Population ageing and public policy in Sri Lanka: applied demographic perspectives

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The demographic determinants of population ageing and its socio-economic implications have been discussed over the last two decades in Sri Lanka. It is evident that a close relationship exists between ageing and public policy in developed countries. However, in Sri Lanka, research and an analysis of ageing and public policy remains relatively underdeveloped. Presently, ageing population (aged 60 and over) consists of more than 12 per cent of the total population in the country and it is projected to be doubled (or one in every four persons will be aged) by the middle of the century. In this context, applied demographic knowledge is vital for addressing present and future implications of the ageing population successfully. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to examine the relationships between ageing and public policy in Sri Lanka by looking through the ageing process through applied demographic perspectives. This would substantially contribute to understanding a better model for public policy formation and decision making to improve welfare system for the elderly, especially at local level. The paper analyses theoretical and empirical literature, and also the data obtained from the Sri Lanka Population and Housing Census, 2012. The findings reveal that as in many other countries, in Sri Lanka too, the meaning of ageing is recognized by a very few parameters such as chronological age division, the labour market needs and the rules and institutional framework of the public and private sector. In the existing pension system, old age is symbolized as retirement age, hence retirement programmes and welfare programs for elderly are designed accordingly. Local level demographic and socioeconomic condition have not been given significant attention in policy planning and therefore existing policies and programmes are inadequate in addressing components of physical, mental and social well-being of old aged population. The analysis further suggests that Sri Lanka should adopt a multi-dimensional model which can recognize and integrate key domains of elderly well-being such as access to geriatric heath care, promote active and healthy ageing, ensure financial well-being, social dignity and rights of older people. In doing this, policy makers should incorporate provincial or local level demographic diversities in order to strengthen the coverage, efficiency, and the sustainability of the elderly welfare system in Sri Lanka.

Key words: Population ageing; ageing and public policy; applied demography of ageing

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