

# Population Ageing: Looking Through Gender Lens from the Perspectives of Developed and Developing Economies

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## INTRODUCTION

Population Ageing, the inescapable upshot of demographic transition, has emerged as a development challenge, invariably faced by developed and developing economies. In fact, it is the shift towards higher age structures and consequent concentration of aged population<sup>1</sup>. (Peterson, Peter, 2001). Policy makers and social engineers increasingly understand that the population pyramids are becoming heavier and heavier at the top and that there are fewer and fewer adults of working age at the base to support the older generations. The concentration of old aged population in the society is bound to create profound impact on several aspects of the economy and polity. Hence, this phenomenon has been the focus of academics and the flow of literature show no signs of abating. The increasing demand for health care facilities, extension of pension and other social security networks, provision of literacy and employment opportunities, caring of the aged by providing alternative support systems as well as strengthening the existing familial support systems were the angles from which economists, anthropologists and policy makers address this issue. (Walker, 1990: Hoyert, 1991: Wolf, 1994: Pollard, 1995: de Jong –Gierveld and van Solinge, 1995: Higuchi, 1996: Baldacci and Lugaesi, 1997 : Barai, 1997: Crimmins, 1997: Chaney 1998: Creedy, 1998: Jackson, 1998: United Nations, 1998: Cliquet and Nizamuddin, 1999: : Bravo, 1999: United Nations, 1999: Gruber and Wise, 1999). However, a gender lenses to look at this issue is the missing focus in these series of attempts. But, Population ageing, in its basic demographic aspects, is hardly gender neutral. ( Mirking and Weinberger, 2002) Hardly much research attention has been paid to women experiencing midlife and old age, even by ardent feminist writers though available anthropological and ethnological reports confirm that women live longer and head multigenerational households with more resilience and independence, than expected and they enjoy freedoms that are reserved for men and women with elderly status ( Chaney, 1998). This paper is an attempt in this regard. This work, organized six sequential parts, examines the gender dimension of population ageing and analyses the consequences and policy implications of it.

The first part introduced the problem and discusses the methodology while the second part examines the recent attempts in this area. The third part provides a brief idea on the global scenario of population ageing both from global perspective and from the perspective of developed and developing economies. The fourth part examines the whole issue with a gender lenses and the fifth part looks into the consequences and policy implications, while the sixth part concludes the discussion.

## SOME RECENT STUDIES

Though the literature on population ageing and issues related to women flood unabatedly, much less attention has been focused on women beyond child bearing years. The work by Brown (1982) has been cited as the pioneering effort that focuses directly on elderly women. As Chaney (1998) puts it, since then only a few studies of women at midlife and older ages in any society have come out, and still lesser numbers on older women in cross cultural perspective. Most of the research in Anthropological and Ethnological sources reveals that in most countries of the World, women live significantly longer than their own grand mothers, mothers and male partners. Identified widely as the ‘Third Age’ in Latin America, the life of elderly women, stands polar different from their adolescent and young age. They are conferred with increased freedom, become more independent, less subject to male subordination and are permitted to engage in activities not permitted to younger women. ( Brown 1992 p 144, Chane 1998 p.253). According to Giele (1982. p.1) Older women potentially have more possibility to challenge men in the councils, to engage in economic activities and hence it is appropriate for scholars to explore what this new aging paradigm holds for women. Sokolovsky, (1982, p.122) supports this arguments and emphasize on the social behavior of the elderly women. Chany (1991) has documented evidences from ethnography, history, sociology, anthropology, sociology and psychology supporting a better status for elderly women.

## SCOPE, METHODOLOGY AND DATA

As specified, the study examines the gender dimension of population ageing, using data related to various aspects of population above 60 (here after aged). Sex ratio, Life expectancy and Survival ratio are the three parameters used in this study<sup>2</sup>. Three groups of countries viz., the World, the developed economies and the developing economies, as grouped by United Nations Reports on Population (various years), are considered for

the study. (See Annexure One for detailed UN Grouping of countries). The data on various aspects of population and development from 1950 to 2000 and projections for another 50 years from 2000 to 2050 are used for the analysis. U. N. Reports on Population and Development, Reports of International Labour Organisation and World Bank are the other major sources of data.

## II GLOBAL SCENARIO OF POPULATION AGEING

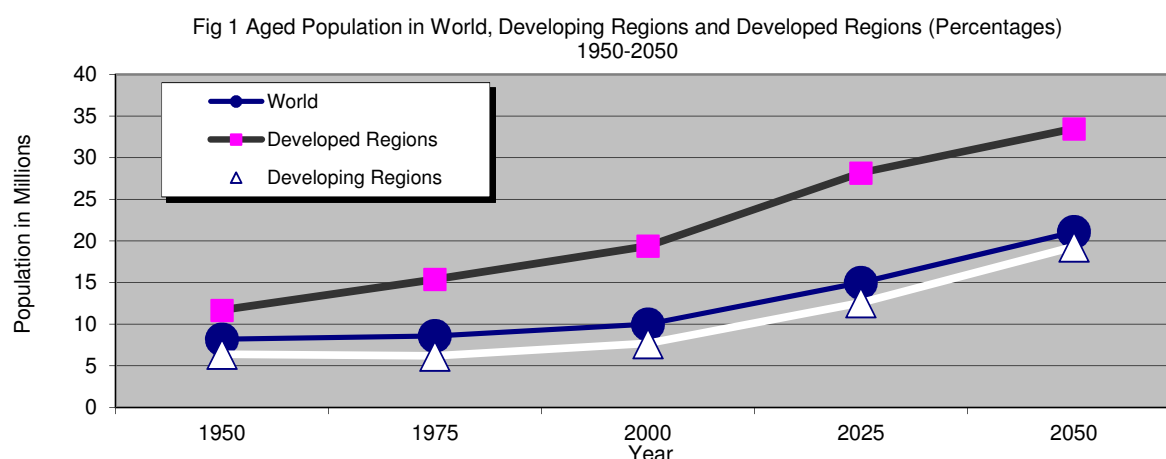
The global scenario emerging from the U.N Reports on population ageing presents a dismal picture for the less developed economies. The population aged above 60 years in the world was 605 million in 2000, which is expected to grow to nearly 2 billion by 2050, by when it will be as large as the population of children (0-14 years). Persons aged 60 or more comprised 10 per cent of the world population in 2000. The proportion of old aged is much higher in the more developed regions (20 per cent) than in the less developed regions (8 per cent), which are in the earlier stages of demographic transition. It is estimated that by 2050, the older aged persons will make up a projected 22 per cent of the world population. Out of which 33 per cent will be in the more developed regions, 21 per cent in the less developed regions and 12 percent in the least developed regions. The region wise picture of the old aged population shows that the majority of the world's aged population resides in Asia (53 per cent), followed by Europe (24 per cent). Asia will have to host a major share of the world's aged in the coming decades. (Muraleedharan. K, 2005) It is predicted that Asia's relative share of the older population will show an increase to 63 per cent, while that of Europe will decrease to 11 per cent by 2050. In other words, while the developed economies are slowly getting relieved from the grip of ageing, the developing economies will be moving to the stronghold of it.

The process of ageing is to occur in different parts of the world in different patterns, that too at different timings. The Global share of aged population has been 8 percent in 1975 and it has grown to 10 per cent in 2000 and is estimated to touch 15 per cent in 2025 and 22 in 2050 (United Nations, 2001). The pattern of population ageing emerging in the coming decades is given in the table 1 below and illustrated in Fig 1. The table clearly indicates the variation in the pattern of the population ageing across the globe over time. The developed regions will have higher percentage of older aged persons at the earlier stage compared to the less and least developed regions.

**Table 1**  
**Distribution of Population above 60 year or more in 1970, 2000, 2050 (Percentages)**

Region	1950	1975	2000	2025	2050
The World	8.2	8.6	10.0	15.0	21.1
Developed Economies	11.7	15.4	19.4	28.2	33.5
Developing Economies	6.4	6.2	7.7	12.6	19.3

Source: Sex and Age Distribution of World Populations: 1998 revision. Volume II. Sex and Age (United Nations Publications, Sales No.E.99, XIII, 8) medium variant projections.

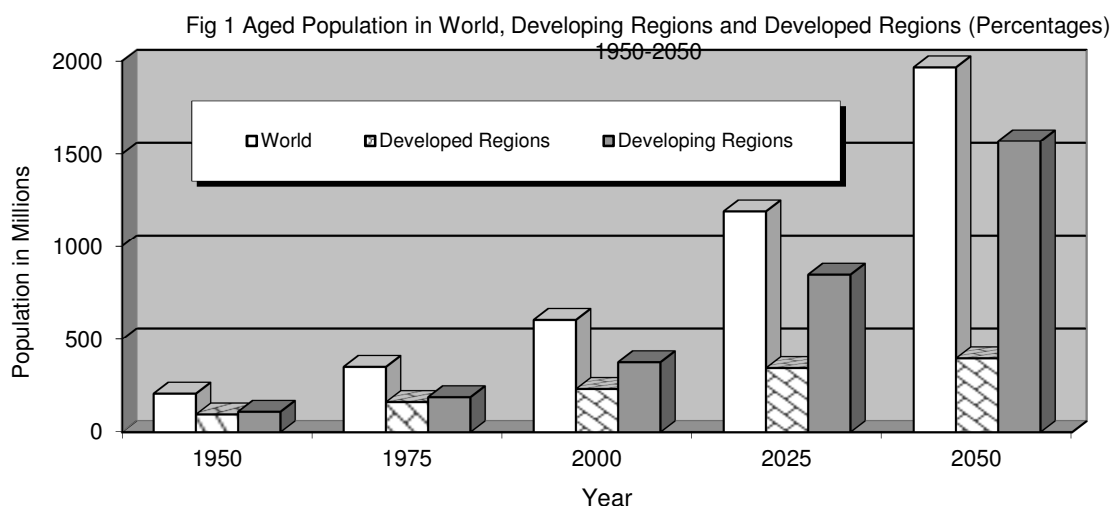


A clearer picture of global scenario will be emerging from the account of relative shares of the aged population in these regions, as given in Table 2 and Fig 2. Though the percentage share of aged population is higher in the developed economies, the developing economies will have to bear the larger number of them in the coming decades.

**Table 2**  
**Distribution of Aged Population in World and Regions by Development 1950-2050 (in Millions)**

Region	1950	1975	2000	2025	2050
The World	206	349	605	1090	1966
Developed Economies	95	161	231	343	395
Developing Economies	109	187	374	846	1571

Source: Sex and Age Distribution of World Populations: 1998 revision. Volume II. Sex and Age (United Nations Publications, Sales No.E.99, XIII, 8) medium variant projections.



The major trends in the process of ageing, apparent from the table, follows

1. The less developed regions will have to share more than 80 per cent of the population above 60 years of age, while the developed regions will have much less.
2. Aged population is to increase in the less developed regions, least developed regions, Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and Northern America.
3. Asia, as the single continent, will have the largest share of population above 60 years i.e., more than 60 percent.

### III

#### THE GENDER DIMENSION OF POPULATION AGEING

Population ageing, as it evolves, a gender dimension emerges overtime, as the female population do enjoy a direct edge in several aspects. The female population above 60 will be much larger in the world in the coming decades as it has been 9 per cent in the 1950s, 11.1 per cent in the 2000 and is expected to be 16.3 and 22.7 by 2025 and 2050 respectively. (See Table 3 and Fig 3.1 to 3.3)

**Table 3**  
**Distribution of aged Female and Male**  
**Population by World and Development Regions 1950-2050 (Percentages)**

Region	1950	1975	2000	2025	2050
<b>The World</b>					
Male	7.3	7.5	8.9	13.6	19.4
Female	9	9.7	11.1	16.3	22.7
<b>Developed Economies</b>					
Male	10.5	12.8	16.5	25.2	30.2
Female	12.9	17.9	22.2	31	36.5
<b>Developing Economies</b>					
Male	5.8	5.8	7.1	11.6	17.9
Female	7.1	6.7	8.3	13.5	20.7

Source: Sex and Age Distribution of World Populations: the 1998 revision. Volume II. Sex and Age (United Nations

Publications, Sales No.E.99, XIII, 8) medium Variant projections.

Fig 3.1 Percentage of Aged Population, Male and Female in World 1950-2050

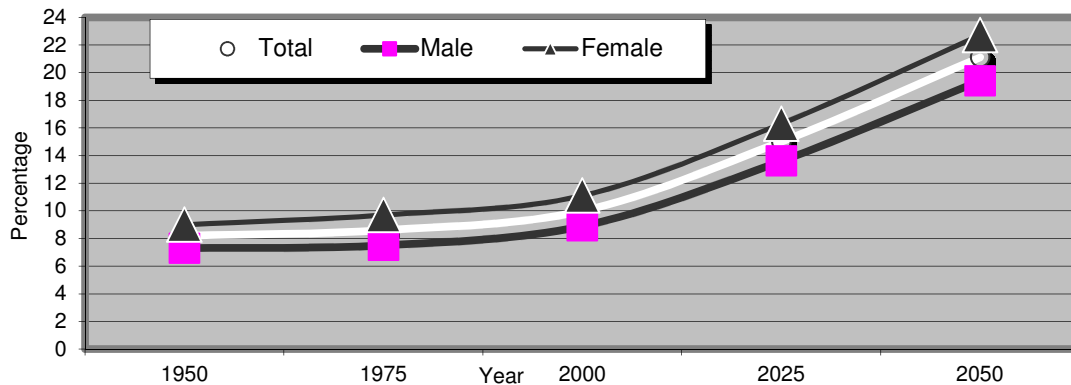


Fig 3.2 Percentage of Aged Population, Male and Female in Developed Economies 1950-2050

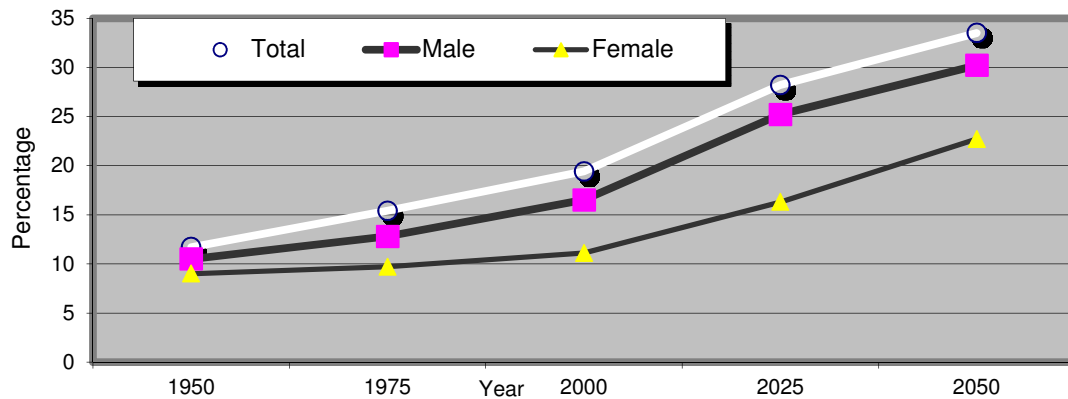


Fig 3.3 Percentage of Aged Population, Male and Female in Developing Economies 1950-2050

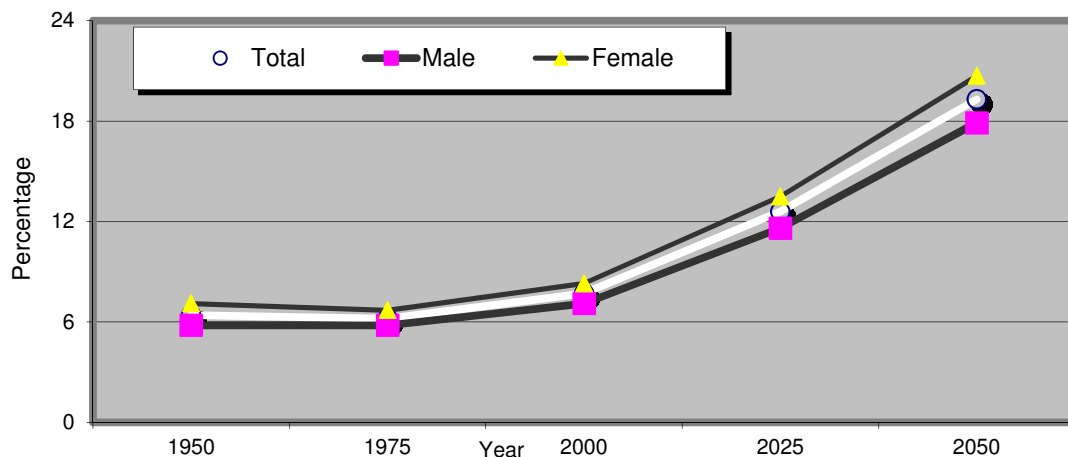


Table 3 and Figures 3.1 to 3.3 show that the world and other development regions show diverse trends in the case of total, male and female aged populations. Globally, the total aged population and female population exhibit upward trends, as the male population begins to fall down by the 2025 onwards. In the developed economies the percentage of female population has been smaller in the 1950s, as evident from the figures. It slowly exceeds the male population and shows an upward trend, according to the projections, till 2050s. The percentage of aged male population shows a steep downward trend since 2025 in these economies. In the case of developing economies, the percentage of total, male and female population show a continuous

upward trend since 1950 and continues till 2050. It can be seen that the aged female population will be on the increase in both these regions as well as also globally.

A better and clearer perspective will emerge from a look at parameters such as 1.) Sex ratio, 2.) Life expectancy and 3.) Survival ratio. A brief contextual note on these parameters will be quite fitting. Sex ratio, number of males per every 100 females, is one of the indicators generally in use in the analysis population ageing. Life expectancy is another indicator which is in wide use in the analysis. There are two types of indicators related to life expectancy viz., Life expectancy at birth and Life expectancy at a specific age. While life expectancy at birth is the average number of years a new born would live at the current mortality rates, the life expectancy specific age is the average number of additional years a person of that age is expected to live at the current mortality rates. In this study life expectancy at the age of 60 is used. Survival rate is the third indicator with which gender dimension of population ageing is analysed. Survival rate, to a specific age (60 in this study), is the proportion of newborns in a given year who would be expected to survive the specific age, if the current mortality rates prevail.

Analysis of sex ratios for the period of study presents a quite different picture. Developing economies had a higher sex ratio compared to the developed regions and the world. But the sex ratio increases in favor of men till 1975 and then decreases in 2000, 2025 and 2050 which implies that there will be less males per 100 females during the coming decades in these regions. The table 4 and fig 4 show that the sex ratio is moving in favor of females, as it goes on decreasing since 1975. In brief, while the situation in the world as a whole and developed economies as a group shows that there will be more males per 100 females, the developing economies show an entirely reverse trend of less males per 100 females, that too in a continuous downswing.

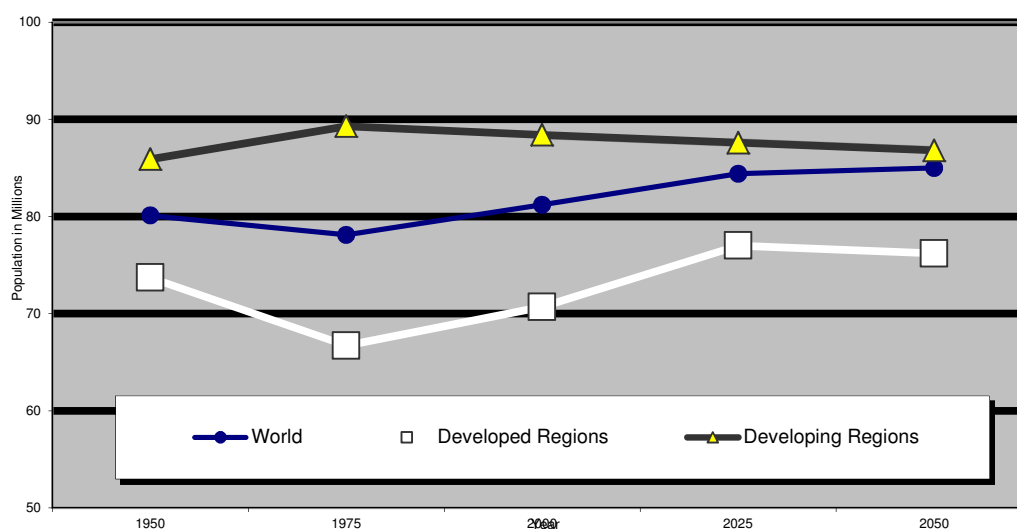
**Table 4**  
**Sex Ratio of World and Regions by Development 1950-2050 (in Millions)**

Region	1950	1975	2000	2025	2050
The World	80.1	78.1	81.2	84.4	85
Developed Economies	73.7	66.7	70.7	77	76.2
Developing Economies	85.9	89.3	88.4	87.6	86.8

Source: Sex and Age Distribution of World Populations: 1998 revision. Volume II. Sex and Age (United Nations

Publications, Sales No.E.99, XIII, 8) medium variant projections.

Fig 4 Sex Ratio in World, Developing Regions and Developed Regions 1950-2050



Life expectancy at the age of 60, as stated earlier, shows the years for which an individual will be surviving, on the average, assuming unchanging mortality rates. As given in table 5, female life expectancy at the age of 60 is above the male life expectancy globally and in both developed as well as developing economies. This implies that, at the current mortality rates, females will be surviving for longer periods compared to males in these regions. This makes it clear that above 60 years of age more females will be surviving the males globally, regardless of the stages of economic development.

**Table 5**  
**Life Expectancy at the age of 60 by World and Regions by Development 1950-2050 ( Years)**

Region	2000	2025	2050
<b>The World</b>			
Total	18.8	21.0	22.2
Male	17.0	19.1	20.2
Female	20.4	22.8	24.1
<b>Developed Economies</b>			
Total	20.8	23.3	24.7
Male	18.4	20.8	22.1
Female	22.9	25.6	27.1
<b>Developing Economies</b>			
Total	17.7	20.0	21.5
Male	16.3	18.4	19.7
Female	19.0	21.6	23.2

Source: Sex and Age Distribution of World Populations: the 1998 revision. Volume II. Sex and Age (United Nations Publications, Sales No.E.99, XIII, 8) medium Variant projections.

Survival rate of the aged population in the world, developed and developing regions in the case of female are higher since 2000, compared to that of males. (See Table 5) In other words, the chances of survival of female population is much higher than that of male population in general.

**Table 6**  
**Survival Rate at the age of 60 by World and Development Regions 1950-2050 ( Years)**

Region	2000	2025	2050
<b>The World</b>			
Total	73.8	82.1	86.7
Male	71.0	79.9	84.8
Female	76.8	84.4	88.8
<b>Developed Economies</b>			
Total	86.0	91.3	93.5
Male	81.2	88.6	91.5
Female	91.1	94.2	95.5
<b>Developing Economies</b>			
Total	71.7	80.8	85.9
Male	69.3	78.7	84.0
Female	74.1	83.1	88.0

Source: Sex and Age Distribution of World Populations: the 1998 revision. Volume II. Sex and Age (United Nations Publications, Sales No.E.99, XIII, 8) medium Variant projections.

The analysis of gender dimension of population ageing shows that both in the global context as well as in the developing and developed regions, the female population will have an edge over the male population, at higher ages, particularly above 60 years old. The percentage of female population, the total number of female population, the sex ratio, the life expectancy and survival ratio show that all these indicators are in favor of higher concentration of female population, compared to that of male population. Except for small countries, where cultural factors have contributed towards lower life expectancy in the case of females, reductions in mortality have been much higher in the case of females, practically in all age groups. During the past 50 years, the female advantage in life expectancy at birth increased from 2.7 to 4.2 years and is expected to increase by 4.8 years by 2050. The trend in gender gap is expected to move in reverse directions during the next decades. While the gender gap in the less developed regions is expected to increase, the same in the more developed regions are expected to decrease. Under the current mortality conditions projected for the middle of the century, for the world as a whole, 59 per cent of the world's female newborns are expected to cross the age of 80, up from 41 per cent under the current mortality conditions. In the less developed regions, this proportion is expected to cross 70 per cent. The gender dimension of the population ageing calls for special packages and policy designs for the female aged in less developed regions in the coming decades.



#### IV CONSEQUENCES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Population ageing, continues to be in academic focus, due to the profound impact, it has on a broad range of economic, political and social conditions. The general consequences of population ageing will be discussed as a preface to a more detailed attempt with a gender lense. First, and foremost population ageing will disturb the balance between various age groups in an economy. Reduction in birth rates and consequent decrease in the strength of healthy younger generation will result in the shortage of labour force who can contribute towards national output. Population ageing will reduce the number of younger generations who can contribute productively towards the nation and economy, leaving a large number of older people at the dependency of youngsters. Another significant consequence of population ageing is the increasing demand for health care by the old aged at a very high cost, as the geriatric medical care is costlier. (de Jong-Gierveld and Van Solinge, 1995; Holliday, 1999) There are growing concerns about the long-term viability of intergenerational social support systems, which are crucial for the well-being of both the older and younger generations. (Cliquet and Nizamuddin, 1999). More people living for longer periods will require the extension of retirement, pension and other social benefits, which calls for social security systems to change (Creedy, 1998: Bravo, 1999).

An important consequence of fertility decline, one of the determinants of population ageing, is the progressive reduction in the availability of kin to whom future generations of older persons may turn for support. This process is bound to have a significant impact on the well being of older persons, especially in the less developed countries where social support for the older persons is largely provided by immediate family (Hoyert, 1991: Wolf, 1994). Besides, the social and economic institutions will find it difficult to adjust so abruptly as the impact of population ageing on the society's socio economic institutions may be amplified by the speed at which it occurs. When considering the pace at which the dramatic events occur, it will be a grim-faced challenge for the social and economic institutions. Increasing proportion of the older aged necessarily affects the relative importance of the other segments. These changes in age composition can dramatically affect society's political, economic and social structures. The need for change in pattern of resource distribution and use will be an imperative and there will be intergenerational conflict. (Walker, 1990: Jackson 1995). The need for support to old aged will be on the increase as a consequence of shift in the population to higher ages structures. Support to old aged is only partly provided through public transfer of resources and the family remains an important source of support to older persons, especially in the less developed regions (U N,1994). Population ageing will create a situation in which the young old is increasingly in a compelled position to provide care and support of all sorts, including medical as well as physical, to the old aged in the family. This may perhaps operate as a resource drain on the part of the earning member, due to the reasons mentioned earlier like the higher cost of geriatric medical care. Rapid growth of the oldest group among the older population is of special relevance in terms of public policy as it will create a long term demand for health and other care systems (Pollard, 1995: Crimmins, 1997).

The gender dimension of population ageing is one of the serious issues that need to be focused in public policy, however rarely discussed in detail. Since mortality rates are usually higher among the male population, even at older ages the percentage of female tends to increase with advancing age. In most countries older women even now outnumber older men, and most of them are widows, with less education, less work experience, and less access to public assistance and other private income sources (Higuchi, 1996; United Nations 1999). Hence, while designing public policy due concern towards this segment of older population must be provided.

Another significant impact of the population ageing is to be reflected in the areas of labour force participation and literacy. As Gruber and Wise (1999) observed, in the more developed regions, where social security coverage is nearly universal, decline in labor force participation at older ages primarily reflect changes in public policies regarding early retirement. On the other hand, in the less developed regions, there are large concentrations of old aged population in the agricultural and informal sectors, who have little or no social security coverage. (ILO, 2000). But, lower levels of labor force participation, both in the more and less developed regions, are partly associated with shortage of employment opportunities and obsolescence of skills and knowledge (Drury , 1994: Taylor and Walker, 1996). As far as literacy of the older generations are concerned, generally in the less developed regions, illiteracy is much high among the older generations, particularly among women of old aged. Public policy needs to be geared in such a way that the literacy levels of the older populations be enhanced so that higher levels of literacy among the older generations are substantially to affect their needs, interests and attitude to life as well as will improve their quality of lives.

The most serious aspect of gender dimension of population ageing is that at older ages most women are likely to be widows. This bears a very significant policy implication for the developing regions, as the support system devised needs to be geared to face this outcome also.

## V CONCLUSION

Population Ageing, the inevitable consequence of development gains in the health sector, has emerged as a development challenge, for both developed and developing economies. In fact, it appears to be a tough and formidable challenge to the less developed regions, as it calls for a reversal of several public policies in the context of retreating State and cutting down of welfare and social security measures. The speed and dynamics as well as pattern and timing of population ageing in the developing regions are comparatively different from that of developed regions. One of the major determining factors of population ageing is the sharp decline in fertility that occurred faster in the developing regions. Another factors contributing for the increased number of older people is the gains in life expectancy and consequent mortality rates throughout the world, particularly in the developing world. Asia will be the home of more than 60 per cent of the above 60 year old population in the coming decades. In the first part of the paper the global scenario of Population Ageing has been examined during the period from 1950 to 2050. It has clearly brought out the regional variation in the pattern, timing and intensity of population ageing. Population ageing, emerged in the more developed regions at an early stage will be moving to the less developed regions with high intensity, placing heavy burdens on them in terms of health care, social security measures and public policy to address the aged. The less developed regions will have higher concentrations of old aged in the coming decades, while the share of more developed regions will be on the decrease. The second part has examined the dynamics and determinants of population ageing from a global perspective. The general trends and determinants of population ageing have been analysed. The declining fertility, mortality and enhanced life expectancy has been the major determinants of population ageing. One of the major trends in the process is that the growth rates of old aged is much higher than that of total population every where. The gender dimension of population ageing calls for special packages and policy designs for the increasing female aged in the less developed regions. The third part has examined the consequences and policy implications of the process of population ageing. Population ageing, the unprecedented shift in age structures towards older ages will send unexpected shocks and tremors so far unheard of in the economy. The impact will be profound on a broad range of economic, political, and social conditions and the situation emerging will call for revision and further designing of public policy in the less developed regions. In the fourth part, the region wise picture of the trends and dynamics of population ageing in Asia has been attempted. Eastern Asia, comprising China and Japan, will have to host the largest concentrations of older populations in the coming decades. South Central Asia, in which India is included, will be the second largest host of aged population. Both in the rate of growth of older aged populations compared to total population and concentration of them, these regions stands out.

The next few decades will see the increasing concentration of older generations in the Asian sub continent. On the average one to two out of every five will be above 60 in Asia by 2050. The economies in Asia will have to gear their public policy to address the older generations. At present a few economies and governments have a definite policy and well organized system to take care of the largest single segment of the aged population. One of the most serious issues the governments will face is the questions of support systems required for these older generations. Changing social setup from the agro oriented co- family living to nuclear families results in the loosing the familial support to the old aged people. Increased labour force participation by women in formal and informal sectors has resulted in the loss of presence of women, the ultimate care giver, in the family. Migration to the urban and semi-urban areas for employment and better opportunities also accentuates this phenomenon as it forces the youngsters to leave their ancestral homes at their native places with their parents. Even at the urban based nuclear families, since both the husband and wife have to go out in search of bread, the parents and old aged people living with them are in deep and sustaining agony. All these results in old aged people left uncared and unwanted at homes either in the concrete jungles of urban areas or deserted homes at the rural areas. Now a day, they live as helpless witnesses as well as victims of fast changing world, marginalized and relegated from the mainstream. One of the most serious and significant challenges the Asian economies, particularly China and India, will have to face during the coming decades, is the question of designing an effective public policy to address the problems of old aged population.

### Notes and References

- The terms 'aged' and 'old aged' in this study refer to those above 60 years of age, unless otherwise specified. A detailed note on this and other relevant parameters can be had from Page 42, Annex I, World Population Ageing 1950-2050. United Nations, Economic and Social Affairs, New York, 2002.
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