AGEING AND THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE FAMILY
IN SRI LANKA

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
DISCIPLINE GEOGRAPHY, ENVIRONMENT AND POPULATION
THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE
September, 2014
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>xix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction ............................................................................ 1

1.2 The Aim and Objectives .......................................................... 4

1.3 The Demographic Context .......................................................... 5

1.4 Social and Economic Development ............................................. 11

1.5 Studies of the Relationship between Ageing and Family Change ........ 15
  1.5.1 Changing Nature of Living Arrangement .................................. 17
  1.5.2 Trends on Living Arrangements ............................................ 18
  1.5.3 Intergenerational Support/care ........................................... 20
  1.5.4 Studies of Ageing and Family Change in Sri Lanka .................... 24

1.6 Organisation of the Thesis ..................................................... 26

1.7 Conclusion .............................................................................. 27

## CHAPTER 2: Theoretical Framework: Understanding the Relationship between the Changing Role of the Family and Ageing in Developing Societies

2.1 Introduction ............................................................................. 28

2.2 Population Ageing: Demographic Perspective ................................ 29
  2.2.1 Classical Demographic Transition Theory ................................ 29
  2.2.2 Epidemiological Transition Theory ....................................... 30
2.3 Theories on Population Ageing ................................................................. 32
   2.3.1 Functionalism Perspective ................................................................. 33
   2.3.2 Conflict Perspective ........................................................................... 36
2.4 Theories on the Changing Role of the Family ........................................... 39
2.5 Perspective of Intergenerational Transfers/Relationships ......................... 41
2.6 Conceptualising the Relationship between Changing Role of the Family and Population Ageing ................................................................. 50
2.7 Conclusion ................................................................................................. 52

CHAPTER 3: Data Sources and Methodology .................................................... 53
3.1 Introduction .............................................................................................. 53
3.2 Mixed Method Paradigm ........................................................................... 54
3.3 Philosophical Underpinning of the Mixed Method Approach ..................... 55
3.4 Mixed Method Approaches ....................................................................... 57
3.5 Sequential Explanatory Design ................................................................. 58
3.6 Mixed Method Design and Ageing Studies ................................................. 59
3.7 Secondary Data Sources ........................................................................... 59
   3.7.1 Census Data ....................................................................................... 60
   3.7.2 United Nations Data Sources ............................................................. 61
3.8 Primary Data Collection ........................................................................... 62
3.9 Survey Research ....................................................................................... 62
3.10 Defining Elderly Population ..................................................................... 63
3.11 Survey Questionnaire ............................................................................. 64
   3.11.1 Questionnaire for Elderly Parents ..................................................... 64
   3.11.2 Questionnaire for Adult Children .................................................... 64
3.12 Sampling Process ................................................................................... 65
3.13 The Sample Size ..................................................................................... 70
3.14 Drawing the Sample ............................................................................... 71
3.15 Data Collection ....................................................................................... 72
3.16 Ethical Consideration ............................................................................. 73
3.17 Data Analysis and Presentation .......................................................... 73
3.18 Analysis of Secondary Data ................................................................. 74
3.19 Analysis of Primary Data ................................................................. 74
3.20 Qualitative Investigation ..................................................................... 75
  3.20.1 In-depth interviews ..................................................................... 75
  3.20.2 Focus Group Discussions ......................................................... 76
3.21 Analysing Qualitative Data ................................................................. 77
3.22 Limitations of the Study ................................................................. 78
3.23 Conclusion ...................................................................................... 79

CHAPTER 4: The Ageing Process and It’s Onset in Sri Lanka .................. 80
4.1 Introduction ...................................................................................... 80
4.2 Pace of Population Ageing ................................................................. 80
4.3 Demographic Determinants of Ageing ............................................. 85
  4.3.1 Fertility Decline and Growth of the Ageing Population .............. 86
  4.3.2 Mortality Decline and Increase of Life Expectancy ................. 87
4.4 Changes in Age Structure of Population ........................................ 89
  4.4.1 Changing Balance among Age Groups .................................... 92
  4.4.2 Median Age ............................................................................ 93
4.5 Relative Status of Dependency Ratio ............................................. 94
4.6 Potential Support Ratio .................................................................... 97
4.7 Characteristics of Ageing Population ............................................... 98
  4.7.1 Ageing of Older Persons ......................................................... 98
  4.7.2 Feminisation of Ageing .......................................................... 101
  4.7.3 Marital Status of Elderly .......................................................... 102
4.8 Conclusion ...................................................................................... 105

CHAPTER 5: The Changing Role of the Family in Sri Lanka ............... 106
5.1 Introduction ...................................................................................... 106
5.2 Understanding the Role of the Family .......................................... 106
5.3 Family Transformation ................................................................. 109
  5.3.1 Differences between Traditional and Modern Family .................... 109
  5.3.2 Changing Status of the Family: Composition and Structure ............. 114
    Increasing trend in female headed households .................................. 115
    Changes in age-composition ....................................................... 116
5.4 Factors Influencing the Changing Role of the Family .......................... 117
  5.4.1 Major Factors of Change: Views of the Elderly Generation and Adult
       Children Generation .................................................................... 117
  5.4.2 Education including Female Education as Factor of Change ............ 119
  5.4.3 Diminishing Family Economies and Female Employment as Factor of
       Change ....................................................................................... 121
  5.4.4 Growth of Internal Migration and International Labour Migration as Factor
       of Change .................................................................................... 123
  5.4.5 Changing Marital Status as Factor of Change ............................... 126
5.5 Emerging Intergenerational Inequalities ............................................. 128
5.6 Status of the Elderly in Traditional and Modern Family ....................... 131
5.7 Conclusion ..................................................................................... 133

CHAPTER 6: Factors Influencing Living Arrangements of the Elderly .......... 134
6.1 Introduction .................................................................................... 134
6.2 Patterns of Living Arrangements ...................................................... 135
6.3 Demographic Determinants of Living Arrangements ......................... 142
  6.3.1 Age and Living Arrangements .................................................. 142
  6.3.2 Gender, Marital Status and Living Arrangements ....................... 144
  6.3.3 Number of Children and Living Arrangements ............................ 146
6.4 Socio-economic Determinants of Living Arrangements ....................... 148
  6.4.1 Place of Residence and Living Arrangements .............................. 149
  6.4.2 Education and Living Arrangements ........................................ 150
  6.4.3 Income, Savings, Expenditure, Government Financial Assistance and
       Living Arrangements .................................................................... 151
6.5 Migration and Living Arrangements ................................................ 155
CHAPTER 7: Transition of the Wealth Transfers: From Traditional to Modern Society in Sri Lanka

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Theoretical Underpinning: Patterns of Wealth Transfers in Traditional and Modern Society

7.3 Differences between the Present “Elderly Parent” and “Adult children” Generations

7.4 The Changing Pattern of Wealth Transfers between Parents and Children

7.5 Changing Value Systems and Old-age Support

7.6 Conclusion

CHAPTER 8: Exploring the Pattern of Intergenerational Wealth Transfers

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Measuring Intergenerational Wealth Transfers

8.3 Intergenerational Wealth Transfers

8.3.1 Economic Transfers

8.3.1.1 Direct Economic Transfers

8.3.1.2 Indirect Economic Transfers

8.3.2 Social Transfers

8.3.2.1 Moral/emotional Support

8.3.2.2 Non-family Social Support

8.4 Public Transfers

8.5 Support Provided between Migrant children and the Elderly Parents

8.6 Well-being of the Elderly

8.7 Conclusion
CHAPTER 9: Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 215

9.1 Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 215

9.2 Major Findings of the Study .................................................................................................. 215


9.2.2 Nature, Trends and Patterns of Family Structure and Functioning ................................. 216

9.2.3 Implications of Changes in the Family for the Well-being of Elderly .............................. 217

9.2.4 Implications of Internal and International Migration for Care of the Elderly ................. 219

9.2.5 Impact of Changing Intergenerational Roles on Population Ageing ............................... 220

9.3 Policy Implications and Recommendations ....................................................................... 221

9.4 Theoretical Implications ..................................................................................................... 227

9.5 Methodological Implications .............................................................................................. 230

9.6 Future Research Directions ............................................................................................... 230

9.7 Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 232

Appendices .................................................................................................................................. 234

Appendix 1: Demographic Transition in Sri Lanka ..................................................................... 234

Appendix 2: Ethical Approval ..................................................................................................... 235

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet ................................................................................ 237

Appendix 4: Sheet of Contact for Information on Project and Independent Complaints Procedure ........................................................................................................................................ 239

Appendix 5: Standard Consent Form for People Who Are Participants in a Research Project ........................................................................................................................................ 240

Appendix 6: Questionnaire for the Household with Age 60+ Persons ....................................... 241

Appendix 7: Questionnaire for the Household Without Elderly People (No elderly Household Ages between 18-59) .................................................................................................................. 263

Appendix 8: Sample Format for Focus Group Discussion .......................................................... 276

Bibliography ............................................................................................................................... 278
List of Tables

Table 1.1: Sri Lanka: Composition of the Population by Ethnicity and Religion, 2012 ................................................................. 6
Table 1.2: Selected Indicators of Ageing in Countries of South Asia, 2012 and 2050 ................................................................. 9
Table 1.3: Sri Lanka: Percentage Distribution of Population by Selected Age Groups and Sector in Sri Lanka, 2012 ................................................................. 9
Table 3.1: Sequential Explanatory Design ................................................................................................................................. 58
Table 3.2: Galle District: Key Indices of Population and Socio-economic Characteristics, Galle District 2012 .................................................................................. 66
Table 3.3: Galle District: Distribution of Elderly Population by DS Divisions, Galle District, 2012 .................................................................................................................................. 67
Table 3.4: Sri Lanka: General Information in Galle Four Gravets and Baddegama Divisional Secretariats, 2012 .................................................................................. 68
Table 3.5: Sampling Frame and the Sample ................................................................................................................................. 71
Table 3.6: Sampling for the Survey ............................................................................................................................................... 72
Table 3.7: Themes for Analysing In-depth Interviews Elderly Parent and Adult Children Generations ........................................................................................................................................ 78
Table 3.8: Themes for Analysing Focus Group Discussions ........................................................................................................ 78
Table 4.1: Actual and Projected Growth in Asia’s Elderly Population from 2000-2050 ........................................................................................................................................ 82
Table 4.2: Actual and Projected Population (60+) in South Asia from 2000-2050........................................................................ 83
Table 4.3: Sri Lanka: Actual and Projected Total Population, Total Elderly Population and Percentage of Population Age 60+, 1946-2031 .................................................................................................................. 83
Table 4.4: Sri Lanka: Total Fertility Rates, 1946-2012 ........................................................................................................................ 86
Table 4.5: Sri Lanka: Child Dependency, Old Dependency and Index of Ageing, 1881-2012 ................................................................................................................................. 95
Table 5.1: Comparison of Traditional Family and Modern Family .................................................................................................. 111
Table 5.2: Sri Lanka: Average Household Size by Sector, 1963-2012 .......................................................................................... 114
Table 5.3: Sri Lanka: Female Headed Households by Age Group and Sector, 2012 ........................................................................ 115
Table 5.4: Perceived Reasons for Family Change by the Elderly Parents and Adult Children Generations

Table 5.5: Sri Lanka: Literacy Rates by Sex, 1881-2012

Table 5.6: Sri Lanka: Departure for Foreign Employment by Age and Sex, 2005-2012

Table 5.7: Sri Lanka: International Labour Migration, Departures for Foreign Employment, Sri Lanka, 1986-2012

Table 5.8: Sri Lanka: Trends in Singulate Mean Age at Marriage, 1901-2006/7

Table 5.9: Reasons for Wider Gap between Generations according to Elderly People

Table 5.10: Reason for Adult Children Not Living with Elderly Parents

Table 5.11: Factors Affecting Declining the Relationship between Elderly Parents and Adult children

Table 6.1: Elderly according to Types of Living Arrangement

Table 6.2: Elderly according to Their Living Arrangements, Birth Order of the Children and Their Current Place of Residence

Table 6.3: Reasons for Dissatisfaction with Living Arrangements by the Elderly

Table 6.4: Living Arrangements of Elderly by Age

Table 6.5: Elderly Who are Ages 80 Years and Over and Living in Their Own Home by Their Childrens’ Residential Status

Table 6.6: Elderly by Their Living Arrangement and Gender

Table 6.7: Marital Status of the Elderly by Age and Gender

Table 6.8: Elderly by Age and Number of Children Still Alive

Table 6.9: Living Arrangements by Number of Children Ever Born

Table 6.10: Living Arrangements of the Elderly by Urban and Rural Residence

Table 6.11: Problems of Living Arrangements of Elderly by Place of Residence

Table 6.12: Income Sources of the Elderly by Living Arrangements

Table 6.13: Elderly by Their Living Arrangements and Monthly Expenditure on Food
Table 6.14: Elderly by Their Living Arrangements and Expenditure on Health

Table 6.15: Elderly by Their Living Arrangements and Leisure Time Activities

Table 6.16: Elderly by Living Arrangements and the Internal and International Migration Status of Their Children

Table 6.17: Demographic and Socio-economic Factors Influencing Institutionalisation of Elderly

Table 7.1: Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics of Elderly and Adult Children Generations in Household Survey

Table 7.2: Opinion of the Elderly (Born Before 1932) on Childrens’ Contribution to the Family Economy During Their Younger Days

Table 7.3: Elderly Response to “it is costly to bringing up children to day”

Table 7.4: Elderly Response According to Their Childrens’ Dependency During the Life Course

Table 7.5: Elderly According to Various Types of Help Extended to Their Dependent Children during the Life Course

Table 7.6: Average Monthly Expenditure of the Adult Children Generation on Their Dependent Children

Table 8.1: Various Types of Methods Utilised for Measuring Wealth Transfers

Table 8.2: Economic Transfers between Elderly Parents and Adult Children

Table 8.3: Elderly Exchanging Financial Transfers (current) with Children According to Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics

Table 8.4: Elderly Exchanging At Least One Material Transfers (current) with Children according to Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics

Table 8.5: Elderly Respondents according to Their Engagement in Current Household Activities by Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics

Table 8.6: Elderly According to the Support Given by Various People for ADL by Living Arrangements

Table 8.7: Elderly According to the Type of Illnesses by Age and Sex

Table 8.8: Elderly Exchanging Moral/emotional Support with Children According to Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics

Table 8.9: Elderly According to the Moral Support Received from Non-family Members by Living Arrangements
Table 8.10: Elderly According to the Type of Government Assistance Currently Received by Living Arrangements

Table 8.11: Elderly Respondents Aware of the Government Programmes for the Elderly

Table 8.12: Elderly According to the Financial Support Currently Received from Migrant Children by Living Arrangements

Table 8.13: Support Given by Elderly to Internal Migrant Children

Table 8.14: Indices of Well-being of the Elderly by Different Components of Well-being and Living Arrangements
List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Map of Sri Lanka ........................................................................................................5
Figure 1.2: Population Distribution of Sri Lanka by Districts, 2012 ........................................ 7
Figure 1.3: Sri Lanka: Growth of Total Population and Rate of Population Growth of the Population from 1871-2012 ..................................................................................... 8
Figure 1.4: Population (60+) in Districts of Sri Lanka, 2012 .................................................. 10
Figure 1.5: Human Development Index in Countries of South Asia, 2011 ............................ 11
Figure 1.6: Social Indicators in Comparative Perspective, 2012 ............................................ 12
Figure 1.7: Sri Lanka: Labour Force Participation Rates by Age and Gender, 2013 ........... 13
Figure 1.8: Sri Lanka: Poverty Head Count Ratios, 1995-2012 ............................................. 14
Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework: Changing Role of the Family and Ageing Population ................................................................................................................................. 51
Figure 3.1: Three Ways of Mixing Quantitative and Qualitative Data .................................. 55
Figure 3.2: Interconnection among the Philosophical Views, Strategies of Inquiry and Research Designs/methods ........................................................................................................... 56
Figure 3.3: Sample GN Divisions, Galle District, Sri Lanka .................................................... 69
Figure 3.4: Sample Process of the Study .................................................................................. 70
Figure 3.5: Sequential Explanatory Design ............................................................................. 74
Figure 4.1: Expected Trends in Ageing in Major Regions of Asia in 2000-2050, Compared with Europe and North America in 1950-2000 ................................................................. 82
Figure 4.2: Sri Lanka: Actual and Projected Trends of the Average Annual Growth Rate of the Total Population and the Elderly Population, 1946-2031 .................................................. 84
Figure 4.3: Actual and Projected Speed of Population Ageing (percent increase), World’s Major Regions and Sri Lanka, 1980-2040 ................................................................. 85
Figure 4.4: Sri Lanka: Elderly (60+ years) and TFR 1946-2012 .............................................. 87
Figure 4.5: Sri Lanka: Actual and Projected Life Expectancy at Birth, 1946-2012 ............... 88
Figure 4.6: Sri Lanka: Actual and Projected Age-sex Structure of Population, 1981-2051 ................................................................................................................................. 91
Figure 4.7: Sri Lanka: Actual and Projected Population by Broad Age Groups, 1946-2101 ................................................................................................................................. 92
Figure 6.4: Elderly by Living Arrangements and Number of Children Who Have Migrated Internally and Internationally.........................................................156

Figure 7.1: Flow of Intergenerational Transfers in the Traditional Society and the Modern Society........................................................................................................164

Figure 7.2: Lexis Diagram Depicting Elderly Generation and Their Adult Children Generation........................................................................................................166

Figure 7.3: Elderly According to Various Types of Expectation of Their Children___174

Figure 8.1: Types of Wealth Transfers.................................................................................................................................181

Figure 8.2: Intergenerational Relationships/transfers between Generations............182

Figure 8.3: Sri Lanka: Reasons for International Migration, 2012..............................208
ABSTRACT

The ageing of populations is an unavoidable and irreversible global phenomenon. Ageing in developed countries occurred gradually over a relatively long period of time, while ageing in developing countries including Sri Lanka has been more rapid. The rapid decline of fertility and mortality rates along with migration in Sri Lanka, have reshaped the age-sex structure of the population. Sri Lanka’s rapidly ageing population has important social-economic implications and real challenges for government and older people themselves. The ageing process has an important relationship with the changing nature, structure and the function of the family which has been occurring simultaneously in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan elderly have traditionally been almost totally dependent on family support, and a key policy question is whether the transition from traditional to modern family will change intergenerational relationships.

The conceptual framework of the study, based largely on the work of Caldwell (1982) and Hugo (1997) focuses on changes in the intergenerational transfer of wealth and its implications for ageing populations. The study argues that the changes in the direction of wealth flows associated with changing role of the family, has influenced the well-being of the aged population. The study uses a mixed methodology based primarily on surveys of 300 elderly households and 150 control households and a wide range of quantitative and qualitative information.

This study examines the effects of the changing role of the family on the ageing population in Sri Lanka. Examination of the timing of the onset of ageing and its process, as well as the changing family role, enabled this study to differentiate the family roles of different generations according to their diverse behavioural patterns in dissimilar socio-economic and cultural environments in different time periods. The study shows that living arrangements of the elderly population are changing with an increasing number of one generation families. Co-residence with an adult child in their own home is the most common living arrangement but the study found that many children who co-reside with parents receive some benefits from the parents, despite the commonly held belief that it is the parents who benefit through gaining access to care.

The study examines intergenerational exchanges between elderly parents and adult children. Transfers between the generations are greatest where there is co-residence. It was found that while older Sri Lankans on average have lower levels of well-being than
the rest of the community it is higher among those who co-reside compared to those living in one generation families. Overall the changes in the family role and functioning have led to a reduction in the well-being of Sri Lankan older people. Moreover this gap has not been filled by pension and social protection schemes in Sri Lanka which remain limited. It is crucial that this area be addressed by policy makers and planners.
DECLARATION

This work does not contain any material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University or tertiary institution by Manori Kaluthantiri. Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this work contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. After the copy of my thesis is deposited in the University library, I give consent for the material to be made available for loan and photocopying, subject to provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. Unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time, my consent is given for a digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University’s digital research repository, the Library catalogue, the Australian Digital Thesis Program(ADTP) and web search engines.

K.D. Manori S. Kaluthantiri
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am greatly indebted to my principle supervisor, Professor Graeme Hugo and co-supervisor Dr. Dianne Rudd, for their guidance, advice and strong moral support, without this research would not have materialised. The quality of this work would have been significantly reduced without the careful perusal of Professor Graeme Hugo and Dr. Dianne Rudd. I also would like to extend my sincere thanks to Janet Wall and Margaret Young for their invaluable support throughout the study. I would like to thank Christine Crothers for the preparation of maps for my thesis.

My sincere gratitude should go to Adelaide Graduate Centre for awarding me a full-time of Adelaide Scholarship International (ASI) which allowed me in three years. I also thank to Dr. Dianne Rudd for her support obtaining some funds from the Post Graduate Fund of the Department of Geography, Environment and Population for my field work. I also should thank to National Centre for Advanced Studies (NCAS) for providing me financial support for my field work.

I also would like to thank Vice Chancellor of the University of Colombo for granting me leave which enabled for me to read for my PhD in the University of Adelaide and Head of the Department of Demography, University of Colombo, for releasing me from academic and research work as well as my colleagues who carried out my teaching work during the period of my absence and all the staff members for their support in various ways.

My deep appreciation also goes to District Secretariat of Galle District, Divisional Secretaries of Galle Four Gravets and Baddegama Divisional Secretariats, and officials of the Department of Census and Statistics, Head office and Regional office in Galle district for their assistance in organising the field work and helping collecting relevant information. I would also like to thank Gramaniladari’s (village headman) for helping me to organise the field work successfully. Invaluable support rendered to me by all these people in the field helped me to produce a document of this quality. A special word of appreciation is extended to the community leaders and villagers in the study area who supported me by giving relevant information. Without their correct information and assistance, this research would not have been possible. I also should thank my research assistants for helping me and spending valuable time with me in the field which make this task successful.
I also would like to express my sincere gratitude for my colleagues, especially Cathy, Romy, Rhianon, Sill and Nicky in the school of Geography, Environment and Population at the University of Adelaide who gave me continuous moral support during some difficult times.

Finally I would like to thank my family for their love and support through a seemingly endless process. Especially, my husband Lakmal Weeratunga whose personal courage, valuable suggestions and confidence was always an inspiration. My heartfelt appreciation is extended to my parents for their various support and my mother-in-law for looking after my kids during my absence and courage given for me to complete this journey. Last, but not least, I want to thank my son Yesith Dinsara Weeratunga and little daughter Disini Rehansa Weeratunga for their support during an extremely stressful time.
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
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<td>IPS</td>
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