

Changing Intergenerational roles and population ageing in Sri Lanka

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The ageing of populations is an unavoidable and irreversible global phenomenon. Ageing in developed countries occurred gradually over a relatively long period of time, while ageing in developing countries including Sri Lanka has been more rapid. The ageing process has an important relationship with the changing nature, structure and the function of the family which has been occurring simultaneously in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan elderly have traditionally been almost totally dependent on family support, and a key policy question is whether the transition from traditional to modern family will change intergenerational relationships. The main objective of this paper is to explore the impact of changing intergenerational roles on population ageing in Sri Lanka. The study uses a mixed methodology based primarily on surveys of 300 elderly households and 150 control households and a wide range of quantitative and qualitative information. The study further showed that there was a shift in wealth transfers from parents to children during their life course in the modern family setting, where parents have become sole investors in their children's education and health. In contrast to the life course developments, the study further examined the current intergenerational transfers between elderly parents and their adult children. The current net transfers between elderly parents and adult children revealed that the elderly parents were mainly at the receiving end. Examination of net transfers by type of transfers revealed that the net financial transfers are upward from adult children to parents, but elderly who live in one generation families benefit more than their co-residing counterparts. The material net transfers are also upward from children to elderly parents but more for the co-residing parents compared to those who live in one generation families. The net social transfers (moral/emotional support) are also upward from adult children but more on co-residing parents. Although half of the elderly living in one generation families do not receive social support from their adult children, they receive more support from the community. On the other hand, detailed interviews showed that elderly parents are not just merely recipients of support, but in some instances provide significant support to their adult children. It was also observed that when the elderly have more capacity to support their adult children, they tend to receive more support from their adult children. The study also showed that the low level of well-being status of the elderly in Sri Lanka is constrained by the lack of pension schemes and other social protection facilities available for the elderly.

Key Words: Ageing, inter-generational transfers, living arrangements

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