Epidemiological Transition due to growing elderly population

The world is ageing. With people living longer and fewer children being born, the absolute number older people is increasing. Increased longevity is a triumph for public and the result of social and economic development.

In Sri Lanka, as in other developing countries, the rapidity of population ageing continues to outpace social and economic development. With ageing comes an increased risk of developing chronic diseases and disability. In order to prepare for unprecedented population ageing now, it is of utmost importance that health systems in Sri Lanka are prepared to address the consequences of these demographic changes.

Population Growth and Size
1991-96 to 2036-41

Projected Changes in Young and Old-Age Dependency Ratio, 1991 to 2041 (Standard Projection)

Population Age 60 and Over (in millions), Sri Lanka, 1991-2021

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Projected Contrast in the Age structure of the population from 1995 to 2050 (Standard Projection)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base.
Legislations & Policies in Sri Lanka

The current proportion of the elderly in the population (persons aged 60 years or above) is above 9 percent and is increasing. Knowing this trend the government has taken steps to ensure the adequacy, timeliness and efficacy of policies, programs and services that affect the elderly. Establishment of a National secretariat for Elders in the Department of Social Services and enactment by the parliament of Act No 9 of 2000 for the protection of the rights of Elders are significant landmarks. By this Act, the National council for elders was established for the promotion and protection of the welfare and the rights of Elders.

In addition the National Charter and National Policy for Elders has been adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers in the year 2006.

National Council for Elders

Provision of services for the elders is not limited to one institution. Public sector agencies such as Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Plan Implementation, Non Governmental Organizations, Private Sector, Organizations of elders are key partners in this regard. The composition of the National Council for elders is a good example for inter-sector collaborations where all the mentioned parties as well as elderly persons are represented. In addition World Health Organisation (WHO) & UNFPA are also observers at the National Council.

National Secretariat for Elders

Mission

To encourage participation of older persons on social development and to ensure their independence, care, participation, self fulfillment, dignity and to protect the rights of elders through awareness programmes.
National Policy on Elders

The National Policy was based on Madrid Conference recommendations (2002) and focuses on three main priority areas as highlighted below and the policy sets out 17 major strategies and 112 Actions.

- To protect & promote rights of elders
- To identify the problems faced by the elders and make policies accordingly & implement them.
- To implement various types of programmes by using their knowledge, skills & experience for social development.
- To conduct awareness programmes for people who are becoming elders & various types of institutions.
- To provide guidance and various types of welfare assistance for low level income group of elders.
- To update data related to elders.
Draft National Action Plan for Elders (NAPE)

The National Council for elders have appointed a committee to draft the action plan which is now in a draft stage. The objectives of the draft action plan are:

- As an expository statement on major programme areas as a background to the Action plan
- As a supportive document to the final action plan, which will list programme areas
- To serve as a basic resource document for all stakeholders

**Main Programme Areas**

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**National survey on Elders: 2003-2004**

In order to obtain reliable information on elderly population a National Survey was done in 2003-2004 covering the rural, urban and estate sectors in all districts. The survey covered 11,663 elders and based on this the estimated total population of elders in the country was 1,661,000. The specific objectives of the survey were:

- To ascertain the specific distribution of the elderly population
- To obtain details on the demographic, economic, health and social characteristics of the elderly population
- To identify special needs of the elderly, the difficulties faced in domestic and social environment, requirement to overcome disability
- To obtain insight on the potentials of the elders and their families to satisfy these needs and overcome difficulties
- To generate other ancillary information helpful to make policies and services for the well being of elders
Summary findings of some data from 2003-2004 survey

Distribution of Elders by Sectors

- Rural 83.9%
- Urban 12.3%
- Estate 3.8%

Distribution of Elders according to hearing ability

- Good 70%
- Poor 28%
- Not at all 2%

Distribution of Elders according to seeing ability

- Good 33%
- Poor 65%
- Not at all 2%

Distribution of Elders by Gender according to Age Groups

- Males
- Females

- 60 yrs. to 70 yrs.
- 70 yrs. To 80 yrs.
- 80 yrs. To 90 yrs.
- 90 yrs. and above

Proportion of elders who indicated that they suffer from a particular illness

- Other
- Cancer
- Mental Illness
- Fracture in Limbs
- Joint Pains/ Difficulty Moving
- Wheeze/ SoB
- High/Low Blood Pressure
- Heart Disease
- Diabetes
- No Illness

Number & Proportion of elders needing equipment or aids

- Wheelchairs
- Crutches
- Walkers
- Bed-Pans
- Spectacles
- Hearing Aids
Programmes /Activities for older people from the Ministry of Social Services & Social Welfare

Elders Identity Card

Persons who are above 60 years of age can obtain Elders identity card from the Grama Niladhari, Divisional Secretariat or the National Secretariat for elders. This identity card facilitated elders to have priority in government & private sector services, 5% discount from National Pharmaceutical Department when medicines are purchased & Extra interest for fixed deposits. Approximately 625,000 identity cards have been issued upto now.

Establishment of village level/Divisional level/District level Elders Committees

Elders committees are formed at the divisional development activities different administrative levels and enhance their social, economical including District, Divisional & spiritual development. A grant of Rs 5000 is given by the National Secretariat for Elders to the village elders committee. Income generation activities by village elders committees are also supported.

In order to expand and make the services of village level committees more meaningful elders committees are being set up at divisional level, combining all village level elders committees. A grant of Rs 7500 is given by the National Secretariat for Elders to the divisional elders committees.

Village level Elders Committees

Income Generating Activities
Day Centres

Day centres are usually established in a public building located at a divisional level and is a place where elders over the age of 60 years could be engaged in productive activities during day time, with others of the similar age group. Through these centres, the elders will get the opportunities to be actively engaged in exchanging views, self employments, lectures and discussions on various subjects, religious activities, exercise and recreational activities. A grant of Rs 25,000 is given for this through the divisional secretary.

In addition elders who come to the day centre could obtain financial assistance up to a maximum of Rs 10,000 for self employment. 24 day centres were financially assisted in the year 2008.

“Care Givers” for Elders

The ministry of Social Services & Social Welfare initiated “Care Givers” for Elders program with the aim of providing care givers for elders so that the children could be able to deploy trained care givers to look after their parents. Care givers training programs are also to be conducted at provincial level.

Pension Scheme for Senior Citizens

A pension scheme is to be prepared under the Sri Lanka Social Security Board for the elders. Approx Rs 3 million has been obtained from the treasury and 100 elders above 70 years, who do not get any kind of assistance and who have no family or relative to look after them are benefitted through the monthly pension of Rs 500.

Maintenance Board for Elders

A board has been appointed under the protection of the Rights of the Elders Act No 9 of 2000, to look into and determine the claims for maintenance by parents, who have been neglected by children. An application may be made to the board for an order that one or more of his/her children pay a monthly allowance or any other periodical payment or a lump sum for maintenance. In 2008, 78 such applications were received and 27 cases were settled.

Conducting Pre- Retirement seminars

Pre Retirement seminars are conducted for employees of governmental and Non Governmental institutions who are getting closer to retirement. This will then prepare them for an active retired life and to create awareness regarding leading a planned retired life. National Secretariat for elders will make arrangements to conduct a two day seminar on pre retirement, at divisional, provincial or national level according to the application received.

Issue of cataract lenses

Cataract lenses are issued based on an application certified by the National Elders Secretariat for low income earners (less than Rs5000/ month). 660 such cataract lenses were issued in the year 2008.
Conducting Medical Clinics

Medical Clinics for elders are being organized at divisional secretary division levels. Elders Committees, Elder Day Centres can conduct these clinics by applying through the divisional secretary. Only one such clinic was conducted in 2008.

Registration of organizations and individuals providing services for the elders

Organisations and individuals, providing services for the elders, should be registered under the protection of the Rights of the Elders Act No. 9 of 2000.

Financial grants for the homes for the aged

Construction & renovations of Elders home is supported - 20 buildings housing over 1000 elders have been renovated and refurbished under this programme.

Distribution of Books, Magazines and other Publications

A hand Book for Elders

This publication was done through the National secretariat for elders in all three languages, Sinhala, English & Tamil. This book entails articles on the positive aspects of ageing. An elders contribution to society and advice on common diseases and prevention in old age, prevention of domestic accidents, Seeking legal advice & Obtaining of government services provided for elders including pension, identity card

“Wedihitiyo” Magazines

This magazine contains very useful information for elders and articles writes by intellectuals on various subjects

Other programmes / Activities

Provision of assistive devices

Counseling Services

Sponsorship Scheme

Social Security Schemes

Home Gardening programme

Commemoration of the International Elders Day

A national Programme is organized annually by the National Secretariat for Elders to commemorate the International Elders Day which falls on 1st October every year. Various programmes are being implemented on this day, with the objective of creating awareness among the public regarding the social and economic problems faced by the elder population.

In 2008 the National council for Elders conducted a seminar titled "Meeting the challenges of Ageing in the 21st Century". This was presided by the Minister of Social Services & Social Welfare and representatives from Ministries, Departments, NGOs and other relevant institutions Funds were also distributed among divisional secretaries and provincial councils to commemorate International Day for Elders at Village Level. Nine provincial councils and 43 Divisional Secretaries held functions accordingly.
Helpage Sri Lanka

Helpage Sri Lanka established in 1986 was initially guided by the recommendations of 1st World Assembly on Ageing of 1982. At the beginning helpage Sri Lanka was concentrating on the infrastructural development of existing elders homes and creating awareness on the older persons in Sri Lanka. However the activities have now expanded to include:

- Volunteers home care programme
- Eye Care Centre
- Conducting Mobile Medical Camps
- Providing Assistive Devices
- Training Home Carers
- Paid Care Facility
- Livelihood Assistance
- Capacity Building Programmes for older persons
- Psychosocial Intervention Programmes
- Youth Education
- Strengthening Old Peoples Associations

Mobile Medical Unit

Medical Camp

Livelihood Assistance

Eye Camp

Cataract Operations

Eye care centre

Psychosocial Activities
NGO Forum on Ageing (NFOA)

The NGO Forum on Ageing is a consortium of organizations interested in caring for senior citizens, in creating public awareness on the rapidly ageing population, and in advocacy for public policies for their welfare and participation in the affairs of the nation. The forum was launched through the Sri Lanka Women's Conference and inaugurated in 1999 during its celebration of the UN year of older persons. Some Activities undertaken by the NFOA include:

- Implementing aspects of the National Policy on Ageing
- Facilitating Rights of Elders Act 2000 through block issue of elders identity cards in local communities
- Conducting Health, Medical & Eye Camps
- Lecture and Lecture Demonstrations on Health Care, Fitness, Yoga "Tai Chi" etc
- Lobbying for more services for elders and private sector concessions for pharmaceuticals, consumer goods and improved bank interest rates
- Setting up of training course on preparation for retirement
- Training of carers and counsellors
- Legal assistance for elders
- Liaison with media on ageing issues

Regional Consultation on a strategic framework for Active Healthy Ageing in the South East Asia Region

The regional consultation on a strategic framework for Active Healthy Ageing was held in Colombo, from the 15th—17th December. Representatives from 6 countries in South East Asia including Indonesia, Maldives, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Thailand and Sri Lanka participated in this conference as well as WHO representatives from Geneva, Eastern Mediterranean & South East Asia Region participated as facilitators.

The objectives of the meeting were

- To share relevant experiences on policies and programme interventions including success stories for strengthening active healthy ageing
- Review the draft regional framework for healthy ageing in the South East Asia Region
- Identify challenges in effective interventions on active healthy ageing.
Way Forward—Adopting Age friendly principles & Initiatives

Age Friendly Primary Health Care

The World Health Organisation has recognized the critical role PHC centres play in the health of older people worldwide and the need for these centers to be accessible and adapted to the needs of older populations. Numerous focus group discussions, backed up by background research and a consensus meeting of experts, led to the development of a set of age friendly principles which addresses three major areas.

⇒ Information, Education, Communication and Training
  This includes staff training in clinical geriatrics and approaches to patient education

⇒ Health Care Management Systems
  Adapting procedures such as registration, to the special needs of older persons and supporting continuity of care through updated medical records available at each visit

⇒ The Physical Environment
  Clean & Comfortable centers that apply as far as possible, the principles of universal design

Package of Essential NCD Interventions for primary care in Low resource settings (GEP)

The WHO Package of Essential Non communicable Disease Interventions (WHO PEN) is a prioritized set of cost-effective interventions, tools and aids that make it possible to deliver acceptable-quality of care even in resource-poor settings. It can be used to strengthen National Capacity to integrate and scale-up care of heart disease, stroke, cardiovascular risk, diabetes, cancer, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Most importantly, it provides a minimum set of core NCD interventions which also includes information, education, communication and training on major NCDs that is seen in the elderly population. In addition health care management systems are also included. The only component that is not incorporated in the PEN is the attention to physical environment including availability of safe & affordable transport, simple & easily readable signage, access, non slip floor surface, stable furniture & clear walkways to name a few.

Age Friendly City

The Age-friendly Cities Programme is an international effort by WHO to help cities prepare for the two major demographic trends: the rapid ageing of populations and urbanization.

This programme began in 2006 when WHO turned its attention to the environmental and social factors that contribute to active and healthy ageing in urban centres. As a result, WHO launched the Age-friendly Cities Project in order to engage countries across the world in making their cities more age-friendly. This project resulted in a document titled "Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide" which identifies core features of an Age Friendly City.

Cities wishing to participate in the Age friendly cities programme are now able to join a Global Network of Age-friendly Cities® and receive guidance, technical support and training as they embark on the journey of building age-friendly cities.
Determinants of Active Ageing:

Gender

Economic determinants

Health and social services

Behavioural determinants

Social determinants

Personal determinants

Physical environment

Culture

Senior citizens are not only the victims of neglect and unfairness but also suffer from severe discrimination. There is an urgent need to address this issue at both national and international levels. The proposed bill aims to empower elderly people and ensure their rights and interests are protected. It also seeks to address the social, economic, and health challenges faced by senior citizens.

Any Queries please contact:

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