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Global Ageing Trends: A Sociological Perspective

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A B S T R A C T

The aging of the population presents an immense challenge and constraints for the developing as well as developed countries. Ageing is the wedge of life characterized by growing old and one of the most momentous trends which has important and far-reaching implications for all aspects of society. Population ageing also presents social, economic and cultural challenges to individuals, families, societies and the global community. The present review is an endeavor to highlight the demographic phenomenon of graying from global perspective including both developed and developing societies. Population aging is a global issue that is affecting almost every country around the world. Changes in age structure are driven primarily by the decline in birth and death rates that characterize the demographic transition.

A Prologue of Ageing

The concept of age has become more complicated because life expectancy has increased and people at each age have had progressively more remaining years of life. As people modified their behavior to reflect these changes, 40-year-olds began to act more like 30-year-olds had acted in the past (Warren Sanderson and Sergei Scherbov, 2008).

The world is entering largely unfamiliar territory with respect to population aging.

Combined with the dynamic evolution of past variations in birth and death rates, recent declines in fertility rates and increases in life expectancy are causing a significant shift in the global age structure. The elderly are not only growing rapidly in absolute numbers, but have also become substantially healthier. In a phenomenon referred to by demographers and health specialists as the “compression of morbidity”, the length of healthy old-age appears to be increasing. Part of this trend

can be attributed to increases in the length of life, and part to shorter and later periods of illness. The net effect is an increase in number of years lived at old age without major health problems.

The world's population is ageing more rapidly than at any time in history. According to United Nations Population Division (UNPD) data, humanity's median age, after decades of very little change, has climbed by five years in the last 20, to an expected 29.1 years in 2010. The next two decades are likely to see a similar increase. In the oldest society, Japan, the median age is already nearly 45. To put this into perspective, until about 1840 even the best-off demographic groups in the world had lower life expectancies than Japan's current average.

The other driver of ageing within societies is the higher number of people reaching old age. For most of this decade, humanity as a whole has fit the United Nations definition of an ageing society-one in which more than 7% of the population is over the age of 65. In absolute numbers, as the UNPD demographers put it starkly at the beginning of this decade, "the number of older persons has tripled over the last 50 years; it will more than triple again over the next 50 years" (World Population Ageing: 1950-2050, 2002).

The population of all countries will continue to age substantially. For example, the median age of the world will rise from 28 years today to 38 years in 2050. As already noted the number of persons aged 60 years or over will rise from 10 per cent of the world population today to 22 per cent in 2050. The percentage aged 80 years or over will rise from just 1 per cent today to 4 per cent in 2050 (Population Challenges and Development Goals", 2005).

Ageing a global Trend

Population ageing-the process whereby older individuals account for a proportionally larger share of the total population-was a key demographic outcome of population trends during the twentieth century and will surely be the distinctive trait of populations during the twenty-first century. Starting first in the more developed countries, population ageing has now become apparent in much of the developing world and it will affect virtually all countries over the medium-term, although its intensity will vary considerably among countries (World Population Ageing, 2009).

The Demographic Revolution Worldwide, the proportion of people age 60 and over is growing faster than any other age group. Between 1970 and 2025, a growth in older persons of some 694 million or 223 percent is expected. In 2025, there will be a total of about 1.2 billion people over the age of 60. By 2050 there will be 2 billion with 80 percent of them

Age composition - that is, the proportionate numbers of children, young adults, middle aged adults and older adults in any given country - is an important element for policymakers to take into account. Population ageing refers to a decline in the proportion of children and young people and an increase in the proportion of people age 60 and over. Decreasing fertility rates and increasing longevity will ensure the continued "greying" of the world's population, despite setbacks in life expectancy in some African countries and in some newly independent states (due to increased deaths caused by cardiovascular disease and violence). Sharp decreases in fertility rates are being observed throughout the world. It is estimated that by 2025, 120

countries will have reached total fertility rates below replacement level (average fertility rate of 2.1 children per woman), a substantial increase compared to 1975, when just 22 countries had a total fertility rate below or equal to the replacement level.

Until now, population ageing has been mostly associated with the more developed regions of the world. For example, currently nine of the ten countries with more than ten million inhabitants and the largest proportion of older people are in Europe (see Table 1). Little change in the ranking is expected by 2025 when people age 60 and over will make up about one-third of the population in countries like Japan, Germany and Italy, closely followed by other European countries (see Table 1).

What is less known is the speed and significance of population ageing in less developed regions. Already, older people - around 70 percent - live in developing countries (see Table 2). These numbers will continue to rise at a rapid pace. In all countries, especially in developed ones, the older population itself is also ageing. People over the age of 80 currently number some 69 million, the majority of whom live in more developed regions. Although people over the age of 80 make up about one percent of the world's population and three percent of the population in developed regions, this age group is the fastest growing segment of the older population.

In both developed and developing countries, the ageing of the population raises concerns about whether or not a shrinking labour force will be able to support that part of the population who are commonly believed to be dependent on others (i.e., children and older people).

The old age dependency ratio (i.e., the total population age 60 and over divided by the population age 15 to 60 - see Table 2) is primarily used by economists and actuaries who forecast the financial implications of pension policies. However, it is also useful for those concerned with the management and planning of caring services.

However, most of the older people in all countries continue to be a vital resource to their families and communities. Many continue to work in both the formal and informal labour sectors. Thus, as an indicator for forecasting population needs, the dependency ratio is of limited use. More sophisticated indices are needed to more accurately reflect "dependency", rather than falsely categorizing individuals that continue to be fully able and independent.

Rapid Population Ageing in Developing Countries

In 2002, almost 400 million people aged 60 and over lived in the developing world. By 2025, this will have increased to approximately 840 million representing 70 percent of all older people worldwide. (see Figure 2). In terms of regions, over half of the world's older people live in Asia. Asia's share of the world's oldest people will continue to increase the most while Europe's share as a proportion of the global older population will decrease the most over the next two decades (see Figure 2).

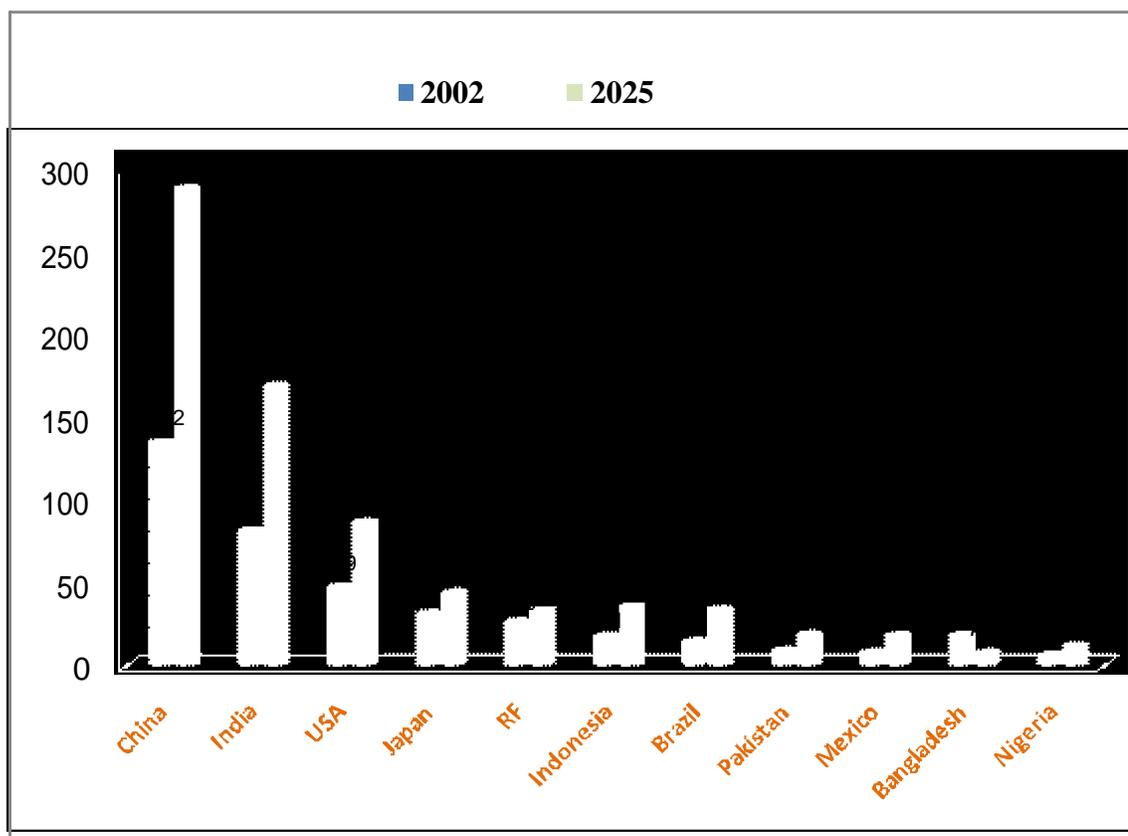
Compared to the developed world, socioeconomic development in developing countries has often not kept pace with the rapid speed of population ageing. For

Table.1 Countries with more than 10 million inhabitants (in 2002) with the highest proportion of persons above age 60

2002		2025	
Italy	24.5%	Japan	35.1%
Japan	24.3%	Italy	34.0%
Germany	24.0%	Germany	33.2%
Greece	23.9%	Greece	31.6%
Belgium	22.3%	Spain	31.4%
Spain	22.1%	Belgium	31.2%
Portugal	21.1%	United Kingdom	29.4%
United Kingdom	20.8%	Netherlands	29.4%
Ukraine	20.7%	France	28.7%
France	20.5%	Canada	27.9%

(Source: UN, 2001)

Figure.1 Absolute number of persons (in millions) above 60 year of age in countries with a total population approaching or above 100 million inhabitants (in 2002)



(Source: UN, 2001)

USA United States of America

RF Russian Federation

example, while it took 115 years for the proportion of older people in France to double from 7 to 14 percent, it will take China only 27 years to achieve the same increase. In most of the developed world, population ageing was a gradual process following steady socioeconomic growth over several decades and generations. In developing countries, the process is being compressed into two or three decades. Thus, while developed countries grew affluent before they became old, developing countries are getting old before a substantial increase in wealth occurs (Kalache and Keller, 2000).

Rapid ageing in developing countries is accompanied by dramatic changes in family structures and roles, as well as in labour patterns and migration. Urbanization, the migration of young people to cities in search of jobs, smaller families and more women entering the formal workforce mean that fewer people are available to care for older people when they need assistance (Active Ageing A Policy Framework, 2002).

China and India already have the largest and second-largest elderly populations in the world. As the long-term demographic impact of China's one-child policy kicks in, the proportion of Chinese over 65 will grow from around 8% in 2009 to nearly 16% by 2030.

On the one hand, this is old news. Life expectancy-as measured by the highest national figure for females (consistently the longer-lived gender)-has been going up in almost a straight line of three months per year since 1840. Global average life expectancy has also been climbing rapidly. Fertility rates have also been falling for many years: indeed, analysts speak of a "demographic transition" where as

developing countries grow wealthier the average number of children predictably decreases (Healthcare strategies for an ageing society, 2009).

The majority of older persons are women, as life expectancy for women is higher than that for men. In 2005, there were 67 million more women than men aged 60 years or over and, at the oldest ages (80 years or above), there were almost twice as many women as men (figure III). The declines in fertility reinforced by increasing longevity have produced and will continue to produce unprecedented changes in the age structure of all societies, notably the historic reversal in the proportions of young and older persons. The profound, pervasive and enduring consequences of population ageing present opportunities as well as challenges for all societies.

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Youth and Aged

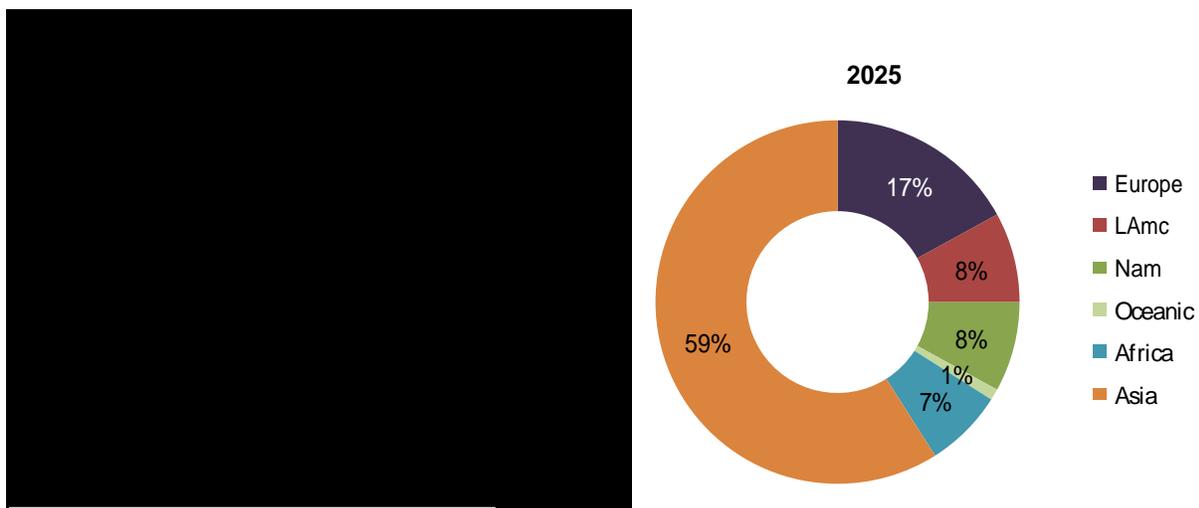
Population Since the beginning of recorded human history, young children have outnumbered older people. Very soon this will change. For the first time in history, people age 65 and over will outnumber children under age 5 (Figure 3). This trend is emerging around the globe. Today almost 500 million people are age 65 and over, accounting for 8 percent of the world's population.

Table.2 Old age dependency ratio for selected countries/regions

2002		2025	
Japan	0.39	Japan	0.66
North America	0.26	North America	0.44
European Union	0.36	European Union	0.56

(Source: UN, 2001)

Figure.2 Distribution of world Population over age 60 by region



Nam:North America

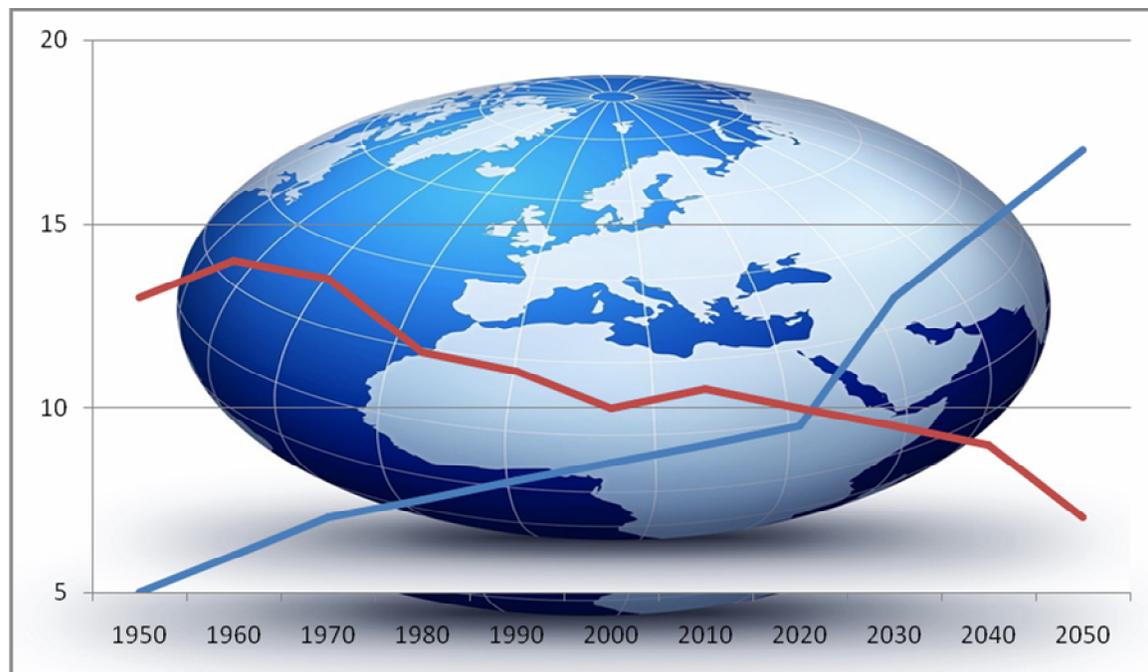
LAmc:Latin America and the Caribbean

(Source:UN,2001)

By 2030 the world is likely to have 1 billion older people, accounting for 13 percent of the total population. While today's proportions of older people typically are highest in more developed countries, the most rapid increases in older populations are occurring in the less developed world. Between 2006 and 2030, the number of older people in less developed countries is projected to increase by 140 percent as compared to an increase of 51 percent in more developed countries. Population aging is driven by declines in

fertility and improvements in health and longevity. In more developed countries, declines in fertility that began in the early 1900s have resulted in current fertility levels below the population replacement rate of two live births per woman. Perhaps the most surprising demographic development of the past 20 years has been the pace of fertility decline in many less developed countries. In 2006, for example, the total fertility rate was at or below the replacement rate in 44 less developed countries.

Figure.3 Young Children and Older People as a Percentage of Global Population



(Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. World Population Prospects. The 2004 Revision. New York: United Nations, 2005)

Most of the more developed nations have had decades to adjust to this change in age structure (Figure 2). For example, it took more than a century for France's population age 65 and over to increase from 7 to 14 percent of the total population. In contrast, many less developed countries are experiencing rapid increases in the number and percentage of older people, often within a single generation. The same demographic aging process that unfolded over more than a century in France will occur in two decades in Brazil. In response to this "compression of aging," institutions must adapt quickly to accommodate a new age structure. Some less developed nations will be forced to confront issues, such as social support and the allocation of resources across generations, without the accompanying economic growth that

characterized the experience of aging societies in the West. In other words, some countries may grow old before they grow rich (Why Population Aging Matters Global Perspective, 2007).

Rising Numbers of the Oldest Old

An important feature of population aging is the progressive aging of the older population itself. Over time, older people survive to even more advanced ages. For research and policy purposes, it is useful to distinguish between the old and the oldest old, often defined as people age 85 and over. Because of chronic disease, the oldest old have the highest population levels of disability that require long term care. They consume public resources disproportionately as well.

Table.3 The speed of Population Aging Number of years for population age 65 + to increase from 7 % to 14%

Developed countries	
France (18651980)	115
Sweden (18901975)	85
Austarlia (19382011)	73
US (19442013)	69
Canada (19442009)	65
Hungary (19411994)	53
Poland (19662013)	47
UK (19301975)	45
Spain (19471992)	45
Japan (19761996)	26
Developing Countries	
Azerbaijan (20002041)	41
Chile (19982025)	27
China (20002026)	26
Jamaica (20082033)	25
Tunisia (20082032)	24
Srilanka (20042027)	23
Thialand (20032025)	22
Brazil (20112032)	21
Colombia (20172037)	20
Singapore (20002019)	19

Source Kinsella K, Gist Y. Older Workers, Retirement, and Pensions. A Comparative International Chartbook. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. National Institute on Aging, 1995; and U.S. Census Bureau. International Data Base.

The growth of the oldest old population has a number of implications:

Pensions and retirement income will need to cover a longer period of life.

Health care costs will rise even if disability rates decline somewhat.

Intergenerational relationships will take on an added dimension as the number of grandparents and great grandparents increase.

The number of centenarians will grow significantly for the first time in history. This will likely yield clues about individual and societal aging that redefine the concept of oldest old.

The oldest old constitute 7 percent of the world's 65 and over population: 10 percent in more developed countries and 5 percent in less developed countries. More than half of the world's oldest old live in six countries: China, the United States, India,

Japan, Germany, and Russia. In many countries, the oldest old are now the fastest growing portion of the total population. On a global level, the 85andover population is and a 21percent increase for the population under age 65 (Figure 5). Past population projections often underestimated decreases in mortality rates among the oldest old; therefore, the number of tomorrow's oldest old may be significantly higher than anticipated.

The percentage of oldest old will vary considerably from country to country. In the United States, for example, the oldest old accounted for 14 percent of all older people in 2005. By 2030, this percentage is unlikely to change because the aging baby boom generation will continue to enter the ranks of the 65andover population. In Europe, some countries will experience a sustained rise in their share of oldest old while others will see an increase during the next two decades and then a subsequent decline. The most striking increase will occur in Japan: By 2030, nearly 24 percent of all older Japanese are expected to be at least 85 years old. Most less developed countries should experience modest long term increases in their 85andover population.

As life expectancy increases and the oldest old increase in number, four generation families become more common. The aging of the baby boom generation, for example, is likely to produce a great grandparent boom. As a result, some working adults will feel the financial and emotional pressures of supporting both their children and older parents and possibly grandparents simultaneously.

While people of extreme old age that is, centenarians constitute a small portion of the total population in most countries, their

projected to increase 151 percent between 2005 and 2030, compared to a 104percent increase for the population age 65 and over

numbers are growing. The estimated number of people age 100 and over has doubled each decade since 1950 in more developed countries. In addition, the global number of centenarians is projected to more than quintuple between 2005 and 2030. Some researchers estimate that, over the course of human history, the odds of living from birth to age 100 may have risen from 1 in 20 million to 1 in 50 for females in low mortality nations such as Japan and Sweden.

Conclusion

The word "Ageing" does not give a good benevolent to most of us because of problems and complications associated with ageing. Most of the world's populations are aging, this partly reflects the very welcome increase in life expectancy as a result of higher living standards and the progress of medical science. As we enter the process of globalization, ageing will put increased economic and social demands on all countries embracing developing as well as developed, as the process of graying is an intricate part of the life cycle.

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