

## Population Dynamics and Their Impact on Adolescents in the ESCAP Region

By Gavin W. Jones \*

\* Head, Division of Demography and Sociology, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia. An unabridged version was presented at the ESCAP Expert Group Meeting on Adolescents: Implications of Population Trends, Environment and Development, which was held at Bangkok from 30 September to 2 October 1997. It will be published as a chapter in a forthcoming issue of the Asian Population Studies Series.

Adolescents greatly outnumber the elderly, so care must be taken to ensure that policies towards them are not neglected

The ESCAP region is undergoing dramatic demographic, social and economic changes, which are both altering the share of adolescents in the population and changing their roles in society. The changes are, however, not uniform over the ESCAP region. On the contrary, the region contains countries running the full gamut: in demographic terms, from high fertility to extremely low fertility; in economic terms, from economically highly advanced to very poor; in human development terms, from highly advanced to some of the worlds least developed. These wide differences within the region pose difficulties for a broad overview of the topic of the effect of population dynamics on adolescents. This article will take a range of approaches, sometimes using broad subregions<sup>1</sup> of ESCAP, at other times concentrating on some of the largest countries or on particular cases that are seen to illustrate a situation or trend that has wider applicability.

**Table 1: Trends in adolescent population, by major subregions of Asia, \* 1970-2020**

	Number									
	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	
<b>East Asia - Total</b>	986,971	1,179,012	1,351,710	1,424,155	1,493,284	1,550,773	1,605,221	1,659,593	1,707,477	
10-14	102,834	147,104	113,658	114,246	130,141	116,954	116,996	109,747	111,580	
15-19	105,456	123,969	141,699	113,263	113,900	129,798	116,675	115,740	109,536	
20-24	81,873	101,460	146,008	140,892	112,676	113,371	129,268	116,226	116,342	
Total 10-24	290,163	372,533	401,365	368,401	356,717	360,123	362,939	342,713	337,458	
<b>South-Central Asia - Total</b>	787,673	990,060	1,243,314	1,381,160	1,525,812	1,672,087	1,816,977	1,954,244	2,076,460	
10-14	93,514	117,731	138,554	157,304	168,480	179,069	186,637	190,456	191,347	
15-19	77,891	103,842	128,245	137,133	156,167	167,531	178,298	185,954	189,868	
20-24	63,893	89,879	114,815	126,746	135,900	155,029	166,588	177,452	185,209	
Total 10-24	235,298	311,452	381,641	421,183	460,527	501,629	531,523	553,862	566,424	
<b>South-East Asia - Total</b>	286,708	360,180	442,312	484,252	527,103	568,748	607,479	644,668	679,498	
10-14	35,973	45,166	59,758	53,417	55,635	57,439	59,234	59,153	57,441	
15-19	29,160	39,077	48,165	50,150	52,870	55,144	56,998	58,835	58,795	
20-24	22,934	34,173	43,766	47,380	49,440	52,223	54,555	56,464	58,348	
Total 10-24	88,067	118,416	142,689	150,947	157,945	164,806	170,787	174,452	174,584	
<b>Total Asia - Total#</b>	2,061,352	2,529,252	3,037,336	3,289,567	3,546,199	3,791,608	4,029,677	4,258,505	4,463,435	
10-14	232,321	310,001	302,970	324,967	354,236	353,462	362,867	359,356	369,368	
15-19	212,507	266,888	318,109	399,546	322,937	352,473	351,971	361,529	358,199	
20-24	168,700	225,512	304,589	315,018	298,016	320,623	350,411	350,142	359,899	
Total 10-24	613,528	802,401	925,668	940,531	975,189	1,026,558	1,065,249	1,071,027	1,078,466	

Source: United Nations, 1994. The Sex and Age Distribution of the World Population: The 1994 Revision, New York.

Notes: Projected numbers taken from the medium projection.

\* Excludes West Asia and Oceania.

# Total Asia calculated as the sum of East, South-Central and South-East Asia.

## The growth of the adolescent population

The United Nations considers adolescents to be young people aged 10-19 and youth to be those aged 15-24. This article will deal with the three age groups 10-14, 15-19 and 20-24, and for ease of presentation will refer to them all as adolescents. How many adolescents are there, how rapidly are their numbers growing, and how large is the share of adolescents in the population? These are fundamental questions, and some of the answers to them are contained in table 1. It should be noted that the projection of adolescent populations over the next 10 years is a fairly precise exercise because these young people have already been born, and their numbers will be affected only by mortality and (to a limited extent) by migration. But the number of adolescents 20 or 30 years from now will depend as well on fertility trends, which cannot be predicted with any degree of precision. In the present article, reliance is placed on the United Nations medium projection.

Asias adolescent population as a whole is continuing to grow -- by 0.6 per cent per annum between 1990 and 2000. But this is much slower than its growth over the past few decades. Growth is slowing because of the earlier declines in fertility that have been very pronounced in East Asia, in parts of South-East Asia, and more recently in parts of South-Central Asia (see Leete and Alam, 1993). Total fertility rates declined from a range of 5.3-7.0 in the 1970s to a range of 1.2-3.4 in 1995, except for two outliers, Bangladesh and the Philippines, where the TFRs were 4.1 and 4.3, respectively, in that year (see Caldwell, 1997, table 4.3). Such declines begin to affect the adolescent population within 10 years, and have a really major effect on its growth within 20 years. The delayed onset of fertility decline in South-Central Asia is the main reason why its adolescent population is continuing to grow quite rapidly. The pace of fertility decline has varied sharply within major regions as well. It is largely for this reason that there are extreme inter-country variations in the growth of the adolescent population.

The share of adolescents in the total population of Asia has already fallen somewhat -- from a peak of 31.7 per cent in 1980 to 28.6 per cent in 1995. This decline is expected to continue. By 2020 their share is expected to have declined to 24.2 per cent. Again, there are wide differences by subregion; for example, in 1995, adolescents were 25.9 per cent of East Asias population, but 31.2 per cent of South-East Asias population. It is worth stressing here that the share of adolescents in the population of the ESCAP region is much larger than the share of the elderly. The elderly (aged 65 years and older) make up only 5.4 per cent of the population and, although their share is increasing rapidly, they will still make up only 8.4 per cent in 2020, still well below the 24 per cent expected to be made up by adolescents.

**Table 2: Growth and decline of adolescent populations, ESCAP subregions, 1970-2020**

Proportions (percentage)										
	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	
<b>East Asia - Total</b>	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	
10-14	10.4	12.5	8.4	8.0	8.7	7.5	7.3	6.6	6.5	
15-19	10.7	10.5	10.5	8.0	7.6	8.4	7.3	7.0	6.4	
20-24	8.3	8.6	10.8	9.9	7.5	7.3	8.1	7.0	6.8	
Total 10-24	29.4	31.6	29.7	25.9	23.9	23.2	22.6	20.7	19.8	
<b>South-Central Asia - Total</b>	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	
10-14	11.9	11.9	11.1	11.4	11.0	10.7	10.3	9.7	9.2	
15-19	9.9	10.5	10.3	9.9	10.2	10.0	9.8	9.5	9.1	
20-24	8.1	9.1	9.2	9.2	8.9	9.3	9.2	9.1	8.9	
Total 10-24	29.9	31.5	30.7	30.5	30.2	30.0	29.3	28.3	27.3	
<b>South-East Asia - Total</b>	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	
10-14	12.5	12.5	11.5	11.0	10.6	10.1	9.8	9.2	8.5	
15-19	10.2	10.8	10.9	10.4	10.0	9.7	9.4	9.1	8.7	
20-24	8.0	9.5	9.9	9.8	9.4	9.2	9.0	8.8	8.6	
Total 10-24	30.7	32.9	32.3	31.2	30.0	29.0	28.1	27.1	25.7	
<b>Total Asia - Total<sup>#</sup></b>	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	
10-14	11.3	12.3	10.0	9.9	10.0	9.3	9.0	8.4	8.1	
15-19	10.3	10.6	10.5	9.1	9.1	9.3	8.7	8.5	8.0	
20-24	8.2	8.9	10.0	9.6	8.4	8.5	8.7	8.2	8.1	
Total 10-24	29.0	31.7	30.5	28.6	27.5	27.1	26.4	25.2	24.2	

Source: United Nations, 1994, The Sex and Age Distribution of the World Population: The 1994 Revision, New York.

Note: Projected numbers taken from the medium projection.

The differences in growth rates of the adolescent population between different parts of the Asian region are immense. Table 2 shows indices of growth in the main subregions of Asia, and table 3 shows similar indices in China, India, Indonesia and Pakistan. Eastern Asia is already experiencing a decline in the absolute number of adolescents. Growth is relatively slow in South-East Asia, but remains more rapid in South-Central Asia.

**Table 3: Growth and decline of adolescent populations, China, India, Pakistan and Indonesia, 1970-2020**

1995 = 100	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000	2010	2020
<b>East Asia</b>							
10-14	90.0	128.8	99.5	100	113.9	102.4	97.7
15-19	93.1	109.5	125.1	100	100.6	103.0	96.7
20-24	58.1	72.0	103.6	100	80.0	91.7	82.6
Total 10-24	78.8	101.1	108.9	100	96.8	98.5	91.6
<b>South-Central Asia</b>							
10-14	59.4	74.8	88.1	100	107.1	118.6	121.6
15-19	56.8	75.7	93.5	100	113.9	130.0	138.5
20-24	50.4	70.9	90.6	100	107.2	131.4	146.1
Total 10-24	55.9	73.9	90.6	100	109.3	126.2	134.5
<b>South-East Asia</b>							
10-14	67.3	84.6	95.0	100	104.2	110.9	107.5
15-19	58.1	77.9	96.0	100	105.4	113.7	117.2
20-24	48.4	72.1	92.4	100	104.3	115.1	123.1
Total 10-24	58.3	78.4	94.5	100	104.6	113.1	115.7
1995 = 100	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000	2010	2020
<b>China</b>							
10-14	87.7	129.9	98.2	100	117.0	103.3	98.8
15-19	93.0	110.4	126.4	100	101.9	105.7	98.3
20-24	54.4	70.5	105.0	100	79.2	94.5	83.6
Total 10-24	76.5	101.2	109.4	100	97.9	100.7	92.8
<b>India</b>							
10-14	62.6	77.9	89.0	100	105.3	112.9	111.5
15-19	60.1	78.4	95.8	100	112.5	124.6	127.8
20-24	53.1	72.4	91.3	100	104.5	124.5	134.0
Total 10-24	58.9	76.4	91.9	100	107.4	120.3	123.7
<b>Pakistan</b>							
10-14	48.3	64.6	81.4	100	119.5	143.9	165.7
15-19	51.6	69.2	89.6	100	124.4	166.5	193.0
20-24	41.4	66.2	94.1	100	113.0	169.7	205.0
Total 10-24	47.4	66.5	87.5	100	119.2	158.4	185.4
<b>Indonesia</b>							
10-14	68.1	85.7	99.0	100	100.2	102.4	93.9
15-19	56.3	74.7	96.9	100	101.2	101.1	102.3
20-24	47.2	69.8	89.1	100	103.5	105.5	108.3
Total 10-24	57.5	76.9	95.1	100	101.6	103.0	101.3
<b>Proportion of total population (per cent)</b>							
<b>China</b>							
10-14	10.6	13.0	8.5	8.2	9.1	7.5	6.7

15-19	11.0	10.8	10.7	8.0	7.8	7.5	6.5
20-24	8.1	8.7	11.2	10.1	7.6	8.4	6.9
Total 10-24	29.6	32.6	30.4	26.3	24.5	23.3	20.0
<b>India</b>							
10-14	11.6	11.6	10.8	11.0	10.6	9.8	8.6
15-19	9.8	10.3	10.2	9.7	10.0	9.5	8.8
20-24	8.2	9.1	9.3	9.2	8.8	9.0	8.7
Total 10-24	.7	31.0	30.3	29.9	29.4	28.3	26.1
<b>Pakistan</b>							
10-14	12.7	13.1	11.6	12.3	12.8	11.9	11.0
15-19	10.8	11.2	10.1	9.8	10.6	10.9	10.2
20-24	7.6	9.4	9.3	8.6	8.4	9.7	9.4
Total 10-24	31.2	33.7	31.0	30.7	31.8	32.5	30.6
<b>Indonesia</b>							
10-14	12.2	12.2	11.6	10.9	10.1	9.2	7.6
15-19	9.8	10.4	11.1	10.6	10.0	8.9	8.1
20-24	7.9	9.3	9.8	10.2	9.8	8.8	8.2
Total 10-24	29.9	31.9	32.6	31.7	29.9	26.9	24.0

Source: United Nations, 1994. The Sex and Age Distribution of the World Population: The 1994 Revision, New York.

Note: Projected numbers taken from the medium projection.

But within these broad subregions, there is also considerable variation. Between 1995 and 2020, the number of adolescents in Asia as a whole is projected to grow by 20 per cent, but over the same period, as table 3 shows, the growth is projected to be 85 per cent in Pakistan but only 24 per cent in neighbouring India. These rates of increase do not cover the full range of difference to be found within countries of the region; over the same 1995-2020 period, the number of adolescents is projected to increase by 18 per cent in the Philippines and by 1 per cent in Indonesia, but to decline by 7 per cent in China and 10 per cent in Thailand. The difference between Pakistan and countries such as China, Indonesia and Thailand is truly dramatic, and reflects Pakistans failure to lower fertility rates over recent decades, contrasted with the sharp fertility decline in China, Indonesia and Thailand.

### Age at marriage

Traditionally, age at marriage for females has been very young in most of the countries of the ESCAP region, though considerably higher in some. This is reflected in the data on percentages ever married at ages 15-19 in years prior to 1970 in the countries of South Asia. Percentages ever married at these ages, i.e. of above 70 per cent in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, imply average age at marriage of no more than 16. By contrast, very few females were married at these ages in Japan or Hong Kong, and only around 14 per cent in the Republic of Korea, Philippines and Thailand. Sri Lanka, the only South Asian country where most females married at ages in their twenties, joined South-East Asian countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Myanmar as countries with intermediate ages at marriage for females.

Male ages at marriage were much older; in South Asian countries, it was typical for the age difference between spouses to be about seven years, and in South-East Asian countries, four or five years (Casterline, Williams and McDonald, 1986, table 1). Thus, despite the very young female ages at marriage in South Asian countries, most males aged 15-19 were not yet married. Bangladesh showed the most dramatic gender difference in percentages married: 8 per cent of males compared with 76 per cent of females. Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, however, showed a pattern of "child marriage" not only for females but also for quite a high proportion of males, with a quarter or more of males aged 15-19 already married. By contrast, in no countries of East and South-East Asia did the percentage of males married at these ages reach 8 per cent.

What changes had taken place by the 1980s? Almost universally, female ages at marriage had risen, and by a much greater margin than male ages at marriage, leading to a narrowing in the age difference between the spouses. In the Republic of Korea and Singapore, female marriage before age 20 had almost vanished, and in Indonesia and Malaysia, percentages married in the teenage years had declined very sharply. But in the Philippines and Thailand, where age at marriage had long been higher, there was actually a slight rise in the percentages ever married as teenagers. In the South Asian countries, child marriage remained very common, although in India and Pakistan at least, it was considerably less prevalent than it had been in the 1950s and 1960s.

**Table 4: Marriage and early fertility in selected countries of the ESCAP region**

	Percentage of women 20-24 marrying before 20 years of age	Percentage of women 20-24 giving birth before 20 years of age
Indonesia	51	36
Thailand	37	24
Sri Lanka	28	17
Pakistan	49	30

Source: Westoff and others, 1994.

Data from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHSs) of the late 1980s showed that half of Indonesian women were still marrying before 20 years of age, compared with little more than one-third in Thailand and one-fourth in Sri Lanka (table 4). In fact, Indonesia compared with Pakistan in this respect, even though the relative position of women and womens educational levels in Pakistan are much inferior to those of Indonesia.

The only substantial changes in the proportion of males married at ages 15-19 were for those countries where the proportion had previously been high: India, Nepal and Pakistan. But in each of these countries, the proportion of females married declined by even more. There has been a tendency over time for a convergence in male and female ages at marriage in Asian countries (Xenos and Gultiano, 1992:14-20), resulting from a faster rise in female ages at marriage than in male ages at marriage. This is very apparent among Malay-Muslim populations of South-East Asia, where average age differences narrowed from about five years in 1960 to 3-4 years in 1990 (Jones, 1994, table 3.16). Age differences were, and remain, wider for women who married very young, who were uneducated, and whose marriages were arranged (Jones, 1994:102-109).

For some countries, data are available for a year in the 1990s. These most recent data reveal a narrowing of the previously very wide differences between the East and South-East Asian countries, with their low proportions married among teenage girls, and South Asian countries. For example, the proportion of females married in the teenage years has fallen sharply in India and Pakistan to levels comparable with those in Indonesia and Thailand. In Bangladesh, teenage marriage remains very prevalent, but even there it is gradually declining: the married proportion of 15-19-year-old Bangladeshi girls had fallen from 75 per cent in 1974 to 69 per cent in 1981 and to 51 per cent in 1991.

The implications of the differentials and changes in proportions married for the life of young women are important. In many ESCAP countries, marriage used to take place at such young ages that the transition was straight from childhood to marriage. But now adolescence has become an extended period of time before marriage, raising issues about sexuality and relationships with the opposite sex that simply did not arise in times of early, parent-arranged marriage (Xenos, 1990; Utomo, forthcoming). Wide age differences between the spouses reinforced cultural norms about the subservient place of women, and narrowing of those differences is linked with trends towards self-choice of spouse and a more companionate form of marriage, a trend that has proceeded much further in South-East Asia than in South Asia. As will be discussed later, rising age at marriage for females has been linked with extended periods of schooling for girls and with very substantial increases in labour force participation, particularly in work that is not based in the home.

**Table 5: Educational statistics, ESCAP subregions and countries**

ESCAP subregions and countries	School enrolment as a percentage of age group													
	Primary				Secondary				Tertiary		Percentage of cohort reaching grade 4			
	Females		Males		Females		Males				Females		Males	
	1980	1993	1980	1993	1980	1993	1980	1993	1980	1993	1980	1990	1980	1990
<b>East Asia</b>														
China	103	116	121	120	<b>37</b>	51	54	60	1	4				
Republic of Korea	111	102	109	100	<b>74</b>	92	82	93	15	48	96	100	96	100
<b>South-Central Asia</b>														
Bangladesh	46	105	76	128	<b>9</b>	12	26	26	3	4*	30	46	29	44
India	67	91	98	113	<b>20</b>	37	39	60	5		52		57	
Kazakhstan		86		86		91		89	34	42				
Kyrgyz Republic									28	<b>21</b>				
Nepal	49	<b>87</b>	117	129	<b>9</b>	23	33	<b>46</b>	3	<b>6</b>				
Pakistan	27	49	51	80	<b>8</b>	13	20	29	4#	3*	41	45	53	55
Sri Lanka	100	105	105	106	<b>57</b>	78	52	71	3	6		96		95
Uzbekistan		79		80		92		96	30	33				

South-East Asia													
Cambodia		<b>46</b>		<b>48</b>									
Indonesia	100	<b>112</b>	115	<b>116</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>39</b>	35	<b>48</b>	<b>4<sup>#</sup></b>	<b>10</b>			
Lao People's Democratic Republic	104	<b>92</b>	123	<b>123</b>	16	<b>19</b>	25	<b>31</b>	0	<b>2</b>	31		31
Malaysia	92	93	93	93	<b>46</b>	61	50	56	4	<b>7<sup>*</sup></b>		99	98
Philippines	112	111	113	113	<b>69</b>	75	61	71	24	26		82	78
Singapore	106	107	109	110	<b>59</b>	71	56	70	8		<b>100</b>	100	<b>99</b>
Thailand	97	<b>97</b>	100	<b>98</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>37</b>	30	<b>38</b>	13	<b>19</b>			
Viet Nam	106	99	111	105	<b>40</b>	40	44	43	2	2	67		71
<b>East Asia and Pacific</b>	102 <sub>w</sub>	116 <sub>w</sub>	118 <sub>w</sub>	120 <sub>w</sub>	<b>36<sub>w</sub></b>	51 <sub>w</sub>	51 <sub>w</sub>	60 <sub>w</sub>	<b>3<sub>w</sub></b>	<b>5<sub>w</sub></b>			
<b>South Asia</b>	61 <sub>w</sub>	87 <sub>w</sub>	91 <sub>w</sub>	110 <sub>w</sub>	<b>18<sub>w</sub></b>	35 <sub>w</sub>	36 <sub>w</sub>			<b>5<sub>w</sub></b>			
<b>Europe and Central Asia</b>		97 <sub>w</sub>		97 <sub>w</sub>		90 <sub>w</sub>		81 <sub>w</sub>	31 <sub>w</sub>	32 <sub>w</sub>			

Source: World Bank, World Development Report, 1994 and 1997; Asian Development Bank, Key Indicators of Developing Asian and Pacific Countries, 1995.

Notes: Figures in bold are for years other than those specified.

\* 1991; # 1970; w = weighted average.

## Educational developments

Table 5 shows basic data about educational developments in the Asian region, derived from the World Bank's World Development Report for 1997. As with so many other matters related to youth and adolescents dealt with in this article, it is hard to draw generalisations because the differences between countries are so wide. However, in the following discussion, an attempt will be made to generalize as much as possible.

### Primary schooling

In most Asian countries, almost all children attend primary school, but not all complete it. The gross enrolment rates in table 5 are a very rough guide because they relate primary school enrolments to the numbers in the official primary school age groups, making no allowance for late enrolment and repetition of grades. That is why many of them exceed 100 per cent. Figures exceeding 100 per cent do not necessarily imply that all children complete primary school. For example, in Indonesia, where the rates for both boys and girls were well over 100 per cent in 1993, approximately 20 per cent of children do not complete primary school (World Bank, 1997: 68). Even more strikingly, in Bangladesh, which also has a gross enrolment rate above 100 per cent, less than 50 per cent of children reach grade 4, and in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, only 31 per cent do so (see table 5).

In most Asian countries, differences between boys and girls in school attendance at this level are not very great. There is a fairly wide gap, however, in some countries, in Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan, for example.

Primary school enrolment rates appear to have improved universally since 1980 in those countries where rates were low in 1980. Improvements have been particularly impressive in Bangladesh and Nepal, particularly for girls, whose rates had been very low in 1980.

Another point needs to be made about primary school in the region, and this concerns the quality of primary education, and its relation to equity of access. Although near-universal primary education, as attained in many countries, has positive implications for access to opportunity on the part of the rural and the underprivileged sections of the population, many problems remain. The quality of education varies greatly between regions and between kinds of primary schools within most countries, with the lowest quality normally in the more isolated and poorest regions of the country. Problems of inadequate training of teachers, absenteeism of teachers, poor quality buildings and lack of facilities and teaching aids bedevil such regions. A child sent barefoot to a school where attendance is spasmodic, the teacher is poorly trained and lacking motivation, and teaching aids are non-existent apart from a cracked blackboard and a few pieces of chalk can hardly be considered to be equipped to compete with his or her city cousins in the competition to advance to higher levels of education.

### Secondary schooling

At the secondary level, enrolment rate differences between countries, between the sexes, between regions within countries, and between socio-economic groups, become more pronounced, although the two last-mentioned differentials are rarely apparent in readily available international comparative statistics, simply because such data are rarely presented (and in fact, are frequently unavailable, even at the national level).



At this level of education, conflict emerges between education and traditional roles for adolescents and youth: namely, to become an immediate economic asset for the family by assisting in the family farm or business, or as exchange labour; and, particularly in the case of girls, to get married. In societies such as Nepal, or among Malays and Indonesians in the 1950s and 1960s, most girls were already married at ages younger than the completing age for high school. Thus, extended education required major modifications in community attitudes towards appropriate marriage ages. These modifications have been taking place almost universally in the region, as already discussed in the section on marriage.

In 1980, secondary education was already widespread in countries such as the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore and Sri Lanka. It was very restricted in Bangladesh, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Pakistan, particularly among young women. By 1993, rates had increased in all countries for which data are available. In most countries, the rise appeared to be sharper for females than for males (UNDP, 1995, table 2.3), thus closing to some extent the gender gap in enrolment. The gender gap in enrolments remains wide in the South Asian countries as a whole, but it is no longer of major consequence in most of East and South-East Asia. The really serious gap in these countries (which is also present, along with the gender gap, in South Asia) is the socio-economic status gap. This refers to the comparatively very poor chances for young people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds to enter and complete secondary school (Knodel and Jones, 1996).

### Tertiary education

At the tertiary level, differences between countries are very pronounced, but difficulties in interpreting the data are also great. For example, in Indonesia and Thailand, the development of open universities led to a rapid increase in tertiary enrolments, but a much less impressive increase in tertiary graduates, because of the very low ratio of graduates to enrolments in any given year. Countries such as Malaysia and Singapore still rely on overseas institutions to provide a substantial proportion of the tertiary education received by their young people, so local tertiary enrolment rates are thus misleading with regard to the proportion of young people who do receive tertiary education.<sup>2</sup> Despite these problems of interpretation, most countries of the region do appear to have raised the proportion of adolescents attending tertiary institutions over the past decade or two. For example, in Indonesia, tertiary enrolments increased from slightly under 1 million in 1984 to 2.2 million in 1994 (Oey-Gardiner, 1997, table 8.1), a rate of increase greatly in excess of the growth rate of the potential student population.

### Future trends

In table 3, which compares the projected growth of the adolescent population in China, India, Indonesia and Pakistan. Not only are there wide differences in the projected growth of the adolescent population (ranging from 85 per cent in Pakistan to minus 7 per cent in China over the period 1995 to 2020), but also in its proportion of the total population. Thus in 1990, adolescents were 31 per cent of Pakistans population and 33 per cent of Indonesias. But by 2020, they will remain at 31 per cent of Pakistans population but will have fallen to 24 per cent of Indonesias population. Pakistans adolescents will be requiring massive investment in educational facilities if educational enrolment rates are to be held constant, let alone increased. Indonesia, by contrast, faces the task of raising enrolment rates, but this will be facilitated by the near-cessation in growth in numbers of potential students. Moreover, the dependency rate in Indonesia will be much lower than in Pakistan, implying that Indonesia should find it much easier to generate the necessary resources to fund an expansion of the education system.

The generalisation that the demographic structure tends to be least favourable to educational development in precisely those countries with the least developed educational systems (Jones, 1990:11) continues to hold. It is in countries with high fertility, experiencing rapid population growth and high child dependency ratios, that school enrolment ratios tend to be the lowest. Such countries face an uphill battle in raising their school enrolment ratios to levels reached in other countries. The task is not impossible, but it will require a high priority to be given to educational expenditures among the many competing claims on government budgets.

## Labour force participation

Labour force participation at these ages is affected by many different factors: most importantly, by the extension of schooling, changes in the economy and changes in cultural norms about appropriate activities for women. The extension of schooling tends to delay the entry of young people into the labour force, although some continue to combine part-time work with studies. Changes in the economy sometimes provide many new employment opportunities that are considered to be best filled by young people, often of a particular sex: for example, work for young women in electronics factories in Malaysia or in garment production in Bangladesh. In general, the rapid expansion of manufacturing has been credited with much of the advancement of womens employment in East Asia (Joekes, 1987), whereas in South and West Asia, where urban employment growth has been sluggish, women have actually been displaced from the labour force, possibly by better educated male workers (Schultz, 1990:480).

**Table 6: Labour force participation rates, Asian subregions \* , countries and areas, 1980, 1990 and 1995**

	Labour force participation rate
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	1980			1990			1995		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
<b>East Asia</b>									
China	<b>1982</b>								
15-19	76.2	72.5	80.1	64.8	61.5	68.3			
20-24	94	96.8	91.1	91.2	92.6	89.6			
Hong Kong	<b>1981</b>			<b>1991</b>					
15-19	43.9	45.2	42.6	32.1	35.2	28.6	20.7	22.5	18.8
20-24	85.6	90.9	79.7	83.8	84.8	82.9	78.1	79.2	77.2
Japan									
15-19	19.6	20.3	18.8	18.7	19.9	17.4	17	17.9	16
20-24	73	74.7	71.1	75.5	75.4	75.5	74.1	74	74.1
Republic of Korea									
15-19	29.8	25.9	34	12.5	8.4	16.7	11.9	9.3	14.6
20-24	51.9	50.8	53	46.4	40.2	51.4	62.8	58	66.1
<b>South-Central Asia</b>									
Bangladesh	<b>1981</b>			<b>1990-91 LFSS</b>					
15-19	35.3	65.6	4.1	66.8	72.8	59.5			
20-24	41	80.9	4.5	72	85.5	59.8			
India									
15-19	47.9	61.7	32.4						
20-24	62.2	88.4	35.3						
Maldives	<b>1977</b>								
15-19	65.2	78	52.2	30.1	46.8	13.6			
20-24	78.1	93.4	62.1	51.7	82.6	23.6			
Nepal	<b>1981</b>								
15-19	60.7	69.2	51.3						
20-24	66.1	86.3	47.6						
Pakistan	<b>1981</b>			<b>1990-91OE</b>			<b>1993-94</b>		
15-19	35	62	3.4	35.7	55.2	13.1	33.4	52.3	12.1
20-24	41.9	76.5	3.6	49.4	87.7	14	47.8	84.9	14
Sri Lanka	<b>1981</b>			<b>LFSS</b>					
15-19	29.9	40.4	19	31.5	36.2	26.9	23.5	28.5	18.2
20-24	57.8	78.7	36.8	74.2	84.9	63.8	64.5	78.2	51.8
<b>South-East Asia</b>									
Brunei Darussalam	<b>1981</b>			<b>1991</b>					
15-19	28.2	38.2	17	18.9	23.8	13.7			
20-24	68.5	86.4	47.1	71.5	84.2	58.2			
Indonesia									
15-19	39.3	47.7	31.3	40.9	47.6	33.6	43.2	49.2	37.1
20-24	55	79.4	34.2	60.7	80	43.5	66.4	86.4	48.7
Malaysia	<b>LFSS</b>								
15-19	40.8	47.8	33.9	34	40.2	27.6			
20-24	70.1	89	52.6	70.7	83.2	57.7			
Myanmar	<b>1983</b>								
15-19	42	48.3	35.8						
20-24	57.2	75	40.1						



	<b>1975</b>								
Philippines									
15-19	31.9	40.4	23.5	36.8	42.3	31.3	37.7	46.5	28.1
20-24	48.7	70.5	27.6	56.5	70.7	42.5	68.3	81.1	53.8
Singapore									
15-19	49.1	47.5	50.7	28.1	28.4	27.8	19.9	20.5	19.1
20-24	86.1	93.4	78.4	82	84.3	79.6	76.7	76.2	77.2
Thailand		<b>CS</b>			<b>LFSS</b>			<b>1994 LFSS</b>	
15-19	61.8	63.5	60.1	68.5	67.7	69.4	49.4	50.8	48
20-24	73.4	79.3	67.6	86.7	91.6	81.7	78.4	86.6	70.1
Viet Nam					<b>1989</b>				
15-19				70.4	67.4	73.3			
20-24				91.3	94.4	88.8			

Source: ILO, 1980, Yearbook of Labour Statistics: Retrospective Edition on Population 1945-1989; ILO Yearbook of Labour Statistics 1991-96; Biro Pusat Statistik, 1990 Indonesian Population Census and 1995 Intercensal Population Survey; and United Nations, Demographic Yearbook, 1994.

Notes: \* Excludes West Asia and Oceania.

The data used in table 6 suffer from the definitional and measurement problems that bedevil the measurement of womens labour force participation in particular. The sharp rise in the participation rate of young women in Bangladesh between 1981 and 1990-1991 must surely be the result of changes in measurement procedures. The higher proportion in the data for the period 1990-1991 is more likely to reflect reality. Many studies have shown that womens economic activities in societies such as Bangladesh are hidden or disregarded because the society perceives their work as more wifely or daughterly duties than as economic contributions (Anker, 1983; Barkat-e-Khuda, 1985; Wallace and others, 1987). In agricultural areas of many countries, most women work despite what the official statistics might say (ILO/ARTEP, 1981).

However, in urban areas the official statistics are more (though not completely) reliable in recording employment. There was a steady increase in labour force participation rates for young females in urban areas throughout East and South-East Asian countries over the 1970s (Jones, 1984), and this has continued in most cases (Singarimbun, 1997, Ch. 2). However, this trend has been confounded at the young ages by the extension of schooling. This almost certainly accounts for the sharp decline in both male and female participation rates at ages 15-19 in the Republic of Korea between 1980 and 1990 and the more modest decline in Malaysia over the same period. Some stranger trends are apparent in some countries. The very sharp rise in female participation rates in Bangladesh has already been commented on; the Maldives registered a sharp fall. This probably also reflects definitional and procedural changes between the two sources of data rather than real changes.

There is no doubt that, in the cities of East and South-East Asia, labour force participation rates for young women once they have left school are currently very high. In South Asian cities, too, they are tending to rise, although this rise faces resistance from conservative forces, such as is the case in Afghanistan, where both educational and employment opportunities for young women are restricted.

**Table 7: Unemployment rates at ages 15-24, various Asian countries and areas**

	<b>1980s</b>		<b>1990s</b>	
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>East Asia</b>				
Hong Kong		<b>1986</b>		<b>1995</b>
15-19	9.4	8.8	12.6	12.7
20-24	4.3	4.2	6.4	4.4
Japan		<b>1985</b>		<b>1995</b>
15-19	7.9	5.3	8.9	7.5
20-24	3.5	4.4	5.5	5.8
Republic of Korea		<b>1985</b>		<b>1995</b>
15-19	12.5	10.1	9.2	7.5
20-24	13.8	6.3	7.7	4.9
<b>South-Central Asia</b>				
India		<b>1981</b>		

15-19	13.9	5.6		
20-24	26.1	12.1		
Pakistan	1988		1994	
15-19	6.3	1.2	8.4	11.9
20-24	5.4	1.4	6.3	9.1
Sri Lanka	1990		1995	
15-19	23.4	38.8	41.0	58.3
20-24	22.5	50.5	21.1	35.3
<b>South-East Asia</b>				
Indonesia	1988		1992	
15-19	5.4	7.0	6.3	7.4
20-24	12.3	10.3	10.2	10.4
Philippines	1985		1995	
15-19	8.1	12.2	12.8	16.3
20-24	11.2	19.9	15.8	21.3
Singapore	1985		1995	
15-19	4.9	11.0	3.7	9.0
20-24	7.2	5.9	4.9	4.8
Thailand	1985		1991	
15-19	6.0	5.5	4.1	4.7
20-24	6.6	7.6	3.8	4.7

Source: International Labour Office, Yearbook of Labour Statistics, various years, Geneva; United Nations, Demographic Yearbook, various years, New York; and National Statistical Office, Thailand, Report of the Labour Force Survey Whole Kingdom, Round 3, August 1985 and 1991.

## Unemployment

Most countries of the ESCAP region are still relatively low-income countries, and unemployment is notoriously difficult to measure in such countries. Time trends are also difficult to measure, because there are often changes in definitions or procedures between different sources of data. It is probably for reasons such as this that both the levels and trends of unemployment at ages 15-19 and 20-24 vary greatly between different societies as seen in table 7. Moreover, there is no consistency, either between countries and areas or in the same country/area over time, in male/female differentials in unemployment rates or in whether the rate are higher at ages 15-19 or at 20-24. What is clear is that in many ESCAP countries, a substantial proportion of young people are unemployed, defined as not working but looking for work during the reference period, and that unemployment is particularly a problem for the young, rather than a general problem.

**Table 8: Unemployment rates, by age and sex, Indonesia and Thailand**

Age group	Males	Females	Both sexes
<b>Indonesia 1995</b>			
10-14	12.6	20.9	16.1
15-19	18.4	26.7	21.9
20-24	15.5	23.3	18.5
25-29	6.4	12.5	8.6
All ages 30+	1.2	2.4	1.7
<b>All ages</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>7.2</b>
<b>Thailand, 1991</b>			
13-14	7.2	0.5	2.9
15-19	5.4	6.1	5.8
20-24	5.6	6.5	6.0

25-29	2.9	3.3	3.1
All ages 30+	0.6	1.0	0.8
<b>All ages</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.3</b>

Sources: Indonesia: Central Bureau of Statistics, Population of Indonesia, Results of the 1995 Intercensal Survey, Series S2, table 35.

Thailand: Report of the Labour Force Survey, Whole Kingdom, Round 2, May 1991, National Statistical Office, Bangkok, table 1.

There is a strong age pattern to unemployment rates in the region, as in most countries. The unemployment rates are generally much higher at ages 15-24 than they are at older ages. Examples of this are shown for Indonesia and Thailand in table 8. It is the age patterns rather than the actual levels that should be stressed in this example, because there is some evidence that the unemployment rates in Indonesia are exaggerated in comparison with other sources of Indonesian data (World Bank, 1997a:8-9). Both sets of data show the pattern of higher youth unemployment, and if the data were disaggregated by educational level, the rates would be highest for those with a high school and college education. A corollary of the higher unemployment rates among young people is that young people constitute a very high proportion of the total unemployed. In the Indonesian data on which table 8 is based, those aged 15-24 make up 64 per cent of the total unemployed; in the Malaysian Labour Force Survey for 1989-1990, they made up 72 per cent of the total unemployed.

A large literature has emerged on the meaning of high unemployment rates for the young, well-educated population. A cross-sectional approach generally leads to the conclusion that a crisis situation is emerging, and that the economy is unable to absorb the young people leaving school and college. But a longitudinal view, comparing similar sets of data over time, generally leads to a more sanguine interpretation, namely, that high unemployment among these young, educated groups is a structural fact of life, reflecting a period of job search and delays in finding satisfactory employment, a period that in most cases has ended by the mid-twenties of a persons life. This more sanguine view is based on the fact that unemployment rates do not normally rise sharply over time at ages beyond 25.

For many countries, the appropriate interpretation may contain elements of both the interpretations just noted. There is sometimes an element of crisis involved, because with the rapid expansion of education systems, the number of jobs of the kind that educated young people aspire to is not growing as rapidly as the number of job aspirants. Rising unemployment rates are one result; another is a modification of expectations in light of the new reality (Jones, 1993). Therefore, the decline in unemployment rates at ages beyond 25 may reflect both the tendency for young people to have found long-term employment by that age, and the tendency for much of this employment to be in jobs with a status and conditions worse than those the young people had aspired to.

**Table 9: Fertility indices, various years, for ESCAP subregions, countries and areas**

ESCAP subregions	Year	Total fertility rate	Age-specific fertility	
			rate (per 1,000)	
			15-19	20-24
East Asia	1990-95	1.91	14	160
South-Central Asia	1990-95	4.12	73	223
South-East Asia	1990-95	3.29	47	162
<b>ESCAP countries and areas</b>		<b>General fertility rate<sup>#</sup></b>		
<b>East Asia</b>				
China	1966	-	56.0	299.0
	1976	-	16.0	179.0
	1986	-	9.0	183.0
	1991	-	20	187.0
Hong Kong	1970	84.4	17.7	134.7
	1980	66.1	12.1	86.1
	1985	53.2	8.5	57.4
	1990	42.6	5.8	35.5
Japan	1970	64.9	4.4	95.3
	1980	51.5	3.6	76.5

	1985	46.4	4.1	61.3
	1990	38.9	3.6	44.3
Macau	1970	45.5	3.4	67.8
	1981	65.0	10.2	79.8
	1988	59.2	4.8	47.0
	1991	59.4	9.9	60.0
Mongolia	*		38.0	
	-			
Republic of Korea	1975	94.7	13.2	170.5
	1980	84.7	10.3	129.1
	1985	58.8	9.8	117.0
	1989	52.8	4.1	86.3
<b>South-Central Asia</b>				
Afghanistan	1979	232.5	159.9	332.8
Bangladesh	1981	161.5	130.4	247.7
	1986	154.2	84.1	262.0
	1988	147.6	81.4	247.4
Bhutan	*		86.0	
	-			
India	1993		66	224
Islamic Republic of Iran	*		80.0	
	-			
Kazakhstan	1989	92.3	47.5	210.4
Kyrgyzstan	1989	131.7	45.2	269.2
Maldives	*		71.0	
	-			
Nepal	*		89.0	
	-			
Pakistan	1968	174.8	61.1	219.7
	1975		131	275
	1979		99	283
	1984		64	223
	1991	177	84	230
Sri Lanka	1968	143.5	49.6	216.2
	1980	119.3	38.3	177.8
	1985	96.3	35.2	151.8
	1987	85.6	32.1	130.9
	1993		35	
Tajikistan	1989	175.2	38.9	302.6
Turkmenistan	1989	149.0	22.3	227.3
Uzbekistan	1989	144.8	42.1	285.7
<b>South-East Asia</b>				
Brunei Darussalam	1971	178.6	73.4	263.1
	1978	140.1	59.4	206.4
	1983	115.7	41.7	148.6
	1989	104.8	35.5	118.6
Cambodia	*		23.0	
	-			
Indonesia	*		45.0	
	-			
Lao People's Democratic Republic	*		51.0	
	-			
Malaysia:				

Peninsular	1970	140.1	53.6	232.6
	1980	121.5	35.0	176.0
	1986	117.9	23.8	147.4
	1990	104.9	18.5	123.9
Sarawak	1970	150.3	74.5	227.5
	1980	124.7	67.6	202.6
	1985	114.9	57.0	168.7
Myanmar	*		36.0	
Philippines	1970	114.8	36.3	165.5
	1980	126.3	45.8	188.8
	1986	107.7	43.9	164.0
	1989	103.9	38.6	159.4
Singapore	1970	93.1	26.2	139.5
	1980	59.3	12.3	80.0
	1985	56.4	9.7	66.9
	1990	64.5	8.8	61.9
	1992	60.3	8.2	55.3
Thailand	1970	147.0	52.3	227.1
	1980	95.5	52.1	173.6
	1985	73.2	42.6	129.3
	1990	63.3	43.1	111.6
Viet Nam	*		35.0	
<b>Pacific</b>				
Australia	*		22.0	
Fiji	*		48.0	
French Polynesia	*		69.0	
Guam	*		81.0	
New Caledonia	*		53.0	
New Zealand	*		32.0	
Papua New Guinea	*		23.0	
Samoa	*		32.0	
Solomon Islands	*		95.0	
Vanuatu	*		74.0	

Sources: United Nations, 1994. World Population Prospects: The 1994 Revision; United Nations, Demographic Yearbook 1975, 1981, 1986 and 1992; 1997 ESCAP Population Data Sheet; India, National Family Health Survey 1993; China data kindly provided by Mr. Zhongwei Zhao.

Notes: # General fertility rate (to women 15-49);

\* Data included from 1997 ESCAP Population Data Sheet for countries whose data are not included in the Demographic Yearbooks.

## Fertility among adolescents

Overall fertility varies considerably between the regions and countries of Asia (see table 9). The lower total fertility rate in Eastern Asia (1.91 or below replacement level fertility) is mirrored by a much lower age-specific fertility rate at ages 15-19 than in either South-Central Asia or South-East Asia. In fact, at 14 per thousand at ages 15-19 in Eastern Asia, fertility at these ages can be said to have almost vanished. However, there is far less difference in fertility rates between these regions at ages 20-

24. This is because these are major ages for childbearing, and even in East Asia, there is a tendency for childbearing to be concentrated in these ages and the late twenties.

Table 9 also presents age-specific fertility rates at ages 15-19 and 20-24 for individual countries, in many cases for a series of years, although in some countries, notably in Central Asian countries of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, only one years figures are available.

In Asian countries, fertility outside of marriage is extremely rare. It is therefore not surprising that fertility rates are correlated fairly closely with marriage. In countries with early marriage, fertility at the young ages tends to be high. This is evident in table 9, which shows a higher proportion of young women giving birth before 20 years in Indonesia and Pakistan -- where age at marriage is fairly low -- than in Sri Lanka or Thailand, where age at marriage is higher. The reason is that in almost all Asian countries, strong pressure tends to be exerted on newly married couples by their parents and other family members to begin childbearing quickly. Even in societies where fertility is low, such as the Republic of Korea and Taiwan Province of China, there is still pressure on couples to quickly produce the one or two children they will have. However, in China, there is the additional element of state permission to negotiate. This might have been expected to lower the age-specific fertility rate for Eastern Asia, which is dominated by China, at ages 20-24, but this is not the case. Although figures for China at ages 20-24 are not available in the United Nations Demographic Yearbook, other sources indicate that there is a sharp rise in fertility from an extremely low level at ages 15-19 to a peak at ages 20-24 (about 180 per thousand), after which fertility declines sharply again (Zhao, 1994:41).

In Hong Kong, Japan and the Republic of Korea, fertility at ages 15-19 and 20-24 has declined sharply since 1970, except at ages 15-19 in Japan, where fertility was already very low in 1970. The contrast with South Asian countries is dramatic: Afghanistan is estimated to have a fertility rate of 153 per thousand at ages 15-19, Bangladesh a rate of 119 and India 110, compared with 5 in China and 4 in Japan and the Republic of Korea; at ages 20-24, the age-specific birth rate in Bangladesh was 247 per thousand, compared with 35 in Hong Kong, and 44 in Japan. The only South Asian country with relatively low fertility at these ages is Sri Lanka. At these ages, fertility in major South-East Asian and North and Central Asian countries tends to be intermediate between the low East Asian and high South Asian rates. In Singapore and Thailand, there have been clear declines in fertility over these ages, though interestingly the decline at ages below 20 in Thailand has been only modest, probably because age at marriage has not risen markedly. In the Philippines, there has been only a slight decline.

In South Pacific island countries, the total fertility rates are above 3.0 in most countries and territories, and over 5.0 in three of them: Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The percentage of all births occurring to teenagers is unknown in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands; it is 7 per cent in Vanuatu and much higher (approximately 20 per cent) in the Cook Islands and the Marshall Islands. The age-specific fertility rates at ages 15-19 range quite widely from around 20 per thousand in the Cook Islands and Tuvalu to about 80 in the Marshall Islands and Guam and 95 in Solomon Islands (Lee, 1995, table 1; ESCAP, 1997).

## **Effects of demographic and educational changes, poverty, globalization and urbanization on adolescents: implications for policy**

Adolescents in the Asian region, like the rest of the population, are living in a rapidly changing environment. As the region enters the twenty-first century, most of its adolescent population will still be alive at mid-century. In the interim, this cohort will play a crucial role in national development in an increasingly interconnected and high-technology world. From this perspective, it is tragic to note that many of these adolescents will still lack access to secondary schooling -- and in some cases, even to primary schooling -- and will suffer from avoidable health problems. Some will continue to suffer from exploitation in the form of child labour and abuse within the family. Profound changes in technology, in economic structures and in living conditions are altering the nature of adolescents lives and influencing family relationships and expectations placed on them. In general, conditions of life are improving for Asias adolescent population and their opportunities are widening. Nevertheless, the variety of circumstances across the Asian region is so broad as to defy easy generalisation.

Demographic trends in the ESCAP region will have important ramifications for the growth and welfare of the adolescent population. With the exception of certain high-fertility South Asian countries such as Nepal and Pakistan, the growth of the adolescent population has slowed considerably and will continue to decelerate in coming years. This will facilitate the rise in primary and secondary school enrolment ratios, with all the implications this has for adolescents: increased life skills, greater independence, and the opening of a greater range of possible work opportunities. Of course, the extent to which the opportunities will increase to match the rising educational levels of young people will depend on rates of economic growth, which are very hard to predict. Economic growth rates have been remarkably high in recent years in many East and South-East Asian countries, and quite high in a number of South Asian countries. But recent revisions to projected economic growth rates have been sharply downward in a number of South-East Asian countries.

Demographic trends, however, underpin positive longer-term assessments of the economic prospects of these countries, as a result of the declining dependency ratios they will experience over a sustained period (Higgins and Williamson, 1997). Many other factors will of course influence the rates of economic growth achieved, but the declining dependency ratios will have unambiguously positive implications for economic growth and levels of per capita income.

Urbanization in the region is increasing apace. Projections suggest that even large and relatively poor countries such as



the Philippines and Indonesia are likely to reach urbanization levels of 50 per cent of their population by about the year 2002 (Philippines) or 2017 (Indonesia), although India is expected to remain predominantly rural until about 2030. A number of implications for adolescents emerge. First, for the next two decades, most adolescents in the region will continue to live in rural areas, and their needs should not be overlooked because of the greater visibility of issues facing adolescents in metropolitan areas. Second, adolescents will be prominent in rural-to-urban migration flows, and an increasing proportion of adolescents will be living their lives in urban environments, increasingly in big city and metropolitan environments.

In conditions of poverty and traditional attitudes about the role of children and of women, child labour remains a problem and women continue to fulfil their traditional roles of producing children and serving their husbands family. Such conditions can be observed very widely throughout the region. In countries such as Indonesia and Thailand, the incidence of poverty has been dramatically reduced, and most children are now able to continue their schooling into lower secondary school without the pressure of working at the same time. Reduction of poverty and the achievement of almost universal secondary education has been particularly dramatic in some countries such as the Republic of Korea.

But even in the poorest countries, expanded schooling and the effect of improved transport and communications is changing attitudes and leading to tensions as tradition comes into conflict with the changing aspirations of the young. Age at marriage has risen, and puberty is now reached well before young people marry. Issues of sexuality and how to deal with it, along with the problems of finding satisfactory employment for both the young city-born and young people migrating to the cities from the countryside, are only two of the key problems with which young people have to deal. Adolescence is the most volatile period in a persons life, and issues young people have to resolve are faced at the household, local community and wider political level. At the household level, there is frequently a growing gap between the traditional attitudes of parents regarding control over teenagers and appropriate behaviour of teenagers, and the attitudes of teenagers themselves, conditioned by their peers at school and the influence of the Westernized media. In fact, for many parents the control of the behaviour of adolescent girls is a new issue, since they themselves and their own parents were already married when they reached these ages.

At the societal level, rebelliousness of teenagers in school is frequently decried, as is the reluctance of some of them to participate in youth organizations under the auspices of religious, school or government authorities. The idealism and perhaps foolhardiness of youth frequently encounter the reality of deficiencies in the political system and the nature of governance, and in some cases oppressive and/or corrupt regimes. Aspirations for effective political expression lead some adolescents to the forefront of demonstrations and expressions of dissatisfaction with the regimes in power, and this leads to tight control over political movements in universities in many countries of the region, thus inhibiting expression of views of a kind not officially sanctioned.

Communications is one area in which the changes have been so profound and universal that it is possible to generalize to some extent. It is clear that, even in the most isolated villages in countries such as Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand, the influence of radio and television has penetrated deeply. This was not the case 30 years ago. Villagers these days are bombarded by images of the urban middle class, not to mention of the great world beyond national boundaries. Therefore, it is very difficult any longer to find villages where young people are entirely ignorant of the world outside and of the gulf that separates their conditions from those in more favoured settings typically shown on television. These images help to fuel migration of young people from rural areas to the cities.

It was noted previously that the share of adolescents in the ESCAP region is much larger than the share of the elderly which, although increasing rapidly, will remain much smaller than the share of adolescents three decades from now. Issues of an ageing population are, appropriately, receiving increased attention throughout the region. But care must be taken to ensure that the pressing issues facing adolescents and facing governments in their policies towards adolescents are not neglected.

## **Acknowledgements**

The author would like to acknowledge with gratitude the help of Ms. Jenny White and Ms. Ann Evans in preparing the data for this article.

## **Endnotes**

1. In summary tables, the ESCAP region is approximated by Asia (excluding Western Asia): in other words, as the sum of East, South-East and South-Central Asia. This excludes Oceania, but as Oceania constitutes less than 1 per cent of the population of the ESCAP region, this is not a major problem. The difficulty with Oceania is that it comprises Australia and New Zealand and the Pacific island countries, which have quite different demographic regimes, with the result that the aggregate Oceania figures have little meaning, and certainly do not reflect conditions in most member states of that subregion, the small island states of the South Pacific.

2. According to data in UNDP's Human Development Report for 1995 (table 10), in Singapore and Malaysia, the ratio of tertiary students abroad to those at home was 25 per cent and 38 per cent, respectively, compared with 1 per cent in Bangladesh and 2 per cent in Indonesia.

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