Learning Needs and Preferences of Members of Multi-service Centers for Elderly and Social Centers for Elderly

Final Report

Prepared by

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I. Introduction

A. Purpose of Study

This study was commissioned by the Health and Welfare Bureau to find out the learning needs and preferences of members of multi-service centers (ME) and social centers (SE) for the elderly and any barriers that prevent the members from participating in learning activities. The findings of this study can provide territory-wide information on the organized educational activities of Hong Kong elderly people who are members of MEs and SEs. The information serves as an important input in the development of educational programs targeting specifically at this segment of the older population. Furthermore, as members of elderly centers come from a cross-section of community, their experiences and views could provide valuable insights for the formulation of lifelong learning programs for the older population at large.

B. Background

2. According to figures from the Census and Statistics Department, the 2001 mid-year estimate of the number of Hong Kong people aged 60 and over was 1,004,300, or 15% of the total population. By 2020, the number of Hong Kong people in this age group is expected to rise to 1,867,000, or 22% of the projected total population. Within the older population, the proportion of older old will also increase when many of the post-war baby-boomers turn 75. As the Hong Kong population ages, helping the elderly live a better life becomes an increasing concern of society.

3. Many studies have investigated links between education and quality of life in old age. Older adult learners seem to enjoy life more than non-learners: they are better able to cope with everyday life, are more socially active, and have higher level of self-esteem and self-confidence (Dench and Regan, 1999). They also tend to have more knowledge and deeper understanding of society and about their role in it (Jarvis and Walker, 1997). In respect of physical and mental health, more years of education is usually associated with better health (Ross and Mirowsky, 1999, cited in Schuller, Bynner, Green, Blackwell, Hammond and Preston, 2000), lesser depression (Cacciatore, Napoli, Abete, Marciano, Triassi and Rengo, 1999, cited in Schuller et al, 2000), and fewer phobias in elderly people (Arnarson, Gudmundsdottir and Boyle, 1998, cited in Schuller et al, 2000). Learning in old age also plays an important role in empowering elderly people to deal with major turning points at different stages of their lives (Antikainen, 1998).

4. With all these benefits, education for the elderly is an important means to help the elderly improve their life. The identification of the needs and preferences of the elderly, and the motivations and deterrents they encounter becomes an essential first step in formulating policies and programs to promote the concept of lifelong learning among the older population.

C. Choice of Elderly Center Members as Target Population

5. As at 31 March 2001, there were 52,106 registered memberships from 35 Multi-service centers for the elderly (ME) and 127,087 registered memberships from the 209 Social Centers for the Elderly (SE). These 179,193 members[1] of the elderly centers represented about 17% of the Hong Kong population aged 60 and over. This was a sizeable proportion of the elderly population.

6. Furthermore, members of elderly centers are also commonly believed to be primary healthy individuals who have the spare time and also the will to participate in various types of activities. They form a significant segment of the potential pool of elderly learners, whose needs, preferences, motivations and deterrents with respect to participation in organized educational activities deserve seriously consideration in a study of the prospect of elderly learning in Hong Kong now and in the future.

D. Definition of "Learning" in this Study

7. Learning does not take place only in the classroom. Adults, including older adults, learn in a variety of settings. Some settings are informal, which are usually less structured and organized. Some settings are non-formal, where learners learn from each other, usually without an obvious "teacher". Some settings are incidental, where learning is unplanned and occurs in parallel to some other activities.

8. For our study, we focused on organized educational activities that provide opportunities for "formal" learning by the elderly. The learning is "formal" in the sense that the learning experiences are structured and organized, usually involving a set of lessons or units of study, and the learning process spans over a reasonably long period. The learning styles need not be limited to classroom or group settings only. This is the form of learning that older people are more likely to resist and hence requires more understanding on the pattern of and barriers to participation.

9. More specifically for our study, organized educational activities that respondents have participated in or planned to participate refer to any courses:

- that are explicit in their purpose for their attendants to learn something;
- that follow a set of more or less structured and organized lessons;
- that are multi-session;
- that require registration; and
- that are not limited to offerings by elderly centers.

E. Framework for the Study

10. Various conceptual frameworks have been developed over the years to model adult education participation. One of the more often cited frameworks in the adult

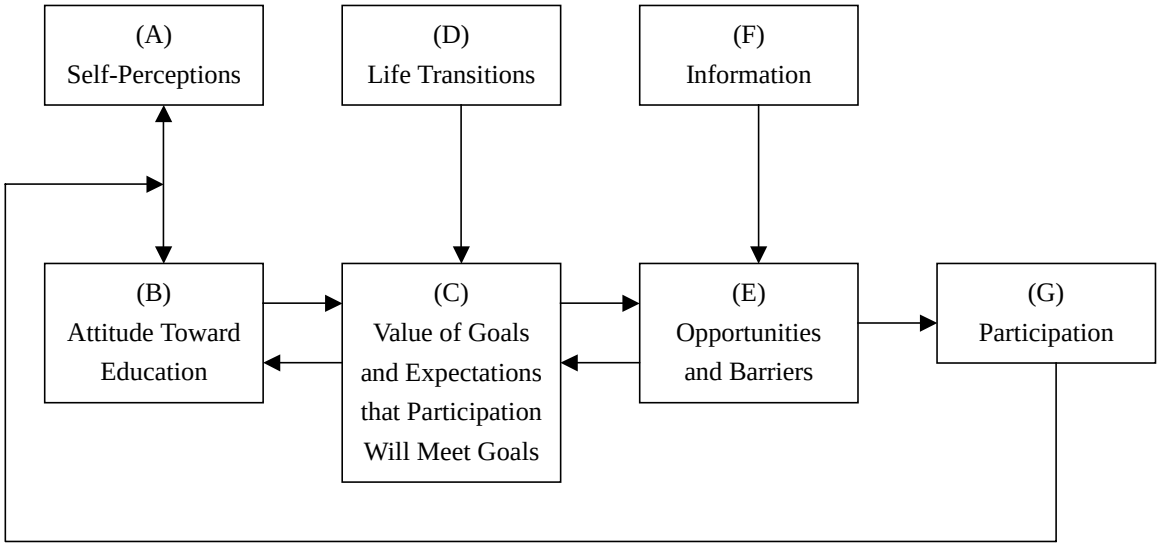
[1] This number ignores the possibility of double memberships, which will lead to overestimating the number of members.

education literature and one that is more relevant to the type of formal learning that we are considering is Cross's "Chain-of-Response Model" (1981).

11. In the "Chain-of-Response Model", an individual responds to a chain of seven sequentially linked factors, starting from internal psychological factors to external environmental factors, that ultimately influence his / her decision to participate in a learning activity. (See figure 1.)

Figure 1: Cross's Chain-of-Response Model

Source: Cross (1981), p 124.



12. Decision to participate originates from within an individual. The individual's self-perceptions on his / her ability to learn (Box A) tend to influence his /her attitude toward education (Box B), which is in large part also shaped by the individual's past experience in learning and the attitude of people around him / her, such as family members and friends. The influence is however seen to be mutual. That is, it is also the case that the more negative one's attitude is toward education, the lower one's confidence is in successful learning. The individual's attitude, in turn, influences and is itself influenced by the value he / she places on the goals to be achieved through participation in learning and the expectations that participation will meet such goals (Box C).

13. External environmental factors also play an important role in encouraging the individual to discover the value of his goals and reinforce his expectation of what education can do for him / her. Life transitions (Box D) help motivate the individual to participate in educational activities by bringing to the forefront new needs or previously hidden needs that can be fulfilled by participation. A motivated individual will actively explore new opportunities and overcome barriers (Box E); but lack of opportunities and presence of barriers can be discouraging. Lack of information (Box F) on the opportunities of education may make barriers seem insurmountable.

14. Positive experience in any of the seven areas leads to higher likelihood of participation. If the individual participates in the educational activity, this particular learning episode will form part of his educational experience and influence his / her self-perceptions and attitude toward education.

15. For our purpose of collecting information about what organized educational activities members of MEs and SEs participate in and why they do it, the Chain-of-Response Model provides us with a focus of the study and guided us in our design of instruments being used for the study.

F. Research Questions

16. Given the framework of our study, a set of related research questions were derived as follows:

- Participants of Learning

    1. How do members of MEs and SEs who take courses to learn and those who do not compare with respect to gender, age and educational attainment?

- Motivations (Needs) to Learn

    2. What is the relative importance of the reasons members of MEs and SEs cite for taking courses?
    3. What are the relationships between the variables of gender, age and educational attainment and the reasons members of MEs and SEs cite for taking courses?
    4. What are the learning needs specific to the soon-to-be-old members of MEs and SEs; in particular, with respect to the transition of life stages that they are to experience?

- Learning Preferences

    5. What are the preferences of members of MEs and SEs with respect to subject areas, modes of learning, age segregation classes, time of classes, offering institutions and maximum amount willing to pay?

- Deterrents to Learning

    6. What is the relative importance of the reasons members of MEs and SEs cite for not taking courses?
    7. What are the relationships between the variables of gender, age and educational attainment and the reasons members of MEs and SEs cite for not taking courses?

II. Method

A. Introduction

17. This study utilized a mixed approach to find out the learning needs and preferences of members of MEs and SEs. A cross-sectional survey provided the dominant paradigm to describe the general behavioral pattern of members of MEs and SEs regarding participation in organized educational activities. Several focus group discussions were organized to serve as a supplementary component of the study, exploring the educational issues faced by soon-to-be-old members, i.e., those aged between 55 and 60, and the role education could play in their quest for better living at this turning point of their life and beyond.

18. In the following subsections, the subjects being studied, the instruments used for collecting data, and the procedures of the two components of the study are detailed.

B. Survey

1. Subjects

Target Population

19. The subjects for this survey, and this study in general, were members of MEs and SE.

20. Both MEs and SEs aim to assist elderly people to live a long and productive life in the community. The main function of MEs is to provide community supportive service for the elderly on a district basis, while that of SEs is to organize social and recreational activities for elderly people in the community.

21. As part of their services, both types of centers offer organized educational activities in a range of natures (e.g., social, recreational, community education and etc.) and formats (e.g., talks, seminars, courses and etc.)

22. To become a member of a subvented ME or SE[2], one has to be at least 60 years of age and live in the neighborhood of the center. Non-subvented centers usually have a lower minimum admission age of 55. Membership fee is about $21 per annum for subvented centers, and is considerably higher for non-subvented centers. Double membership is discouraged.

[2] The minimum admission age for subvented elderly centers were changed from 55 to 60 in 1999/2000. Those under-60 who had been admitted before 1999/2000 could retain their membership. As a result, a number of subvented elderly centers still had members aged under-60 during our study period.

23. According to figures from the Social Welfare Department, as at 31 March 2001, there were 35 MEs (all subvented) and 209 SEs (two non-subvented) in operation. Disregarding the possibility of double membership, the total number of members for MEs and SEs were 52,106 and 127,087 respectively. These 179,193 members of elderly centers constituted our target population.

Sampling Method

24. A random sampling design was used so as to allow generalization of sample results to the target population. As there was no master list of all members of MEs and SEs, a simple random sample was deemed impossible to obtain. Instead, to maximize precision on one hand and to minimize cost on the other hand, a random sample was selected using a two-stage cluster sampling design with stratification at the first stage.

25. The sampling procedure is briefly described as follows:

a. For the first stage of sampling, the primary sampling unit was center. Two center lists, one for MEs and one for SEs, with the number of registered members of each center (as at 31 December 2000[3]) were obtained from the Social Welfare Department.

b. From the list of MEs in operation, 21 were randomly selected and ordered, with the probabilities of selection proportional to the number of members. The first 18 MEs were included in the first stage sample, while the last three served as reserves.

c. Similarly, from the list of SEs in operation, 60 were randomly selected and ordered. The first 53 SEs were included in the first stage sample and the last seven served as reserves.

d. For the second stage of sampling, the secondary sampling unit was member. A membership list (as at 31 March 2001) was obtained from each sampled center.

e. Each membership list was randomly ordered, with the selection probabilities of all list orders being equal. For MEs, the first 45 members on the ordered list were included in our second stage sample, while the rest served as reserves. For SE, the first 35 members on the ordered list were included.

f. In total, a sample size of 2,665 members (810 from MEs and 1,855 from SEs) was expected.

Problems of Duplicate Listings of Members (Double Membership)

26. Persons who are members of multiple centers were more likely to be included in our sample. That is, this group of persons would be over-represented in our sample.

[3] Figures for 31 March 2001 were not available at the time of sampling.

As it could be sensibly argued that the number of memberships one has would be positively correlated with the level of participation in learning activities, our results would possibly be biased toward active participation.

27. Kish (1960) suggested two methods to adjust for such bias: Given that we know the number pi of replicates (i.e., the number of elderly center memberships) of a sampled member *i*, member *i* will be kept in the sample with probability n_i/p_i, where n_i is the number of times member *i* appears in the sample. Instead of dropping the member *i*, the second method involves giving member *i* a weight of n*i*/p*i*. For this survey, the second method was adopted.

2. Questionnaire

Pre-testing

28. A structured and standardized questionnaire was designed for this survey. Prior to the finalization of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted to pre-test the questionnaire, in particular, with respect to the appropriateness of its design for elderly people.

29. Center workers from 5 MEs and SEs acting as interviewers tested the questionnaire on 40 of their members. The questionnaire was subsequently revised to take into consideration of the comments from both interviewees and interviewers.

Content

30. The final version of the questionnaire adopted for use in this survey consists of twenty-nine questions in six sections:

Section 1: Past history of course taking and intention for future (six questions)
Section 2: Reasons for considering taking courses (one question)
Section 3: Reasons for not taking courses (one question)
Section 4: Learning preferences (eight questions)
Section 5: Personal information (eleven questions)
Section 6: Center participation (two questions)

<u>Past History of Course Taking</u>

31. The main questions in Section 1 are Questions 1 and 6. Question 1 asks whether the interviewee has taken any courses since September 2000, while Question 6 asks whether he / she will take any courses in the coming year. The former gives an indication about past participation and the latter about future participation. All interviewees were asked these two questions.

32. The remaining four questions in Section 1 concern the interviewee's experience in taking courses in the past year. These include:

(Question 2) Subject area, offering institution and formal qualification awarded, if any, of each course

(Questions 3 and 4) Average number of days and hours per week spent by the interviewee on going to class

(Questions 5) Overall satisfaction with the courses, rated on a 5-point scale from "very satisfied" to "very dissatisfied", and areas for course improvement, if any

33. Only those interviewees who had taken at least a course between September 2000 and the time of interview (which took place some time in late May to early June 2001) were asked these questions.

Reasons for Considering Taking Courses

34. Reasons for taking courses can very often reflects the needs that an individual would like to satisfy through taking courses. In this study, we study the learning needs of members via their reasons for considering taking courses and the subject areas they are most interest in. Ten common reasons of elderly people for taking courses, as well as an "others" category, are listed in the single question, Question 7, in Section 3. They are:

a. Cope with daily needs and problems
b. Keep abreast of society / don't want to fall behind
c. Learn new things and knowledge
d. Be occupied mentally / emotionally
e. Escape boredom/pass time
f. Prepare oneself to help others or to serve society
g. Improve one's relationship with others (such as family and friends)
h. Prove one's own ability
i. Widen one's social circle / meet new friends
j. Have better understanding of society

35. The list of reasons used here was drawn up with reference to the Education Participation Scale (EPS), originally created by Boshier (1971) and further developed by Morstain and Smart (1974), Boshier and Collins (1985) and others, to identify what factors motivate the general public to participate in adult education. The EPS consists of 48 items that can be grouped into seven factors:

- *Social relationships*
- *External expectation*
- *Social welfare*
- *Professional advancement*
- *Escape/stimulation*
- *Cognitive interest*
- *Personal development*

36. To keep the length of the questionnaire simple and manageable, instead of the full EPS, an 11-part question was developed for the survey. Of the seven factors suggested by EPS, items of our list cover five factors that are judged more relevant to the subjects under study:

- *Social relationships* – items (g) and (i)

- *Social welfare* – items (f) and (j)
- *Escape/stimulation* – items (d) and (e)
- *Cognitive interest* – item (c)
- *Personal development* – items (a), (b) and (h)

37. In regard of the scoring of each reason, based on the pre-testing results, it was found that many elderly interviewees had difficulties responding to the question on the original 4-point Likert scale, ranging from "4—much influence" to "1—no influence". The simple "yes/no" response was adopted.

38. Therefore, in the final version, the interviewee is asked one reason by one reason whether he / she has seriously considered taking any courses in the past two years because of any of the 10 motivations offered. Only those interviewees who would or might take courses in the coming year, i.e. "yes" or "maybe" response to Question 6, were asked this question.

Reason for Not Taking Courses

39. Twelve common reasons of elderly people for not taking courses, as well as an "others" category, are listed in the single question, Question 8, in Section 4. They are:

a. Do not like learning
b. Nothing I want or need to learn
c. Health problem, disabilities or fatigue
d. Not good at learning
e. Too old to learn
f. Occupied by work or domestic chores
g. Occupied by other leisure activities
h. Do not know what courses are available or where to get course information
i. Inconvenient class time or location
j. No course in area I am interested
k. Family or friend not supportive
l. No money to pay tuition and other miscellaneous fees

40. The list of reasons used here was drawn up with reference to the Deterrents to Participation Scale (DPS), developed by Scanlan and Darkenwald (1984) and modified by Darkenwald and Valentine (1985), to identify what factors deter the general public from participation in adult education. The 36 items of DPS can be conceptualized into four types of barriers, within a framework first suggested by Johnstone and Rivera (1965) and later modified by Cross (1981) and Darkenwald and Merriam (1982):

- *Dispositional barriers* (relating to one's attitude)
- *Situational barriers* (relating to one's current circumstances)
- *Institutional / organizational barriers* (relating to practices and procedures of the course / program)
- *Informational barriers* (relating to course / program information available to oneself)

41. Because of the same concerns arising when considering the adoption of the full EPS, instead of the full DPS, a simple and more straightforward 13-part question was developed, covering the four types of barriers as follows:

- *Dispositional barriers* – items (a), (b), (d) and (e)
- *Situational barriers* – items (c), (f), (g), (k) and (l)
- *Institutional / organizational barriers* – items (i) and (j)
- *Informational barriers* – item (h)

42. Likewise, the scoring of reasons was also simplified from the 4-point Likert scale "4 – much influence, … , 1 – no influence" to a simple "yes/no" response.

43. Therefore, in the final version, the interviewee is asked one reason by one reason whether he / she has not taken any courses in the past two years was due to any of the 13 deterrents offered. Only those interviewees who would not take courses in the coming year, i.e. "no" response to Question 6, were asked this question.

Learning Preferences

44. The eight questions in Section 4 cover what and how the interviewee would like to study. These represent the learning preferences of the interviewee in the following areas:

(Questions 9, 10 and 11)	Subject areas, vocational and/or formal qualification desired
(Questions 12, 13, 14 and 15)	Modes of learning, age segregation class, time of class, offering institutions
(Question 16)	Maximum amount willing to pay for an eight-hour course

45. Only those interviewees who would or might take courses in the coming year, i.e., "yes" or "maybe" response to Question 6, or those whose deterrents to participation were not dispositional or health-related, i.e., all "no" to Question 8, Parts (a) to (e), were asked these questions.

Personal Information

46. The eleven questions (Questions 17 to 27) in Section 5 ask about the interviewee's gender, age, education, employment status, occupation, type of housing, living arrangement, CSSA status, chronic illness status, self-perceived health status and expected length of time not staying in Hong Kong in 2001. All interviewees were asked all questions in this section.

Center Participation

47. The two questions (Questions 28 and 29) in Section 6 ask the interviewee about the number of elderly centers of which he / she is currently a member and how often he/she goes to these centers. The former question is particularly important because the response is used to calculate a weight for adjusting for the effect of "double membership". All interviewees were asked the two questions in this section.

Administration of Questionnaire

48. Not all interviewees have to answer all questions. The following table outlines who answers what:

Table 1: Who is to Answer What

	An interviewee who	*Sections to Respond*
1.	took courses in the past year and would take courses in the coming year.	All except Section 3
2.	took courses in the past and might take courses in the coming year.	All
3.	took courses in the past but would not take courses in the coming year due to reasons other than dispositional ones and health-related ones	All except Section 2
4.	took courses in the past but would not take courses in the coming year due to at least one dispositional or health-related reasons	All except Sections 2 and 4
5.	did not take courses in the past year but would take courses in the coming year.	All except Sections 1 and 3
6	did not take courses in the past but might take courses in the coming year.	All except Section 1
7	did not take courses in the past and would not take courses in the coming year due to reasons other than dispositional ones and health-related ones	All except Sections 1 and 2
8	did not take courses in the past and would not take courses in the coming year due to at least one dispositional or health-related reasons	All except Sections 1, 2 and 4

49. The time to complete a questionnaire ranges from 15 minutes (for category 8 interviewee) to at most 30 minutes (for category 2 interviewee).

3. Procedures

Recruiting Centers

50. A fax outlining the purposes and the method of this survey was sent to each of the sampled MEs and SEs in early May 2001 to invite them to participate in this survey. The sampled centers played an important role of not only supplying the Research Team with a membership list (as at 31 March 2001) for second stage sampling, but also liaising with sampled members and arranging for interviews on their premises.

51. In the case that a sampled center turned down the invitation, the next center on the reserve list would be sent an invitation. The Research Team stopped sending invitations when 18 MEs and 53 SEs agreed to participate.

Recruiting Members

52. Each participating center was given a randomly ordered list of their members. Based on the list, the center then contacted its sampled members in turn, brief them about the survey, ask them for consent, and arrange them to come to the center for interview by a trained interviewer sent there by the Research Team.

53. In the case that a sampled member of a center refused to be interviewed, the next member on the reserve list of that center would be contacted. The recruitment for that center would stop at the discretion of either the center or the Research Team. Resource constraint of the center was an important factor in deciding when to quit. However, every effort was made to ensure that in total, at least 2,500 members were interviewed.

Possible Bias Resulting from Sampling

54. All interviews were voluntary. Sampled members could choose not to participate in the survey. As it incurred costs and required efforts for a sampled member to come to his/her center for interview, those agreed to the interview would likely be active members who frequently visited the centers. It could be argued that they were more likely to take courses. Therefore, in regard of members involving in educational activities, high non-response rate of sampled members might possibly lead to results biased toward higher participation rate.

55. To cope with this problem, cooperation of sampled centers was essential. Given the already established rapport between the center workers and their members, it was hoped that heavy involvement of the sampled centers in the recruitment of the sampled members and in the arrangement of interviews would help keep the non-response rate of the sampled members at a minimum.

Fieldwork

56. A total of 40 part-time interviewers were hired in early May for the survey. They attended a compulsory 3-hour training on 4 May 2001, learning background information of the survey, content of the questionnaire and basic interviewing techniques.

57. The fieldwork formally started on 7 May 2001. Twenty to thirty centers each week were scheduled. Normally, it took three to four days for a center to finish its share of interviews. The last interviews were completed on 9 June 2001. In all, there were 2,659 successful interviews out of 4,972 valid sampled membership numbers, giving a response rate of 53.5%.

D. Focus Group Discussions

1. Subjects

Target Population and Sampling Method

58. The original target population of the focus groups was 55-60 years old members of MEs and SEs. But members in this age group turned out to be few and difficult to reach. To better achieve our purpose of exploring issues concerning the soon-to-be olds' decision to participate in organized educational activities, but still within the confinement of the elderly center setting, it was decided that the inclusion criteria for this part of the study be relaxed, so as to encompass a larger segment of the 55-60 years old.

59. The extended target population included four categories of subjects:

- 55-60 years old members / associate members of MEs and SEs
- 55-60 years old who were not members / associate members of MEs and SEs but were taking courses offered by elderly centers.
- 55-60 years old who were not members / associate members of MEs and SEs but were users of services offered by elderly centers.
- 55-60 years old who were not members / associate members of MEs and SEs but were volunteers working at elderly centers.

60. With no ready-to-use sampling frame available, the Research Team relied on the cooperation of a few MEs and SEs to invite from their network persons fitting the description of at least one of the four categories above to participate in the focus group discussions. Each center was requested to find at last one participant for each of the following four focus groups:

Group 1: 55-60 years old, Male, Current / Recent Participants of Adult / Continuing Education
Group 2: 55-60 years old, Male, Non Current / Recent Participants of Adult / Continuing Education
Group 3: 55-60 years old, Female, Current / Recent Participants of Adult / Continuing Education
Group 4: 55-60 years old, Female, Non Current / Recent Participants of Adult / Continuing Education

61. To encourage dynamic interchange among participants of each group and remove inhibitions, the composition of each group was such that there were homogeneity with respect to demographic characteristics and their status on participation in adult / continuing education.

2. Guidelines

Topics

62. The guidelines adopted for use in the focus group discussions consists of five topics:

Topic 1: Motivations and deterrents
Topic 2: Attitudes / opinions toward education
Topic 3: Expected learning needs
Topic 4: Learning preferences
Topic 5: Satisfaction and expectation

63. One of the biggest differences between learning by the elderly and formal education by the youth, or continuing education by adults, is that the former kind is voluntary while the latter two are more or less compulsory or required. Therefore, the guidelines encourage discussion of contrasts between learning now and learning when younger.

64. In Topic 1, unlike the survey, which focuses on motivations and deterrents in relation to recent or future learning episodes only, the emphasis is on the changes in motivations and deterrents as one gets older.

65. Topic 2 allows participants to evaluate the education they have had so far, comparing the experiences between now and then (when they were younger). Also being explored under this topic is the role of education, in general, in one's later life. Participants are asked about their opinions on the two Chinese proverbs "Living till old age, learning till old age – 活到老學到老" and "Learn till old age to live till old age – 學到老才能活到老".

66. Topic 3 explores participants' self-perceived educational needs. Many people think that people in their late-50s and 60s are coming to another major turning point This topic makes particular references to their expectation about future needs as they enter the later stages of their life and are presented with a different set of life tasks to deal with.

67. In Topic 4, the emphasis is not so much on *what* the learning preferences are, as in the survey, but *why*. Very often, people in the 55-60 years old age group start to experience first signs of decline in their physical and cognitive abilities. Failing to address these problems could discourage participation in learning now and in later life. Knowing their learning preferences and the reasons would gain insights into how they think the learning environment and the mode of learning can help them overcome these problems.

68. The last topic of the discussion concerns the opportunities that participants are aware of in the area of learning and how satisfied they are with them. The focus is on the courses that are available to them, including the sources of information, the content and the logistic of the courses. Their expectations about the future direction of elderly learning are also covered.

Administration of Focus Groups

69. To cover the five topics adequately within a reasonable time limit, the size of a focus group was set to ten participants or fewer. Each discussion session should last about at most one and a half hour, depending on the actual number of participants.

3. Procedures

Recruiting Participants

70. Through members of the Survey Team, a few MEs and SEs were contacted and invited to help the Research Team in a search for participants of focus groups. The recruitment of participants turned out to be disappointing.

71. Given that the minimum age of admission for subvented centers to be 60, there were few eligible soon-to-be olds available. Male participants were particularly hard to find, as the number of male members were in general fewer than that of female members to begin with. Also, from the observation of the Research Team, it was found that most of the eligible soon-to-be olds tended to be participating in organized educational activities. As a result, the sample for our focus groups was over-represented by females who were taking courses.

Possible Bias Resulting from Sampling

72. There were few men and non-learners in our focus groups. Majority of the views expressed were from women who were participating or were planning to participate in adult/continuing education. Generalizing from these results would be inappropriate. Interpretation of the data would have to be done in conjunction with the survey results of this study and findings from previous research studies.

73. Therefore, the focus groups should be treated as an exploratory stage of this study. On the one hand, the findings could assist us in gaining a deeper understanding of the general phenomena as observed in the survey results. On the other hand, the findings could also give insights to issues that could help formulate a survey questionnaire targeting at the soon-to-be olds group in future research studies.

Fieldwork

74. Focus group sessions were held on the premises of either the Hong Kong Council of Social Service or a ME/SE. In addition to the facilitator, a research assistant was present to jot field notes. All sessions, except the one in-depth interview, were taped recorded. To encourage participation, participants were given HK$150 as honorarium.

75. In all, from 11 June 2001 to 29 June 2001, five focus group sessions and one in-depth interview were conducted. A total of 28 eligible soon-to-be olds, 24 women and 4 men, participated in the focus group discussions. The size of each focus group, excluding the in-depth interview, ranged from 2 to 10.

III. Research Findings

A. Survey Results

1. Profile of Respondents

76. Based on the random sample of membership numbers, a total of 2,659 interviews of members from 18 MEs and 53 SEs were successfully conducted. Table 2 presents a profile of the respondents in terms of their demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

Table 2: Profile of Respondents

	Proportion (%)	**Standard Error (%)**	**C. V. (%)**
Sections 5 and 6 of Questionnaire			
Gender			
Male	24.4	0.9	3.7
Female	75.6	0.9	1.2
(Un-weighted N = 2659)			
Age			
55-59	1.2	0.3	23.5
60-64	9.6	0.7	7.4
65-69	20.7	0.9	4.3
70-74	25.8	1.0	3.8
75-79	23.3	0.9	3.9
80 or over	19.3	0.9	4.5
(Un-weighted N = 2659)			
Educational Attainment			
None	38.7	1.5	4.0
Kindergarten	0.3	0.1	41.6
Chinese primary	5.6	0.6	10.1
Primary	37.2	1.2	3.1
Secondary	13.3	1.0	7.5
Apprenticeship	0.2	0.1	37.6
Post-secondary or above	2.9	0.4	13.3
Others	1.9	0.5	28.9
(Un-weighted N = 2654, missing = 5)			

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	Proportion (%)	Standard Error (%)	C. V. (%)
Employment Status			
Full time	0.6	0.2	26.7
Part time	1.2	0.2	17.4
Unemployed	2.2	0.9	42.0
Homemaker	35.8	1.7	4.6
Retired	59.7	1.9	3.2
Others	0.4	0.2	46.1
(Un-weighted N = 2657, missing = 2)			
Occupation			
Managerial & administrative	1.5	0.3	21.4
Professional & sub-professional	5.1	0.5	10.5
Clerical	2.9	0.4	12.7
Service & sales	9.6	0.7	7.4
Craft & related	17.0	1.1	6.6
Plant & machine operators	6.4	0.6	9.4
Elementary	30.8	1.5	5.0
Homemaker	22.2	1.1	5.2
Others	4.6	0.8	17.5
(Un-weighted N = 2636, missing = 23)			
Type of Housing			
Temporary	0.3	0.1	39.3
Public rental	48.3	3.2	6.6
Subsidized sale	12.6	1.5	11.6
Private rental	3.8	0.6	16.3
Private sale	30.6	2.9	9.4
Others	4.4	0.9	21.1
(Un-weighted N = 2654, missing = 5)			
Main Co-habitants			
Alone	19.7	1.1	5.4
Spouse only	20.9	1.0	4.6
Family w/ children	15.4	1.0	6.8
Family w/o children	40.4	1.4	3.5
Relatives w/ children	0.3	0.1	40.6
Relatives w/o children	1.3	0.3	20.5
Friends	1.3	0.3	19.6
Others	0.8	0.2	21.4
(Un-weighted N = 2657, missing = 2)			
Receiving CSSA			
Yes	18.2	1.3	6.9
No	81.8	1.3	1.5
(Un-weighted N = 2652, missing = 7)			
Chronic Illness			
Yes	53.7	1.5	2.7
No	46.3	1.5	3.2
(Un-weighted N = 2655, missing = 4)			

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	Proportion (%)	Standard Error (%)	C. V. (%)
Self-perceived Health Status			
Very bad	4.2	0.6	15.0
Bad	20.2	1.1	5.6
Fair	49.5	1.4	2.8
Good	22.3	1.1	5.1
Very good	3.8	0.6	15.5
(Un-weighted N = 2650, missing = 9)			
Frequency of Elderly Center Visits			
None	2.0	0.4	18.9
Once every 2 months or longer	6.5	0.8	13.0
Once or twice a month	23.9	1.4	5.7
3 or 4 times a month	9.4	0.7	7.9
Once or twice a week	18.3	1.1	5.8
3 or 4 times a week	15.6	0.9	6.0
Almost everyday	24.3	1.3	5.2
(Un-weighted N = 2647, missing = 12)			

77. In regard of demographic characteristics, 76% of the respondents were female, 57% were under 75 years old, and 61% had received at least some primary education.

78. In regard of socio-economic characteristics, almost 60% of the respondents were retired, while 36% were homemakers. About 31% had worked in elementary positions, whereas 22% had been (or were still) homemakers. Only 18% were CSSA recipients.

79. In regard of living arrangements, about 48% of the respondents lived in public rental housing, and another 31% in owner-occupied private flats. About 40% lived mainly with their family consisting of only adults.

80. In regard of health, almost 54% of the respondents reported that they had chronic illness. Almost 50% rated their health as “fair”, another 24% rated theirs as “bad” or “very bad”.

81. In regard of frequency of center visits, over 24% of the respondents visited their elderly centers almost daily. Another 34% visited at least once a week.

82. To check the representativeness of our sample, data from the Hong Kong Council of Social Service’s Clientele Information Systems (CIS) for the Multi-service Centers and Social Centers for the Elderly were obtained for comparison. For the year 2000/01, 24 MEs and 109 SEs submitted membership data to the CIS.

83. As at 31 March 2001, 75% of members of MEs and SEs in the CIS sample were female (vs. 75% of our respondents), and 60% were under 75 years old (vs. 57% of our respondents). The CIS sample and our sample were therefore essentially the same in those two aspects.

84. As for educational attainment, it was not a data item of the CIS. Data on the literacy of members were however collected for the CIS. As at 31 March 2001, 35% of the members in the CIS sample were illiterate, while the rest were either literate or partially literate. Given that 39% of our respondents had not received any formal education, our sample should be quite similar to the CIS sample in that regard.

2. Overall

Past Participation

85. From September 2000 to May 2001, about one in three respondents took at least one course. Information about their participation in organized educational activities is given in Table 3.

Table 3: Overall Results of Past and Future Participation

	Proportion (%)	**Standard Error (%)**	**C. V. (%)**
Section 1 of Questionnaire			
Having Taken Courses in the Past Year			
Yes	30.3	1.5	4.8
No	69.7	1.5	2.1
(Un-weighted N = 2659)			
Days Spent on Classes per Week			
One	61.0	2.8	4.8
Two	16.0	1.6	10.6
Three	10.9	1.1	10.5
Four	6.0	0.1	17.4
Five	3.0	0.7	22.4
Six	3.2	0.7	21.1
(Un-weighted N = 815, missing = 19)			
Hours Spent on Classes per Week			
Mean	2.2	0.1	6.4
(Un-weighted N = 822, missing = 12)			
Satisfaction with Past Courses			
Very satisfied	21.6	2.3	11.1
Satisfied	70	2.3	3.3
Fair	7.1	1.1	16.1
Dissatisfied	1.0	0.4	35.0
Very dissatisfied	0.2	0.2	99.8
(Un-weighted N = 818, missing = 16)			
Taking Courses in the Coming Year			
Yes	30.0	1.6	5.3
Maybe	7.7	1.0	12.6
No	62.3	1.5	2.5
(Un-weighted N = 2659)			

86. Of these respondents, 61% usually spent one day weekly on attending courses, while another 16% usually spent two days weekly. On average, they usually spent about 2.2 hours weekly on attending courses.

87. About 92% of the respondents who took courses within the period were generally satisfied or very satisfied with the courses they took.

88. Table 4 lists the six most popular subject areas in the past year. The most popular subject among these respondents was "music / singing", with 19% of the courses taken within the period falling into this category. The other subjects that each accounted for at least 10% of the courses taken included "basic literacy" (17%), "languages" (15%), "sports and exercise" (13%) and "computer application" (10%).

Table 4: Subjects Areas Having Taken in the Past Year

(Ranked by "Responses")

	Proportion of "responses" (%)
Top 6 Subjects Areas Having Taken in the Past Year	
Music / singing	19.0
Basic literacy	17.2
Languages	15.0
Sports / exercise	12.9
Computer Application	10.1
Dancing	7.9
(Number of responses = 1747, N=799)	

89. About 89.5% of the courses taken by the respondents were offered by elderly centers (MEs and SEs). Government's departments, community organizations (excluding community centers), and community centers respectively accounted for 2.8%, 2.7% and 1.9% of the courses taken. Educational institutions of various levels and other types of organizations offered the remaining 3.1% of the courses taken.

90. More than three quarters (76%) of the courses would not award qualifications of any kind upon completion. About one in five (19%) would award attendance certificates. Few courses (5%) offered formal qualifications upon completion.

Future Participation and Reasons

91. Every respondent was asked about their intention to take courses in the coming year. As indicated in Table 3, about 30% of them said "yes", while about 8% said "maybe". The other 62% had no intention of taking courses.

92. For the respondents who had taken courses in the past, the satisfied ones were more likely to consider taking future courses than the dissatisfied ones and the ones who thought the experiences were only 'fair'. About 82% of those satisfied or very satisfied with their courses said they would or might take courses in the coming year. Only about 69% of those whose satisfactory ratings ranging from 'fair' to 'very dissatisfied' said they would or might take courses in the coming year. This

association between satisfaction with courses and future intention to take courses were statistically significant (Fisher's exact test, p=0.022).

93. All reasons for considering taking courses listed on the questionnaire were deemed to be important motivations for taking courses. Every reason was cited by more than 50% of the respondents who would or might take a course in the coming year. The average number of reasons cited was 7.0. Table 5 lists the percentage for each motivation.

Table 5: Overall Results of Reasons for Considering Taking Courses

	Proportion (%)	**Standard Error (%)**	**C. V. (%)**
Section 2 of Questionnaire			
Reasons for Considering Taking Courses			
Cope with daily needs and problems	59.3	2.8	4.7
Keep abreast of society / don't want to fall behind	77.3	2.2	2.9
Learn new things and knowledge	80.9	1.8	2.2
Be occupied mentally and Emotionally	80.5	1.7	2.1
Escape boredom / pass time	64.0	2.5	3.9
Prepare oneself to help others or to serve society	56.5	2.4	4.3
Improve one's relationship with others	55.3	3.0	5.4
Prove one's own ability	67.6	2.4	3.6
Widen one's social circle / meet new friends	86.7	1.4	1.6
Have better understanding of society	78.2	2.0	2.6
(Un-weighted N = 1027, missing = 3)			

94. The most popular reason was to "widen one's social circle / meet new friends", with 87% citing it. The next two most popular reasons were to "learn new things and knowledge" and "be occupied mentally/emotionally", each with 80% citing them. The other two reasons that were cited by over 70% of the respondents were "to have better understanding of society" (78%) and "to keep abreast of society / don't want to fall behind" (77%).

95. In contrast, not all reasons for not taking courses listed on the questionnaire figured in the decision of all respondents to not take courses. Only four reasons were cited by more than 50% of the respondents who would not or might not take a course in the coming year. The average number of reasons cited was 5.0. Table 6 lists the percentage for each deterrent.

Table 6: Overall Results of Reasons for Not Taking Courses

	Proportion (%)	Standard Error (%)	C. V. (%)
Section 3 of Questionnaire			
Reasons for Not Taking Courses			
Do not like learning	47.4	2.1	4.5
Nothing I want or need to learn	58.3	2.3	4.0
Health problem, disabilities or Fatigue	62.2	1.6	2.6
Not good at learning	64.2	2.0	3.2
Too old to learn	76.1	1.4	1.9
Occupied by work or domestic Chores	46.6	1.8	3.9
Occupied by other leisure activities	26.9	2.0	7.4
Do not know what courses available or where to get info	22.9	2.1	9.3
Inconvenient class time or location	28.6	2.1	7.4
No course in area I am interested	14.8	1.7	11.5
Family or friends not supportive	4.8	1.3	27.4
No money to pay tuition and other Miscellaneous fees	11.0	1.2	10.5
(Un-weighted N = 1804, missing = 35)			

96. The most popular reason was “too old to learn”, with 76% of the respondents citing it. The other reasons that were cited by more than 50% of the respondents included “not good at learning” (64%), “health problems / disabilities / fatigue” (62%), “nothing I want or need to learn” (58%).

Preferences

97. Those who would or might take a course in the coming year and those who would not take courses due solely to non-dispositional and non health-related reasons, were asked of their preferences pertaining to studying and learning. Table 7 lists the five most popular subject areas.

Table 7: Subjects Areas of Interest

(Ranked by “Responses”)

	Proportion of “responses” (%)
Top 5 Subjects Areas of Interest	
Basic literacy	15.0
Computer application	14.8
Languages	13.1
Sports / exercise	12.5
Music / singing	11.9
(Number of responses = 2198, N=982)	

98. Subject areas of interest fell mainly into the following categories: “basic literacy” (15% of the subject areas mentioned by respondents), “computer application” (15%), “languages” (13%), “sports/exercise” (13%) and “music /

singing" (12%). The other categories each accounted for less than 10% of the subject areas mentioned. (Please refer to Table 22 in Appendix III for the full list of subjects areas of interest and their scores.)

99. In addition to what subject areas they were interested in, respondents who indicated that they would or might take courses were also asked about their preferences regarding mode of learning, age-segregation classes, class times, institutions offering courses, and maximum amount willing to pay. The results are in Table 8.

Table 8: Overall Results of Preferences

	Proportion (%)	**Standard Error (%)**	**C. V. (%)**
Section 4 of Questionnaire			
Interested in Vocational Courses			
Yes	14.1	1.6	11.3
No	85.9	1.6	2.05
(Un-weighted N = 1066, missing = 7)			
Interested in Academic Education			
Yes	16.6	1.6	9.4
No	83.4	1.6	2.1
(Un-weighted N = 1064, missing = 9)			
Ways of Learning			
Classroom	80.4	2.5	3.3
Small group	57.8	3.3	5.9
Individual tutoring	26.4	2.4	9.6
Field visit	25.6	3.1	12.6
Self study through books/magazines	21.5	2.4	11.5
Self study through TV/radio	35.8	3.2	9.2
Self study through computer/internet	8.3	2.0	25.6
(Un-weighted N = 1046, missing = 27)			
Age Segregation Class			
Elderly only	36.6	2.6	7.1
No age limit	28.7	2.5	8.7
Does not matter	34.7	2.6	7.7
(Un-weighted N = 1066, missing = 7)			
Preferred Class Time			
Weekday's morning	61.0	2.2	3.6
Weekday's afternoon	41.1	2.4	5.9
Weekday's evening	4.2	0.7	16.0
Saturday's morning	24.3	3.4	14.1
Saturday's afternoon	16.3	2.3	14.2
Saturday's evening	2.9	0.6	40.3
Sunday's morning	14.4	2.1	14.5
Sunday's afternoon	12.0	2.1	18.0
Sunday's evening	1.7	0.3	40.3
Any time will do	13.0	1.2	9.3
(Un-weighted N = 1073)			

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	Proportion (%)	Standard Error (%)	C. V. (%)
Offering Institution			
MEs / SEs			
No	4.0	0.8	22.8
Maybe	6.4	1.0	15.4
Yes	89.6	1.3	1.5
Community centers			
No	29.3	2.3	8.0
Maybe	16.5	2.2	13.4
Yes	54.1	2.7	5.0
Government			
No	41.1	2.9	7.1
Maybe	18.6	1.9	10.5
Yes	40.3	2.4	6.0
Tertiary institutions			
No	78.3	2.3	3.0
Maybe	9.9	1.5	15.1
Yes	11.8	1.4	12.3
Extramural – tertiary institutions			
No	78.8	2.2	2.8
Maybe	10.2	1.5	15.1
Yes	11.0	1.3	12.2
Other community organizations			
No	46.4	2.5	5.6
Maybe	22.0	2.4	11.2
Yes	31.6	2.4	7.7
Other educational institutions			
No	55.3	2.6	4.8
Maybe	19.8	2.3	11.7
Yes	24.8	2.2	9.0
(Un-weighted N = 1073)			
Highest amount willing to pay			
Over $400	5.3	1.0	19.6
$301 – $400	5.0	0.7	13.7
$201 – $300	9.9	0.7	9.8
$101 – $200	18.9	1.6	8.8
$51 – $100	19.6	1.6	8.8
$50 or under	41.3	2.7	6.8
(Un-weighted N = 1022, missing = 51)			

100. When asked about which modes of learning suited them better, about 80% of the respondents picked “classroom lecture” as one of their choices. “Small group discussion” was the distant second with 58% of the respondents choosing it.

101. About 37% of the respondents preferred attending courses that were limited to the elderly, while 29% preferred courses with no age limit. The remaining 35% said that age limit did not matter.

102. As for class time, “weekdays’ mornings” was the most popular, with 61% of the respondents picking it as one of their choices. “Weekdays’ afternoons” was second with 41%, and “Saturdays’ mornings” was third with 24%.

103. About 96% of the respondents would consider courses offered by MEs / SEs. About 71% would consider courses offered by community centers. Other popular choices included courses offered by the government and those by other community organizations, with respectively 59% and 54%. The other options were less popular, each being considered by at most 20% of the respondents.

104. About 41% of the respondents said they would pay $50 maximum for an 8-hour course in their favorite subject area. Another 20% would pay between $51 and $100 maximum. About 19% would pay between $101 and $200 maximum. At the other extreme, about 5% said they would pay over $400 for a course they liked.

3. Differences by Demographic Characteristics

105. To examine the differences among members of different gender, age and educational attainment in their intention, motivations and deterrents regarding participation in organized educational activities, a series of logit models were fitted with each of the variables on participation, motivations and deterrents serving as dependent variables and the three demographic characteristics serving as independent variables.

106. To ensure adequate number of cases in each cell of the multi-way contingency tables, it was necessary to collapse categories of some variables. In particular,

- the participation variable “taking courses in the coming year” was collapsed to “yes/maybe” and “no”;
- the age variable was collapsed to “55-74” and “75 and over”; and
- the educational attainment variable: was collapsed to “none / kindergarten” and “primary and up”.

107. With the recoding of these three variables, none of the multi-way contingency tables being considered in our logit modeling had more than 20% of its cells having less than 5 cases.

108. Table 9 gives, for each dependent variable, the best model selected by backward elimination based on likelihood ratios. In general, the closer to one the p-value of a model is, the better the fit of that model is.

Table 9: Fitted Logit Models of Relationship

(Participation / Motivations / Deterrents Variables vs. Demographic Variables)

Model		p-value of Goodness of Fit
Dependent Variable	**Independent Variable**	
Future Participation		
Taking courses in the coming one year *(un-weighted N = 2592, missing cases = 67)*	Gender, Age, Education	0.6348
Reasons for Considering Taking Courses		
Coping with daily needs and problems	Gender *X* Education	0.1704
Keep abreast of society / don't want to fall behind	Age	0.2137
Learn new things/knowledge	Gender *X* Age, Education	0.0875
Be occupied mentally / emotionally	None	0.5871
Escape boredom / pass time	None	0.2370
Prepare oneself to help others or to serve society	None	0.1413
Improve one's relationship with others	None	0.3751
Prove one's own ability	None	0.8847
Widen one's social circle / meet new friends	Gender, Age, Education	0.4751
Have better understanding of society *(un-weighted N = 993, missing cases = 10)*	Age, Education	0.9605
Reasons for Not Taking Courses		
Do not like learning	Age, Education	0.4734
Nothing I want or need to learn	Gender, Education	0.8085
Health problems, disabilities or fatigue	Age	0.6281
Not good at learning	Education	0.8670
Too old to learn	Age, Education	0.1976
Occupied by work or domestic chores	Gender *X* Age	0.4476
Occupied by other leisure activities	Gender, Age	0.7864
Do not know what courses are available or where to get course information	Education	0.5265
Inconvenient class time or location	Gender *X* Age	0.4143
No course in area I am interested	Education	0.3315
Family or friends not supportive	Gender *X* Age, Gender *X* Education, Age *X* Education	0.9753
No money to pay tuition and other miscellaneous fees *(unweighted N = 1766, missing cases = 94)*	None	0.6740

NOTE: Hierarchical logit model selection by backward elimination based on likelihood ratio chi-square statistics.

109. Except for the model with dependent variable "learn new things and knowledge", whose fit as indicated by the goodness-of-fit statistics was only marginal, the overall fit of each of the other models was considered adequate. Residual plots of the models also revealed no systematic bias. However, as the number of respondents in certain categories might be small, e.g. the number of male respondents, especially those with no formal education or only kindergarten education, the fit for these particular categories of respondents was expected to be not as good as that for the other categories.

110. As far as motivations and deterrents were concerned, there were no obvious differences in proportion among members of different gender, age and educational

attainment in citing the following five reasons for considering taking courses and one reason for not taking courses:

- be occupied mentally / emotionally;
- escape boredom / pass time;
- prepare oneself to help others or to serve society;
- improve one's relationship with others;
- prove one's own ability; and
- no money pay tuition and other miscellaneous fees.

111. Based on the fitted models listed in Table 9, odds ratios with respect to intention, motivations and deterrents were calculated for different subgroups of interest. In the following three sections, the differences in survey results by gender, age and educational attainment are presented in turn.

4. Differences by Gender

112. Tables 10, 12 and 14 list the odds ratios of male members to female members derived from the fitted models regarding intention, motivations and deterrents, with corresponding proportions also being presented. In each table, only model predicted odds ratios are presented, but both model predicted proportions (on the left) and observed sample proportions (on the right and in italic) are presented. An odds ratio greater than one indicates male members were more likely than female members to participate or to cite the reason concerned for taking / not taking courses. Odds-ratios that are different from one at 5% significance level are marked with an asterisk.

113. Tables 11 and 13 list respectively the top five reasons for considering taking courses and the top five reasons for not taking courses by gender.

Future Participation

Table 10: Intention to Take Courses – Male Members vs. Female Members

Take courses in the coming year

Age	**Educational Attainment**	**Gender (%)** Male		Female		**Model Predicted Odds-ratios**	
55 – 74	None / kg	25.4	*31.8*	35.7	*36.2*	0.61	*
	Primary & up	45.9	*44.4*	58.0	*58.0*	0.61	*
75 & over	None / kg	11.4	*16.2*	17.4	*16.1*	0.61	*
	Primary & up	24.3	*24.7*	34.3	*35.4*	0.61	*

NOTE:
1. Proportions are in percentage.
2. Model predicted values are on the left, while observed sample values are on the right and in italic.
3. Odds-ratios with asterisk are different from one at 5% significance level.
4. A seemingly large / small odds ratio that is insignificant may indicate an insufficient number of respondents in the categories concerned.

114. Female members were expected to be 1.6 times more likely than male members in the same age-and educational attainment group to take courses in the coming year.

Reasons for Considering Taking Courses

Table 11: Top Five Reasons for Considering Taking Courses by Gender

	Proportion of 'Yes' (%)	Standard Error (%)	C. V. (%)
Reasons for Considering Taking Courses			
Male's Top Five			
Widen one's social circle / meet new friends	82.7	2.7	3.2
Learn new things and knowledge	81.9	2.7	3.3
Have better understanding of society	79.7	2.9	3.6
Be occupied mentally / emotionally	79.4	2.9	3.6
Keep abreast of society / don't want to fall behind	76.3	2.8	3.6
Female's Top Five			
Widen one's social circle / meet new friends	87.9	1.3	1.5
Be occupied mentally / emotionally	80.8	1.8	2.2
Learn new things and knowledge	80.6	1.9	2.4
Have better understanding of society	77.8	2.2	2.8
Keep abreast of society / don't want to fall behind	77.6	2.5	3.3

NOTE: *Un-weighted N = 1027.*

115. Table 11 lists the relative importance of the reasons for considering taking courses, which was essentially the same for male and female members. The percentage differences in the top five reasons between the two gender groups were also quite small. To further explore the relationship between reasons for considering taking courses and gender, with both age and educational attainment controlled for, we examine the results of our logit models and present the significant differences in Table 12.

Table 12: Motivations to Take Course – Male Members vs. Female Members

Cope with daily needs and problems

Educational Attainment	Gender				Model Predicted Odds-ratio	
	Male		Female			
None / kg	33.0	*34.0*	66.6	*66.5*	0.25	*
Primary & up	56.9	*56.8*	57.2	*57.2*	0.99	

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Learn new things and knowledge

Age	Educational Attainment	Gender				Model Predicted Odds-ratios	
		Male		Female			
55 – 74	None / kg	71.5	*86.3*	78.8	*76.3*	0.68	*
	Primary & up	80.7	*79.6*	86.1	*87.3*	0.68	*
75 & over	None / kg	79.2	*50.9*	65.8	*70.8*	1.98	
	Primary & up	86.4	*89.1*	76.3	*73.3*	1.98	

Widen one's social circle / meet new friends

Age	Educational Attainment	Gender				Model Predicted Odds-ratios	
		Male		Female			
55 – 74	None / kg	76.7	*91.1*	86.3	*84.3*	0.52	*
	Primary & up	84.2	*84.9*	91.1	*91.2*	0.52	*
75 & over	None / kg	68.6	*71.1*	80.7	*82.7*	0.52	*
	Primary & up	77.9	*72.6*	87.1	*88.1*	0.52	*

NOTE:
1. Proportions are in percentage.
2. Model predicted values are on the left, while observed sample values are on the right and in italic.
3. Odds-ratios with asterisk are different from one at 5% significance level.
4. A seemingly large / small odds ratio that is insignificant may indicate an insufficient number of respondents in the categories concerned.

116. Based on the results of our logit models, when age and educational attainment were taken into account, out of the ten reasons for considering taking courses listed in our questionnaire, members of different gender did not differ in their likelihood to cite the following reasons:

- keep abreast of society / don't want to fall behind;
- be occupied mentally / emotionally;
- escape boredom / pass time;
- prepare oneself to help others or to serve society;
- improve one's relationship with others;
- prove one's own ability; and
- have better understanding of society.

117. "Widen one's social circle / meet new friends" was the most frequently cited for both male and female learners / would-be learners in our sample. But our logit model indicated that female learners / would-be learners were 1.9 times more likely than male learners / would-be learners in the same age and educational attainment group to cite it as a motivation.

118. Another reason in the two top five lists that showed gender differences was "learn new things and knowledge". While male and female learners / would-be learners were almost equal in proportion to cite it as a motivation, younger female learners / would-be learners were 1.5 times more likely than younger male learners / would-be learners in the same educational attainment group to cite the reason.

119. While "cope with daily needs and problems" was not in the top five of either the male's or the female's list, there were noticeable gender differences. Our logit model indicated that only one in three uneducated male learners / would-be learners were expected to cite "cope with daily needs and problems" as a reason, while two-thirds of uneducated female learners / would-be learners would cite the reason. That is, uneducated female learners / would-be learners were 4.0 times more likely than uneducated male learners / would-be learners to cite it as a motivation.

Reasons for Not Taking Courses

Table 13: Top Five Reasons for Not Taking Courses by Gender

	Proportion of 'Yes' (%)	**Standard Error (%)**	**C. V. (%)**
Reasons for Not Taking Courses			
Male's Top Five			
Too old to learn	73.5	2.3	3.1
Nothing I want or need to learn	64.1	2.9	4.5
Health problems, disabilities or Fatigue	59.7	2.7	4.6
Not good at learning	56.1	3.1	5.5
Do not like learning	43.9	2.9	6.5
Female's Top Five			
Too old to learn	77.0	1.6	2.1
Not good at learning	67.0	2.2	3.3
Health problems, disabilities or Fatigue	63.1	1.6	2.6
Nothing I want or need to learn	56.3	2.7	4.8
Do not like learning	48.6	2.4	4.9

NOTE: *Un-weighted N = 1804*

120. Table 13 lists the relative importance of the reasons for not taking courses, which was again essentially the same for male and female members. Except for "nothing I need or want to learn", the percentage differences in the top five reasons between the two gender groups were also quite small. To further explore the relationship between reasons for not taking courses and gender, with both age and educational attainment controlled for, we examine the results of our logit models and present the significant differences in Table 14.

Table 14: Deterrents to Taking Course – Male Members vs. Female Members

Nothing I want or need to learn

Educational Attainment	**Gender**				**Model Predicted Odds-ratios**	
	Male		Female			
None / kg	69.6	*67.8*	59.4	*59.6*	1.56	*
Primary & up	63.3	*63.5*	52.5	*52.3*	1.56	*

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Occupied by work or domestic chores

Age	Gender: Male		Gender: Female		Model Predicted Odds-ratios	
55 – 74	36.7	*36.7*	63.8	*63.8*	0.33	*
75 & over	27.3	*27.4*	39.3	*39.3*	0.58	*

Occupied by other leisure activities

Age	Gender: Male		Gender: Female		Model Predicted Odds-ratios	
55 – 74	36.4	*37.0*	28.6	*28.3*	1.43	*
75 & over	28.0	*27.3*	21.4	*21.6*	1.43	*

Inconvenient class time or location

Age	Gender: Male		Gender: Female		Model Predicted Odds-ratio	
55 – 74	19.9	*20.1*	28.8	*28.8*	0.62	*
75 & over	30.7	*30.8*	30.5	*30.5*	1.01	

Family or friends not supportive

Age	Educational Attainment	Gender: Male		Gender: Female		Model Predicted Odds-ratio	
54 – 74	Primary & up	3.9	*3.9*	6.4	*6.4*	0.59	
75 & over	Primary & up	9.4	*9.4*	3.3	*3.3*	3.02	*

NOTE:
1. Proportions are in percentage.
2. Model predicted values are on the left, while observed sample values are on the right and in italic.
3. Odds-ratios with asterisk are different from one at 5% significance level.
4. A seemingly large / small odds ratio that is insignificant may indicate an insufficient number of respondents in the categories concerned.

121. Based on the results of our logit models, when age and educational attainment were taken into account, out of the twelve reasons for not taking courses list in our questionnaire, members of different gender did not seem to differ in their likelihood to cite the following reasons:

- do not like learning;
- health problems, disabilities or fatigue;
- not good at learning;
- too old to learn;
- do not know what courses are available or where to get course information;
- no course in area I am interested; and
- no money to pay tuition and other miscellaneous fees.

122. Among the top five male's and female's reasons for not taking courses, our logit models indicated that "nothing I want or need to learn" was the only one with

significant gender differences. Male non-learners were 1.6 times more likely than female non-learners in the same educational attainment group to cite it as a deterrent.

123. For female non-learners in our sample, 'occupied by work or domestic chores' was the sixth most frequently cited reasons for not taking courses. On the other hand, many male did not run into this problem. In particular, younger female non-learners were 3.0 times more likely than younger male non-learners to cite it as a deterrent. For older non-learners, the difference by gender was less pronounced. Older female non-learners were 1.7 times more likely than older male non-learners to cite it as a deterrent.

124. As for "occupied by other leisure activities", male non-learners were 1.4 times more likely than female non-learners in the same age group to cite it as a deterrent.

125. Regarding "inconvenient class time or location", younger female non-learners were 1.6 times more likely than younger male non-learners to cite it as a deterrent.

126. Very few non-learners in our sample cited "family or friends not supportive" as a deterrent. However, our logit model indicated that older male non-learners who had had at least some primary education were 3.0 times more likely than older female non-learners who had had at least some primary education to cite the reason.

Subject Areas of Interest

127. Table 15 shows the subject areas of interest to male and female learners / would-be learners. Subject areas of interest to male and female learners / would-be learners were quite similar. But noticeable differences could be found in 'basic literacy' (8% male vs. 17% female; a 9 percentage point difference) and 'computer application' (23% male vs. 12% female; a 11 percentage point difference).

Table 15: Subjects Areas of Interest by Gender

(Ranked by Male Member's "Responses")

	Proportion of "Responses" (%)	
	Male	Female
Top 5 Subjects Areas of Interest		
Computer Application	23.4	12.4
Sports / exercise	13.3	12.2
Music / singing	12.1	11.8
Languages	10.8	13.8
Basic literacy	8.1	17.0
(Number of responses = 2198, N=982)		

5. Differences by Age

128. Tables 16, 18 and 20 list the odds ratios of members aged 55-74 to members aged 75 or over derived from the fitted models regarding intention, motivations and deterrents, with corresponding proportions also being presented. An odds ratio

greater than one indicates younger members were more likely than older members to participate or cite the reason concerned for taking/not taking courses.

129. Tables 17 and 19 list respectively the top five reasons for considering taking courses and the top five reasons for not taking courses by age.

Future Participation

Table 16: Intention to Take Courses – Younger Members vs. Older Members

Take courses in the coming year

Gender	Educational Attainment	Age 55 - 74		Age 75 & over		Model Predicted Odds-ratios	
Male	None / kg	25.4	*31.8*	11.4	*16.2*	2.64	*
	Primary & up	45.9	*44.4*	24.3	*24.7*	2.64	*
Female	None / kg	35.7	*36.2*	17.4	*16.1*	2.64	*
	Primary & up	58.0	*58.0*	34.3	*35.4*	2.64	*

NOTE:
1. Proportions are in percentage.
2. Model predicted values are on the left, while observed sample values are on the right and in italic.
3. Odds-ratios with asterisk are different from one at 5% significance level.
4. A seemingly large / small odds ratio that is insignificant may indicate an insufficient number of respondents in the categories concerned.

130. Younger members were 2.6 times more likely than older members in the same gender and education group to take courses in the coming year.

Reasons for Considering Taking Courses

Table 17: Top Five Reasons for Considering Taking Courses by Age

	Proportion of 'Yes' (%)	Standard Error (%)	C. V. (%)
Reasons for Considering Taking Courses			
Top Five of Aged 55-74			
Widen one's social circle / meet new friends	87.9	1.5	1.7
Learn new things and knowledge	83.1	1.9	2.3
Be occupied mentally / emotionally	81.0	1.8	2.2
Have better understanding of society	81.0	2.2	2.8
Keep abreast of society / don't want to fall behind	79.7	2.5	3.1

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	Proportion of 'Yes' (%)	Standard Error (%)	C. V. (%)
Reasons for Considering Taking Courses			
Top Five of Aged 75 and over			
Widen one's social circle / meet new friends	83.4	2.3	2.8
Be occupied mentally / emotionally	79.1	2.8	3.5
Learn new things and knowledge	75.2	3.1	4.1
Keep abreast of society / don't want to fall behind	71.0	3.4	4.8
Have better understanding of society	70.9	3.3	4.7

NOTE: *Un-weighted N = 1027.*

131. Table 17 lists the relative importance of the reasons for considering taking courses, which was essentially the same for younger and older members. The percentage differences in the top five reasons between the two age groups were however noticeable. To further investigate such differences, with both gender and educational attainment controlled for, we examine the results of our logit models and present the significant differences in Table 18.

Table 18: Motivations to Take Course – Younger Members vs. Older Members

Keep abreast of society / don't want to fall behind

		Age				Model Predicted	
		55 - 74		75 & over		Odds-ratio	
		79.9	*79.9*	70.8	*70.7*	1.64	*

Learn new things and knowledge

	Educational	Age				Model Predicted	
Gender	Attainment	55 - 74		75 & over		Odds-ratios	
Male	None / kg	71.5	*86.3*	79.2	*50.9*	0.66	
	Primary & up	80.7	*79.6*	86.4	*89.1*	0.66	
Female	None / kg	78.8	*76.3*	65.8	*70.8*	1.93	*
	Primary & up	86.1	*87.3*	76.3	*73.3*	1.93	*

Widen one's social circle / meet new friends

	Educational	Age				Model Predicted	
Gender	Attainment	55 - 74		75 & over		Odds-ratios	
Male	None / kg	76.7	*91.1*	68.6	*71.1*	1.51	*
	Primary & up	84.2	*84.9*	77.9	*72.6*	1.51	*
Female	None / kg	86.3	*84.3*	80.7	*82.7*	1.51	*
	Primary & up	91.1	*91.2*	87.1	*88.1*	1.51	*

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Have better understanding of society

Educational Attainment	Age				Model Predicted Odds-ratios	
	55 - 74		75 & over			
None / kg	74.6	*74.4*	63.2	*63.8*	1.71	*
Primary & up	83.1	*83.1*	74.1	*73.9*	1.71	*

NOTE:
1. Proportions are in percentage.
2. Model predicted values are on the left, while observed sample values are on the right and in italic.
3. Odds-ratios with asterisk are different from one at 5% significance level.
4. A seemingly large / small odds ratio that is insignificant may indicate an insufficient number of respondents in the categories concerned.

132. Based on the results of our logit models, when gender and educational attainment were taken into account, members of different age did not differ in their likelihood to cite the following reasons for considering taking courses:

- cope with daily needs and problems;
- be occupied mentally / emotionally;
- escape boredom / pass time;
- prepare oneself to help others or to serve society;
- improve one's relationship with others;
- prove one's own ability; and

133. Regarding "widen one's social circle / meet new friends", younger learners / would-be learners were 1.5 times more likely than older learners / would-be learners in the same gender and educational attainment group to cite it as a motivation.

134. Regarding "learn new things and knowledge", age differences might come from female learners / would-be learners. Younger female learners / would-be learners were 1.9 times more likely than older female learners / would-be learners in the same educational attainment group to cite it as a motivation.

135. Regarding "have better understanding of society", younger learners / would-be learners were 1.7 times more likely than older learners / would-be learners in the same educational attainment group to cite it as a motivation.

136. Regarding "keep abreast of society / don't want to fall behind", younger learners / would-be learners were 1.6 times more likely than older learners / would-be learners to cite it as a motivation.

Reasons for Not Taking Courses

Table 19: Top Five Reasons for Not Taking Courses by Gender

	Proportion of 'Yes' (%)	Standard Error (%)	C. V. (%)
Reasons for Not Taking Courses			
Top Five of Aged 55-74			
Too old to learn	66.2	2.0	3.1
Not good at learning	61.6	2.2	3.6
Occupied by work or domestic chores	56.5	2.0	3.5
Nothing I want or need to learn	56.3	2.5	4.4
Health problems, disabilities or Fatigue	55.0	2.1	3.8
Top Five of Aged 75 & over			
Too old to learn	85.9	1.5	1.8
Health problems, disabilities or Fatigue	69.4	1.9	2.7
Not good at learning	66.7	2.5	3.7
Nothing I want or need to learn	60.2	2.9	4.8
Do not like learning	52.3	2.4	4.7

NOTE: *Un-weighted N = 1804.*

137. Table 19 lists the relative importance of the reasons for not taking courses, which was again essentially the same for younger and older members. One exception is that younger non-learners' top five included "occupied by work or domestic chores", while older non-learners tended to cite "do not like learning" more often. The percentage differences in the top five reasons between the two age groups were also quite noticeable. To further investigate the differences, with both gender and educational attainment controlled for, we examine the results of our logit models and present the significant differences in Table 20.

Table 20: Deterrents to Taking Course – Younger Members vs. Older Members

Do not like learning

Educational Attainment	**Age** 55 – 74		75 & over		**Model Predicted Odds-ratios**	
None / kg	52.5	*50.9*	60.6	*61.9*	0.72	*
Primary & up	36.0	*37.1*	43.9	*42.6*	0.72	*

Health problems, disabilities or fatigue

	Age 55 – 74		75 & over		**Model Predicted Odds-ratio**	
	54.8	*54.8*	69.4	*69.4*	0.53	*

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Too old to learn

Educational Attainment	Age: 55 – 74		Age: 75 & over		Model Predicted Odds-ratios	
None / kg	75.3	*75.8*	89.9	*89.5*	0.34	*
Primary & up	60.9	*60.5*	81.9	*82.4*	0.34	*

Occupied by work or domestic chores

Gender	Age: 55 - 74		Age: 75 & over		Model Predicted Odds-ratios	
Male	36.7	*36.7*	27.3	*27.4*	1.54	*
Female	63.8	*63.8*	39.3	*39.3*	2.73	*

Occupied by other leisure activities

Gender	Age: 55 - 74		Age: 75 & over		Model Predicted Odds-ratios	
Male	36.4	*37.0*	28.0	*27.3*	1.47	*
Female	28.6	*28.3*	21.4	*21.6*	1.47	*

Inconvenient class time or location

Gender	Age: 55 - 74		Age: 75 & over		Model Predicted Odds-ratio	
Male	19.9	*20.1*	30.7	*30.8*	0.56	*
Female	28.8	*28.8*	30.5	*30.5*	0.92	

Family or friends not supportive

Gender	Educational Attainment	Age: 55 - 74		Age: 75 & over		Model Predicted Odds-ratio	
Male	Primary & up	3.9	*3.9*	9.4	*9.4*	0.39	*
Female	None / kg	2.8	*2.8*	5.5	*5.5*	0.49	
	Primary & up	6.4	*6.4*	3.3	*3.3*	1.99	

NOTE:
1. Proportions are in percentage.
2. Model predicted values are on the left, while observed sample values are on the right and in italic.
3. Odds-ratios with asterisk are different from one at 5% significance level.
4. A seemingly large / small odds ratio that is insignificant may indicate an insufficient number of respondents in the categories concerned.

138. Based on the results of our logit models, when gender and education attainment were taken into account, members of different age did not differ in their likelihood to cite the following reasons:

- nothing I want or need to learn;
- not good at learning;
- do not know what courses are available or where to get course information;

- no course in area I am interested; and
- no money to pay tuition and other miscellaneous fees.

139. "Too old to learn" topped both top five lists. But older non-learners were 2.9 times more likely than younger non-learners in the same educational attainment group to cite it as a deterrent.

140. "Health problems, disabilities or fatigue" was a frequently cited reason among non-learners, especially so for older ones. Older non-learners were 1.9 times more likely than younger non-learners to cite it as a deterrent.

141. Regarding "do not like learning", it was among the top five reasons of older non-learners for not taking courses. In fact, older non-learners were 1.4 times more likely than younger non-learners in the same educational attainment group to cite it as a deterrent.

142. "Occupied by work or domestic chores" was in the top five list for younger non-learners, but not in the list for older non-learners. In particular, younger male non-learners were 1.5 times more likely than older male non-learners to cite it as a deterrent. The difference was even more pronounced for female non-learners. Younger female non-learners were 2.7 times more likely to cite it as a deterrent than older female non-learners.

143. "Occupied by other leisure activities" was not a major deterrent cited by non-learners. However, it was found that younger non-learners were 1.5 times more likely than older non-learners in the same gender group to cite it as a deterrent.

144. "Inconvenient class time or location" was also not a major deterrent. Yet, age differences are still noticeable. Older male non-learners were 1.8 times more likely than younger male non-learners to cite it.

145. Few non-learners in our sample actually cited "family or friends not supportive" as a deterrent. Nonetheless, our logit model indicated that older male non-learners with at least some primary education were 2.6 times more likely than younger male non-learners with at least some primary education to cite it as a deterrent.

Subject Areas of Interest

146. Table 21 shows the subject areas of interest to younger and older learners / would-be learners. In terms of percentage, subject areas of interest to the two age groups were quite similar. In terms of relative popularity, "computer application" was the most popular among younger learners / would-be learners, while older learners / would-be learners preferred "basic literacy" most.

Table 21: Subjects Areas of Interest by Age

(Ranked by 55 – 74 Years Old Member's "Responses")

	Proportion of "Responses" (%)	
	55-74	75 & over
Top 5 Subjects Areas of Interest		
Computer Application	15.4	12.9
Basic literacy	14.3	17.5
Languages	13.4	12.3
Sports / exercise	12.3	13.2
Music / singing	11.6	12.9
(Number of responses = 2198, N=982)		

5. Differences by Educational Attainment

147. Tables 22, 24 and 26 list the odds ratios of members with no formal or only kindergarten education to members with at least some primary education derived from the fitted models regarding intention, motivations and deterrents, with corresponding proportions also being presented. An odds ratio greater than one indicates uneducated members were more likely than members with at least some primary education to participate or cite the reason concerned for taking/not taking courses.

148. Tables 23 and 25 list respectively the top five reasons for considering taking courses and the top five reasons for not taking courses by educational attainment.

Future Participation

Table 22: Intention to Take Courses – Uneducated Members vs. Educated Members

Take courses in the coming year

		Educational Attainment				Model Predicted	
Gender	**Age**	None / kg		Primary & up		**Odds-ratios**	
Male	55 – 74	25.4	*31.8*	45.9	*44.4*	0.40	*
	75 & over	11.4	*16.2*	24.3	*24.7*	0.40	*
Female	55 – 74	33.7	*36.2*	58.0	*58.0*	0.40	*
	75 & over	17.4	*16.1*	34.3	*35.4*	0.40	*

NOTE:
1. Proportions are in percentage.
2. Model predicted values are on the left, while observed sample values are on the right and in italic.
3. Odds-ratios with asterisk are different from one at 5% significance level.
4. A seemingly large / small odds ratio that is insignificant may indicate an insufficient number of respondents in the categories concerned.

149. Members with at least some primary education were 2.5 times more likely than uneducated members in the same gender and age group to take courses in the coming year.

Reasons for Considering Taking Courses

Table 23: Top Five Reasons for Considering Taking Courses by Educational Attainment

	Proportion of 'Yes' (%)	Standard Error (%)	C. V. (%)
Reasons for Considering Taking Courses			
Top Five of Uneducated			
Widen one's social circle / meet new friends	83.8	2.9	3.4
Be occupied mentally / emotionally	80.3	3.3	4.2
Learn new things and knowledge	74.7	4.1	5.5
Keep abreast of society / don't want to fall behind	73.5	3.5	4.7
Have better understanding of society	71.0	3.5	4.9
Top Five of Educated			
Widen one's social circle / meet new friends	87.8	1.5	1.7
Learn new things and knowledge	83.2	1.7	2.1
Have better understanding of society	80.7	2.3	2.8
Be occupied mentally / emotionally	80.6	1.7	2.1
Keep abreast of society / don't want to fall behind	78.8	2.4	3.0

NOTE: *Un-weighted N = 993.*

150. Table 23 lists the relative importance of the reasons for considering taking courses, which was essentially the same for uneducated members and members with at least some primary education. The percentage differences in the top five reasons between the two educational attainment groups were however noticeable. To further investigate such differences, with both gender and age controlled for, we examine the results of our logit models and present the significant differences in Table 24.

Table 24: Motivations to Take Course – Uneducated Members vs. Educated Members

Cope with daily needs and problems

	Educational Attainment				Model Predicted	
Gender	None / kg		Primary & up		**Odds-ratio**	
Male	33.0	*34.0*	56.9	*56.8*	0.37	
Female	66.6	*66.5*	57.2	*57.2*	1.49	*

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Learn new things and knowledge

Gender	Age	Educational Attainment: None / kg		Educational Attainment: Primary & up		Model Predicted Odds-ratios	
Male	55 - 74	71.5	*86.3*	80.7	*79.6*	0.60	*
	75 & over	79.2	*50.9*	86.4	*89.1*	0.60	*
Female	55 - 74	78.8	*76.3*	86.1	*87.3*	0.60	*
	75 & over	65.8	*70.8*	76.3	*73.3*	0.60	*

Widen one's social circle / meet new friends

Gender	Age	Educational Attainment: None / kg		Educational Attainment: Primary & up		Model Predicted Odds-ratios	
Male	55 - 74	76.7	*91.1*	84.2	*84.9*	0.62	*
	75 & over	68.6	*71.1*	77.9	*72.6*	0.62	*
Female	55 - 74	86.3	*84.3*	91.1	*91.2*	0.62	*
	75 & over	80.7	*82.7*	87.1	*88.1*	0.62	*

Have better understanding of society

Age	Educational Attainment: None / kg		Educational Attainment: Primary & up		Model Predicted Odds-ratios	
55 - 74	74.6	*74.4*	83.1	*83.1*	0.60	*
75 & over	63.2	*63.8*	74.1	*73.9*	0.60	*

NOTE:
1. Proportions are in percentage.
2. Model predicted values are on the left, while observed sample values are on the right and in italic.
3. Odds-ratios with asterisk are different from one at 5% significance level.
4. A seemingly large / small odds ratio that is insignificant may indicate an insufficient number of respondents in the categories concerned.

151. Based on the results of our logit models, when gender and age were taken into account, members of different educational attainment did not differ in their likelihood to cite the following reasons for considering taking courses:

- keep abreast of society / don't want to fall behind;
- be occupied mentally / emotionally;
- escape boredom / pass time;
- prepare oneself to help others or to serve society;
- improve one's relationship with others;
- prove one's own ability; and

152. "Learn new things and knowledge" and "widen one's social circle / meet new friends" were both frequently cited by both uneducated learners / would-be learners and learners / would-be learners with at least some primary education. But learners / would-be learners with at least some primary education were 1.7 times more likely than uneducated learners / would-be learners in the same age and gender group to cite either one or both as motivations.

153. "Have better understanding of society" also appeared in both top five lists. Yet, learners / would-be learners with at least some primary education were 1.7 times more likely than uneducated learners / would-be learners in the same age to cite it as a motivation.

154. Regarding "cope with daily needs and problems", uneducated female learners / would-be learners were 1.5 times more likely than female learners / would-be learners with at least some primary education to cite it as a motivation.

Reasons for Not Taking Courses

Table 25: Top Five Reasons for Not Taking Courses by Educational Attainment

	Proportion of 'Yes' (%)	**Standard Error (%)**	**C. V. (%)**
Reasons for Not Taking Courses			
Top Five of Uneducated			
Too old to learn	83.6	1.8	2.2
Not good at learning	76.6	2.1	2.7
Health problems, disabilities or Fatigue	65.0	2.0	3.1
Nothing I want or need to learn	60.2	3.1	5.1
Do not like learning	57.1	2.5	4.4
Top Five of Educated			
Too old to learn	70.3	1.9	2.7
Health problems, disabilities or Fatigue	59.8	2.0	3.4
Nothing I want or need to learn	56.9	2.3	4.0
Not good at learning	54.1	2.7	4.9
Occupied by work or domestic chores	45.7	2.1	4.6

NOTE: *Un-weighted N = 1766.*

155. Table 25 lists the relative importance of the reasons for not taking courses, which was again essentially the same for uneducated and educated members. One exception was that educated non-learners' top five included "occupied by work or domestic chores", while uneducated non-learners tended to cite "do not like learning" more often. The percentage differences in the top five reasons between the two educational attainment groups were also quite noticeable. To further investigate the differences, with both gender and age controlled for, we examine the results of our logit models and present the significant differences in Table 26.

Table 26: Deterrents to Taking Course – Uneducated Members vs. Educated Members

Do not like learning

	Educational Attainment				Model Predicted	
Age	None / kg		Primary & up		**Odds-ratios**	
55 – 74	52.5	*50.9*	34.0	*37.1*	1.96	*
75 & over	60.6	*61.9*	43.9	*42.6*	1.96	*

Nothing I want or need to learn

	Educational Attainment				Model Predicted	
Gender	None / kg		Primary & up		**Odds-ratios**	
Male	69.6	*67.8*	63.3	*63.5*	1.33	*
Female	59.4	*59.6*	52.5	*52.3*	1.33	*

Not good at learning

	Educational Attainment				Model Predicted	
	None / kg		Primary & up		**Odds-ratio**	
	76.5	*76.5*	54.1	*54.1*	2.77	*

Too old to learn

	Educational Attainment				Model Predicted	
Age	None / kg		Primary & up		**Odds-ratios**	
55 – 74	75.3	*75.8*	60.9	*60.5*	1.96	*
75 & over	89.9	*89.5*	81.9	*82.4*	1.96	*

Do not know what courses are available or where to get course information

	Educational Attainment				Model Predicted	
	None / kg		Primary & up		**Odds-ratio**	
	25.5	*25.5*	20.8	*20.9*	1.30	*

No course in area I am interested

	Educational Attainment				Model Predicted	
	None / kg		Primary & up		**Odds-ratio**	
	11.0	*11.0*	17.7	*17.7*	0.57	*

Family or friends not supportive

		Educational Attainment				Model Predicted	
Gender	**Age**	None / kg		Primary & up		**Odds-ratio**	
Female	55 - 74	2.8	*2.8*	6.4	*6.4*	0.41	*
	75 & over	5.5	*5.5*	3.3	*3.3*	1.68	

NOTE:
1. Proportions are in percentage.
2. Model predicted values are on the left, while observed sample values are on the right and in italic.
3. Odds-ratios with asterisk are different from one at 5% significance level.
4. A seemingly large / small odds ratio that is insignificant may indicate an insufficient number of respondents in the categories concerned.

156. Based on the results of our logit models, when gender and age were taken into account, members of different educational attainment did not differ in their likelihood to cite the following reasons for not taking courses:

- health problems, disabilities or fatigue;
- occupied by work or domestic chores;
- occupied by other leisure activities
- inconvenient class time or location; and
- no money to pay tuition and other miscellaneous fees.

157. "Too old to learn" was the most frequently cited reason for both groups of non-learners. However, uneducated non-learners were 2.0 times more likely than non-learners with at least some primary education in the same age group to cite it as a deterrent.

158. Regarding "not good at learning", another frequently cited deterrent among non-learners, uneducated non-learners were 2.8 times more likely than non-learners with at least some primary education to cite it as a deterrent.

159. "Nothing I want or need to learn" also appeared in both top five lists. Uneducated non-learners were 1.3 times more likely than non-learners with at least some primary education in the same gender group to cite it as a deterrent.

160. "Do not like learning" was in the top five for uneducated non-learners, but not for educated non-learners. Uneducated non-learners were 2.0 times more likely than non-learners with at least some primary education in the same age group to cite it.

161. Regarding "no course in area I am interested", a less frequently cited deterrent, non-learners with at least some primary education were 1.8 times more likely than uneducated non-learners to cite it as a deterrent.

162. "Do not know what courses are available or where to get course information" was another less frequently cited deterrent, which showed educational attainment differences. Uneducated non-learners were 1.3 times more likely than non-learners with at least some primary education to cite it as a deterrent.

163. Few non-learners regarded "family or friends not supportive" as a deterrent. Yet, younger female non-learners with at least some primary education were 2.4 times more likely than uneducated younger female non-learners to cite it as a deterrent.

Subject Areas of Interest

164. Table 27 shows the subject areas of interest to uneducated learners / would-be learners and learners / would-be learners with at least some primary education, where

there were noticeably different. "Basic literacy" was by far the most popular among uneducated learners / would-be learners. "Sport / exercise" courses, which do not require abilities to read and write, were also more popular among uneducated learners / would-be learners. On the other hand, "computer application" and "languages", the two subject areas requiring some level of literacy, were considerably more popular among those with at least some primary education.

Table 27: Subjects Areas of Interest by Educational Attainment

(Ranked by Uneducated / KG-educated Member's "Responses")

	Proportion of "Responses" (%)	
	None/KG	Primary & up
Top 5 Subjects Areas of Interest		
Basic literacy	29.1	10.7
Sports / exercise	16.5	11.4
Music / singing	9.0	12.6
Computer Application	8.8	16.8
Languages	8.7	14.6
(Number of responses = 2145, N=955)		

B. Focus Group Results

1. Profile of Focus Group Participants

165. Five focus group discussions and one in-depth interview were conducted to investigate the opinions and comments of the soon-to-be-olds (i.e. aged 55-60) on learning. In total, 24 women and 4 men participated in this part of the research study.

166. Of the 28 participants, only three said that they would not be interested in taking courses in the future, even though all three had participated in learning of some kind recently. One women were volunteering at a hospital and had received training from time to time; one man was actively seeking a job and had received some kind of job search skill training at a community center; one was learning to do exercise in an unstructured way from some friends. The remaining 25 participants were either taking or planning to take courses, mostly interest courses.

2. Comparing Past and Present Learning

167. The participants were asked about whether there were differences in the reasons for learning when one was young, comparing to the present. Almost all participants seemed to agree that when they were younger, they did not have time to study. If they studied at all, it was for career advancement and for earning more. The reasons then were almost always the same.

168. But now, most participants studied more and took more courses. As they were coming to retiring age, there was not as much pressure to earn a living for the family as before. They now have time to learn. Their reasons for learning now were more varied. They learned because they wanted to learn things that they had not had chances to learn in the past, they wanted to pass time, to keep abreast of the world, to understand what was going on in the world, to communicate better with the young, to enhance their social life, to find emotional support, to contribute to society, and to keep their mind and their body working.

169. Some were not eager learners in the past, especially at school. But now they said they at least took part in some learning activities. When they were younger, they felt they were forced to learn; now, they had no pressure and could learn whatever they liked.

3. Education as a Means to Prepare for Old Age

170. All participants agreed that ‘at each stage of one’s life, one has to prepare for the next stage’. However, virtually all participants said they did not have a clear idea of what they would like their lives to be as they grew older and therefore did not have a plan to prepare for it. As a result, they had not really considered the specific role, if any, education could play in their preparation for old age.

171. However, many did think that whatever the future held, to prepare for old age, they would need to keep healthy both physically and mentally, to be independent and to have good relationship with the young.

4. Deciding What Courses to Take

172. They said that while they were interested in learning, they usually did not have any subject areas of interest in particular. What courses to take usually depended on what were offered and what their friends took or recommended. They said that very seldom did they go around and look for a course that they had in mind particularly. More usually, it was that they went through the list of courses offered by their elderly centers and picked the ones that interested them. As a result, the courses they took were mostly limited to those commonly available at elderly centers.

173. The courses they did take or were interested in taking included interest courses (such as handicrafts and music / singing), physical activity courses (such as sports / exercise and dancing), practical courses (such as languages and computer applications) and basic literacy courses.

174. For some participants, the courses they took were just intermediate steps to further learning. A few participants said that they took basic literacy courses or English courses because, ultimately, they would like to take some courses in computer. They were not able to take computer courses then because they did not understand many of the computer terms, which are usually in English.

5. Deciding Where to Take Courses

175. Elderly centers were the most popular places participants considered for taking courses. One major reason was certainly the design of our study, which restricted our target group to members of elderly centers. However, participants still raised a few important factors as to why elderly centers were so appealing to them. Some factors concerning logistics are described in the rest of this section, while others concerning participants' preferred way of learning are described in the next section.

176. Many participants pointed out that the proximity of class location was an important reason why they preferred elderly centers. They would save a lot in transportation costs, and also they would be in a familiar neighborhood.

177. Furthermore, convenient class time was another important factor. They said that courses offered by elderly centers fit their time better than others because all courses were held in weekdays' mornings or afternoons. Being retired, they were free during that time of day and in general did not need or want to go learning in the evenings. They pointed out that courses offered by other institutions were usually held in the evenings or weekends so as to be more convenient to working adults.

6. How to Learn

178. In regard of the best way for them to learn, many said that they preferred to learn in an environment with less pressure. After all, most of them were not learning to increase their competitiveness in the job market. In generally, they did not want examinations or rigorous study schedule. Because of their reasons for learning and their ability of learning, they would like to learn at their own pace.

179. Partly because of the same reasons as stated above, many said they preferred courses offered by elderly centers. They believed that elderly centers better understood their needs and abilities. Also, in the elderly centers, they would meet people of similar age and abilities, with similar purposes for learning. They believed that this would not only facilitate communication among classmates, but also would allow course instructors to follow more closely their progress and make adjustments in teaching accordingly.

7. Some Worries About Taking Courses

180. For the learners in our focus group participants, the deterrents to more learning were related to physical aspects and financial aspects of getting old. Many said that their memory was not as good as it used to be. It therefore took more time to memorize the materials, whatever the subject was. It might be English vocabulary, dance steps and so on. Some said it could be discouraging. However, one participant did not see it so negatively. He said that if he forgot something, he just practiced it again and again; he saw coping with bad memory as a challenge.

181. Financially, as most were retired, they did not have that much income to pay for tuition and other related expenses. Usually, the tuition fee might not be that high, but when one was to add in transportation costs and other miscellaneous expenses, taking a few courses might quickly become quite unaffordable, even though one had the time and the willingness for the courses.

8. Some Reasons for Not Taking Courses

182. For those that were not interested in learning at all, the main reason for one participant was that she had no urgency in learning anything. She did not have any particular interests or hobbies. For her, there had to be some specific purposes to take a course; for example, to satisfy particular urgent needs.

183. For another participant, as he still had to raise his children, he had to look for a job. There was no time for him to learn, unless the learning could help him get a job. This particular problem is probably prevalent among soon-to-be-olds who are not yet retired. But these people are less likely to be members of MEs and SEs.

184. As for another participant, he just got retired and were interested in taking courses some time in the future; but not now. He said that he wanted to relax for a while.

185. In general, the course taking behavior, reasons and preferences of these soon-to-be-olds as revealed by these focus groups discussions did not differ much from those of the elderly as revealed by the survey results.

IV Discussion and Conclusions

A. Introduction

186. The purpose of this study is to find out the learning needs and preferences of members of MEs and SEs, and the factors that prevent them from learning. Focusing on members' behavior and attitude toward taking the more structured and organized type of educational courses, we have collected data through a random sample survey of the members and various focus group discussions among the "soon-to-old" members for answering the research questions outlined in Section I. In particular,

- through examining the relationship of members' intention to take courses and their demographic characteristics, we have gained a better understanding of who are more likely to participate in organized educational activities;

- subject areas of interest, reasons for considering taking courses, and their relationship to the different demographic characteristics of learners and would-be learners combine to give us a picture of the needs that members would like to satisfy through such organized educational activities;

- reasons cited by non-learners for not taking courses, and their relationship to demographic characteristics of non-learners represent many of the main obstacles that members have to overcome before they would consider engaging in organized educational activities; and

- preferences of learners and would-be learners can guide us in determining how best to attract members to participate in organized education activities.

187. The findings match our general impression and expectation in terms of learning needs, preferences and deterrents of the elderly population at large. Such generalization should however be exercised with caution; respondents in our study were more likely to be active members of MEs and SEs (para. 54), who may be quite different from less active members and elderly non-members in some essential ways. Still, what we have learned from this study could be of value not only to the study of elderly learning with respect to members, but also with respect to the whole elderly population. Details of the conclusions that could be derived from the findings are presented in the following sections.

B. Learners

Increasing Gap Between Have and Have-Not

188. Our data show that there are significant associations between likelihood of taking courses and the three demographic variables being examined, namely, gender, age and educational attainment. The association between taking courses and age and

that between taking courses and educational attainment, as reflected by the corresponding odds-ratios, are particularly strong.

189. In general, non-learners are over-represented by the males (para. 114), the old-olds (para. 130) and the uneducated (para. 149). These non-learners do not take courses as defined in our study. Some of them could still be learning through some less structured and formal modes, such as drop-in talks and seminars, which were not covered in this study. However, there are probably some non-learners who are not engaging in any substantive educational activities.

190. Among the three over-represented groups, the old-olds and the uneducated are often considered to be less capable than others of meeting the challenges of contemporary society and enjoying a fuller life. Failing to encourage such non-learners to participate – for example, by focusing only on serving learners – would therefore run the risk of widening even further the gap between the have and the have-not.

C. Learning Needs

Learners' Needs Numerous and Diverse – Intellectual, Physical, Mental and Psychological Well-Being All Important

191. Learning can be seen as one of the many ways available to a person to satisfy his/her certain needs. The subject areas that one learns and the reasons for learning are all indicators as to what needs he / she chooses to satisfy. With this approach, our study found that learners' needs are both numerous and diverse.

192. In regard of subject areas of interest, the four most popular courses, namely "basic literacy", "computer application", "languages", and "sports / exercise", can all be seen as satisfying the learner's coping needs (para. 98). The first three are practical skills that enable the learner to function better in daily life, while the last one enables the learner to maintain a physically healthy body so as to cope with the often-demanding daily tasks. However, coping needs are by no means the only needs that learners would like to satisfy through taking these courses.

193. The large number of reasons cited by each learner and the high percentage of learners citing each reason (see Table 5) are both indications that learners may have many needs to satisfy through taking courses. Besides coping needs, in terms of intellectual and physical well-being, the fulfillment of psychological needs all rank high. In fact, the two of the top three reasons for taking courses, namely "meet new friends / widen one's social circle" and "be occupied mentally and emotionally", are both indications of the need to get rid of the sense of "loneliness", which incidentally is considered the main reason contributing to depression and even suicidal tendency for the elders.

194. From learners' viewpoint, some reasons could be the ones that initially propel them to act. However, as their learning goes on, other reasons or motivations might develop. Our study did not make a distinction between these two kinds of motivations. In any case, it can be said that the importance learners attach to all ten

reasons listed in our questionnaire reflects the learners' multitude of needs. While some needs might be perceived to be more important than others, none can be ignored.

195. Furthermore, the diversity of the ten reasons on the list used in this study also reflects the diversity of learners' needs. The needs could be for social relationships, for social welfare, for personal development, for escape or simulation or for cognitive interest. Different people of different genders, in different age groups and with different educational attainments attach different importance to different reasons, and therefore, different needs.

196. For example, our findings showed that while many of the courses having taken are geared toward the coping of daily needs / challenges, this reason is not the only or the top reason of members for taking courses. Uneducated female members may be more concerned with acquiring coping skills (para. 119), but younger and more educated members would be more likely to satisfy their cognitive interest through learning new things (para. 133) or to satisfy their social and psychological needs for stimulation and contact through the process of learning and interacting with other students in the class (para. 134).

197. Either as individuals or as a group, there is no single, generic ultimate purpose of education for learners. Intellectual, physical, mental and psychological well-being are all important concerns of learners.

Soon-to-be-Olds Not Preparing for Life Transitions

198. If there were needs common to the soon-to-be-olds in particular, they would be needs to address transitional problems arising from growing into old age. Those needs are both real and pressing. However, findings of focus groups discussions among soon-to-be-old members suggest that soon-to-be-old may not be aware of those needs.

199. Comparing to people aged 55 to 60 in the general population, soon-to-be-old members are more likely to have just retired. Even at this stage, with their active working life behind them, soon-to-be old members still may not have given much thought to what they would like their life to be a few years into the future, and how they will go about making it happen. For non-learners, this attitude is often reflected in their belief that there is simply nothing they need to learn (para. 182).

200. Even the learners, while they learn, their learning plan, if any exists, is usually short term and not specific. Many do not relate the courses they take to the more specific needs with respect to life transition (para. 170). Course selection can be haphazard, rather than in any structured and systematic way to achieve goals and satisfy needs. The choice is influenced more by external factors, such as their friends and center staff, than their own recognition of needs (para. 172). They may not have strong preference of the subject areas to study. In a sense, their subject interests and in fact their own perceptions of educational needs are not only confined to what available courses they are made aware of, but also defined by such courses.

201. Hence, there seems to be a real need to help soon-to-be-olds, as well as other members, to recognize their needs specific to their own situation and aspiration and related to their life in the farther future.

D. Deterrents to Learning

Myths About Aging Popular Among Non-learners

202. The myths that "old people can't learn" and that "old people do not need to learn" are popular among non-learners, and this has an adverse effect on their participation in educational activities.

203. The relative importance of reasons for not taking courses as indicated by the findings shows that the deterrents seem to be mostly dispositional (see Table 6). Lacking self-confidence in their learning abilities and / or in their health is one popular reason, and it is especially true for older and less educated members. They believe they are "too old to learn" or "not good at learning" or they have "health, disabilities or fatigue" problems that prevent them from learning.

204. Many researchers in the fields of psychology and gerontology have demonstrated that it is not impossible for old people to learn new things. It certainly takes more effort and a different approach for older people to learn. However, Botwinick (1967) and Riley and Foner (1968) showed that, given enough time and repetitions of materials, older people learn new things just as well as their younger counterparts. The decline in learning performance is not likely to show noticeable decline before the age of 75 (Kidd, 1973). In fact, the fear of aging may induce mental deterioration and be more harmful than the aging process itself (Horvath and Horvath, 1952).

205. The myth that "old people do not need to learn" is reflected in the fact that many non-learners lack interest in learning, do not have any urge to learn and do not like learning. Older and less educated non-learners especially feel this lack of interest or urge (paras 142, 159 and 160). As discussed in Section IV.B, these beliefs could be resulted from not being aware of their future needs, having low expectations of themselves, or not seeing relevance of education to their needs, rather than a reflection of their confidence in their later life. If such is the case, there is cause for concern and the myth should be taken seriously and dealt with accordingly, just like the other myth.

Institutional and Informational Barriers Seemingly Insignificant

206. The prominent of the dispositional deterrents may offer an explanation as to the seemingly insignificant role of the institutional and informational barriers in deterring learning (see Table 6). The institutional and informational barriers refer to "inconvenient class time and location" and "lack of information on available courses".

207. A straightforward explanation is that institutional barriers are indeed relatively less important. After all, six out of ten members visited their centers at least once a month (para. 81), and for many of them, elderly centers are the best place to take

courses. But an alternative explanation might be that for some dispositional or situational barriers, a person does not see himself / herself taking any courses, and therefore, institutional constraints will not be considered and will not be perceived as barriers.

208. In any case, as planners of educational programs for the elderly have the most control over measures to remove the institutional and information barriers, such barriers should be dealt with first in any course development process.

E. Learning Preferences

Elderly Centers a Popular Place for Learning

209. For members of MEs and SEs, elderly centers are the most popular place to take courses (para. 89). In one way or another, many members view elderly centers as their centers for activities. Elderly centers as centers of learning appeals to them because the institutional barriers that might deter them are overcome, to a large extent.

210. Many being retired and with only limited income, members prefer the proximity of the center to their home, the day-time classes, and the low tuition fees offered by the elderly centers. The familiar surrounding and people, together with the expertise of the center staff in communicating and dealing with older people, added further to the attractiveness of the courses (paras 174-176).

211. Furthermore, at the elderly center, one learns with other elderly people. Most learners do not see "age integration vs. age segregation" as an issue per se; some even prefer learning with people of other age (para. 101). But it often becomes a concern if the differences in cognitive functioning between the young and the old are not adequately taken into account in age-integrated classrooms. Courses offered by other institutions, which are often not age-segregated, are perceived by many members to have the problems of not giving enough attention to help elderly learners to succeed (para. 179).

Traditional Instructional Methods Still Learners' Preference

212. With respect to instructional methods, traditional methods of class lectures and group discussion sessions are still preferred by a majority of current elderly learners, whereas independent study is much less appealing (para. 100). There are at least two likely reasons: first, independent study lacks instructor's instant feedback that elderly learners might consider essential in making the learning experience a success, and secondly, it lacks the social function that can be found in group learning, which makes the learning experience less attractive to the elderly learners (para. 178).

213. Aspects of courses that members find appealing could sometimes be served as lubricant in their decision to participation. On the other hand, aspects that are unknown or unappealing can sometimes become deterrents. However, one has to realize that members' preferences, like their subject interests, are often influenced by their past experience and are limited to what they are made aware of. Many members may not have opportunities to try out alternatives and therefore will not be in a

position to make a judgment as to what is best suited them. Members' preferences, like other members' input, should be seen as important guides to course / program planners, but not as constraints.

Vocational Training Courses and Formal Academic Courses Preferred by Few

214. Few members who are interested in learning seriously consider taking vocational training courses and formal academic courses (see Table 8). As a matter of fact, as members of MEs and SEs are more likely to be retired, vocational skills and to some extent formal qualifications seems to be less relevant for them than for elderly people who are expected to be in the workforce for some years to come.

215. Findings of the focus group discussion indicate that for members who are already retired, even if they are only in their fifties, upgrading their vocational skills seems not to be an urgent need (para. 178). Also, given many members' aversion to examinations, taking formal academic courses and competing with the young seem also not to be attractive. They are more interested in leisure pursuit. Therefore, while having an employable skill or a formal qualification is always desirable, not many members, even the soon-to-be-olds, are ready to expend the amount of money and effort necessary to achieve such goals.

216. However, members' lack of interest in the current corps of vocational training courses and academic courses may be an indication of the failure of the such courses in matching members' learning needs and style, rather than members' rejection of courses for obtaining vocational skills or fulfilling intellectual needs. Whether vocational training courses and more formal and intellectually rigorous courses catering specially for the needs and learning style of the elderly would appeal to any sizeable segment of the members and the elderly population at large, the young-olds in particular, remains to be seen.

V. Policy Implications and Recommendations

Funding and Resource Allocation be More Comprehensive in Coverage

217. Funding and resources should not be directed only to the development of programs and courses for the current groups of active learners. The numerous and diverse needs of different learners and the adverse impact of not participating in organized educational activities on current non-learners, which are disproportionately represented by the old-olds and the uneducated, should not be ignored. Due attention should be paid to seek funding and resources for the promotion and facilitation of elderly learning among non-learners and for the experimentation of innovative programs and courses for all needs and at all levels.

218. In regard of the soon-to-be olds, while this group of clientele was not the main target of this study, focus group results indicated that some might not be ready for transition from working life to retirement. Possibly, there exists a need to motivate their learning in their latter life and to provide early intervention during this life transition period. Future research, e.g. feasibility of extending services and funding allocation to soon-to-be olds, seems to be warranted.

Educators be More knowledgeable About Educating the Elderly

219. In terms of learning needs, preferences and abilities, elderly learners are very different from school children and working adult learners. The expectations of the three groups of learners are also very different. To be effective in designing and delivering courses for the elderly, in addition to the awareness of such differences, it is also essential for the educators and program / course providers to possess specialized knowledge about educating the elderly. Training in utilizing theories and practices related to education for the elderly should therefore be readily provided to educators and program planners in the field.

The Elderly be Helped to Understand Own Learning Needs and Style

220. The self-perceived learning needs and suitability of learning style of elderly people are very often confined by their experience and knowledge of the current corps of courses. Without recognizing their real learning needs / style and then translating such needs / style into their interests, intention to participate in organized educational activities is bound to be low. Learners should therefore be helped to understand better their learning needs and style through a more systematic analysis of and planning for their personal needs, and by exposing them to innovative possibilities in terms of course content, learning environments and instructional methods.

Periodic Needs Assessment and Program / Course Revision Required

221. Different people have different needs. Even the patterns observed in our study of members of different demographic characteristics are too general for program / course development purpose. The heterogeneity of the elderly population in this regard implies that a diverse content and a variety of learning environments and instructional methods should be considered in the context of purpose and clientele by

the program / course planner during the development of programs / courses for each educational experience. Organizations and providers of education for the elderly should be prepared to carry out periodic needs assessments and program / course revision to monitor and address the different and changing needs of their clients.

Program / Course Development to Involve Clients

222. One important ingredient in needs assessments and program / course design exercises is to get the clients, both learners and would-be learners, actively involved in the process. Such exercises can serve two purposes: one is to help the program / course planner better grasp and interpret the learning needs and style information so as to make the program / course more relevant to the clients, as well as reviewing and removing any particular institutional / information barriers the center's clients might encounter; another, as discussed previously, is to help the clients themselves better understand their own needs and styles so as to make them aware of the relevance of the program / course.

223. An approach to involve clients would be to recruit and train learners and would-be learners as partners in the conduct of the program / course development exercises. These recruits could be turned into market researchers – helping the center to decide what questions to ask, to do the interviews, and to interpret the findings. The exercise would become an education for them. Not only that, in the course of their many interviews with other elders, especially non-learners, these elderly researchers, living and convincing examples of the fact that "the elders can learn", could establish rapport and share experiences with their subjects. For some doubters / non-learners, such peer influence could possibly be enough to help break their belief in the myth about ageing.

Elderly Centers be Focal Point of Learning

224. Elderly centers are one of the largest providers of education for the elderly. A sizeable number (17%) of the Hong Kong population aged 60 and over are already members of MEs and SEs. Six out of ten members visit their centers at least once a week. Elderly centers are the favorite places of their members for learning. They play an important role in providing learning opportunities to the elderly population.

225. With the lower institutional barriers that are often associated with taking courses in the centers, the rapport the centers have built up with their members, and the centers' expert knowledge in dealing with elderly people, elderly centers are in a better position than other educational institutions to promote and facilitate learning among their members, as well as the rest of the elderly population. This role should continue and be expanded.

226. In addition to continuing the current corps of courses, the centers should be allowed to experiment with new and innovative courses. Smaller and more individualized programs and courses should be developed to address the diverse needs of active learners and to reach out for the non-learners.

227. Elderly centers should also be ready to share their advantages with other educational institutions interested in education for the elderly. This could be done

through forming alliances with such institutions and jointly developing and offering courses with such institutions for their members. For example, it would be essential to draw on expertise of all partners of such alliances if a viable curriculum / environment were to be developed to fill the needs of the considerable number of MEs' / SEs' members who are interested in age-integrated classes.

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