

SOCIAL DIMENSION OF ACTIVE AGEING AMONG COMMUNITY-DWELLING ELDERLY IN SRI LANKA

R.A.S.P. Ranabahu*, K.A.P. Siddhisena**, Sarath Amarasinghe***
and S.K.M. Ali****

Abstract: Active ageing is one of the most recent positive ageing discourses developed by the World Health Organization (2002), to enhance the wellbeing of elders all over the world. The social dimension of active ageing recognizes the importance of the inclusion of elders in the community. The current paper aims to examine the nature of social engagement among elders in Sri Lanka using a sample of 350 community-dwelling elderly men and women in three residential sectors viz., urban, rural and estate. The study was guided by the pragmatic paradigm adopted with a mixed-methods research design. The results highlight the current status of social engagement and the perceived benefits associated with active ageing among elders in Sri Lanka. The study revealed that 57.4 per cent of elders have been engaged in some form of societal activity at the time of the survey. The marital status and educational attainment are observed to be having a significant association with the societal participation, whilst there was no relationships with sex, age, and living arrangement. A significant spatial disparity could also be identified in the participation of societal activities. The study also found that the major motivational factor behind social participation was the 'opportunity' provided across one's lifespan. The benefits of societal participation entailed outcomes such as the opportunity to socialize and contribute to the community while acquiring happiness, sense of usefulness and new relationships. .

Keywords: Active Ageing, Social Dimension, Community-Dwelling Elderly

Introduction

Active ageing is a multidimensional concept which plays a key role in the current global strategy for the management of ageing populations (World Health Organization, 2009; Walker, 2002; 2006; Stenner et al., 2011). World Health Organization (2002) defined 'active ageing' as "the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security, in order to enhance quality of life as people age". Active ageing depends on various determinants such as demographic, social, economic, behavioural, personal, health and physical environment (WHO, 2002; Avramov & Masakowa, 2003; Sidorenko & Zaidi, 2012; Fernandez-Ballesteros et al., 2013). Ageing takes place within the context of friends, work associates, neighbours and family members (Amarabandu, 2004; Silva, 2004; Chadha & Malik, 2007; Batra & Bhaumik, 2007). Therefore, the interdependence, as well as inter-

* Senior Lecturer, Department of Geography, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka.

**Emeritus Professor, Department of Demography, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

***Senior Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka.

****Senior Lecturer, Department of Geography, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka.

Acknowledgements: The authors wish to thank the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) for granting access to data from the Sri Lanka Demographic and Health Survey, 2006-07 and Ms. Champa Shiromali and Mr. Prabash Priyadarshana of the DCS for their assistance in the various stages of this study.