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LEISURE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AMONG THE ELDERLY COMMUNITY DWELLERS IN A SUBURBAN DISTRICT IN SELANGOR

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ABSTRACT

Background: Physical inactivity is an independent risk factor for chronic diseases. Elderly gain more significant advantages from physical activity (PA) than their younger counterparts.

Objective: The main objective of this study was to evaluate the physically able elderly on their perceptions and the social and environmental support in doing PA.

Methods: A survey was conducted in April 2011 among 230 elderly aged 60 years and above in six out of eleven villages in a suburban district in Selangor using interviewed questionnaire. The questionnaire consist items of socio-demographic data, medical background, PA, social support, environmental factors and perception toward PA.

Result: A total of 192 elderly responded to the questionnaire. The respondents' mean age was 67±0.44 years old. There were almost equal number of male (48.4%) and female (51.6%) respondents with more Malays (62.5%), married (75%), having primary education (83.9%) and chronic diseases (68.8%). The most common type of leisure activity was walking within the house (89.1%). Most elderly never/ seldom received encouragement for PA from their friends (84.3%), family members (78.1%), or health care providers (71.4%). Limited facilities (80.2%), unsafe environment (79.7%) and poor transportation (79.7%) were stated as environmental barriers towards having PA in their neighborhood. Nevertheless, they still felt that PA was beneficial (89.1%), important (87.5%), not harmful (85.9%) and not difficult to perform (66.7%).

Conclusion: Majority of elderly in this study were perceptive towards PA despite poor encouragement from friends, family and health care providers. Walking within the house was the most popular leisure PA since most of them felt the neighborhood was not a conducive place for PA.

Keyword: Leisure physical activity, community dwellers, elderly