

Urban Rural Differences in Economic Activity of the Elderly: A Case Study of Employed Elderly in Thangalle Divisional Secretariat, Sri Lanka

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Population ageing is of current interest in Sri Lanka mainly due to the rapidity of the process. Ageing is occurring parallel to the socio-economic transformation taking place in the country, suggesting that it should be viewed in a different light to that of the past. The objective of this study is to look into one aspect of social transformation and ageing, i.e. the economic activities of elderly; particularly its urban rural differences. Specific focus is given to identify why the elderly engage in economic activities, what activities they engage in, and what they gain from being employed. Data is drawn from a survey conducted in 2013, of 150 employed elders in two urban and rural Grama Niladari Divisions in Hambantota District. Data was collected using an interviewer administrated questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS. Findings show that more than 50 per cent of rural elderly are in agriculture, from which 66 and 34 per cent respectively are males and females. The majority in the urban sector are in fisheries. Most rural elders engage in economic activities to fulfil personal needs, while the urban do so to fulfil family needs. Monthly income of 47 per cent of rural elders is lower than Rs.10,000. In contrast, only 15 per cent of the urban fall to this category. Irrespective of the income level, majority take decisions on managing their income. These findings indicate that unlike in the past where the economic responsibility of elders were taken care of by the family, the present elderly take an active economic role, and in some instances, even support families. It is therefore necessary from a policy perspective to look into their work environment and conditions, savings for future, and the effect on elderly health due to employment, so as to make ageing productive and positive.

Keywords: Employed elders, Urban, Rural, Economic activity