



**APPGM-SDG**



SOCIETY FOR PROMOTION OF  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS  
PPM-023-14-07012020

APPGM-SDG Case Study Small Grants for  
Young Researchers Programme

# DEVELOPING CULTURALLY RELEVANT REMINISCENCE THERAPY MATERIALS FOR MALAYSIAN OLDER ADULTS

**Thirresh Guna Segaran**  
*Sunway University*

**APPGM-SDG Case Study Small Grants for  
Young Researchers Programme**

**Developing Culturally Relevant  
Reminiscence Therapy Materials  
for Malaysian Older Adults**

Thirresh Guna Segaran  
*Sunway University*

**MySDG Centre for Social Inclusion**

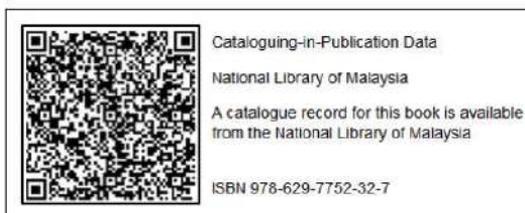
Published by:

**Persatuan Promosi Matlamat Pembangunan Lestari** (Society for the Promotion of Sustainable Development Goals) A-1-10, Block A, 8 Avenue, Jalan Sungai Jernih 8/1, Seksyen 8, 46050 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.

© 2026 Persatuan Promosi Matlamat Pembangunan Lestari (Society for the Promotion of Sustainable Development Goals)

**All Rights Reserved.** No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law.

**Disclaimer:** The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the publisher.



The APPGM-SDG Case Study Small Grants for Young Researchers Programme empowers researchers under 35 to conduct qualitative research on pressing SDG-related issues in Malaysia. The resulting papers explore challenges affecting left-behind communities, directly supporting APPGM-SDG's grounded, evidence-based research agenda. The grant is offered and managed by APPGM-SDG's policy think tank, MySDG Centre for Social Inclusion.

Lead Editor: Dr. Khairil Ahmad  
Editorial Advisors: Prof. Datuk Dr. Denison Jayasooria  
Prof. Emeritus Dato' Dr. Rashila Ramli

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	1
<b>Introduction</b>	2
Social Issues for Older Adults	2
Reminiscence Therapy (RT) as a Response to Social Issues in Aging	2
The Importance of Cultural Relevance	3
Problem Statement	4
Research Questions	6
Research Objectives	6
<b>Literature Review</b>	6
Theoretical Foundations of RT	6
Butler’s Life Review Theory	6
Types of RT (Simple Reminiscence, Integrative Reminiscence, Life Review)	7
Evidence of Reminiscence Therapy Effectiveness	7
Cognitive outcomes	7
Emotional/psychological outcome	8
Quality of life outcomes	8
Cultural Consideration of RT	9
RT in the Malaysian Context	11
Gaps in the Literature	13
<b>Methods</b>	14
Research Design	14
Participants	14
Phase 1: Older Adults	15
Phase 2: Experts	16
Data Collection	16
Phase 1: Identifying Meaningful Themes	16
Phase 2: Exploring Integration with Reminiscence Therapy	17
Data Analysis	17
Trustworthiness	17
Credibility	17
Dependability	18
Confirmability	18
Transferability	18

Ethical Considerations	18
Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools	19
<b>Results</b>	19
Phase 1: Older Adults Perspective	19
Theme 1: Family and Kinship Bonds	19
Theme 2: Cultural Identity and Traditions	20
Theme 3: Food as a Memory Trigger	20
Theme 4: Childhood and Playful Memories	20
Theme 5: Work, Migration and Socioeconomic Change	21
Theme 6: Community and Social Life	21
Theme 7: Entertainment and Leisure	21
Theme 8: Coping, Resilience and Emotional Growth	22
Phase 2	49
Aging in Places & Family-Centred Living	49
Loneliness and Cognitive Risk	50
Cultural Anchors and Tangible Prompts	51
Materials and Modalities	51
Format and Facilitation	52
Training and Manuals for Non-Specialists	53
Sensitivity and Ethics	53
Evidence and Regional Adaptation	54
<b>Discussion</b>	59
Culturally Relevant Themes from Older Adults	59
Adaptation of Themes into a Western RT Framework	61
<b>Conclusion</b>	62
Summary	62
Implications	62
Research Implications	62
Practice Implications	63
Policy and Community Implications	64
Limitations and Future Direction	64
Significance to Malaysia's SDG Agenda	66
<b>Statements and Declarations</b>	67
Acknowledgements	67
Funding Statement	67

Compliance with Ethical Standards	68
Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest	68
Research Involving Human Participants	68
<b>References</b>	<b>68</b>

# Developing Culturally Relevant Reminiscence Therapy Materials for Malaysian Older Adults

*Thirresh Guna Segaran*

*Sunway University*

## **ABSTRACT**

Malaysia's rapid demographic transition toward an aging society has amplified social challenges among older adults, including loneliness, reduced social roles, identity loss, and declining mental health. Reminiscence Therapy (RT), a non-pharmacological intervention that engages older adults in recalling and sharing life experiences, has demonstrated potential in addressing these issues by enhancing social connectedness, emotional well-being, and cognitive stimulation. However, most RT materials are Western-centric, limiting their relevance in Malaysia's multicultural context. This qualitative case study was conducted in two phases to develop culturally relevant RT materials. Phase 1 involved interviews with nine older adults to identify salient themes such as family bonds, religious and cultural traditions, *kampung* life, national history, and food as memory triggers. Phase 2 engaged three professionals to evaluate the usability of adapted RT materials within a Western framework. Findings highlight the importance of culturally grounded prompts to improve engagement and therapeutic relevance. By addressing social isolation, fostering dignity, and promoting inclusion, culturally adapted RT supports Sustainable Development Goals on SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

## **Keywords:**

Reminiscence Therapy, Cultural Relevance, Cognitive Functions, Emotional Well Being, Quality of Life, Loneliness, Older Adults

## **INTRODUCTION**

### ***Social Issues for Older Adults***

Senior citizens are becoming increasingly common in many countries worldwide. As the global population continues to age, the prevalence of dementia and its associated challenges in healthcare, caregiving and quality of life are expected to escalate significantly. According to Amran and Ibrahim (2024), Malaysia is projected to become an ageing nation by the year 2030, with 15.3 percent of the population being 60 and above. This demographic change reflects the importance in healthcare and longevity while simultaneously presenting multifaceted challenges that relate to economic sustainability as well as the adequacy of social services and the healthcare system.

Older adults encounter multifaceted social issues that extend beyond biological aging, encompassing ageism (Abdullah et al., 2024; Kang & Kim, 2022), social exclusion (Güler & Yildırım, 2025), caregiver burden (Mohd Ismail et al., 2025; Tran et al., 2025), and disparities in healthcare access (Rahemi et al., 2025). These challenges are particularly pronounced in developing nations like Malaysia, where rapid urbanisation and changing family structures are reshaping traditional support systems for the elderly. The decline of multigenerational households, paired with increasing workforce participation among younger family members, has contributed to greater social isolation among older adults. This could increase the risk factor for cognitive decline and poor mental health (Evans et al., 2019).

### ***Reminiscence Therapy (RT) as a Response to Social Issues in Aging***

Reminiscence Therapy (RT) is a psychosocial intervention that uses structured or semi-structured recall of past life experiences to stimulate memory, foster emotional expression, and strengthen identity. Sessions often involve prompts such as photographs, music,

objects, cultural artifacts, or guided conversations that encourage older adults to share autobiographical memories. RT can be delivered individually or in groups, in settings such as nursing homes, community centres, or clinical facilities.

Beyond its cognitive and psychological benefits, RT also addresses pressing social issues commonly faced by older adults. Aging is often accompanied by increased risk of social isolation, loss of social roles, and reduced opportunities for meaningful interaction, particularly among those in institutional care (Donovan & Blazer, 2020; Akhter-Khan et al., 2022). These factors can contribute to loneliness, depression, and diminished quality of life. By creating opportunities for interpersonal sharing and collective storytelling, RT helps rebuild social connections, fosters intergenerational understanding, and affirms older adults' sense of identity and belonging (Subramaniam & Woods, 2016). Moreover, by situating personal memories within broader cultural or communal narratives, RT validates life experiences and counters marginalisation, which is particularly valuable in multi-ethnic contexts like Malaysia. Thus, RT is not only a non-pharmacological strategy for supporting cognitive functioning and emotional well-being but also a socially responsive intervention that mitigates isolation, strengthens social cohesion, and enhances dignity in later life.

### ***The Importance of Cultural Relevance***

RT has traditionally been implemented in Western settings, with therapy materials predominantly influenced by themes such as war memories, Western music, and Hollywood films. Its effectiveness is largely shaped by the cultural relevance of these materials, as older adults tend to engage more deeply with content that aligns with their personal histories and lived experiences. Culturally relevant materials in RT align with older adults' cognitive schemas, facilitating stronger

memory recall and emotional engagement, as supported by research on autobiographical memory and neural activation patterns (Li, 2024; Meng, 2022).

This research seeks to address the gap in culturally responsive RT interventions by systematically identifying and integrating Malaysian-specific themes into an existing Western RT framework. Through a qualitative, case study approach, this study will explore how historical narratives, linguistic diversity, and cultural artifacts shape the reminiscence experience of older adults in Malaysia. By incorporating themes drawn from Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultural traditions, the study aims to enhance the accessibility, engagement, and therapeutic efficacy of RT interventions. Additionally, it will assess the perspectives of counsellors-in-training, who play a crucial role in delivering RT sessions, ensuring that the adapted materials are both clinically applicable and culturally sustainable.

### ***Problem Statement***

Malaysia is a multicultural and multilingual nation where Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Indigenous communities have long coexisted, shaping a rich social and cultural fabric. The lived experiences and memories of older Malaysians are deeply influenced by this diversity, making culturally relevant interventions essential for cognitive and emotional well-being. However, existing RT materials remain predominantly Western-centric, incorporating themes such as World War II, Hollywood films, and Western music (Engelbrecht et al., 2024). These materials may not resonate with Malaysian older adults, as they introduce language barriers, unfamiliar historical events, and culturally irrelevant references, limiting engagement and therapeutic effectiveness.

Multilingual RT materials (Malay, Mandarin, Tamil, and English) would ensure better accessibility for a wider population. Hence, the lack of culturally relevant RT materials presents several challenges that impact the effectiveness, emotional benefits and engagement of RT in Malaysia. Previous studies show that culturally familiar content enhances engagement and memory recall (Diwan et al., 2023; Meng, 2022), yet Malaysia lacks standardised RT materials tailored to its unique historical and cultural context. While a study by Sharifah Munirah et al. (2019) introduced Spiritual Reminiscence Therapy (SRT) as a culturally adapted RT approach, it focused exclusively on religious themes, overlooking non-spiritual but culturally significant memories such as childhood games, national celebrations, and traditional storytelling. Additionally, the study was conducted within a single aged care facility, limiting its generalisability to community-dwelling older adults, who may have different social and cognitive needs.

Given these limitations, there is a critical need to develop a broader, culturally inclusive RT framework that integrates Malaysian-specific themes beyond religious contexts. Without culturally relevant materials, engagement levels may drop, and the potential cognitive and emotional benefits of RT may not be fully realised. Additionally, while RT is often facilitated by professional therapists or trained caregivers, Malaysia's aging population creates a demand for trained facilitators who can effectively implement RT in elder care settings. This study aims to address this gap by identifying culturally appropriate themes for RT and applying them within an existing Western RT framework to assess their relevance and feasibility.

### **Research Questions**

Thus, this research seeks to answer the following question:

- 1) What culturally relevant themes do Malaysian older adults consider meaningful for RT materials?
- 2) How do professionals (e.g., counsellors, gerontologists, psychologists) perceive the usability and appropriateness of the culturally adapted RT materials?

### **Research Objectives**

This research also seeks to address the following objectives:

- 1) To explore and identify culturally meaningful themes for Malaysian older adults that can be incorporated into RT materials.
- 2) To examine professionals' perspectives on the cultural relevance and usability of the adapted RT materials.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Theoretical Foundations of RT***

#### *Butler's Life Review Theory*

According to Robert N. Butler (1963), life review is a natural and universal mental process in which older adults recall, evaluate, and reflect on their past experiences to preserve a sense of ego integrity. This concept aligns closely with Erikson's formulation, as both emphasised that ego integrity arises from a positive evaluation of one's later life (Erikson, 1963). In addition, this psychological process was instrumental in helping the elderly to resolve regrets, since an unsolved regret typically led to depression, anxiety or even despair, but if an individual conducted a successful life review, it fostered wisdom and psychological well-being (Sharifah et al., 2019). Butler's

framework laid the foundation for RT, which systematically employs life review principles as a therapeutic intervention.

#### *Types of RT (Simple Reminiscence, Integrative Reminiscence, Life Review)*

Building on this foundation, RT has been conceptualised into several forms, which include simple reminiscence, integrative reminiscence, and life review. Simple reminiscence is described as open-ended interaction focused on recalling and sharing past memories with the aim of enhancing positive mood and social interaction. It typically emphasises positive or neutral events that evoke a sense of empowerment. In contrast, integrative reminiscence is a therapeutic form that helps other elderly people alleviate depressive feelings and other psychological distress by re-assessing and re-interpreting past experiences. Unlike simple reminiscence, integrative reminiscence enables individuals to gain deeper insights into their life events, leading to meaningful improvements in self-esteem, life satisfaction, and overall quality of life. Lastly, life review involves a comprehensive recall and comprehension of an elderly individual's prior experiences, and often occurs naturally during near-death experiences (NDEs). This process allows individuals to resolve lingering regrets, thereby fostering a sense of integrity and closure.

#### ***Evidence of Reminiscence Therapy Effectiveness***

##### *Cognitive outcomes*

Several studies report cognitive benefits of following RT, including improved autobiographical memory, attention and subdomains of global cognition. For example, Reitano et al. (2023) found that a mindfulness-integrated life review produced improvements on MoCA memory subdomains, suggesting that emotion regulation components may amplify cognitive effects. Meta-analytic and RCT evidence also points to cognitive gains in clinical groups; a meta-analysis reported cognitive improvement among older adults with

dementia (Kim & Cho, 2025), and an RCT of stroke survivors indicated that individual RT activated memory-related brain regions and enhanced cognitive performance (Wang et al., 2025). Additional studies (Huang et al., 2025; Pu et al., 2025) similarly report positive effects on memory and reduced cognitive decline in group RT formats. However, heterogeneity in measures, populations and RT protocols means findings should be interpreted cautiously.

#### *Emotional/psychological outcomes*

RT has consistently been associated with reductions in depressive symptoms and improvements in emotional well-being in many studies (Fernández-Pérez et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2025). Integrations such as combining mindfulness with life review have shown mood regulation benefits alongside cognitive gains (Reitano et al., 2023). Group RT frequently enhances emotional expression, social connectedness, and psychological well-being (Kurian et al., 2025), whereas individual RT has been linked to greater psychological resilience and reduced negative affect in some samples (Wang et al., 2025). Notably, not all trials find clear benefits; for example, Allen et al. (2020) reported no significant cognitive or emotional improvements compared with control in a group reminiscence program adapted from “Remembering Yesterday...”. Emerging innovations like AI-enhanced digital RT report promising improvements in engagement and positive emotional responses by personalising content (Wang, 2024), but these are early findings.

#### *Quality of life outcomes*

Multiple studies and meta-analyses indicate improvements in life satisfaction and overall quality of life following RT interventions (Xu et al., 2023; Shin et al., 2023). RT delivered in group formats often promotes community engagement and subjective well-being; personalised reminiscence themes also support longer-term Quality

of Life (QoL) benefits (Wang et al., 2025; Pu et al., 2025). Therefore, the evidence suggests RT can improve cognitive, emotional and QoL outcomes, but effects vary by population, format (group versus individual), and whether interventions are culturally adapted.

Although the literature supports RT's therapeutic utility, most published protocols and materials were developed in Western contexts and often reflect individualistic themes. This raises questions about transferability to collectivist or multicultural societies, where family, religion, communal traditions and national history more strongly shape autobiographical memory and meaning.

### ***Cultural Consideration of RT***

Culture shapes which memories are salient, what counts as a meaningful life event, and how emotions are expressed during recall. Cues such as religion, family roles, food, and national history serve as powerful anchors for autobiographical memory and affective engagement, directly influencing RT participation and outcomes (Rueda et al., 2023). In Western contexts, RT prompts often emphasise individual achievement, career milestones, or Western holidays, reflecting individualistic values. In contrast, in collectivist cultures such as Malaysia, Japan, Korea, and China, memories are often embedded in family, religious traditions, communal celebrations, and national history. This cultural distinction underscores the need for contextually sensitive approaches.

Empirical studies increasingly highlight the benefits of culturally adapted RT. Zhang et al. (2025) found that nostalgia-based music combined with culturally themed prompts produced synergistic cognitive and emotional effects in Chinese participants. Diwan (2023) reported reductions in depression and stronger family engagement following culturally tailored RT. Similarly, Siverová and Bužgová (2018)

observed higher life satisfaction and emotional expression, while Naomi Rose (2020) showed that participants generated richer, more positive autobiographical narratives in culturally sensitive group RT. Multimedia enhancements have also been tested where studies like Yanagida (2024) reported improved emotional tone and verbal interaction with multimedia-enhanced RT.

Culturally specific adaptations have been embedded in East Asian programs. In Japan, familiar practices such as making and eating onigiri were incorporated into RT sessions to stimulate recall. Korean studies (Shin et al., 2023) demonstrated stronger mental health and quality-of-life improvements when collectivist values and cultural context were integrated into group RT. Similarly, Chinese meta-analyses confirm that culturally adapted, group-based RT is associated with reduced depression and increased life satisfaction. Cross-cultural research in Europe and Latin America also points to the importance of cultural grounding where studies in Mexico and Spain show that locally meaningful prompts enhance engagement and therapeutic outcomes (Diwan et al., 2023). A 2021 review proposed culturally tailored dementia interventions for low- and middle-income countries (including East Asia), underlining the need for culturally grounded therapeutic elements to improve therapy adherence and effectiveness (James et al., 2021).

Despite these advances, relatively few RT protocols systematically evaluate the added value of cultural content such as festivals, traditional foods, or national events. In Southeast Asia, research is limited but emerging. Studies in Singapore and Indonesia suggest the potential of culturally adapted RT formats, though these remain small in scale and scope. Singapore's National Neuroscience Institute (2025) runs an "OWOW!" programme integrating reminiscence therapy and cognitive stimulation therapy with group-based sessions. This

programme uses culturally relevant prompts such as artifacts, photographs, music, and familiar smells. Early reports indicate improvements in engagement, cognitive function, mood, and quality of life among people with dementia. Studies in Indonesia (Mendrofa et al., 2025; Gumilang et al., 2025) showed RT has a significant effect on the levels of stress, anxiety, and depression in the elderly, promoting emotional well-being, enhancing self-esteem, and fostering a sense of social connectedness and purpose.

This regional gap highlights the need for systematic development of RT approaches in multi-ethnic and multi-religious contexts such as Malaysia. Given Malaysia's diversity, where memories may be shaped by *kampung* (village) life, colonial histories, and a tapestry of cultural and religious festivals, there is a strong justification for creating culturally relevant RT materials that can resonate across its varied communities.

### ***RT in the Malaysian Context***

Although research on RT in Malaysia is limited, existing studies offer valuable insights. For example, Syed Elias et al. (2020) evaluated a Spiritual Reminiscence Therapy program and found it significantly reduces loneliness and depression over a six-week period. This study adapted its measures to the local Malay language and culture using the Malay version of the Geriatric Depression Scale (M-GDS-14). Similarly, Azizan et al. (2023) demonstrated that RT, either alone or combined with exercise, may enhance quality of life and reduce depressive symptoms in older adults with mild Alzheimer's disease. Earlier, Rahimi and Anuar (2012) explored reminiscence themes among Malay nursing home residents and identified culturally rooted themes such as pride in past achievements, loss of independence, family separation, and religious faith, underscoring the unique cultural content recalled by Malaysian elders. Another study by Noraini Che et

al. (2019) supports culturally tailored group RT as a beneficial psychosocial intervention to improve mental health and quality of life for elderly individuals with dementia in Malaysian institutional settings.

A scoping review (Nur Fatimah et al., 2023) highlighted the limited but growing evidence base for RT in Malaysia, noting various modes including intergenerational, digital, and traditional physical formats. The review found that these approaches improved communication and quality of life among dementia patients, suggesting opportunities for broader implementation in the Malaysian context. Another study on group live music reminiscence therapy research at Monash University Malaysia proved that there is a positive effect on depression and anxiety for people with dementia (Wong et al., 2024). Meta-analyses from broader Asian samples including Malaysian studies suggest group reminiscence therapy is generally more effective than individual therapy in improving psychological outcomes like depression and life satisfaction, especially in care home settings (Xu et al., 2023).

These findings suggest RT can be effective in Malaysia, particularly when spiritual and culturally meaningful elements are emphasised. However, research to date is generally small-scale with ad-hoc cultural adaptations rather than systematic, manualised tailoring. Given Malaysia's diverse multiethnic, multireligious makeup and distinct life experiences including rural *kampung* backgrounds, communal rituals, and colonial history, RT protocols developed in Western contexts may not fully reflect the themes most relevant and resonant for Malaysian older adults.

### ***Gaps in the Literature***

Several limitations restrict the current application of RT materials. The most prominent is the Western-centric bias in both protocols and structured manuals, which were largely developed and validated in Western contexts. Items in these materials often emphasise themes such as individual career achievements and Western holidays (e.g., Christmas, Easter). While meaningful in individualistic societies, such themes are less relevant to collectivist cultures like Malaysia, where older adults more often draw upon memories of family life, communal celebrations, religious practices, and national events such as Chinese New Year, Hari Raya, Deepavali, and Merdeka. The use of Western-oriented materials risks creating cultural dissonance, where unique life stories shaped by religion, migration, ethnic traditions, and colonial heritage are marginalised. This underscores the need for culturally sensitive RT materials that reflect Malaysia's multicultural traditions, linguistic diversity, and lived histories to enhance therapeutic relevance and inclusivity.

A second limitation is the lack of structured adaptation of RT for Malaysian older adults. Existing studies often rely on ad hoc modifications by facilitators, which limits consistency and produces weaker evidence of effectiveness. For example, older adults who grew up in *kampung* settings, participated in traditional festivals, or engaged in religious rituals may find little resonance in protocols centred on Western-oriented cues. This cultural mismatch can diminish the effectiveness of RT by weakening memory recall, identity affirmation, and social connectedness.

Furthermore, the multi-ethnic nature of Malaysian society has not been adequately addressed in past research. While some studies have included Malay participants, there is limited representation of Chinese, Indian, Sikh, and Orang Asli communities. Each group brings

distinct cultural markers from food customs and religious festivals to migration histories that shape autobiographical memory and identity. The absence of an inclusive, multicultural RT framework risks privileging certain narratives while overlooking others.

Finally, methodological issues remain. Many Malaysian RT studies are limited by small sample sizes, short intervention durations, and inconsistent outcome measures. The absence of systematically developed, culturally grounded manuals means that facilitators must improvise, reducing the reliability of findings. Given Malaysia's rapidly ageing population, the lack of culturally tailored, structured interventions highlights an urgent need for systematic development of RT materials that reflect the country's multi-ethnic and multi-religious context.

## **METHODS**

### ***Research Design***

The study uses a qualitative research design using a one-to-one, in-depth interview approach to gain insights to understand the culturally relevant RT themes and how they can be integrated into an existing western RT framework. This approach was chosen to capture rich, detailed narratives of older adults' lived experiences and culturally grounded memories.

### ***Participants***

#### *Phase 1: Older Adults*

Nine older adults aged 60 years and above participated in the first phase. They were recruited purposively from the Klang Valley area, ensuring representation across Malaysia's three main ethnic groups (Malay, Indian, Chinese). Inclusion criteria were: (a) aged 60+, (b) no reported cognitive impairment, (c) fluency in English, and (d) lifelong residency in Malaysia. The sample included three Malay, three Indian,

and three Chinese participants (5 males, 4 females) with diverse occupational backgrounds. Participant characteristics are summarised in *Table 1*, which shows that the sample included nine older adults aged between 60 and 82 years, with balanced representation across Malay, Indian, and Chinese ethnic groups.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Phase 1 Older Adult Participants ( N = 9 )

<b>PARTICIPANT</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>ETHNICITY</b>	<b>OCCUPATION</b>
P1	62	Male	Chinese	Businessman
P2	60	Male	Malay	Auditor Executive
P3	82	Female	Indian	Housewife
P4	60	Male	Indian	Regional Manager
P5	69	Female	Chinese	Housewife
P6	62	Male	Chinese	Finance Manager
P7	60	Female	Indian	Teacher
P8	60	Male	Malay	Executive Officer
P9	73	Female	Malay	Housewife

### *Phase 2: Experts*

To explore the applicability of identified themes in practice, three professionals were engaged in Phase 2: a counsellor in training, a developmental psychologist, and a gerontologist (see *Table 2*). Their professional roles allowed for reflection on both the feasibility and challenges of implementing reminiscence therapy in a real-world setting.

Table 2. Experts Background of Phase 2 Participants ( N = 3 )

<b>PARTICIPANT</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>PROFESSIONAL ROLE</b>	<b>AREA OF EXPERTISE</b>
P1	Female	Counsellor in Training	Young Adults, Adults
P2	Female	Gerontologist	Social Work, Aging in Places
P3	Female	Developmental Psychologist	Life Span and Grief

*Note: Phase 2 participants contributed perspectives on the practical and theoretical integration of identified reminiscence themes into therapy sessions.*

### **Data Collection**

The data collection was divided into two phases. The first phase targets the perspective of older adults.

#### *Phase 1: Identifying Meaningful Themes*

Participants engaged in open-ended discussions facilitated by the primary researcher. These conversations focused on personal memories, significant life events, and emotionally meaningful experiences relevant to reminiscence. Thematic analysis was later applied to identify emergent themes from the narratives. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in participants' homes to maximise comfort and reduce stress associated with participation. Each session lasted approximately 15–30 minutes. The interviews were conducted by the researcher with assistance from two Chinese volunteer interns (to assist with communication and participant comfort) who supported some sessions. Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained, and participants were provided with a participant information sheet. Some participants agreed to audio recording, while

others preferred not to be recorded. In these cases, detailed field notes were taken by the researcher.

### *Phase 2: Exploring Integration with Reminiscence Therapy*

Participants reflected on how the identified themes could be incorporated into structured RT sessions. Discussions centred on perceptions of RT, potential strategies for integration, and anticipated challenges in practice. This provided a pragmatic perspective on adapting RT to be used by non-specialist facilitators.

### **Data Analysis**

Interview data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach: familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Nvivo Version 15 software was used to support data management and coding. An inductive approach was applied to ensure that themes reflected participants' lived experiences and cultural perspectives.

### **Trustworthiness**

To ensure rigor and trustworthiness, the study adhered to established qualitative criteria, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Ahmed, 2024; Leung, 2015).

### *Credibility*

Several strategies were used to strengthen credibility. Data were collected in participants' homes or familiar settings to promote comfort, authenticity, and openness in sharing. Triangulation was achieved through multiple data sources, including audio recordings (when permitted) and detailed field notes, allowing for cross-verification of findings. Consistency was further enhanced by having

the same researcher conduct all interviews, ensuring uniformity in approach and reducing potential variation across sessions.

### *Dependability*

A clear audit trail was maintained, including documentation of coding decisions and theme development. Assistance from trained volunteer interns in selected interviews also provided an additional layer of dependability by offering external observations that complemented the researcher's perspective.

### *Confirmability*

The researcher practiced reflexivity throughout the process, noting potential biases and ensuring interpretations remained grounded in participants' narratives rather than researcher assumptions. This reflexive stance minimised the risk of undue influence and reinforced the confirmability of the findings.

### *Transferability*

Thick descriptions of participants' demographic and cultural backgrounds were provided to enable readers to assess the applicability of findings to other contexts. This level of detail enables readers to make informed judgments about the applicability of the findings to other contexts and populations with similar cultural characteristics.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from Sunway University's Ethical Committee Board, with ethics code 2025/REC0152. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality. Consent was obtained prior to data collection. Identifiers such as

names have been replaced with pseudonyms in reporting to preserve anonymity.

### ***Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools***

This manuscript underwent AI-assisted copy editing using a large language model (ChatGPT, OpenAI) to improve readability, grammar, and style. No generative content was produced, and the author(s) are fully accountable for the final version of the text.

## **RESULTS**

The two phases of the study results were then thematically analysed according to Braun and Clarke (2006) method. As for the first phase: Older Adults Perspective, thematic analysis of the nine interviews with older adults identified several themes: (1) Family and Kinship Bonds, (2) Cultural Identity and Traditions, (3) Food as a Memory Trigger, (4) Childhood and Playful Memories, (5) Work, Migration and Socioeconomic Change, (6) Community and Social Life, (7) Entertainment and Leisure, (8) Coping, Resilience and Emotional Growth. Each theme is described below:

### ***Phase 1: Older Adults Perspective***

#### ***Theme 1: Family and Kinship Bonds***

Family emerged as the most prominent theme across participants, described as the foundation of their identity and source of meaning throughout life. Participants emphasised family as central to their reminiscence, as participants often recalled their parents, siblings, or children as anchors of identity. Memories of participants, overall, are described as happy and warm (refer Table 3). Older adults often reflected on the roles they held within the family, including responsibilities during childhood, experiences of marriage and parenting, and intergenerational values passed down to children and grandchildren. Loss and grief were also interwoven into these

narratives, particularly in relation to deceased parents or spouses, with participants emphasising the importance of family gatherings, traditions, and maintaining close ties despite life changes. Collectively, these reflections underscored family as a cornerstone of cultural identity and emotional resilience in later life

### *Theme 2: Cultural Identity and Traditions*

Participants highlighted cultural and religious practices, celebrations, and rituals as significant anchors of memory. They recalled festive occasions such as Hari Raya, Chinese New Year, and Deepavali, as well as the shared experiences of food, clothing, and language tied to these events. Cultural identity was not only expressed through traditions but also through national history, such as memories of independence and admired political leaders. These accounts reflected both pride in cultural belonging and nostalgia for communal practices that have changed over time.

### *Theme 3: Food as a Memory Trigger*

Food served as a powerful sensory bridge to the past. Participants often described specific dishes and flavours that evoked memories of family ties, festivals, and everyday *kampung* life. Traditional foods such as *nasi lemak*, *kuih*, or *rendang* were remembered not just for their taste but also for the contexts in which they were prepared and shared, often within family or community settings. Food was thus both a cultural marker and an emotional prompt, triggering recollections of warmth, togetherness, and identity.

### *Theme 4: Childhood and Playful Memories*

Recollections of childhood centred around games, playful activities, and early education. Participants described spending time outdoors, playing traditional games such as marbles or *congkak*, cycling, and engaging in hobbies like drawing or music. These memories were

often contrasted with the experiences of younger generations, who were perceived as having less opportunity for unstructured outdoor play. Childhood memories were associated with joy, innocence, and social connection within the community.

#### *Theme 5: Work, Migration and Socioeconomic Change*

Work and migration were important milestones shaping participants' life trajectories. Many recalled employment achievements, challenges in balancing work and family, and experiences of migration within Malaysia or abroad. Socioeconomic change was a recurring theme, as participants contrasted the relative simplicity of past lifestyles with the technological and cultural shifts of the present. These narratives reflected resilience, adaptability, and the role of work in shaping both personal identity and family stability.

#### *Theme 6: Community and Social Life*

Community life, particularly in *kampung* settings, was remembered as cohesive and supportive. Older adults described interactions with neighbours, communal celebrations, and the sense of belonging fostered through social networks. At the same time, participants reflected on the decline of such cohesion in contemporary society, noting reduced unity and social morality. Despite these changes, the value of community and social ties remained central to the participants' sense of identity.

#### *Theme 7: Entertainment and Leisure*

Entertainment was recalled through music, cinema, outings, and travel. For participants, certain cultural artefacts, songs from the 1960s–1980s, and films such as those featuring P. Ramlee, held special meaning as memory anchors. Leisure activities included beach visits, radio, dramas, and shared experiences of collecting and singing song lyrics with friends. These forms of entertainment were described as

emotionally significant, evoking nostalgia for simpler times and collective enjoyment.

*Theme 8: Coping, Resilience and Emotional Growth*

Participants reflected on how they had navigated life's challenges, including financial struggles, personal loss, and broader social change. Coping strategies included maintaining calmness, problem-solving, and drawing strength from family and cultural values. Many highlighted the importance of resilience and emotional growth, often framed as lessons to be passed on to younger generations. Ageing was seen as an opportunity to reflect, impart wisdom, and appreciate the endurance of values such as respect, kindness, and perseverance.

Table 3. Themes and Subthemes Identified in the Development of Culturally Relevant RT Materials

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
1.	Family and Kinship Bonds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family roles &amp; structure</li> <li>- Childhood responsibilities</li> <li>- Marriage &amp; parenting</li> <li>- Loss &amp; grief</li> <li>- Intergenerational values</li> </ul>	<p>"My two sons have graduated from graduated as master's degree, one in Monash and then twinning to Monash in Australia..." (P1)</p> <p>"...parents will remind you to be a good person. To be kind to people. And then I have been practicing many years" (P1)</p> <p>"Of course, I actually miss my mother. That's sometimes little, little things. I always remember as well what my mother said and things like that" (P1)</p> <p>"And those days when family get together, for example, having dinner, everyone is there talking to each other. This is the culture" (P2)</p>

	THEME	SUBTHEMES	EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS
			<p>“my parents...They took care of me... Family moment... I think that's only my three children. That's my achievement.”(P3)</p> <p>“Of course, the achievement, when I married to my wife, of course I was zero, no house, no car, nothing” (P4)</p> <p>“My father passed away, no more. So my mother is still with my sister” (P4)</p> <p>“On normal days, it's okay if we're not at home, but on special festivals, I feel it's a must to be gather at home... It's the feeling of being together as a family” (P5)</p> <p>“Before I got married, I would always go back kampung to celebrate. When my younger sisters were still small,</p>

	THEME	SUBTHEMES	EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS
			<p>everyone will at home one, it was very joyful." (P5)</p> <p>"Not anymore. Since my parents passed away, I seldom go back... Just like us now, already in our 60s, some classmates have also bye-bye (die liao), due to sickness and so on" (P5)</p> <p>"...my father is from batu, and my mother is no longer around, so basically I rarely go back" (P6)</p> <p>"Happy moment was a lot. For me, I would say is more on my secondary school, where I did well in my exam, make me father proud, these are the happy moment of the childhood." (P7)</p> <p>"My younger siblings are very independent, and I don't need to worry about them. It's also because the relatives living together at that time. We all lived on the</p>

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
			<p>same housing area.” (P6)</p> <p>“I followed my dad in upbringing, same with me.. now my child also hopefully will...No matter what, must take care of the family..”(P8)</p> <p>“My husband passed on but my children are the most important thing...family is important”(P9)</p>
2.	Cultural Identity and Traditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cultural practices &amp; values</li> <li>- Religious/cultural obligations</li> <li>- Language &amp; belonging</li> </ul>	<p>“that the people here is nicer, more progress. Maybe has more, I would say that more civilised in that sense. I mean, that people is more friendly now. Then maybe it's more people, the education level is getting up” (P1)</p> <p>“Because my family background is mixed. So we do, oh, we do celebrate Indian festival, Deepavali, because my great-grandmother, then Chinese New Year, because my great-grandmother as well” (P2)</p>

	THEME	SUBTHEMES	EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS
			<p>“one thing that I liked about here, I like baju Melayu, I like batik, and I like songket. These three things that I really fond, and I'm a collector of these three. So I like to wear baju Melayu not only during Friday, but during the wedding. Oh, okay. The wedding especially. I make sure that being here, being a Malay, and I wear that baju Melayu, even during Hari Raya or Eid al-Fitr.” (P2)</p> <p>“But my third brother can speak Malayalam very well. And my eldest sister can speak Chinese very well. And second younger brother very well” (P2)</p> <p>“First Merdeka I was in Melaka...with friends... It was crowded and I was proud...It was one day” (P3)</p> <p>“Of course food. The most I like is Kuey Teow Goreng and the cendol.” (P4)</p>

	THEME	SUBTHEMES	EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS
			<p data-bbox="948 252 1702 435">“Well, the time of Deepavali, we were very excited. But we only can get one gift, one shirt, one pants But it was exciting at that point of time. So that's how Diwali comes” (P4)</p> <p data-bbox="948 505 1702 637">“the person that I really admire is Tun Mahathir. Because of how he grew the country. And I managed to meet him in my shop.” (P4)</p> <p data-bbox="948 706 1702 991">“for me right, happiness was just having new clothes to wear during Chinese New Year...Celebrating in the kampung used to be more fun... or example traditional festivals, like the Winter Solstice... On normal days, it's okay if we're not at home, but on special festivals, I feel it's a must to be gather at home” (P5)</p>

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
			<p>"During the New Year, because we are Chinese, we can reunite, we worship our ancestors during the Qingming Festival, the Mid-Autumn Festival, and the Magnolia Festival... t's just that because of work; we don't go home every time. I only go home during the New Year and Qingming." (P6)</p> <p>"Deepavali is fun, because early morning you need to wake up, you have to shower, you will have your oil bath, and then you are cooking..."(P7)</p> <p>"Hari Raya is the day I feel the most happiest...I used to celebrate with all my friends and family when I was young.. such good memories" (P8)</p> <p>"Hari Kemerdekaan is so fun for us, my husband and kids will bring me to go watch the parade...very "bagi</p>

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
			kita rasa satu hari kesatuan"...then all go back hating each other..(laughs)"(P9)
3.	Food as a Memory Trigger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Specific foods</li> <li>- Sensory memories</li> <li>- Food &amp; family ties</li> </ul>	<p>"Of course we Chinese, every festival we like to steam the chicken.... will actually get you that homely feeling" (P1)</p> <p>"I do like Japanese food but not too much... There more to ice cream, movie, arcade. And of course we have girlfriends. It's just like a crush, it's not a girlfriend" (P2)</p> <p>"Onam, Vishu... We cook vegetarian food... We will enjoy. There is an ice kacang shop..." (P3)</p> <p>"There is a medical shop. Chinese medical...You can get the smell while walking... Pleasant smell...Snacks...At that time, you can buy everything" (P3)</p>

	THEME	SUBTHEMES	EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS
			<p>"I love chestnut. But nowadays, I think very rare. And nowadays, chestnut... Not like those days...The taste is different." (P3)</p> <p>"Because when we were staying at home, our house was stocked and bottom always the food we smell is putumayam" (P4)</p> <p>"back then we didn't have much to eat. Everything was homemade... At the time, we made cakes and kuih-kuih at home... Yes, using charcoal (baked using charcoal" (P5)</p> <p>"Malaysia's Bak Kut Teh is different from theirs (Singaporean)... Klang and KL's can choose something to represent Malaysia... Yes, because they are all from the same family, just like Yong Tau Foo... Wonton</p>

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
			<p>noodles.." (P6)</p> <p>"Then when I was working in Skudai, I went to mamak every afternoon, two fried eggs, one rice and one boiled water. It was the same at night" (P6)</p> <p>"It was so famous, we called it "Sempalit Chicken Curry...That even nowadays, they open their restaurant in Genting and all that. So when we get the smell, it can bring back memories" (P7)</p> <p>"Like when you going some places that do not have the food that you explored before, it will bring back your memory. For example you going Singapore, you might think about Malaysia nasi lemak" (P7)</p>

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
			<p>"For the New Year, we have a reunion dinner together on New Year's Eve." (P6)</p> <p>"On those days, we must eat at home. I don't mind cooking, but sometimes my kid think I will tired." (P5)</p> <p>"I miss rendang from my childhood...I can imagine the taste of it now while I am talking, the saliva is too much when I think of it..."(P8)</p> <p>"We used to make homemade kuih and share with our neighbours.. nothing can beat a good nasi lemak, roti canai and teh ais...I miss those food at home.."(P9)</p>
4.	Childhood and Playful Memories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Childhood roles</li> <li>- Games &amp; play</li> <li>- Early education</li> <li>- Hobbies &amp; Cycling</li> </ul>	<p>"..playing marble is all these things as well" (P1)</p> <p>"Of course, yeah. I was selected to represent our school section in singing contests" (P2)</p>

	THEME	SUBTHEMES	EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS
			<p>"..We really enjoy our childhood. Not like now, everyone even two months old have handphone..." (P2)</p> <p>"The bicycle especially... And what else? We have kites. That was, you know. And of course, swimming near my great-grandfather's house..." (P2)</p> <p>"I used to like... Those days watching cartoons..." (P2)</p> <p>"I like sports car. I like to drive. I like to have sports car. Those days when my dad was still alive. It's a Mercedes AMG. The convertible. My dad's car. And I used to drive." (P2)</p> <p>"I took driving, but I stopped driving...because my husband didn't let" (P3)</p>

	THEME	SUBTHEMES	EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS
			<p data-bbox="948 252 1702 337">"I used to play badminton...My neighbour and friends would come" (P3)</p> <p data-bbox="948 404 1702 588">"I always played badminton. Because in the school, we have a school hall. So after the school, we would book the hall, we would play badminton... we have our own friend group. It's all school friends" (P4)</p> <p data-bbox="948 655 1702 790">"At that time, it was Sentul. It was an open space. It was an old car. It's like a truck. So we would like to jump up and down" (P4)</p> <p data-bbox="948 857 1702 991">"The happiest thing when I was young was reading... I'm very busy at home, I just catch insects when I have time, and use them to fight, two of them fight " (P6)</p>

	THEME	SUBTHEMES	EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS
			<p>"I like to do sketch book, like to do the poster, I like to collect postcard" (P7)</p> <p>"I am not very good at marbles. I usually followed my younger brother. We played marbles, gasing, hide and seek, catching games... We played outdoors, sometimes even in the rain... We caught fish in drains... There was also something called "secret box," like small boxes like that. We lined them up, then used slippers to throw at them, and the ones that fell down were belong to us Wah, it was so fun, hahaha." (P5)</p> <p>"We have to go inside the leaves and catch them, and then play gooli... When I was in the kampung, I would ride a bicycle to the beach and blow the wind." (P6)</p>

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
			<p>"Congkak not so much, but "guli", "batu Seremban".. Konda Kondi" that's like you use a stick and hit the stick... those day, we used to climb up the cherry trees, hits the cherry, the jambu." (P6)</p> <p>"I used to cycle to visit my friends in kampung...we played sepak takraw and kejar ayam..my dad will then chase after me(Laugh)" (P8)</p> <p>"congkak I like..i used to compete in school days.. played badminton when I was young.. now I don't, I am too old" (P9)</p>
5.	Work, Migration, and Socioeconomic Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Employment milestones</li> <li>- Migration stories</li> <li>- Socioeconomic status</li> <li>- Past-present</li> </ul>	<p>"I like to work, I keep on working, so therefore I did achieve my glory day" (P1)</p> <p>"Exactly, because we were poor and didn't have money to buy. So if one family in the kampung was better in</p>

	THEME	SUBTHEMES	EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS
		comparisons	<p>life, they would buy one (TV)"(P5)</p> <p>"It was very easier then compared to now. It was like we don't have technology. For example, the iPhone and digital gadgets... we used to play or to have whatever that around us. And we grew up with no technology," (P2)</p> <p>"Forgetting to Pray...all that. Nowadays, children, they don't do that. You have to force them." (P3)</p> <p>"I know you had a very... It started from... The best memory was when I was in Singapore... Because Singapore, I was given a special mission to train somebody in Singapore" (P4)</p>

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
			<p>“But nowadays, many of us go to trips, so we do we pray we go jalan jalan (walking around), all of these just with family, not that much of inviting people” (P7)</p> <p>“When I was working in SG, there was a Malay woman selling food in the factory. Every day, I would eat goreng kampung ikan, goreng telur, bean sprouts and green beans. I could eat it every day (compared SG with Malaysia)” (P6)</p> <p>“I spend most of my time at work.. no time for family, but when I make time for family, I feel like no one is doing my work” (P8)</p> <p>“Those days, I loved to use batu lesung for my cooking, but now days, kids don’t even know what is that.. see my children, always ordering fast food” (P9)</p>

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
6.	Community and Social Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community interaction</li> <li>- Social cohesion</li> <li>- Social commentary</li> <li>- - Kampung Life</li> </ul>	<p>“politics those days are very different...last time we feel belong together” (P1)</p> <p>“Although we have a lot of crisis in the upper level. Politically. But generally, I think you feel home here...You feel belongs in a way” (P2)</p> <p>“at this age, they talk more about social life, social life but in a different manner rather than talk about, hey, what is going on here? What is going on in the music, we listen to old songs country?” (P2)</p> <p>“My maths teacher..very supportive but I am not smart in it...I get helps from friends and her.”(P3)</p> <p>“Because we used to stay in Sentul. This was something like a town shop. So we don't really mingle around” (P4)</p>

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
			<p>"The only thing that I take the life challenge was because during my father, he was not well doing. So everybody looked at my family very down. Because my father, you know, working in the army, the salary is not so great and he was working after he left" (P4)</p> <p>"I also has this hobby, which collect pen pal in other country, because those day not like now, like now you got internet, those day are all through letters. I had the pen pal in india, Singapore and Germany." (P7)</p> <p>"kampung life was happier...Look at my granddaughter, even my son, they can't run around outside one. They always staying indoors. But kampung life was really different." (P5)</p>

	THEME	SUBTHEMES	EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS
			<p>"I think small villages have a stronger sense of integration and unity, just like in the past, Malays in our kampungs could go to our Chinese kopitiam to drink coffee, come to our homes to play mahjong, and everyone would be together." (P6)</p> <p>"the social morality is very bad now compared to past" (P6)</p> <p>"A long time ago, really, when our group gathered together, we would chat with the old neighbours, talking about how things were in the past." (P5)</p> <p>"If possible, parents are more important because there are fewer people who rely on the community, although we also have community groups like Zhu's and Huang's group unions. We occasionally organise some activities." (P6)</p>

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
			<p>"There were programs where everyone knew each other and could be together."(P6)</p> <p>"Mainly I can see, the community those days are different with now, less unity but I love my jiran jiran, the neighbours and us are like siblings" (P8)</p> <p>"I remember this maths teacher teaching me and scolding me, but she always will say i love you, that's why I scold you"(P9)</p>
7.	Entertainment and Leisure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Songs and music</li> <li>- Cinema &amp; TV</li> <li>- Travelling &amp; outings</li> <li>- Beach sightseeing</li> </ul>	<p>"I would like to listen to those songs (Chinese songs). And you always have some memory tagged to it... generally there are 60s, 70s, 80s, ABBA songs." (P1)</p> <p>"...my time was like Michael Jackson was the pop star" (P2)</p> <p>"...and I was traveling a lot. I thought I never had a</p>

	THEME	SUBTHEMES	EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS
			<p>chance to travel, but I did most part of the world.” (P2)</p> <p>“. Mostly, we will walk... We will enjoy the beach...The beach is not very far in Melaka...here is an ice kacang shop” (P3)</p> <p>“..music, we listen to old songs... Radio, news, songs, drama... Old songs...60s, 70s. Tamil songs” (P3)</p> <p>“Of course, old photos always give us a good memory. Even my children always will send in the WhatsApp. So I always look at that.” (P4)</p> <p>“Old songs, yes. Because sometimes the old songs, the words are different. It's very meaningful compared to now. New songs.... Sudirman songs were very famous” (P4)</p>

	THEME	SUBTHEMES	EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS
			<p>“Collecting lyrics of songs, keep on writing, we have a song book. When friends gather, we will sing from our home.” (P7)</p> <p>“When I was in the kampung, I would ride a bicycle to the beach and blow the wind.” (P6)</p> <p>“There was no TV those days, but when I was in high school, I used to watch cartoon and watch movie secretly...I love listening to old songs, P. Ramlee was my favourite..i always watch his movies when first time release..” (P8)</p> <p>“music, I listen from radio.. music now I listen, I can recall of the past. My friends and I will watch drama as well...” (P9)</p>

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
8.	Coping, Resilience, and Emotional Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emotional regulation</li> <li>- Resilience &amp; problem solving</li> <li>- Aging reflections</li> </ul>	<p>"I like to work, I keep on working, so therefore I did achieve my glory days. But now I think back, I shouldn't be so hardworking." (P1)</p> <p>"I found that Malay people, especially people at my age, they don't talk about things that are happening around there and things that are happening here. And they don't, when they talk about some issue, they don't come up with solutions" (P2)</p> <p>"Just be honest. Don't spoil people. Whoever come, they ask for food, give. So, that is the thing." (P3)</p> <p>"I start to take the learning. So I don't want my children to go through that situation. Let me work hard and put effort. So at least one day they will benefit. Until now I remember that thing" (P4)</p>

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
			<p>"If I faced any problems, I would just think about how to solve them, like financial issues. Once we overcame them, it was fine for me... If there's a problem, just face it. I'm practical. when I face obstacles, I'm okay. I can handle anything." (P5)</p> <p>"In the past, we were more conservative. Looking back, that was actually a good thing...In the past, when Malays lived in kampungs, it was very different. Now, that doesn't exist anymore. When I was in school, there were very few Malays, mostly Chinese. But now it's not the same. There are more Malays now." (P6)</p> <p>"So evening, we spent in the playground. Unlike now, don't see that in kids... when we move to Kluang, its more with relatives, all our gathering, playing</p>

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
			<p>traditional games and all that, which is very unlikely to see this day." (P7)</p> <p>"Life was hard back then...so I work hard now so my kids don't suffer...life is like that, we must have strong mental to move forward, forever grateful for my wife support.." (P8)</p> <p>"Whenever I run into a problem, my parents will say to make sure to stay calm and then act, don't do reckless things when I am in problem...life lessons I teach my kids is to respect and follow our culture, make me proud.."(P9)</p>

## **Phase 2**

The Phase 2 consultation involved three experts: a gerontologist, a community practitioner, and a developmental psychologist. The purpose of these discussions was to validate and refine the themes derived from Phase 1 interviews with older adults, and to provide developmental and practical perspectives for adapting these themes into structured RT materials. Across the three interviews, eight themes emerged: (1) Aging in Place and Family-Centred Living, (2) Loneliness and Cognitive Risk, (3) Cultural Anchors and Tangible Prompts, (4) Materials and Modalities, (5) Format and Facilitation, (6) Training and Manuals for Non-Specialists, (7) Sensitivity and Ethics, and (8) Evidence and Regional Adaptation. These themes highlight the interplay between cultural expectations, developmental needs, and practical considerations in implementing RT in Malaysia. A summary of themes, subthemes, and example quotations is presented in Table 4.

### *Aging in Places & Family-Centred Living*

All three experts underscored the centrality of family and intergenerational ties in the lives of Malaysian older adults. The gerontologist emphasised that many elders express a wish to remain within the family home: *"They want to end their lives with their children"* (Gerontologist). Similarly, the counsellor noted that tangible prompts such as family photo albums are powerful in evoking stories, observing that *"their generation keep a lot of photographs"* (Counsellor).

The developmental psychologist extended this perspective by connecting family ties to developmental theories of aging, suggesting that family is often the "closest and most meaningful system" for older adults. She also highlighted the role of schooling and early environments as alternative anchors of identity for those who lacked

strong family support. Together, these perspectives suggest that family and social anchors should be a core focus when designing RT activities for Malaysian older adults.

At the same time, the expert noted an emerging and growing gap between older adults' expectations and adult children's availability. This reflects a strong cultural desire to live with or live close to their children during the later stages of life. This expectation, however, was described as increasingly difficult to meet due to modern lifestyles, migration, and the demands on adult children.

#### *Loneliness and Cognitive Risk*

The experts linked loneliness to both psychological distress and heightened cognitive risk. The gerontologist noted that "*...Loneliness affects dementia,*" (Gerontologist). This underscores the clinical importance of addressing isolation. The counsellor emphasised the compensatory role of social connections, remarking that "*...they will tend to lean towards their social connections*" (Counsellor) as a protective factor.

The developmental psychologist added nuance by noting how older adults frequently compare their current situation with younger generations, particularly regarding technology: "*Older adults often compare generations ... very fast with technology ... different speed, reaction times.*" Such comparisons can reinforce feelings of exclusion or loss, further highlighting the importance of structured social engagement through RT to mitigate cognitive and emotional risks.

### *Cultural Anchors and Tangible Prompts*

Cultural references and concrete objects were identified as essential tools for reminiscence. Participants highlighted cross-cultural anchors and physical memory cues as powerful stimuli for reminiscence. The gerontologist identified national icons that cross ethnic lines: "P. Ramlee... as an icon to recall our childhood." (Gerontologist). The counsellor recommended using family photo albums as a prompt to find relatedness with their memory. *"Photo albums... their generation keep a lot of photographs."* (Counsellor).

Experts also suggested household artefacts (e.g., old bicycles, charcoal irons) as culturally meaningful prompts. The developmental psychologist elaborated that food itself can be considered a cultural anchor, explaining *"Food can also be considered under culture, because when you talk about culture there are many sub-topics..."* (Developmental Psychologist). This broad view reinforces that RT materials should encompass not only media and entertainment icons but also daily practices, shared meals, and material culture that shape memory and meaning in Malaysian contexts.

### *Materials and Modalities*

The experts also commented on the practical tools and modalities that could be integrated into RT. The counsellor suggested the use of structured aids, noting that *"prompt cards ... will be better to conduct the session,"* while also emphasising the value of art-based, nonverbal approaches, explaining that *"I lean more towards art therapy ... art is universal"* (Counsellor), while the gerontologist broadened the scope by proposing the inclusion of interactive tools such as *"board games ... even iPads would be helpful.."* (Gerontologist).

Both experts expressed a preference for physical artifacts when working directly with older adults. The developmental psychologist introduced a methodological perspective, recommending that reminiscence sessions begin with general, non-threatening topics such as favourite foods before gradually moving to more personal experiences like family or migration. This staged approach recognises the risk of re-traumatisation and underscores the need for careful pacing in session design.

#### *Format and Facilitation*

Experts had varied responses regarding the optimal format and facilitation of RT sessions. The format, whether group-based or individual, elicited mixed perspectives. The gerontologist observed that older adults tend to thrive in group settings, remarking that *“if old people, GRT is good; individual is a bit harder”* (Gerontologist). However, the counsellor raised concerns about the demands on facilitators, particularly when sessions extend for long periods, explaining that *“group ... 90-120 minutes ... very tiring”* (Counsellor). Beyond session structure, both the developmental psychologist and the gerontologist highlighted gendered patterns in reminiscence content. The developmental psychologist suggested that *“men may recall more about work and hobbies, women about relationships ... but later in life both focus on family and bonds”* (Developmental Psychologist). The gerontologist similarly reflected that *“for females ... they focus more on family; if male, they (talk about) more work ... males won’t talk unless it’s about work or sports”* (Gerontologist). Together, these insights suggest that facilitators must not only balance the benefits of group engagement with their own capacity but also remain attentive to gendered differences in memory themes, ensuring that session prompts are inclusive and responsive to these variations.

### *Training and Manuals for Non-Specialists*

Experts agreed that well-designed training manuals are essential for scaling RT in Malaysia, particularly when sessions are delivered by non-specialists. The counsellor emphasised clarity: *"The clearer the manual, the easier non-specialist can use it."* The gerontologist critiqued existing approaches, remarking: *"Everyone has their module, but no one looks at the impact."* The developmental psychologist stressed the importance of cultural competence, cautioning that while Malaysian facilitators can rely on shared understanding, outsiders may struggle: *"Facilitators in Malaysia know cultural boundaries, but outsiders may need explicit dos and don'ts."* This highlights the need for context-sensitive manuals and training that not only guide session delivery but also embed ethical and cultural safeguards.

### *Sensitivity and Ethics*

All three experts emphasised the ethical responsibility of facilitators in managing sensitive content. The counsellor recommended allowing participants to pause when overwhelmed: *"If strong emotions ... let them calm down ... ask them to write."* The gerontologist reinforced the importance of safety, stating: *"Safety issue ... facilitators must be careful."* The developmental psychologist focused on the unique trajectory of grief, explaining that it does not follow linear stages: *"Grief does not follow fixed stages ... some older adults avoid it, others welcome talking about it."* The gerontologist also cautioned about policy and safety concerns when encouraging older adults to engage outside their homes. Together, these perspectives underscore that RT must be trauma-sensitive and flexible, with facilitators trained to respond to diverse emotional reactions.

### *Evidence and Regional Adaptation*

Finally, the experts pointed to the necessity of evaluating RT outcomes and learning from regional neighbours. The gerontologist highlighted the lack of systematic evaluation, stating: *"Everyone has their module, but no one looks at the impact."* She also suggested drawing inspiration from nearby countries: *"Look at Team Indonesia, Team Singapore."* The developmental psychologist contextualised these findings within broader frameworks of ageing, linking the identified themes to concepts of successful or healthy ageing: *"All eight factors link to successful or healthy aging ... financial and health also play a role."* This perspective broadens the implications of RT, situating it as a potential contributor to national goals of promoting healthy aging in Malaysia's rapidly ageing society.

Table 4. Themes, Subthemes and Example Quotation for Phase 2 Expert Consultation

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
1.	Aging in Place and Family-Centred Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desire to live with children</li> <li>- Generational differences in meaning of family</li> <li>- Importance of school and early environments</li> </ul>	<p>“They want to end their lives with their children.” (Gerontologist) · “Family definitely would be one of the most important, closest to them.” (Developmental Psychologist) · “Photo albums—their generation keep a lot of photographs.” (Counsellor)</p>
2.	Loneliness and Cognitive Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social isolation</li> <li>- Cognitive decline risk</li> <li>- Technology gaps and generation comparisons</li> </ul>	<p>“Loneliness affects dementia.” (Gerontologist) · “They will tend to lean towards their social connections.” (Counsellor) · “Older adults often compare generations ... very fast with technology ... different speed, reaction times.” (Developmental Psychologist)</p>

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
3.	Cultural Anchors and Tangible Prompts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Icons and media</li> <li>- Food as cultural memory</li> <li>- Household objects, Shared cultural memory</li> </ul>	<p>"P. Ramlee ... an icon to recall our childhood." (Gerontologist) · "Prompt cards ... maybe photo albums." (Counsellor) · "Food can also be considered under culture, because when you talk about culture there are many sub-topics." (Developmental Psychologist)</p>
4.	Materials and Modalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prompt cards</li> <li>- Art therapy</li> <li>- Tactile and visual aids</li> <li>- Gradual progression from general to personal</li> </ul>	<p>"Prompt cards ... will be better to conduct the session." (Counsellor) · "Board games ... even iPads." (Gerontologist) · "Start from general topics like favourite food, then move to personal stories such as family or migration." (Developmental Psychologist)</p>
5.	Format and Facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group vs. individual sessions</li> <li>- Facilitator workload</li> <li>- Gender perspective</li> </ul>	<p>"If old people, GRT is good; individual is a bit harder." (Gerontologist)</p> <p>"Group ... 90-120 minutes ... very tiring." (Counsellor)</p>

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
			<p>"Men may recall more about work and hobbies, women about relationships ... but later in life both focus on family and bonds." (Developmental Psychologist)</p> <p>"For females ... they [focus] more on family; if male, they [talk about] more work ... males won't talk unless it's about work or sports." (Gerontologist)</p>
6.	Training and Manuals for Non-Specialists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Importance of a Manual</li> <li>- Accessible training</li> <li>- Guidebook</li> <li>- Cultural competence</li> </ul>	<p>"The clearer the manual, the easier non-specialist can use it." (Counsellor) · "Everyone has their module, but no one looks at the impact." (Gerontologist) · "Facilitators in Malaysia know cultural boundaries, but outsiders may need explicit dos and don'ts." (Developmental Psychologist)</p>
7.	Sensitivity and Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emotional safety</li> <li>- Trauma sensitivity</li> <li>- Grief processes</li> <li>- Cultural and generational gaps</li> </ul>	<p>"If strong emotions ... let them calm down ... ask them to write." (Counsellor) · "Safety issue ... facilitators must be careful." (Gerontologist) · "Grief does not follow fixed stages ... some older adults avoid it; others welcome talking about it." (Developmental Psychologist)</p>

	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLE QUOTATIONS</b>
8.	Evidence and Regional Adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evaluation of outcomes</li> <li>- Regional models</li> <li>- Healthy aging &amp; Successful aging frameworks</li> </ul>	<p>“Everyone has their module, but no one looks at the impact.” (Gerontologist) · “Look at Team Indonesia, Team Singapore.” (Gerontologist) · “All eight factors link to successful or healthy aging ... financial and health also play a role.” (Developmental Psychologist)</p>

## **DISCUSSION**

This study aimed to identify Malaysian-specific themes relevant to reminiscence therapy (RT) and to evaluate the feasibility of integrating these themes into an existing Western RT framework. Phase 1 explored older adults' perspectives, revealing eight themes: Family and Kinship Bonds, Cultural Identity and Traditions, Food as a Memory Trigger, Childhood Memories, Work and Migration, Community Life, Entertainment, and Coping and Resilience. These themes highlight the multi-layered nature of reminiscence in Malaysia, grounded in family ties, communal practices, and cultural heritage. Phase 2 aimed to validate findings and elicit implementation-oriented perspectives from professionals, yielding eight complementary themes addressing clinical relevance, ethical sensitivity, and practical delivery considerations: (1) Aging in Place and Family-Centred Living; (2) Loneliness and Cognitive Risk; (3) Cultural Anchors and Tangible Prompts; (4) Materials and Modalities; (5) Format and Facilitation; (6) Training and Manuals for Non-Specialists; (7) Sensitivity and Ethics; and (8) Evidence and Regional Adaptation. Together, these findings provide both cultural and professional validation for adapting RT to the Malaysian context.

### ***Culturally Relevant Themes from Older Adults***

Family emerged as the central axis of reminiscence, echoing findings from other Asian studies where kinship bonds dominate later-life narratives (Shin et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2025). A cultural adaptation of RT that combined family involvement and culturally significant themes showed beneficial mental health effects in non-Western populations (Diwan, 2023). Unlike Western RT frameworks, which often prioritise individual milestones such as career or personal achievements (Butler, 1963; Erikson, 1963), Malaysian participants consistently framed identity within relational and intergenerational contexts as suggested in previous studies (Ostwald & Subhan, 2021).

This underscores the need for family-centred RT materials that emphasise parental roles, marriage, and grandparenting.

Cultural traditions and religious celebrations such as Hari Raya, Chinese New Year, and Deepavali further distinguished Malaysian reminiscence. These findings align with prior Southeast Asian studies where festivals serve as memory anchors (Mendrofa et al., 2025; Gumilang et al., 2025) and extend them by showing how diverse ethnic traditions co-exist in Malaysian older adults' memories. The emphasis on national history, political leaders, and independence narratives also reflects a collective sense of identity, resonating with cross-national findings that socio-historical contexts often ground reminiscence (James et al., 2021).

Food as a Memory Trigger was particularly salient. While food has been recognised as a reminiscence prompt in Western contexts (Rueda et al., 2023), in Malaysia it carries a stronger communal and symbolic role, connecting participants to family gatherings, *kampung* life, and cultural identity. This reinforces evidence that sensory prompts such as taste and smell enhance recall and engagement in culturally grounded RT (Yanagida, 2024).

Other themes such as childhood play, work and migration, and community life highlighted resilience, adaptability, and the contrast between past and present lifestyles. These resonate with gerontological findings that reminiscence bridges personal growth with societal change (Fernández-Pérez et al., 2019; Kurian et al., 2025), but here they are uniquely framed through Malaysia's rapid modernisation and rural-to-urban migration patterns.

### ***Adaptation of Themes into a Western RT Framework***

Phase 2 findings validated and extended older adults' narratives by providing expert guidance on usability. Experts consistently emphasised family and intergenerational living as central to RT in Malaysia, echoing Phase 1's findings and reinforcing family as a universal anchor for adaptation (Shin et al., 2023; Diwan, 2023). They also raised concerns about loneliness and cognitive risk, stressing RT's clinical value in mitigating social isolation which is stated as a perspective echoed in Malaysian studies showing reductions in loneliness and depression through Spiritual RT (Syed Elias et al., 2020).

Cultural anchors and tangible prompts (e.g., P. Ramlee, photo albums, household artifacts, food) were highlighted as necessary tools to evoke memory. This aligns with cross-cultural RT studies showing that culturally familiar cues improve recall and engagement (Zhang et al., 2025; Siverová & Bužgová, 2018). Experts also have stressed the importance of modality and pacing, recommending a staged approach that begins with neutral prompts before progressing to emotionally intense topics. This reflects trauma-sensitive adaptations noted in global RT practice (Naomi Rose, 2020).

Practical concerns emerged strongly, including session format and facilitation. While group RT was seen as beneficial for social connection (Xu et al., 2023; Kurian et al., 2025), experts noted the strain on facilitators during long sessions and highlighted gendered differences in reminiscence content (Rahimi & Anuar, 2012). These insights emphasise the need for facilitator flexibility and structured manuals, a limitation already identified in Malaysian RT research (Azizan et al., 2023; Nur Fatimah et al., 2023).

Ethical considerations were also emphasised, particularly regarding grief, trauma, and participant safety. This echoes global debates on

reminiscence risks (Butler, 1963; James et al., 2021) and confirms the need for culturally sensitive training and ethical guidelines. Finally, experts noted the lack of systematic evaluation in Malaysia and called for regional adaptation, drawing lessons from neighbouring programs such as Singapore's "OWOW!" initiative (Singapore National Neuroscience Institute, 2025) and Indonesia's culturally tailored RT (Mendrofa et al., 2025; Gumilang et al., 2025)

## **CONCLUSION**

### ***Summary***

Overall, this study demonstrates that reminiscence among Malaysian older adults is deeply shaped by family, cultural traditions, food, and resilience. These findings highlight the importance of grounding RT interventions in local cultural contexts rather than adopting Western frameworks wholesale. By tailoring RT to Malaysian older adults, practitioners can create more meaningful and effective interventions that not only support cognitive and emotional health but also preserve cultural identity and intergenerational continuity. In this way, RT becomes more than a therapeutic technique but rather it becomes a tool for honouring lived experiences and sustaining cultural heritage as the uniqueness of Malaysian context is vital to memory.

### ***Implications***

The findings of this study carry several important implications for research, clinical practice, and policy in gerontology and psychosocial interventions.

### ***Research Implications***

This study underscores the significance of embedding cultural considerations into the design of Reminiscence Therapy (RT) interventions. By identifying themes such as Family, Cultural

Traditions, Food as a Memory Trigger, and Community Life, the study advances existing scholarship by demonstrating how cultural context shapes the relevance and effectiveness of RT. These insights lay the groundwork for future empirical investigations that can systematically evaluate the therapeutic outcomes of culturally adapted RT materials, particularly in terms of cognitive stimulation, emotional well-being, and social connectedness among Malaysian older adults. In addition, the findings open avenues for comparative research across rural and urban contexts, sub-ethnic groups, and East Malaysian populations, thereby broadening the scope of cultural inclusivity in intervention design. Cross-national comparisons may also be valuable for situating Malaysia within the wider Asian and global discourse on culturally responsive approaches to aging.

### *Practice Implications*

The results provide practical guidance for professionals in counselling, psychology, and gerontology who seek to implement RT in diverse Malaysian settings. The themes identified offer an accessible framework for structuring therapy sessions that resonate with the lived experiences of older adults. For example, prompts centred on cultural festivals, traditional foods, or early life experiences may serve as effective entry points for eliciting engagement, fostering positive emotions, and facilitating self-reflection. Importantly, the study highlights the potential of user-friendly RT materials such as manuals, prompt cards, or visual aids that could help empower not only specialists but also trainee counsellors, volunteers, and community workers to conduct RT sessions with confidence and certainty. The emphasis on developing clear and adaptable resources is particularly relevant in the Malaysian context, where professional expertise in RT remains limited.

### *Policy and Community Implications*

Beyond research and practice, the study contributes to broader discussions on ageing policy and community-based care in Malaysia. The identification of culturally meaningful themes provides actionable evidence for policymakers, non-governmental organisations, and eldercare institutions seeking to design programs that enhance psychosocial well-being in later life. By aligning with national priorities for active and healthy aging, as well as global objectives outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), culturally adapted RT materials can play a role in promoting mental health (SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being), fostering social inclusion (SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities), and building age-friendly communities (SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities). In doing so, RT has the potential to serve not only as a therapeutic intervention but also as a vehicle for advancing social cohesion and cultural continuity across generations.

Taken together, the implications of this study highlight the importance of integrating cultural sensitivity into psychosocial interventions for older adults. By bridging empirical insights, practical applications, and policy relevance, the findings provide a foundation for advancing both the scientific understanding and the real-world impact of RT in Malaysia.

### ***Limitations and Future Direction***

Despite these contributions, the study has limitations. The sample size was relatively small and limited to older adults from specific regions, which may restrict the generalisability of findings. Although participants represented the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia, perspectives from sub-ethnic groups, rural-urban differences, and East Malaysian communities were not included, which may limit the cultural inclusivity of the identified themes. The inclusion of younger professionals in Phase 2 offered fresh perspectives, but their limited

direct experience with older adults may have constrained the depth and practical applicability of insights. Another limitation concerns the time frame of the study. Conducted within a relatively short span, the research provided valuable initial insights but could not capture longer-term changes in perceptions or the sustained impact of reminiscence themes. A longer study duration, incorporating follow-up phases or longitudinal approaches, would allow future research to examine how culturally relevant RT materials evolve over time and how their effectiveness may differ across stages of older adulthood.

Future studies should therefore aim for broader representation across Malaysia's diverse cultural contexts and engage more experienced practitioners to enhance both cultural relevance and clinical utility. Larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and participatory approaches (e.g., co-developing photographs, songbooks, or food-based activities) could further strengthen the development of culturally tailored RT materials. Additionally, the small number of experts consulted, and the specific scope of their expertise limited the breadth of practice insights gained. While their contributions provided valuable theoretical and developmental viewpoints, the findings may not fully capture the realities of implementing RT in diverse practice settings. Future research should engage a wider range of practitioners including clinicians, therapists, and community-based facilitators who work directly with older adults to ensure that culturally adapted RT materials are both theoretically grounded and practically applicable. Furthermore, future research should adopt longitudinal or extended study designs to examine how reminiscence themes and their therapeutic relevance may shift over time. A longer time frame would enable researchers to capture changes in memory recall, emotional responses, and cultural expressions across different stages of aging. It would also allow for evaluating the sustained impact of culturally tailored RT materials,

offering insights into both their immediate and long-term effectiveness in enhancing cognitive and psychological well-being.

### ***Significance to Malaysia's SDG Agenda***

This study holds important significance in relation to Malaysia's commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in advancing healthy aging, social inclusion, and cultural sustainability.

First, the findings align closely with SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being, which emphasises the importance of ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being across all ages. By identifying culturally relevant themes for RT, this study contributes to developing interventions that support cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, and resilience among older adults. In Malaysia, where the aging population is projected to reach 15% by 2030, culturally tailored psychosocial interventions such as RT can play a critical role in promoting mental well-being and reducing risks of social isolation and depression in later life.

Second, the emphasis on family, community, and cultural traditions resonates with SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, which calls for inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable communities. By documenting memories of festivals, food traditions, and collective practices, this study contributes to preserving Malaysia's rich multicultural heritage. Incorporating these themes into RT ensures that older adults remain connected to their cultural roots and strengthens intergenerational ties, thereby fostering community cohesion in increasingly urbanised settings.

Third, this research supports SDG 4: Quality Education and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities by generating knowledge that can inform

counsellor training and public health initiatives. Integrating RT into non-specialist care contexts, such as through counsellor trainees or community health workers, makes mental health and psychosocial support more accessible and equitable. This aligns with Malaysia's goal of ensuring inclusive services that reach diverse populations across ethnicities, languages, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

In summary, this study directly contributes to Malaysia's SDG agenda by promoting healthy aging (SDG 3), fostering inclusive and culturally sustainable communities (SDG 11) and advancing education and reducing inequalities in access to psychosocial care (SDG 4 and SDG 10). By situating reminiscence therapy within Malaysia's unique multicultural context, the findings not only advance academic knowledge but also provide practical pathways to achieve national development priorities in line with the SDGs.

## **STATEMENTS AND DECLARATIONS**

### ***Acknowledgements***

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my research interns, Chu Chee Yin and Siah Kang Ee from Sunway University for their dedication and support during the fieldwork. I am also grateful to Prof. Madya Dr. Khadijah binti Alavi and Prof Madya Dr. Ponnusamy at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) for their expert guidance and valuable insights. My special thanks go to Dr. Suzana, Developmental Psychologist at UKM, for her continuous support and encouragement throughout this journey. I also wish to thank Dr. Michael Jenkins, from the University of Nottingham, Malaysia, for his assistance and guidance in developing the research proposal.

### ***Funding Statement***

This work was supported by the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG) through

the APPGM-SDG Case Study Small Grants (CSSG) for Young Researchers Programme (Grant agreement number Y25-CSSG005).

### ***Compliance with Ethical Standards***

#### *Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest*

The author(s) declare no known financial or non-financial conflicts of interest.

#### *Research Involving Human Participants*

All procedures involving human participants were approved by the Sunway University Research Ethics Committee (Approval Code: 2025/REC0152) and conducted in accordance with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments.

#### *Informed Consent*

Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

## **REFERENCES**

- Abdullah, J. M., Ismail, A., & Yusoff, M. S. B. (2024). Healthy Ageing in Malaysia by 2030: Needs, Challenges and Future Directions. *Malays J Med Sci*, 31(4), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.21315/mjms2024.31.4.1>
- Ahmed, S. K. (2024). The pillars of trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*, 2, 100051.
- Akhter-Khan, S. C., Prina, M., Wong, G. H.-Y., Mayston, R., & Li, L. (2022). Understanding and Addressing Older Adults' Loneliness: The Social Relationship Expectations Framework. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 18(4), 762-777. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916221127218>

- Allen, A. P., Doyle, C., & Roche, R. A. P. (2020). The Impact of Reminiscence on Autobiographical Memory, Cognition and Psychological Well-Being in Healthy Older Adults. *Eur J Psychol*, 16(2), 317-330. <https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.v16i2.2097>
- Amran, A. N., & Ibrahim, R. I. (2024). Identifying appropriate actuarial indicators affecting long-term pension expenditures in Malaysia. *AIP Conference Proceedings Online*, 2905(1), 020002-020010. <https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0175348>
- Azizan, A., Anum, A., Faisal, F., & Karnadipa, T. (2023). The Effects of Exercise and Reminiscence Therapy on Depression and Quality of Life Among the Older Adults with Mild Alzheimer's Disease. *Journal of Advanced Research in Applied Sciences and Engineering Technology*, 29(3), 185-197. <https://doi.org/10.37934/araset.29.3.185197>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Butler, R. N. (1963). The life review: An interpretation of reminiscence in the aged. *Psychiatry*, 26(1), 65-76.
- Diwan, S., Eliazar, A., Pham, D., & Fuentes, M. (2023). Evaluation of a culturally adapted reminiscence therapy intervention: Improving mood, family and community connectedness in Spanish- and Vietnamese-speaking older adults. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 60(6), 973-984. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13634615231191996>
- Donovan, N. J., & Blazer, D. (2020). Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Review and Commentary of a National Academies Report. *The American Journal of Geriatric*

*Psychiatry*, 28(12), 1233-1244.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jagp.2020.08.005>

Engelbrecht, R., Bhar, S., Shoemark, H., Elphinstone, B., & Ciorciari, J. (2024). Reminiscence Therapy and Music With Older Adults: A Descriptive Study Investigating the Current Views and Practices of Australian Aged Care Providers and Volunteers. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 43(9), 1305-1314.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/07334648241236236>

Erikson, E. H. (1963). *Childhood and society*. New York: W. W Norton & Company. Inc., pp247, 274.

Evans, I. E. M., Martyr, A., Collins, R., Brayne, C., & Clare, L. (2019). Social Isolation and Cognitive Function in Later Life: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*, 70(s1), S119-S144. <https://doi.org/10.3233/jad-180501>

Fernández-Pérez, D., Ros, L., Escribano, F., & Serrano, J. P. (2020). Reminiscence, personality, coping and mood state in institutionalised older adults: a cross-sectional study. *Psychogeriatrics*, 20(3), 310-320.

Güler, A., & Yıldırım, M. (2025). Social isolation, loneliness, death stress and life satisfaction in older adults: A serial mediation study. *Geriatric Nursing*, 62, 78-85.  
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gerinurse.2025.01.037>

Gumilang, A., & Pratiwi, G. D. (2025). The Effect of Reminiscence Therapy on Stress, Anxiety and Depression Levels in The Elderly. *Proceeding STIKep PPNI Jawa Barat*, 1(1), 219-226.

- Huang, X., Ye, C., Zhao, A., Wang, Z., Zuo, S., & Lin, L. (2025). Effects of reminiscence therapy on cognitive function in older adults with cognitive impairment: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, *139*, 106021. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.archger.2025.106021>
- James, T., Naaheed Mukadam, Sommerlad, A., Ceballos, S. G., & Livingston, G. (2021). Culturally tailored therapeutic interventions for people affected by dementia: a systematic review and new conceptual model. *The Lancet Healthy Longevity*, *2*(3), e171–e179. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2666-7568\(21\)00001-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2666-7568(21)00001-5)
- Kang, H., & Kim, H. (2022). Ageism and Psychological Well-Being Among Older Adults: A Systematic Review. *Gerontol Geriatr Med*, *8*, 23337214221087023. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23337214221087023>
- Kim, Y.-H., & Cho, C.-M. (2025). A Digital Reminiscence Intervention Program Using a Time-traveling Road Map for Community-dwelling Older Adults with Subjective Cognitive Decline. *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, *132*, 105789–105789. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.archger.2025.105789>
- Kurian, A. C., B Srisudha, Ganesan, M. P., & Johnson, S. L. (2025). Reviving memories, revitalizing minds: The impact of group reminiscence therapy on well-being of elderly residents in care facility. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*, *14*(3), 963–970. [https://doi.org/10.4103/jfmpc.jfmpc\\_1519\\_24](https://doi.org/10.4103/jfmpc.jfmpc_1519_24)

- Leung, L. (2015). Validity, reliability, and generalizability in qualitative research. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*, 4(3), 324–324. <https://doi.org/10.4103/2249-4863.161306>
- Li, B. (2024). Schema Theory in Personal Growth, Culture, and Social. Proceedings of the 2024 10th International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2024),
- Mendrofa, F. A. M., Iswanti, D. I., Wulaningsih, I., Ernawati, H., & Susilowati, K. (2025). The development of a harmony multisensory space based on reminiscence therapy to improve quality of life for older adults with dementia: A qualitative study. *Physical Therapy Journal of Indonesia*, 6(2), 227-231.
- Meng, S. (2022). Cultural Effects of Human Memory. 2022 International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities and Arts (SSHA 2022)
- Mohd Ismail, I., Khoo, C. S., Ibrahim, L., Ong, M. J. Y., Tan, H. J., Hod, R., Baharudin, A., & Abd Rahman, M. S. H. (2025). Prevalence and associated factors of caregiving burden among caregivers of adults with epilepsy in Malaysia – A cross-sectional study. *Epilepsy & Behavior*, 163, 110244. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.yebeh.2024.110244>
- National Neuroscience Institute. (2025, September 3). *When remembering the past, helps with the present*. Nni.com.sg. <https://www.nni.com.sg/news/patient-care/reminiscence-therapy>
- Noraini Che' Sharif, Ponnusamy Subramaniam, & Khadijah Alavi. (2019). The Relationship between Anxiety and Depression with Quality of Life among the Elderly with Dementia Living: The

Need of Reminiscence Group Therapy in Resident Institutions. *Universiti Malaysia Terengganu Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 1(4), 95–104. <https://doi.org/10.46754/umtjur.v1i4.96>

Nur Fatimah, A Ganapathy, S. S., Rajini Sooryanarayana, Ahmad,, Rasidah Jamaluddin, Mohamad, Tan, M. P., Sherina Mohd Sidik, Zahir, S. M., Sandanasamy, K. S., & Ibrahim, N. (2020). Prevalence of dementia and quality of life of caregivers of people living with dementia in Malaysia. *Geriatrics and Gerontology International/Geriatrics & Gerontology International*, 20(S2), 16–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ggi.14031>

Ostwald, K., & Subhan, M. S. (2021). Regional identity formation in Malaysia: Primacy of the political center and its essentialized ethnic identities. *Asian Politics & Policy*, 13(1), 37-55.

Rahemi, Z., Bacsu, J.-D. R., Shalhout, S. Z., Sadafipoor, M. S., Smith, M. L., & Adams, S. A. (2025). Exploring social determinants of healthcare and cognition levels among diverse older adults. *Geriatric Nursing*, 61, 614-621. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gerinurse.2024.12.037>

Rahimi & Anuar, M. K. (2012) Life and counselling experiences of elderly Malay residents in Rumah Seri Kenangan, Cheras, Malaysia. Masters thesis, Universiti Putra Malaysia

Reitano, M. R., Guidetti, M., Maiorana, N. V., De Sandi, A., Carusi, F., Rosci, C., Ruggiero, F., Poletti, B., Ticozzi, N., Mameli, F., Barbieri, S., Silani, V., Priori, A., & Ferrucci, R. (2023). The Effects of a New Integrated and Multidisciplinary Cognitive Rehabilitation

Program Based on Mindfulness and Reminiscence Therapy in Patients with Parkinson's Disease and Mild Cognitive Impairment: A Pilot Study. *Brain Sciences*, 13(2), 201. <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-3425/13/2/201>

Rose, N., Whitworth, A., Smart, S., Oliver, E., & Cartwright, J. (2020). "I remember when ... ": The impact of reminiscence therapy on discourse production in older adults with cognitive impairment. *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 22(3), 359-371. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17549507.2020.1747542>

Sharif, F., PhD, Jahanbin, I., MS, Amirsadat, A., MS, & Hosseini Moghadam, M., MS (2018). Effectiveness of Life Review Therapy on Quality of Life in the Late Life at Day Care Centers of Shiraz, Iran: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *International Journal Of Community Based Nursing And Midwifery*, 6(2), 136–145.

Sharifah Munirah, S. E., Petriwskyj, A., Scott, T., & Neville, C. (2019). Spiritual reminiscence therapy for older people with loneliness, anxiety and depression living in a residential aged care facility, Malaysia: A qualitative approach. *Australasian journal on ageing*, 38(1), E25-E30.

Shin, E., Kim, M., Kim, S., & Sok, S. (2023). Effects of reminiscence therapy on quality of life and life satisfaction of the elderly in the community: a systematic review. *BMC Geriatrics*, 23, 1-9. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-023-04001-1>

Shin, E., Kim, M., Kim, S., & Sok, S. (2023). Effects of reminiscence therapy on quality of life and life satisfaction of the elderly in

the community: a systematic review. *BMC Geriatrics*, 23(1).  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-023-04001-1>

Siverová, J., & Bužgová, R. (2018). The effect of reminiscence therapy on quality of life, attitudes to ageing, and depressive symptoms in institutionalized elderly adults with cognitive impairment: A quasi-experimental study. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, 27(5), 1430–1439. <https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.12442>

Subramaniam, P., & Woods, B. (2016). Digital life storybooks for people with dementia living in care homes: an evaluation. *Clinical interventions in aging*, 1263-1276.

Syed Elias, S. M., Neville, C., Scott, T., & Petriwskyj, A. (2020). The Effectiveness Of Spiritual Reminiscence Therapy For Older People With Loneliness, Anxiety And Depression In Malaysia. *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging*, 32(4), 341–356. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15528030.2020.1765448>

Tran, T. A., Mattap, S. M., Warren, N., Teng, J. H. J., Duong, M. D., Hoang, V. M., Yasin, S., & Mohan, D. (2025). Caregiver burden among dementia caregivers in low-and middle-income countries in Asia: a systematic review. *Aging & Mental Health*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2025.2462110>

Wang, S., Hu, M., Xue, Y., Chen, Y., Li, K., Dong, L., Liang, L., Jiang, J., Li, X., & Wu, C. (2025). Cognitive and emotional benefits of individual reminiscence therapy in elderly stroke survivors: study protocol for a randomized controlled study. *BMC Psychology*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-02939-y>

Wang, X., Li, J., Liang, T., Hasan, W. U., Zaman, K. T., Du, Y., Xie, B., & Tao, C. (2024). Promoting Personalized Reminiscence Among

Cognitively Intact Older Adults Through an AI-Driven Interactive Multimodal Photo Album: Development and Usability Study. *JMIR Aging*, 7, e49415. <https://doi.org/10.2196/49415>

Wong, A. R. K., Ng, L. T. E., Lee, M. H., Yeow, J. L. H., Lim, Y. J., & Yap, K. H. (2024). The effectiveness of group music reminiscence therapy for people thriving with dementia: A systematic review of randomized controlled trials. *AGING MEDICINE*, 7(4), 528–534. <https://doi.org/10.1002/agm2.12344>.

Xu, L., Li, S., Yan, R., Ni, Y., Wang, Y., & Li, Y. (2023). Effects of reminiscence therapy on psychological outcome among older adults without obvious cognitive impairment: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2023.1139700>

Yanagida, N., Yamaguchi, T., & Matsunari, Y. (2024). Group Reminiscence Therapy for Dementia to Improve Well-Being and Reduce Behavioral Symptoms. *Geriatrics*, 9(5), 109. <https://www.mdpi.com/2308-3417/9/5/109>

Yang, Y., Li, H., Cong, X., & Shellman, J. (2025). The Effectiveness of Reminiscence Interventions on Depression and Depressive Symptoms in Community-dwelling Older Adults without Significant Cognitive Impairment: A Systematic Review. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 47(6), 510–523. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01939459251324833>

Malaysia's rapid demographic transition toward an aging society has amplified social challenges among older adults, including loneliness, reduced social roles, identity loss, and declining mental health. Reminiscence Therapy (RT), a non-pharmacological intervention that engages older adults in recalling and sharing life experiences, has demonstrated potential in addressing these issues by enhancing social connectedness, emotional well-being, and cognitive stimulation. However, most RT materials are Western-centric, limiting their relevance in Malaysia's multicultural context. This qualitative case study was conducted in two phases to develop culturally relevant RT materials. Phase 1 involved interviews with nine older adults to identify salient themes such as family bonds, religious and cultural traditions, *kampung* life, national history, and food as memory triggers. Phase 2 engaged three professionals to evaluate the usability of adapted RT materials within a Western framework. Findings highlight the importance of culturally grounded prompts to improve engagement and therapeutic relevance. By addressing social isolation, fostering dignity, and promoting inclusion, culturally adapted RT supports Sustainable Development Goals on SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

### About the Author

Thirresh Guna Segaran is a doctoral researcher in psychology with a focus in Geropsychology, examining the cognitive and neural correlates of reminiscence therapy in older adults using EEG-based paradigms. His work engages with clinical aspects of cognitive ageing, neuropsychological functioning, memory & emotional processes, and caregiver psychosocial outcomes across diverse ageing populations.

### About APPGM-SDG Case Study Small Grants for Young Researchers Programme

This programme empowers researchers under 35 to conduct qualitative research on pressing SDG-related issues in Malaysia. The resulting papers explore challenges affecting left-behind communities, directly supporting APPGM-SDG's grounded, evidence-based research agenda. The grant is offered and managed by APPGM-SDG's policy think tank, MySDG Centre for Social Inclusion.



**Society for Promotion of Sustainable Development Goals**



A-1-10, Blok A, 8 Avenue, Jalan Sungai Jernih 8/1, Seksyen 8,  
46050 Petaling Jaya, Selangor.



secretariat@appgm-sdg.com



<https://www.facebook.com/APPGMSDGMY>

