Aging in Asia: Setting the research foundation

Albert I. Hermalin

Many countries in Asia have already completed the transition from high to low fertility rates, and others are now undergoing rapid fertility declines. Although a few are experiencing slower rates of change, Asian populations as a whole will age rapidly over the next 25 to 30 years, primarily as a result of lower birth rates. Governments of the region are distinctive in their awareness of emerging demographic trends and their desire to fashion policies and programs that reflect each country's unique cultural and economic profile. Given this desire, a research agenda is needed that will provide maximum insight into how population aging interacts with cultural traditions and economic development, and how these interactions affect the well-being of the elderly and the relationships between generations.

This Research Report first develops a framework for understanding the factors affecting the status and well-being of the elderly, tracing the broad demographic trends, projecting those trends into the future, and examining current living arrangements of the elderly throughout Asia. By 2025, the proportion of the population 60 and older is expected to approach 20 percent in East Asia and to be around 11 to 12 percent in South Asia and Southeast Asia. Currently from two-thirds to four-fifths of Asia's elderly reside with a grown child, but diminishing family size, rapidly rising educational levels among the future elderly, and other factors have created uncertainty about future trends in coresidence.

The report next spells out the elements of a research agenda that can monitor the transformations likely to occur in the cultural, social, and economic arrangements of the elderly. These elements include the types of quantitative and qualitative data to be used, questions that can be added to current data-collection efforts, and modifications in the design of surveys, censuses, and related efforts—all of which can greatly enhance our knowledge of emerging patterns at reasonable costs. The ultimate goal is to inform public policies affecting the elderly.
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