

TIME FOR PANDEMIC SOLIDARITY

Changing perception at times of the pandemic.

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The COVID-19 pandemic has changed many aspects of the world, including how older persons are perceived and treated.

Since the beginning of March 2020, when there has been an escalating spread of COVID-19 globally, the media consistently paired the terms

“vulnerable” and “older people” when describing the pandemic. Although well-intentioned, this type of message carries damaging consequences.

First, it strengthened the homogeneous view of older adults as vulnerable, an already widely embedded negative age stereotype that can be damaging to everyone.

These negative age stereotypes can be internalized, resulting in self-limiting views of old age, which can be a risk to health, well-being, and active participation in later life.

Secondly, the message suggests that only older people should be worried about or are at risk of contracting the virus. By implication, young people





are not vulnerable or worse, are resilient to it. It indirectly also fails to point out that people of all ages are susceptible to COVID-19. This message also misrepresents age as the main indicator of risk when, in reality, other factors are actually more vital, such as the nature and seriousness of preexisting health conditions.

Together, the representation of older adults as vulnerable and younger as invulnerable may cause friction between generations by influencing how we think age groups should behave to control the virus.

Therefore, the vulnerability narrative is problematic because it homogenizes older adults. It can create tensions between generations by influencing how we think age groups should behave during the pandemic. It disregards the contribution of older adults to society. The divisive language of “us” versus “them” or “young” versus “old” split societies has a negative impact on all of us.

The reality is that older people are not merely helpless individuals as they are so often portrayed to be. They hold jobs. They pay taxes. They are the backbone of the volunteer sector,

especially during the COVID-19 crisis. They are the army of retired nurses and doctors returning to the front lines to support the overstretched health services.

More than ever, this pandemic teaches us that we need societal cohesion and solidarity amongst generations.

We must also remember the older adults in long-term care facilities, especially those with severe physical and cognitive impairments, who face substantial threats to their autonomy. It is our duty to ensure that their voices are heard. Their rights should not be compromised, as human rights should not be differentially allocated based on chronological age. This pandemic provides us with the opportunity for intergenerational solidarity like we've never seen before.

These are moments for all of us, regardless of age, to harness our experiences and energy and get the needs and rights, including those of the furthest behind in all our societies, to be heard loud and clear.

Together, we will emerge stronger, wiser, and healthier.

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ASSOCIATION FOR RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE OPERATORS OF MALAYSIA (AGECOPE)



Age Cope

It is an association for Malaysia's residential aged care operators. It was established to collaborate with the government and regulators to be the industry's official spokesperson to collectively provide ideas and feedback on senior care industry issues. The objectives being:

1. To form a cohesive national network of aged care service providers to share and pool resources and expertise.
2. To promote holistic care for the aged in a timely sequential care pathway process.
3. To promote a self-regulated industry based on the pillars of good ethics, support, and best practice.
4. To lobby the government and all stakeholders to increase focus on aged care and its challenges to support and sustain the industry at its highest level.
5. To provide a platform for stakeholders, representatives, and advocates to articulate their concerns and be part of the collaboration to drive the industry consultatively.