



Older women hit hardest by pandemic, claims NGO

PETALING JAYA: Older women were hardest hit during the pandemic, due to immediate job losses and domestic violence during lockdowns, a women's rights NGO claims.

Irene Xavier, consultant and co-founder of Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor (PSWS) said that a majority of older women who work in the informal sector, like food sellers, were the first to lose jobs.

They also faced increased domestic violence as they were trapped at home with abusive family members.

Irene observed that some women have been relieved about the recent easing of lockdowns, since they could quickly get away from homes that had become unsafe spaces for them.

"I think (the lockdown) has been a difficult period for women, and now that businesses have opened, I can see there are so many women who are happy to get out of their houses to go to work.

"I think the reason is that their houses are not safe spaces for them," said Irene in a webinar hosted by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Malaysia to mark International Day for Older Persons 2021, held annually on Oct 1.

During the same webinar, Dr Rahimah Ibrahim said society's perception of older people as caregivers to their grandchildren and staying at home full-time must change.

The deputy director of Malaysian Research Institute on Ageing (MyAgeing) also said public policies centred around the elderly should not only focus on giving handouts, but also on creating meaningful opportunities for them to become productive members of society.

Rahimah also called for a less top-down approach in formulating policies for this community, with local governments and municipalities being empowered to plan policies and cater to the needs of an ageing population.

"We must ensure that the housing policies, transportation policies, healthcare, and job markets are friendly to the elderly persons and their families," she said.

The elderly community comprises 7% of the total Malaysian population.

The statistics department has estimated that Malaysia will become an ageing society by 2030, with 15% of the population turning 60 and above.

<https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2021/10/01/older-women-hit-hardest-by-pandemic-claims-ngo/>