

M.Y. Rosnah, S.A.R. Sharifah Norazizan, H. Tengku-Aizan, M. R. Hussain. Home living environment design and perceptions of safety of older Malaysians. *Gerontechnology* 2008; 7(2):201. A living environment that is safe and comfortable is especially important for older persons to avoid injuries and other related problems. Studies have shown that diminishing physical and functional capabilities of the elderly have made them more vulnerable to accidents in the home<sup>1,2</sup>. Reduced visual, hearing, strength and other physical capabilities require special considerations if the elderly were to maintain self-sufficiency and independence<sup>3</sup>. The home is a place where the elderly should feel secure, comfortable and safe from accidents and injuries. If accidents in the home are frequent, it is physically and mentally more distressing the older we get. Thus, certain precautions should be taken to prevent accidents from occurring. **Method** A study was conducted to identify safety problems of the living spaces in the home environment and to determine the perceptions of the elderly on the safety of their home environment. A total of 386 respondents comprising of 168 males and 218 females aged 60 years and above were identified through purposive sampling. The homes represent the various races in Malaysia and reside in three urban areas of Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam and Johor Bahru. Data was obtained through the completion of self-administered questionnaires. **Results and discussion** The results showed that the mean age of subjects was 68.89, primarily, female (56.5%), and married (60.7%). Most participants have primary school education (51.4%), stay in detached and semi-D type housing (54.6%) and owned their own house (66.8%). Generally, the respondents did not have speech, hearing and physical impairment. However, over 70% had sight impairment, with presbiopia (short sighted) being the most common type. Though eighty one percent of the respondents perceived that their home living environment as safe (Figure 1), the study found that the majority of the homes did not install or have safety appliances such as smoke detectors, peep-holes, alarms, emergency numbers near the telephone, fire extinguishers and first aid box. Among factors that cause fear or insecurity identified by the elderly were fear of intruders, fire, flood and fainting. The common occurrences of accidents were in the toilets and bathrooms. Most of the toilets and bathrooms were not installed with grab bars. The use of squat toilets and slippery floors are major problems in their home environment. **Conclusion** Even though the majority of the respondents feel comfortable with their six living areas in the home, the results of the study clearly showed that the home living environment of the elderly respondents require considerable improvements to increase their safety and comfort. This becomes especially important as the Malaysian elderly population is increasing.

## References

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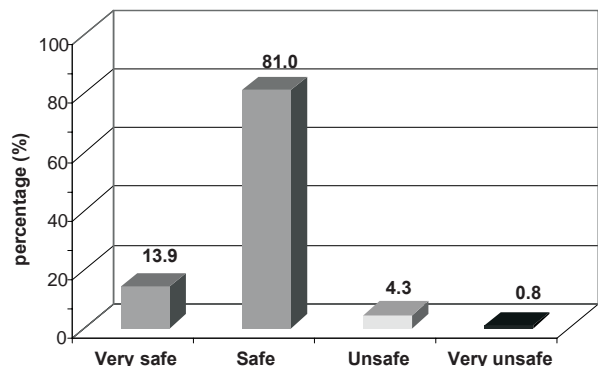


Figure 1 General perception of the home environment (n=374)