

The Elderly Population in Myanmar: Trends, Living Conditions, Characteristics and Prospects, April 2005

Executive Summary

As there has been no survey that has targeted the ageing population in Myanmar, the Data for the analysis prescribed in this monograph is drawn from censuses i.e. 1973 and 1983 population censuses and surveys that have been implemented on a national level since 1973 to 2001. In this way, this study was designed based on the above two censuses and the 2001 Fertility and Reproductive Health Survey, the latest nation-wide survey of population.

The research report in this monograph responds to the needs of the Myanmar government to provide current information about the elderly. Although there has been no survey that has specifically targeted the older population in Myanmar, the research contained in this volume used both censuses and general population surveys from 1973 to 2001.

Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

Findings

The findings of this research clearly indicate that the population of Myanmar is ageing and the pace of ageing is increasing. In 1973, the proportion of the population that was aged 60 &+ was slightly over 6 %. By 2050 it is projected that 21.4 % of the population will be aged 60 r +. Features of the ageing are : a shift in the distribution of the aged with an increasing population of the aged being found in the oldest of the old age groups, an increasing proportion of the aged that are female and increasing old age dependency ratios.

The ageing of Myanmar's population is not as dramatic as that being experienced by other Asian countries. However, it remains the dominant change that Myanmar will experience in its population over the first half of this century and will require detailed information about the living situation of the older population and their families in order to ensure that the elderly continue to be well cared for.

This monograph has described major gender differences in the process of ageing. As the population ageing increases, the proportion of the older population that are female also increases. The predominance of females becomes more marked with increasing age. For older people marital status plays a very important role in living conditions and well-being. In Myanmar, the majority of female elderly are widows, while their male counterparts are mainly married. Most widowed women live with family members, presumably their adult children. However, there is a small minority of elderly women who have never married and many of these women live alone in old age. There is a need to ensure that elderly women receive adequate support to ensure their well being in old age. Another group that is of special and growing concern is the elderly aged 75 and

over – the oldest age group. As noted in this monograph, while the majority of elderly are economically active, less than 15 % of the oldest age group was economically active at the time of 2001 FRHS. The majority of this age group was dependent on family members for their well-being.

Most of the elderly remain economically active well into old age, with 51.1% of those aged 60-64 still working. Levels of economic activity are higher in rural than in urban areas, and higher for males than females.

The tradition in Myanmar is that at least one adult child will remain resident with their parents to care for them as they age. The data presented in this monograph clearly indicate that this tradition is still very much in force. Analysis of the 2001 FRHS data shows that less than 10 % of the elderly were either living alone or only with their spouses and only 0.2 % are living with non-relatives. Almost 90 % were living with their adult children, and typically the households also contained other relatives such as grand children. Most elderly in Myanmar live in households with young children and hence are potentially a major source of childcare support for young families.

Although the strong norms and values related to care for the elderly that are held by the Myanmar people are clearly reflected in the living arrangements of the elderly and other quantitative indicators that are presented in this monograph, it is clear that both demographic and social economic change will place great stress on these values.

Conclusion

The findings of this research clearly indicate that the population of Myanmar is ageing. Features of this ageing are a shift in the distribution of the aged, with an increasing proportion of the aged being found in the oldest of the old age groups, an increasing proportion of the aged that are female are, increasing old age dependency ratios.

Population ageing and how population ageing is experienced by the elderly is related to other changes that are occurring in Myanmar socially.

Recommendations

The recommendations directed at both the government and other organizations are as follows:

- To provide and strengthening support for the elderly policies, strategies and programmers should be integrated into development planning.
- To find ways to preserve traditional family, norms and values related to care for the elderly.
- To strengthen inter generational ties in order to preserve the quality of the relationship between the elderly and younger members of the family.
- To encourage active participation of the elderly in community activities.
- To support employment opportunities that allows elderly workers to play a role in economic and social development.
- To promote a healthy life style.
- To carry out research on the age-specific impacts of socio-economic policies.

- To incorporate issues in data collection that is relevant to planning for the ageing population.
- To adapt demographic monitoring to ensure that sufficient information is made available to identify the levels, pace and composition of population ageing.
- To support research on elderly support systems.
- To support more research, both qualitative and quantitative, on the quality of life of the elderly.

Research Geographic Coverage by area

The data for the analysis presented in this study is drawn from the two censuses i.e. 1973 census and 1983 census. The 1973 census covered about 85.1 % of the total area of Myanmar and 97.1 % of the total population. The 1983 census covered 96.6% of the total population. The other sources of data are the surveys that have been implemented at the national level since 1973.

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