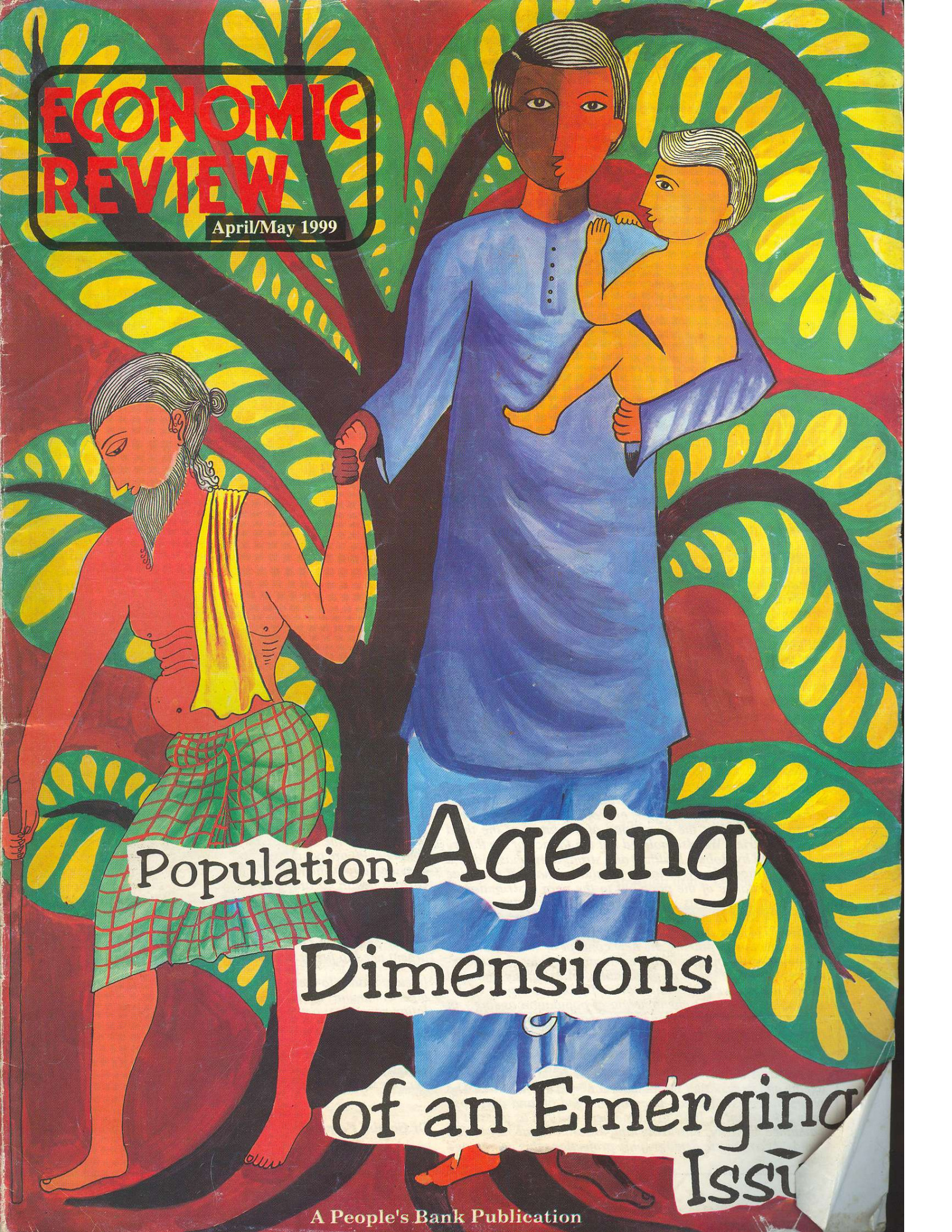


ECONOMIC REVIEW

April/May 1999



Population Ageing Dimensions of an Emerging Issue

A People's Bank Publication

OVERVIEW

In this issue of *Economic Review* to coincide with the International Year of Older Persons in 1999, we cover rather an unusual but highly relevant and topical theme of contemporary Sri Lanka: Population ageing. This special report examines various dimensions of an emerging trend in the demographic transition, which tends to alter the composition of different age groups in the total population by creating a relatively large segment of aged dependents. This unique situation arose as a direct result of decline in fertility coupled with a corresponding increase in the life expectancy during the recent past. In case of Sri Lanka, with its noteworthy achievements in the community development indices, which rank on par with that of developed countries, the proportion of those aged 60 years and older is much higher than in the rest of South Asia. Social and economic consequences of this changing scenario of age structures are manifold and need to be addressed with strategies of long term focus.

Ageing is an unique and complex biological phenomenon, which calls for a change of focus in health care services and family support systems to suit the needs of the elderly, as a distinguished and vulnerable social group. In recent years many countries have initiated various attempts to formulate policies and programmes to address this issue. Many of these policy orientations have given due recognition to the biological, psychological and social aspects of ageing. More pronounced of them are the social problems of the aged, which require a long-term multidisciplinary approach for redress. The main point that needs to be emphasised here is that the elderly population belongs to a different social group with distinguished characteristics of their own. Hence in devising schemes to provide economic and social support to them, it is essential to accord due recognition to these characteristics.

According to a recent UNFPA publication, "Better Medical Care is preserving life at both ends of the age spectrum: infant mortality has fallen rapidly and more people are living longer. Combined with lower fertility, the effect is to increase the proportion of older people. This is what is meant by an "ageing" population." The functions of the aged as bearers and transmitters of the techniques, knowledge and skills in their society have been duly appreciated and honoured by the younger generation. However, with passage of time these hallowed values have undergone a change; many factors would have been contributed towards this change, the most prominent of them being the unprecedented increase in the absolute numbers of elderly persons in society.

Almost two and half decades ago in 1975 *Economic Review* carried a special report on the theme of population to analyse and expose the then prevailing Western bias in theories related to population and population growth. In that issue we focussed attention on the UN Conference on Population held at Bucharest in 1974 amidst the new mood of militancy of the third world countries. We also pointed out the fallacy of the theory propounded by Robert Malthus and strongly emphasised that the distribution of hunger in the population has not been due to the abundance of the poor but to the poor distribution of society's abundance as well as the anarchic organisation of society's means of production. Some two decades later (November 1994), we again returned to this subject from a different perspective by linking the new concept of sustainable development with population and environment. Now, as our journal enters its 25th year of publication, in a rapidly changed global setting, we focus an another important aspect of demography, the recent phenomenon of population ageing - in order to highlight the various socio-economic implications of this vital issue and to stress the urgent need for mitigatory measures.

Sri Lanka is no exception to this global trend of population ageing and its resultant social and economic implications. The proportion of Sri Lankan population aged 60 and over rose from 5.4 percent in 1946 to 9.0 percent in 1996 as a result of combined fertility, mortality and international migration trends. According to demographic projections this percentage

might register an tremendous increase of 27.2% in the year 2041. While the child dependency ratio is projected to reduce to 24.6 in 2041 from present 44%, the adult dependency ratio is to register an increase to 47.9% from the present 14.3%. Thus the major shift in the overall demographic composition that is expected to occur in the first four decades of the next century, calls for immediate action to formulate policies and programmes to obtain the optimum advantages from this shift while mitigating the negative impacts of this process.

Dr Indralal de Silva in his contribution to this issue points out that with the recent economic, social and cultural changes in Sri Lanka, such as urbanisation, industrialisation, local and international migration, increased female labour force participation and increased age at marriage the ability of families to support the elderly is declining. However, he concludes that given the level of economic development in Sri Lanka, the family rather than the state will have to shoulder a major share of the responsibility for the provision of economic and social security for the elderly

Dr A T P L Abeykoon, as an eminent demographer of Sri Lanka has made an immense contribution to the field of population and demography and exerted much influence in the state policy on reproductive health and population planning in his official capacity as Director, Population Division, Ministry of Health. In his paper while he emphasises that if family planning had not been introduced in Sri Lanka, at present the total population would have been about 28 million instead of 18.7 million and takes a positive look at the ageing issue. He concludes that since a large majority of elders aged 60 to 70 are relatively healthy and physically and mentally able to contribute to economic activities, it is important to devise policies and programmes to productively engage them in such activities.

Dr Kotagama argues that one needs to understand clearly some concepts such as population, growth, environmental resistance and carrying capacity to get an insight into the complex issues involved in population and environment. Dr Lakshman Dissanayaka points out that in terms of infant mortality, school enrolment, life expectancy at birth and population growth rate Sri Lanka resembles the upper middle income group. He further states that contemporary Sri Lanka is experiencing vast and unprecedented changes and discusses the meaning of those changes for Sri Lankan women and how they affected their reproductive decisions.

Prof. Kumudu Wijewardene in her contribution points out that in Sri Lanka the complex issues involved in adolescent and youth health are not addressed properly, because the group is considered to be healthy. She elaborates the dimensions of the various health hazards that our youth are exposed to such as pre-marital sex, drug abuse, prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases. Further, she highlights the trauma and agony the most vulnerable groups of our youth population-children at war and street children are subjected to and stressed the urgent need to further strengthening the remedial measures.

In sum, thanks to the recent improvements in health care and other community development spheres, today our elderly population constitutes a valuable component of society's human resources. The UN bodies, in commemorating the International Year of the Older Persons, have aptly selected the theme of "Towards a society for all ages" to promote the age-integrated society that encourages the talents and participation of older persons while meeting their care needs.

Dr Gamini Fernando

ECONOMIC REVIEW

Volume 25

Numbers I/2

April /May 1999

Published by :
People's Bank,
Research Department,
Head Office,
Sir Chittampalam A.
Gardiner Mawatha,
Colombo 02,
Sri Lanka.

Special Report

Population Ageing: Dimensions of an Emerging Issue

Chief Editorial Advisor :
Dr. Gamini Fernando
B.A.Hons (Sri Lanka)
M.A. (Sri Lanka)
M.Sc. (USA), Ph.D.(UK)
Chairman, People's Bank

Chief Editor :
Dr. S.S.A.L. Siriwardena
Director Research

Co-Editor/Managing Editor
W.G.S. Waidyanatha

Editor (Sinhala Version
'Arthika Vimastuma')
E.D.C. Pushpakumara

Editor (Tamil Version
'Porulial Nokku')
M.L.M. Mansoor

W. Indralal de Silva & Dharshani Samarasekara	03	Population Ageing: Emerging Issues in Sri Lanka
Lakshman Dissanayake	09	Factors Influencing Recent Fertility Decline in Sri Lanka
A.T.P.L. Abeykoon	14	Population Ageing in Sri Lanka: Facts & Figures
Sarath Wimalabandara Kotagama	18	Population & Environment - Definitions, Concepts & Classification
Kumudu Wijewardena	24	The Health Needs of Young People
Jayanthi de Silva	29	Land Degradation in Sri Lanka
	33	Abortion in the Developing World

THE ECONOMIC REVIEW is intended to promote knowledge of and interest in the economy and economic development process by a many sided presentation of views and reportage, facts and debate. THE ECONOMIC REVIEW is a community service project of the People's Bank. Its contents however are the result of the editorial considerations only and do not necessarily reflect Bank policies or the official viewpoint. Signed feature articles also are the personal views of the authors and do not represent the institutions to which they are attached. Similar contributions as well as comments and view points are welcome. THE ECONOMIC REVIEW is published monthly and is available both on subscription and on direct sale.

Next Issue:

Garment Sector

Cover Art: Drawn by S.A Eresha Priyadarshana of Minu/Banduragoda Dharmashoka M.V. for the UNFPA Population Poster Contest - 1998 organised by the Ministry of Health & Indigenous Medicine.

Printed at People's Bank, DTP Unit



POPULATION AGEING: EMERGING ISSUES IN SRI LANKA

Prof. W Indralal de Silva & Dharshani Samarasekera

As a result of the decline in fertility accompanied by continuing increase in the level of life expectancy, there have been notable increases in the proportion of population in the elderly age groups in many countries. In developed countries approximately one person in every six is at least 60 years old and this proportion will rise to one person in every four by the year 2025. In less developed countries around one person in every eight is at least 60 years old and this proportion is expected to increase to one person in every five by the year 2025.

Asian societies have traditions, which hold the elderly in reverence. Nayar (1996) states that industrialization, urbanization and new technology have brought about radical social changes, which have weakened the family support system in Asian societies. Therefore population ageing is becoming an emerging problem in many Asian societies.

In Sri Lanka, ageing is seen to occur among families at a lower level of economic development compared with those of Western countries. With recent economic and social changes in Sri Lanka such as

urbanization, migration and increase in female labour force participation, the ability of families to support the elderly is declining.

The proportion of those aged 60 years and older in Sri Lanka is much higher than in the rest of South Asia. In 1996, 9.0 percent of women and 9.1 percent of men in Sri Lanka's population was aged 60 years and over which is a relatively large elderly population for a

developing country (De Silva 1997a). The definition of the term "elderly" or "aged" varies from society to society. In this article, "Elderly" is defined as those who are 60 years or more. The reason for taking 60 as the cut off age is that in both government and private institutions in Sri Lanka, the retirement age is determined to be between 55 and 60 years.

Table 1

Age Composition and Growth of the Population, Sri Lanka 1946-2041

Year	Population (Thousands)		Percentage of	Annual Growth Rate	
	Total	Aged 60+	Aged 60+	Total	Aged 60+
1946	6657	360	5.4	-	-
1953	8098	437	5.4	2.80	2.81
1963	10582	621	5.9	2.63	3.41
1971	12690	807	6.3	2.22	3.20
1981	14847	986	6.6	1.67	2.10
1991*	17015	1393	8.1	1.36	3.45
2001*	19186	1916	9.9	1.20	3.10
2011*	21114	2765	13.1	0.96	3.67
2021*	22375	3997	17.8	0.58	3.69
2031*	22778	5103	22.4	0.18	2.44
2041*	22697	6305	27.8	-0.03	2.12

Source : Data for 1946 to 1981 are from Census Reports of the Department of Census & Statistics.

Data for 1991 to 2041 are from de Silva (1997)

Note : * Projected Population

W Indralal de Silva - Prof. Department of Demography, University of Colombo
Dharshani Samarasekera - Department of Demography, University of Colombo

