

Ageing Population and Gender Issues in Asia-Pacific Region

¹ S. C. Jhansi (Ph. D.)* & ² Santosh Kumar Mishra (Ph. D.)

¹ Coordinator, Gujarat Research Society for Lifelong Learning, Dr. Madhuri Shah Campus, Ramkrishna Mission Road, Corner of 16th and 17th Road, Khar (W), Mumbai, 400052, Maharashtra, India.

² Technical Assistant, Population Education Resource Centre (PERC), Department of Continuing and Adult Education and Extension Work, S. N. D. T. Women's University, Patkar Hall Building, First Floor, Room. No.: 03, New Marine Lines, Mumbai - 400020, Maharashtra, India.

While the majority of the world's elderly population resides in the developing countries, the Asian and Pacific region is home to the largest number of older persons. Worldwide, the number of people aged 60 and over will increase from about 600 million in 2000 to almost 2000 million in 2050, of whom about half will reside in Asia. During the second half of the twentieth century, countries in Asia and the Pacific region have experienced unparalleled declines in mortality and fertility. The present paper examines the impact of the growth of the ageing population on women's well being. The challenges for setting gender-sensitive policies for women and the elderly are discussed in the context of Hong Kong and the Asia-Pacific region. Also, the contribution of the ESCAP and MIPAA in addressing gender issues in ageing population has been looked into. The paper concludes that in Asian societies, ageing issues are generating an active debate about gender, the family, the organization of the workplace, and the policy approaches to address these challenges. Given the fact that people over 65 will constitute close to one-quarter of the population in Asia by 2050, and over one-third of the population in Hong Kong by that time, more refined age grouping with sex-disaggregated data will provide a more useful data base for policy-makers and researchers. Further, the challenge of human service planning for the ageing population has highlighted the importance of mainstreaming gender from a life-cycle perspective in research, policy, and planning in the new millennium.

Key Words: Ageing population, gender issues, Asia-Pacific Region, demographic changes, life-cycle approach, and developed countries.

Introduction

Population ageing is defined as “the process by which older individuals make up a proportionally larger share of the total population over a period of time.” Population ageing has been a global issue since the early 1980's. While the majority of the world's elderly population resides in the developing countries, the Asian and Pacific region is home to the largest number of older persons. Worldwide, the number of people aged 60 and over will increase from about 600

*Corresponding Author. Email: drskmishrain@yahoo.com

million in 2000 to almost 2000 million in 2050, of whom about half will reside in Asia. During the second half of the twentieth century, countries in Asia and the Pacific region have experienced unparalleled declines in mortality and fertility. Consequently, the age structure of their populations is in rapid transition from 'young' to 'old', with some countries at different stages in this transition. Ageing is the final stage and inevitable consequence of this phenomenon. Gender analyses of the growing ageing population and decreasing support ratio illustrate specific concerns faced by women both as the elderly and as caregivers of the elderly. Women constitute the majority of the oldest old age group; they are more likely to lack financial support; they are more likely to be living with family members without their spouses, and cared for by female family members.

Gender analyses of the growing ageing population and decreasing support ratio illustrate specific concerns faced by women both as the elderly and as caregivers of the elderly. Women constitute the majority of the oldest old age group; they are more likely to lack financial support; they are more likely to be living with family members without their spouses, and cared for by female family members. A life-cycle approach is adopted to examine the impact of the growth of the ageing population on women's well being. Sex-disaggregated data and gender analyses are necessary tools for research and policies on ageing.

The present paper examines the impact of the growth of the ageing population on women's well being. The challenges for setting gender-sensitive policies for women and the elderly are discussed in the context of Hong Kong and the Asia-Pacific region. Also, the contribution of the ESCAP and MIPAA in addressing gender issues in ageing population has been looked into.

Population Ageing in the Asia-Pacific Region

The sources of population aging lie in two demographic phenomena: (a) *rising life expectancy*, and (b) *declining fertility*. An increase in longevity raises the average age of the population by raising the number of years that each person is old relative to number of years in which he is young. A decline in fertility increases the average age of the population by changing the balance of people born recently (the young) to people born further in the past (the old). Of these two forces, it is declining fertility that is the dominant contributor to population aging in the world today. More specifically, it is the large decline in the total fertility rate over the last half century that is primarily responsible for the population aging that is taking place in the world's most developed countries.

The Asia-Pacific region is most diverse in its population composition. The region houses probably the second oldest country in the world:

- *Japan*, with an elderly population of 23.2 per cent in 2000, and the biggest elderly population in absolute numbers; and
- *China*, with nearly 130 million older persons in the same year.

The other more developed countries in the region also have high percentages of the population aged 60+, ranging from 10 to 20 per cent. Such countries are:

- *Australia*,
- *Hong Kong*,
- *China*,

- *New Zealand*, and
- *Singapore*.

Developing countries like Sri Lanka and Malaysia have the percentage of elderly people as high as 10 or slightly over 10. In comparison, some South-east and South Asian countries, such as Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, are still youthful with lower proportions of older persons, around 5 to 7%. Despite this fact, most countries in the region will experience considerable growth in their elderly populations in the next few decades when the proportion of people aged 60+ will triple or quadruple to over 20 or 30 per cent. Table-1 shows the current and projected percentage of the elderly population of selected countries and areas in the region.

Growth of the Ageing Population

The world is entering substantially uncharted waters in terms of the size of its elderly populations. Between 2000 and 2050, the share of the population aged 60 and over is projected to increase in every country in the world; the same is true for the 80+ population in all but one country (Mali). Worldwide, the largest absolute increases are yet to come.

Table-1: Demographic profile of selected countries and areas in the Asia-Pacific region

	Country/ Area	Total Population in 2000 (million)	Aged 60+ in 2000 (%)	number	Aged 60+ in 2025 (%)	Aged 60+ in 2050 (%)
East Asia						
1	China	1,275.3	10.1	128,788,420	19.5	29.9
3	Japan	127.0	23.2	29,486,340	35.1	42.3
5	Mongolia	2.5	5.6	141,860	10.7	23.1
6	Rep. of Korea	46.7	11.0	5,141,410	24.1	33.2
South-East Asia						
7	Cambodia	13.1	4.4	576,580	6.7	11.7
8	Indonesia	212.0	7.6	16,118,990	12.8	22.3
10	Malaysia	22.2	6.6	1,466,420	13.4	20.8
11	Myanmar	47.7	6.8	3,246,930	12.1	21.6
12	Philippines	75.6	5.5	4,160,930	10.4	19.5
13	Singapore	4.0	10.6	425,920	30.0	35.0
14	Thailand	62.8	8.1	5,087,250	17.1	27.1
15	Viet Nam	78.1	7.5	5,860,270	12.6	23.5
South and West Asia						
16	Bangladesh	137.4	4.9	6,734,530	8.4	16.0
17	India	1,008.9	7.6	76,679,240	12.5	20.6
18	Iran	70.3	5.2	3,657,160	10.5	21.7
19	Maldives	0.2	5.3	15,423	6.2	12.1

20	Nepal	23.0	5.9	1,359,520	7.1	12.4
21	Pakistan	141.2	5.8	8,192,860	7.3	12.4
22	Sri Lanka	18.9	9.3	1,759,900	18.0	27.6
23	Turkey	66.6	8.4	5,600,110	14.2	23.0
The Pacific						
26	Australia	19.1	16.3	3,119,430	24.8	28.2
27	New Zealand	3.7	15.6	589,370	25.4	29.3
28	Papua New Guinea	4.8	4.1	197,180	6.5	12.1

Source: *World Population Ageing 1950 – 2050*, Population Division, DESA, United Nations, 2002.

Declines in mortality at younger ages, medical advances, and better health care have resulted in longer life expectancy in both the developing and the developed world. At the same time, birth control has reduced the size of the younger population. These achievements in the 20th century have changed the world's demographic proportions. These demographic changes also pose as one of the key challenges in social policies and human services in the 21st century.

Statistics compiled by the United Nations show that in 1999, 10% of the world population was 60 years and older. By 2050, this percentage will rise to 22% (United Nations Population Division, 1999). In Asia, the corresponding proportion of the population aged 60 and over is 9% in 1999, and 24% in 2050. In China, the proportion is 10% in 1999, and 30% in 2050. In Hong Kong, the proportion of elderly is even higher: 14% in 1999, and an estimated 40% in 2050, the highest in Asia. Table-2 presents the proportions of aged population in the Asia-Pacific region.

Table-2: Proportion of ageing population in Asia in 1999 and 2050

Country or Area	% Total Population aged 60 & over in 1999	% Total Population aged 60 & over in 2050	% Ageing Population aged 80 & over in 1999	% Ageing Population aged 80 & over in 2050
Asia	9	24	9	18
China	10	30	10	23
Hong Kong	14	40	14	31
Japan	23	38	16	31
Macau	9	35	14	32
S. Korea	10	30	8	24
Cambodia	5	14	7	11
Indonesia	7	22	7	15
Malaysia	6	21	9	18
Philippines	6	20	9	14
Singapore	10	31	13	36
Thailand	8	30	10	21
Vietnam	7	23	10	17

Source: United Nations Population Division (1999). *Population Ageing 1999*. NY: UN publications.

The increased life expectancy enjoyed by the world population also means that the life span beyond age 60 is much longer than demographers have previously envisaged. Most census statistics categorize the elderly population in one age group: that of age 60-65 and over. A large proportion of the population remains economically active beyond age 60. A large proportion of the population also lives beyond age 80. In many Asian countries, the statutory retirement age is 60 or 55.

In Hong Kong, males may expect to live another 20 years and females another 24 years at age 60. These demographic changes mean that the undifferentiated grouping in census statistics would limit the usefulness of these figures. The activity level, care demand, and health needs of people in their 60s, 70s, and 80s and beyond are varied.

The elderly population could be further differentiated into the modest old (age 60 to 79) and the oldest old (80 and over) (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2000). In 1999, 9% of the elderly population (over age 60) is aged 80 and over; in 2050, this proportion is expected to rise to 18%. In China, the corresponding proportions are 9% in 1999 and 23% in 2050. In Hong Kong, they are 14% in 1999 and estimated to be 31% in 2050 (Table-1).

The potential support for the elderly population comes from the economically active population. The potential support ratio is calculated on the basis of the proportion of the population aged between 15 and 64 to that aged 65 and over. With the decreasing fertility in Asia, this ratio will decrease from 11 in 1999 to 4 in 2050. In China, the ratio will drop from 10 to 3; in Hong Kong, the ratio will drop from 7 to 2.

Gender Composition of the Ageing Population:

Sex – disaggregated data will highlight the differential implications of ageing for men and women. Except for countries in which women suffer from severe forms of discrimination, women worldwide have a higher life expectancy than men. This means that women will form the majority of the elderly population, especially in the oldest old age group. The female to male ratio of the world population in year 2000 is 1.1 for the 60-69 age group, with:

- 1.3 for the 70-79 age group,
- 1.8 for the 80-89 age group,
- 2.9 for the 90-99 age group, and
- 4.0 for the centenarians.

(Source: United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2000.)

In Asia, women constitute 53% of the population aged 60 and above and 62% of the population aged 80 and above in 1999. In China, 52% of the population aged 60 and 65% of the population aged 80 are women; in Hong Kong, the corresponding figures are 51% and 63% respectively (Table 3).

Table – 3: Demographic characteristics of the ageing population in Asia

Country or Area	% Currently Married Men/Women aged 60 & over	% Men/Women aged 60 & over in labour force in 1995	Women as % of population aged 60 & over in 1999	Women as % of population aged 80 & over in 1999
Asia	78/44	51/19	53	62
China	73/48	42/14	52	65
Hong Kong SAR	82/50	--	51	63
Japan	86/51	49/21	56	67
Macau	--	--	56	67
S. Korea	87/37	46/25	59	74
Brunei Darussalam	83/50	50/0	50	53
Cambodia	--	51/38	64	59
Indonesia	84/36	62/32	54	58
Malaysia	84/44	47/21	53	56
Philippines	81/49	67/35	53	58
Singapore	83/45	27/7	53	62
Thailand	80/47	50/27	55	63
Vietnam	84/45	53/32	59	72

Source: United Nations Population Division (1999). *Population Ageing 1999*. NY: UN publications.

Gender Dimensions in Quality of Ageing

Longevity does not directly imply higher status for women. Life expectancy has to be considered in conjunction with the quality of life. These demographic patterns of ageing show that the elderly woman is likely to be widowed or single, and would be economically dependent. Women's lifetime overall labour force participation rate worldwide is lower than that of men especially after marriage. A high proportion of women leave the paid labour force after marriage and childbirth; more of them are employed on a part-time basis; they predominate in the informal sector.

Further, for women who remain in the labour force, they face an earlier statutory retirement age than men do in many countries. As a result, their lifetime earnings are substantially lower than those of men. They do not receive the benefits of pension schemes or provident funds, which are tied to paid employment.

Box-1: Ageing Population, World and Asia-Pacific Region-Key Facts

- **World:**

- The world's population aged 60 years and over stands at 759 million, representing 11 per cent of the total population (2010)
- By 2050, it is anticipated that the world's population aged 60 years and over will have passed the 1 billion mark, representing 15 per cent of the total population

- **Asia-Pacific:**

- Asia and the Pacific is currently home to 55 per cent of the world's elderly population (2010)
- By 2050, Asia and the Pacific will be home to 62 per cent of the world's elderly population
- By 2050, one in four people in our region will be aged 60 years and over

Source: <http://www.unescap.org/sdd/issues/ageing/ageing.asp>, Accessed on October 24, 2011.

With the overall labour force participation rate of 48% among women in Hong Kong (Census & Statistics Department, 1996), the proportion of elderly women facing financial hardship will be substantial. At present, the elderly people constitute almost 60% of all recipients of the social security assistance scheme from the government. Women are the majority recipients in this category. The difference in the gender ratio of welfare recipients increases with advancing age, with women constituting 70% of those recipients aged 80 or above. The proportion of elderly women who have to rely on social security assistance is a trend that needs to be monitored.

Furthermore, in many traditional societies, women have limited access to rights of inheritance or property ownership. Thus, they would need to depend on the family or the state for financial support and living arrangements. In Asia and the developing countries where family values are strong and government funding is limited, elderly support and services are still largely dependent on the family. Reduced government spending is shifting care back to the family. Only a small proportion of the elderly population lives in institutions. In China, multi-generation households are the major living arrangements for the elderly. Unlike old people in more developed Western countries, the proportion of Chinese old people living alone is much lower:

- 8.0% and 10.2% for the modest old men and women, and
- 13.2% and 15.2% for the oldest old men and women.

The limited facilities available for institutional care also account for the extremely low proportion of institutionalized elderly (less than 2% for the extremely old men and 1.1% for women). For Chinese elderly women, their lower social and economic status is one of the explanations cited for their even more limited access to long-term care facilities.

Asian family values have been revered as a celebrated cause for family care. However, co – residency of family members per se does not indicate the types of support or care received by the elderly person. There is little research or data on the types of physical, emotional, and economic care transferred between family members. There is often an assumption that living with family members will serve the needs of the elderly persons. Little is known about the preferences of the elderly people in terms of:

- *their living arrangements,*
- *the mutual benefits to both generations, and*
- *the extent of elderly abuse in these co-residency situations.*

Violence against elderly women is a topic that is receiving increasing attention in the field of domestic violence. Quality of life of the elderly people is closely related to their health. The health status of the elderly population is an area that lacks reliable and internationally comparable data (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2000). The conventional categorization of old age means that persons over age 65 are excluded in many large-scale studies on physical and mental health. Even when epidemiological studies are available, the rates of various health problems for elderly men and women need to be viewed in context given the multiplicity of pathological conditions in old age and the gender differential life expectancies. Health at older age is also linked to lifelong health. In countries where women are being discriminated, older women's health status would be traced to the disadvantages they confront from early life, including:

- *inadequate nutrition and education,*
- *poorer maternity protection, and*
- *less access to health care.*

It has been shown that marital status is an important determinant of health for the elderly person. Married people's longevity may result from pre – selection, protection, or greater financial security (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2000). Unmarried older women are more likely to live in poverty, and are more vulnerable to risks especially in countries where there is inadequate formal support system. On the other hand, it has been shown in a longitudinal study on ageing in Beijing that intergenerational social support is related to the psychological well-being of older Chinese parents. Intergenerational exchanges of social support include providing instrumental support to children, not just receiving support from children. These exchanges of social support and satisfaction with children have positive effects on the morale of the older parents.

A Life-Cycle Approach to Gender and Ageing

Gender issues in lifelong health shows that the physical, mental and social status of men and women in old age is rooted in the gender context throughout their lives. Starting from the prenatal period, childhood, puberty, adulthood, and through later life, females and males are exposed to different experiences in life on the ground of their gender. Access to social resources and vulnerability to risks are influenced by cultural factors such as low valuation of girls and women as compared to that of boys and men.

“Discrimination against women and discrimination against the elderly are a double jeopardy to the elderly women”. The growth of the ageing population, and in particular, the increase in the number of widows and older single women, is one of the new challenges affecting the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, that was adopted by over 180 governments worldwide in 1995 to advance the status of women (Commission on the Status of Women, 2000). In the five - year review of the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women, women and ageing is highlighted as a cross - cutting issue for the original 12 critical areas of concern in the Platform for Action, including:

- *poverty,*
- *economy,*
- *health,*
- *violence against women,*
- *environment, and*
- *institutional mechanism for the advancement of women.*

These critical areas of concern are interrelated and have impact on the rights and status of women in old age. The gender dimension of ageing is not only restricted to the elderly population, but has differential implications on the life cycle of women and men. Programmes for the elderly may create, maintain or reinforce those gender roles and relations that are detrimental to the well-being and status of women. For example, family care for the dependent elderly person affects women and men differently. Especially in Asia, women are the predominant providers of informal care. The economic contributions of these caregivers are unrecognized, unrewarded, and neglected by society, perpetuating the life cycle of disadvantage to women.

With the increasing labour force participation of women on the other hand, there are conflicting demands and stress placed on women at mid-life. Many middle-aged women bear the triple burden of:

- *childcare,*
- *elderly care, and*
- *personal careers.*

The bulk of domestic and emotional labour still falls on the shoulders of women, irrespective of their employment status. Instead of re-examining whether the traditional form of sexual division of domestic labour is still appropriate in the new millennium, women are thrust into a “no-win situation”. Career-oriented women bear the guilt and blame for neglecting their family, even though their employment contributes to the economy of the family and the society. Women who try to balance employment with family responsibilities face the risk of discrimination at work. Women who stay home to take care of the family put themselves in an economically dependent situation and face financial risks in old age.

Challenges and Opportunities

The population of the Asia-Pacific region is rising at an unprecedented pace. It is estimated that the number of older persons in the region will triple from 419 million in 2010 to more than 1.2 billion by 2050. By this time, one in four people in the region will be over 60 years old. This transition will be more pronounced in East and North-East Asia, where more than one in three people will be older than 60 years by 2050. This demographic transformation is unmatched in scale anywhere else in the world.

Such a rapid increase in the population of older persons has deep social, economic and political implications. Rural-to-urban migration and changing family structures have left many older persons without traditional means of support. A large number of older persons in the region have to no secure source of income due to a lack of social protection. Most countries’ health systems cannot meet the needs of older persons. *In addition*, there is rising demand for

'age-friendly' and *'barrier-free'* environments so that older persons can enjoy continued freedom of movement and can actively participate in society.

The feminization of the ageing population is notable, with women constituting the majority of the older population and an even greater majority of the "*oldest old*" population (80 years and older). Older women, more so than older men, tend to live alone due to the death of a spouse. Older women are also more vulnerable to poverty and social isolation, and face greater risks of physical and psychological abuse due to discriminatory social attitudes. It is, thus, critically important to address the gender dimension of population ageing.

Population ageing presents not just challenges, but also opportunities. Older persons play crucial roles in supporting families and communities. Whether through giving such support or through directly engaging in economic activity, older persons also contribute to the economic well-being of society. Home to the largest proportion of the world's population of older persons, the Asia-Pacific region should lead the way in:

- a) *recognizing the role of older persons, and*
- b) *promoting their full participation in the development process.*

Implications for Policy and Research

The rapid growth of the ageing population in the 21st century is a major concern in human service planning. International experts in population and development have recognized the fundamental relationship among population, gender and development. A comprehensive policy on ageing requires the compilation of sex-disaggregated data and the use of gender analyses to provide a gender perspective in policy formulation and programme implementation. Given the predominance of women in the ageing population, gender-sensitive policies and programmes are needed to address the specific concerns of elderly women. In Asian societies, ageing issues are generating an active debate about gender, the family, the organization of the workplace, and the policy approaches to address these challenges.

Current census reports have lagged behind the demographic changes in the ageing population. The older age groups are undifferentiated after age 65 in most census data. Research studies usually restrict their target respondents to those under the age of 65. Given the fact that people over 65 will constitute close to one-quarter of the population in Asia by 2050, and over one-third of the population in Hong Kong by that time, more refined age grouping with sex-disaggregated data will provide a more useful data base for policy-makers and researchers. Use of sex-disaggregated data in research will lead to very different conclusions in policies, especially when there are substantial sex differences.

Gender analyses will identify the potential contributions and specific needs of elderly women and men in terms of:

- *economic security,*
- *living arrangements, health and well-being, as well as*
- *active participation in the community.*

Gender analyses can also be used to evaluate the differential impact of policies and programmes on women and men. A life-cycle approach to gender analyses will provide a comprehensive perspective for interrelated policies on human services. For example, the benefits

of intergenerational exchanges in family care are not restricted to care of the elderly, but also childcare options for the younger couples.

Contribution of the ESCAP AND MIPAA:

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is the regional development arm of the United Nations for the Asia-Pacific region. Established in the year 1947, with its headquarters in Bangkok, Thailand, the ESCAP seeks to overcome some of the region's greatest challenges. It also serves as the "*inter-governmental platform*" in Asia and the Pacific to strengthen regional cooperation and enhance government capacity to design and implement policies that empower and protect older persons.

The ESCAP's programme on ageing focuses on:

- *Serving as an intergovernmental platform to:*
 - *Develop* regional response to the demographic transition
 - *Share* knowledge and good practices in addressing population ageing challenges
 - *Promote* the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, identify gaps and regional priorities
- *Providing technical assistance to Governments to:*
 - *Design* and implement policies/programmes that empower and protect older persons
 - *Review* and appraise the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing

Furthermore, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) was adopted at the United Nations Second World Assembly on Ageing held in Madrid in 2002. Subsequently, the General Assembly endorsed the Plan on December 2002 during its 57th session. The Second World Assembly on Ageing brought together delegates from more than 160 Governments, intergovernmental institutions and NGOs to respond to the opportunities and challenges of population ageing.

The Plan responds to the opportunities and challenges of population ageing and promotes the development of a society for all ages. It calls on Governments to integrate the rights and needs of older persons into national and international, economic and social development policies. The aim is "*to ensure that persons everywhere are able to age with security and dignity and to continue to participate in their societies as citizens with full rights*".

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing is a practical tool to assist policymakers to focus on the key priorities associated with population ageing. It addresses a wide range of issues with implications for the lives of older people around the world, including:

- *social protection,*
- *health,*
- *urbanization,*
- *labour,*
- *education,*
- *nutrition,*
- *training of carers,*
- *housing,*
- *infrastructure, and*
- *images of ageing.*

The three priority directions outlined in the Plan are:

- o *Older persons and development,*
- o *Advancing health and well-being into old age, and*
- o *Ensuring enabling and supportive environments.*

Specific recommendations designed to be adapted to the circumstances in each country are included. The Plan recognizes the many different stages of development and the transitions that are taking place in various regions, as well as the interdependence of all countries in a globalizing world.

Policy Priorities

A national strategy on how to meet the challenges of aging is essential to ensure that the goal of having an active older population is achieved by developing coordinated national and local policies and practices in a range of welfare, health and economic sub-fields. As mentioned, the Madrid Plan identifies three priorities for international efforts. What ESCAP did in formulating the Shanghai Implementation Strategy was to adapt these priorities for Asia with reference to special considerations such as economic and political diversity, geographical barriers to service accessibility, and social and cultural diversity, including differences in language.

Concluding Observations

In view of the growing ageing population, governments in the Asia-Pacific region are beginning to address the needs of the elderly population in more focused policies. In Hong Kong, for instance, an Elderly Commission was set up in the year 1998 in order to:

- *advise the government on the formulation of a comprehensive policy for the elderly,*
- *coordinate the planning and development, and*
- *monitor the implementation of programmes and services for the elderly.*

Ensuring financial security for the elderly is considered fundamental to achieving the policy objective of caring for the elderly. However, no alternative scheme is planned for ensuring the financial security of women who contribute to the economy in the informal sector or as 'homemakers'. Further, in the area of "family care", providing the necessary community care and support services is an important policy that will facilitate the family to take up the care-giving role. In addition to providing more day care and home services to the elderly in need, some national governments are reviewing the mode of provision of home help service and the introduction of day respite services as forms of support to families caring for their elderly members. *On the other hand*, initiatives to encourage the elderly to lead an active life have remained in the traditional models of social welfare that engage the elderly person in social and recreational activities or in voluntary social services. The vast potential of the human talents from different groups of the elderly population could be looked upon as resources for both the family and the community. For example, the possible contributions of active elderly parents to childcare within the family as well as in the community could be:

- a) *explored,*
- b) *organized, and*
- c) *promoted.*

Most importantly, long-term planning for future ageing population needs to take into account not only the current needs and potentials of elderly persons, but also the situation of different cohorts of the population who will become the elderly in the future. A life-cycle approach to gender analysis will provide a comprehensive perspective to gender-sensitive planning for the ageing population.

There was an awakening to the gender perspective in the social sciences at the end of the 20th century. The gender deconstruction of social research and policies has raised the sensitivity of social scientists to the differential interpretation of data and outcome. With rapid changes in gender roles and relations in the last century, the cultural lag in gender attitudes and beliefs has to catch up with the social reality. *To sum up*, the challenge of human service planning for the ageing population has highlighted the importance of mainstreaming gender from a life-cycle perspective in research, policy, and planning in the new millennium. The Asia-Pacific region needs strengthened policy measures and social and economic adjustments in preparation for the region's rapid transition to an ageing society.

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