

World Population Getting Older, Women Live Longer Than Men

One out of 10 persons today is over the age of 60 and likely to be a woman. These are indications that people, particularly females, are living longer everywhere in the world.

Latest data from the United Nations (UN) show that the number of people over 60 years, which is estimated at 605 million is expected to double to 1.2 billion by year 2025. Those living in developing countries are expected to account for almost three-quarters of this number.

The reasons for this trend, explained the United Nations Population Fund in a report, are lower infant and child mortality, better nutrition, education, health care, access to family planning and longer life expectancies.

Today women live longer than men, since their life expectancy has increased faster, according to the State of World Population (SWP) 2000.

"The difference between male and female in life expectancy is a result of a combination of biological differences, such as lower susceptibility to heart disease before menopause, and cultural influences, such as greater male exposure to occupational hazards," said the report, which was

launched recently by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

In at least 33 countries, life expectancy for women now exceeds 80 years. The population over age 80 is the fastest-growing segment of the older population.

While women can look forward to a longer life than men, they are expected to continue suffering from gender discrimination even in their old age.

Consider the following findings contained in the SWP:

- ▶ Despite their large numbers, women receive less old-age support from public programmes than men do because public pension systems have been designed with an expectation that the latter would be the primary economic providers.
- ▶ Widowhood is more prevalent among women because they live longer and usually marry men older than themselves. They are less likely to remarry (unlike men) and often live alone.
- ▶ Older women often receive less support from their families because of an underlying assumption that they do not deserve support.
- ▶ Women suffer from high rates of disability at older ages because of their

lack of health care, education and nutrition in earlier life.

- ▶ Older women are more likely to be poor than older men as a result of the accumulated impact of lower lifetime earnings, lower pensions, lower social status and weaker access to property and to inheritance.

To top it all, the report added that the burden of care-giving for the elderly falls more heavily on women than men.

While a longer life is said to be one of the main achievements of the 20th century, the UN said that adding "quality of life to the extended years" is now one of the major challenges of the new century.

To raise awareness on the issue of ageing, the first week of October has been declared as the Senior Citizens Week in the Philippines. Worldwide, October 1 is being celebrated as International Day of Older Persons.

In his message marking this day, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said: "Populations of developing countries are ageing more quickly than those of developed countries, and will have less time to adapt to the consequences. They can learn from the

continued on page 6...World

continued from page 5...World

experiences of developed countries which have already seen the average age of their population rise significantly."

Policymakers in developed regions are increasingly concerned about the financial and health needs of older populations, the SWP report said.

"Attention is turning to retirement arrangements for older people [including the possibility of continuing work], reform of pension systems, review of health care and long-term care programmes and building community support systems for older persons," it said.

At the same time, it is projected that the ageing of the population will happen more slowly in countries where fertility and mortality rates are still high.

Source: *Today*, 15 October 2000, Philippines

October 18 is World Menopause Day

On October 18 women celebrated the first World Menopause Day, as declared by the International Menopause Society. On this day, nations were reminded to take active steps in educating women about the health-related implications of menopause.

Menopause, which signals the end of a woman's fertility, occurs on the average at age 51. During this period, women's bodies stop producing estrogen, which causes symptoms such as hot flashes, fatigue, vaginal dryness, and sleeplessness. Estrogen loss also has been associated with a number of serious disorders, including osteoporosis, heart disease, macular degeneration (blindness), tooth loss, colon cancer, and cognitive decline. Menopausal women are therefore advised to seek medical advice.

The World Health Organisation estimates that by the year 2030, 1.2 billion women will be 50 years of age and above. Of this figure, many are expected to live for several decades after menopause.

Condensed from: *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 18 October 2000; <<http://www.individual.com>> and BusinessWire. For more information on menopause, visit Websites <<http://www.menopause.org>> and <<http://www.menopause-online.com>>.

Technology Causing Drop in Proportion of Females

The emergence of reproductive technology in India has contributed to the country's declining proportion of females, according to a study by the Haryana state literacy resource centre (*Times of India*, 6 November).

India recently made it illegal for doctors to reveal the sex of an unborn child, a process that had enabled parents to selectively abort girl foetuses; nonetheless, the practice persists. An estimated two million foetuses are aborted annually in India, *foreigntv.com* reported.

The Centre for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes and the Mahila Sarvangeen Utkash Mandal

recently pointed to "the gross misuse of reproductive technology in a society characterised by a strong bias against the female child." Reproductive technology has widened the sex-ratio gap, they said.

While female infanticide has historically been the main contributor to declining sex ratios, "female foeticide" has become a factor as well, according to Venkatesh Athreya, head of the Bharathidasan University economics department in Tamil Nadu. The practice is of very recent origin, he says, since the technology for identifying the sex of the foetus has come into use in India only recently.

The lowest sex ratio in the country is in Haryana, where there are 875 females per 1,000 males, the *Times of India* reports. In neighboring Punjab, the ratio is closer to 882.

Other factors, including the neglect of baby girls and better health care for males, have resulted in the decline in sex ratios. "Discrimination against the girl child has been seen more in the intermediate [classes], especially in communities which have resources in the form of land and money, than in the poor and lower-caste families," says Dr. Ami Sengupta of the Delhi Science Forum (*Times of India*).

Source: UNwire, 9 November 2000