favour the

idea of considering religion factor in spiritual as a religion may demand a person to obey the norms, rituals, and traditions rather than their willingness in making the choice (Ahmad & Khan, 2015). On the other hand, the spiritual concept for Muslims is guided by religion and belief. The active involvement in religious activities will be advantageous to their spiritual needs, as well as social, health, physical, mental and emotional wellbeing that can play a big role in their lifestyle.

### **Religious and Spirituality**

Spiritual is always interrelated with religious and faith of an individual belief. As people become older, their spirituality is related to their journey in determining their faith and religiosity. There are a few of scholars that tried to connect spiritual and religious needs in identifying healthy ageing. One of them is Krause and Tran (1989) who mentioned that religiosity is an important factor in maintaining a positive feeling and giving a good impression of self-esteem; hence, reducing the feeling of stressfulness among the elders. Besides that, Koenig (1994) found that there is a link between faith and practice of religious beliefs in terms of health in which it is able to aid recovery more quickly. The statement is in line with Fry (2000) who mentioned the significance of constructing religious, spiritual and personal meaning to assist the elders in sustaining their well-being.

In contrast, Moberg (1990) stated that the spiritual and religious aspect should be in different interpretation. Religions focus on personal beliefs, values, and activities pertinent to a person's faith, while spirituality is more to inner sources and philosophy regardless whether it is religious or nonreligious. Brown (1987) mentioned that the non-religious may presume activities such as gardening, music, or humanism as a part of gaining their spirituality. Other than that, Wong (2010) stated that it is possible for a person to be spiritual without religion as spirituality can be interpreted not only by the religious aspect. However, Muslims view spiritually as connected to religious activities such as their daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan, *zakat*, and so on, as it is the inner sincerity in submitting themselves to God as mentioned in the Quran and Sunnah (Ahmad & Khan, 2015). Those who adhere to Islam in their everyday lives believe the importance of both religious beliefs and their spirituality (Pe-pua, Gendera, Katz, & O'Connor, 2010). Muslims view religion and spirituality as something that cannot be separated. The increase of faith in the religion can affect their spirituality which will lead to the positive change in life. The elders may see life in a different view and their purpose in life focuses on gaining peacefulness of living. Therefore, the spiritual factors and religiosity cannot be ignored due to its importance in the Muslims' ageing process as well as supporting their longevity.

### **Methodology**

This study only focuses on the population in Johor as the distribution of elderly projection has recorded that Johor will be the second highest number of ageing population by 2020. A questionnaire survey was conducted by used random sampling to the numbers of elderly in Johor within 10 districts, urban and rural area, Muslim and aged at 50 years and above. The respondent aged taken from 50 years old due to they will enter ageing and the preparations towards them need to be explained from the beginning at least in the next 10 years. As WHO not stated the age number of active ageing, yet their determination is based on their ability to contribute to the nation's development, therefore this study is no limit on active ageing by point people who are young ageing (60-70 years old) only but will look to the other different

ageing group of people. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0 was used and analyse quantitatively through descriptive, frequency analysis and Likert scale to tap the study interest.

## Results and Findings

### *a) Demographic profile of respondent*

Table 2 contains demographic information of respondent in the context of gender, age, marital status, employment, education level and the location they consider to be retired. This profile demonstrates mostly equal participants in male and female respondent; the average age of the group is below 55 years old, mostly married and currently employed. In terms of the location to retire, only small differences of percentage appear between the urban and rural area choice. The selection of rural may due to safe, secure, and hospitable environment neighbours (Winterton & Warburton, 2012; Glasgow & Brown, 2012; Aini & Murni, 2016). While the option of the urban area is may to the needs for adequate facilities as their age and capabilities, convenience stores, health centres, transportation and communication networks (Jong et al., 2012; Loomans, 2013; Stockdale (2017).

Table 2

### *Demographic Findings*

<b>Demographic Variable</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
<b>Male</b>	202	49.1
<b>Female</b>	209	50.9
<b>Age</b>		
<b>50-55 years old</b>	148	36
<b>56-60 years old</b>	101	24.6
<b>61-65 years old</b>	70	17
<b>66-70 years old</b>	51	12.4
<b>71 years old and above</b>	41	10
<b>Marital Status</b>		
<b>Married</b>	331	80.5
<b>Single</b>	23	5.6
<b>Widow</b>	57	13.9
<b>Education Level</b>		
<b>No school</b>	55	13.4
<b>SPM and below</b>	245	59.6
<b>Certificate/Diploma</b>	54	13.1
<b>Degree</b>	18	4.4
<b>Master's degree and PhD</b>	4	1
<b>Others</b>	35	8.5
<b>Employment</b>		
<b>Employed</b>	203	49.4
<b>Not employed/Retired</b>	208	50.6
<b>Choice of Living Location</b>		
<b>Urban</b>	196	47.7

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<b>Sub urban</b>	215	52.3
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*b) Active ageing determinants*

This study has also conducted a survey to obtain the opinions regarding the active ageing determination namely health, social, physical, economy and spirituality. The results showed that the respondents agreed on those elements when describing active living. For health, the respondents mentioned that it is important to have enough rest, sleep, a balanced diet as well as having a regular medical check-up to maintain their health level. It is proven that the elderly people nowadays are aware in taking care of their health and maintaining a healthy lifestyle besides relying on the government efforts in providing better health service and establishing more health centres for the elderly people.

In terms of social, most of the respondent prefer to stay connected with the community such as meeting their friends and family members, getting involved in community activities, and joining any committees, clubs, associations like JKKK, Marhaban group, Yaasin group, PAWE and many more. The social participation wills the elderly people the opportunity to become active and meet their friends in building a better relationship.

For economy, almost 86% of them agreed that they have their own financial sources and do not depend on others. Although they have retired, it was discovered that almost 49% of them are still employed and have a steady income such as the income from their own small business after retirement, pension, children contribution, and many more. Almost 80% of them felt that they may join any working sector to contribute their experience, health, and physical ability. The results have proven that there are many elderly people who are still capable to contribute in the economic sector although there are less likely to be employed after retirement. Therefore, this study would like to propose that the government or policymaker to assist the elderly people in joining the appropriate employment sector or organise skill courses so that the elderly people's expertise will not be wasted. However, the programmes have to consider the elderly people's health condition and how much they can commit to their job to avoid any problems to the employers.

The fourth element is physical ability in which the respondents feel active when performing physical activities that suit their ability such as walking around their housing area, gardening, and going to the market, and many more. During the informal interview, the respondents mentioned that they love to perform exciting physical activities which are more relax and does not burden their physical ability. They are also agreed that the environment and surrounding facilities should be adequately equipped and elderly-friendly that will encourage them to participate in physical activities more often.

The final element is spirituality and religiosity. The findings showed that the important elements are spiritual and religiosity. There were 88.3% respondents who mentioned that they become active through religious activities and become more focused on this type of activities as they grow older. They even mentioned that they do not feel lonely and depressed when their spiritual needs are met (84.7%). Hence, the more space of religious facilities provided may assist them to focus on the religious activities. Overall, this study suggests that it is important to consider the spiritual and religious elements apart from health, social

participation, economy, and physical ability aspects in order to maintain the Muslim elderly active lifestyle.

Table 3

*The Distribution of Respondents' Feedbacks on Active Ageing determinants*

No.	HEALTH	SD	D	A	SA	Mean
		%	%	%	%	
QBK1	Independent and healthy person	.2	26.5	42.1	31.1	3.04
QBK2	Practise healthy diet	0	2.4	81.0	16.5	3.14
QBK3	Enough rest and sleep	.2	10.0	46.5	43.3	3.33
QBK4	Consistency of medical check-up	.7	13.9	52.6	32.8	3.18
<b>SOCIAL</b>						
QBS1	Often attend various communities' activities	.5	12.7	34.8	52.1	3.38
QBS2	Often meet family members and friends	.2	11.4	36.7	51.6	3.40
QBS3	Joined a club / an association to connect with the community	.5	13.1	43.6	42.8	3.29
<b>ECONOMY</b>						
QBE1	Do not have to financially depend on others	2.7	10.2	66.2	20.9	3.05
QBE2	Opportunity to engage in the employment sector	1.7	18	51.1	29.2	3.08
QBE3	Enough savings to support life actively	2.7	29.7	54	13.6	2.79
<b>PHYSICAL ABILITY AND ABSENT DISABILITY</b>						
QBF1	Perform physical exercises and activities	0.7	19	60	21	3.01
QBF2	Active person physically	0.5	24	62	14	2.89
QBF3	Adequate and quality of facilities	0.5	19	60	21	3.01
<b>SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOSITY</b>						
SPIRIT 1	Religious activities are required to stay active	1.7	10.0	48.9	39.4	3.26
SPIRIT 2	When spiritual needs are fulfilled, encourage healthy living	4.1	11.2	51.6	33.1	3.14
SPIRIT 3	The facilities and the provision of space for religious activities are essential	2.9	3.6	42.8	50.6	3.41

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree

c) *Religious activities for active living among Muslim*

The next table 4 shows the opinions on the religious activities that may promote active living. The majority of respondents strongly agreed and proven that the religious activities are important for the Muslim elderly people to be more relaxed and comfortable. Among the activities are prayers, recite al Quran and attending religious classes. There were several studies that tried to relate the spiritual and religious aspects to the Muslim elders because this group is concerned with the religious activities. According to the ageing theory, the spiritual role is used to maintain the positive feelings of the elderly people, reduce stress, and sustain their well-being. From the western scholars' perspectives, religious and spirituality should be separated as religions are more to personal beliefs, values, and activities with regards to faith; whereas spirituality is more to philosophy regardless whether it is religious or nonreligious. For the Muslims, religion and spirituality must be accompanied by religious

activities as their spiritual needs will be fulfilled. Therefore, it is proven that spirituality and religiosity is a part of Muslim active living and these aspects should be highlighted.

Table 4

*Religious activities for Active Living*

No.	Religious activities	SD	D	A	SA	Mean
		%	%	%	%	
A	Prayers	1.9	3.4	43.1	51.6	3.44
B	Recite al Quran	.2	2.4	46.5	50.9	3.48
C	Attend recitation and religious class	.5	4.1	46.5	48.9	3.44
D	Attend a feast/ <i>kenduri</i>	2.7	1.9	50.1	45.3	3.38
E	Recite Yaasin and tahlil in Friday night together	1.7	2.9	45.7	49.6	3.43
F	Attend and manage a Muslim funeral	2.9	2.2	48.2	46.7	3.39

\*Notes: SD = Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree,

### Discussion and Implication

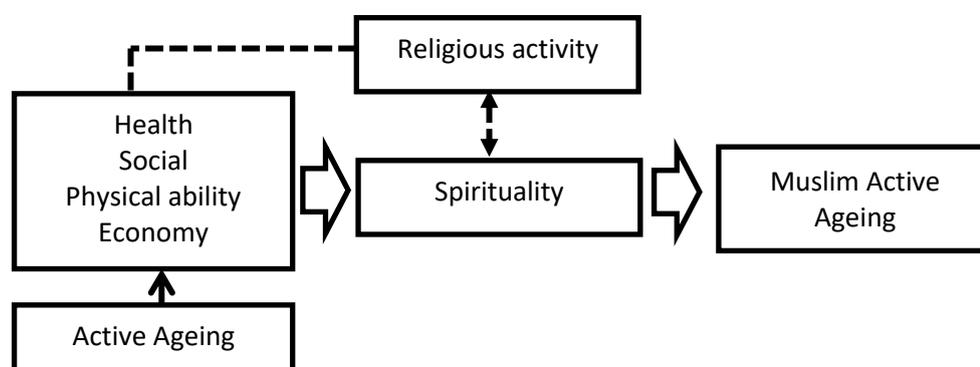
This objective was achieved using secondary data from the literature review as well as the primary data from the questionnaire. As discussed earlier, there are many versions and arguments about definition of active ageing from around the world. The results of the questionnaire showed that the spiritual element cannot be separated from the elderly people's life. This study has denied the earlier statement that spirituality should be separated from religion. The earlier argument states that the spiritual interpretation is more personal and it is determined by the individual. It is not bound by religious rules and not subjected to religious and non-religious particular. This statement contradicts this study's stand in which religious and spiritual elements should be together as the religious activities can help them to improve their spirituality.

In Islam, spirituality and religion are not enough and Muslims are encouraged to have a healthy lifestyle to make them stay active. In terms of food consumption, the elderly people should consume healthy food, food intake should be moderate, practice fasting, cleanliness in food preparation and many more. Islam also recommends Muslims to get enough rest by dividing their day into three divisions which are work, worship, and rest. As mentioned in Al-Qasas 28:47, "And out of His mercy, He made for you the night and the day that you may rest therein and [by day] seek from His bounty and [that] perhaps you will be grateful". The believers are also encouraged to exercise according to their ability as narrated by Imam Muslim, "Allah SWT prefers a strong believer than a weak believer". If they take care of their health and physical ability at an early stage, the person will be able to avoid being a weak elderly person. These features were also agreed by the western scholars who mentioned the importance of healthy lifestyle and performing light exercises to stay fit.

From the social point of view, Islam also emphasises the importance of social relationship among the community for their social well-being. The Muslims can participate in social activities such as congregational prayers at mosques, attending feasts when invited, respecting the neighbours, and maintaining the relationships with family and friends. Similarly, the western scholars also mentioned that the social involvement with others will make the elderly people feel accepted and avoid feeling lonely or isolated. From the economic

point of view, Islam does not prevent the believers from working as long as they are capable to continue working. Islam also suggests that the Muslims should view their retirement in a positive manner as a mean to bring them closer to God, family, and community as they have more time compared when they were younger.

Overall, this study has found that the definitions of active ageing between the western scholars and Islamic perspectives are similar. Although Islam emphasised on spirituality and religiosity, the elderly people also need to take care of their health, become physically active, maintain social relationships, and improve their life after retirement. Besides that, spirituality and religiosity are inseparable in a Muslim's life. Hence, the religious activities will be able to fulfil the Muslim elderly people's needs which can lead them to become physically, emotionally, and socially active. The following figure 1 shows the suggestion of active ageing determination for Muslim.



Source: Author's Search 2018

**Figure 1. Active ageing attribute for Muslim elderly**

### Conclusion

This study has proven that the spiritual and religiosity elements can promote active living besides the need to fulfil their health, social, physical, and economy attributes. Therefore, this study has incorporated all the ideas and concepts of active ageing and produced a definition that active ageing is '*a person who is healthy, physically fit, maintain their relations with the society, financially stable, actively involved in religious activities as the fulfilment of spiritual needs to improve their well-being, and optimise their opportunity to contribute to the nation development as an independent elderly person*'. The religious and spiritual elements have become the main thrust and they need to be further developed to promote the active living among the Muslim elders.

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