

Patterns in Living Arrangements and Familial Support for the Elderly in the Philippines

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Living arrangements for the elderly of the future will not necessarily continue to be predominantly with a child as coresident

Foremost among the traditional roles that the family is presumed to play in Asian societies is that of provider of support for its members at all stages of the life-cycle. The significance of this role is particularly evident in the old-age stage, when the family performs a social security function that in more developed countries has been taken over by non-familial institutions. In recent years, social changes in the Asian region, including those brought about by fertility decline, rural-to-urban and overseas migration, urbanization and rising female labour force participation, have raised questions about the enduring role of the family as a source of support for its elderly members in views of the rapid pace with which these changes are occurring.

The elderly are a vulnerable group in the face of rapid social and economic changes, because the net effect of such changes may be, theoretically at least, a diminution in the pool of available sources of familial support. Fertility decline, for one, can lead to fewer adult children upon whom the elderly could depend. Urbanization and migration, for another, may lead to the abandonment of the elderly in rural areas as their children move to and settle in cities or in other countries. In general though, the results of studies on living arrangements and sources of familial support for the elderly in the Asian context show as yet no evident threat to the age-old arrangement of families living with older kin (Knodel and Debavalya, 1992). Comparative data on regional differences in the percentage of the elderly (65 years and older) who live alone indicates that Asian countries have the lowest percentages whereas European countries have the highest. That cultural rather than purely economic factors are at play is suggested by the equally high percentages of elderly living alone in the Caribbean and in some Latin American countries where economic conditions are presumably different from those of European countries (Kinsella, 1993).

In the Philippines, studies on living arrangements of the elderly and their sources of support generally reveal a predominant pattern of coresidence with other kin, mainly their spouse and/or their children. Only a small proportion live alone (estimated from the 1988 National Demographic Survey (NDS) to be 4 per cent). No significant differences between the sexes and between rural and urban residents were observed (Domingo and Casterline, 1992). Moreover, data from the 1984 ASEAN Survey on the Elderly showed a picture of continued social contact between the elderly and their other non-coresident children (Domingo and Feranil and Associates, 1990). Both coresident and non-coresident children provide economic support to ageing parents, while the latter also extend various forms of economic and social assistance.

Focus group data contribute further insights into the social interactions behind the data culled from survey results. Filipino elderly participants in focus group discussions conducted in Metro Manila and in two rural villages in 1990 and 1991 reveal that many of the elderly would prefer to live independently of their children but are constrained to do otherwise as much by their own needs as those of their offspring. In many cases, the children are not able to establish themselves on their own and have to live with a parent in the latter's house. A pattern of co-dependence is thus established (Domingo and Asis, 1993).

This article examines patterns in living arrangements and sources of social support for the Filipino elderly (aged 60 years and older) using data from the 1996 Philippine Survey on the Near Elderly and Elderly (1996 PSNEE) which cover the population 50 years and older. The sample consisted of 2,285 respondents aged 50 years and older, of whom 1,131 were aged 60 years and older. This survey is the first to have been conducted in the country specifically on these age groups using a nationally representative sample¹ The article aims to examine the latest trends in living arrangements and sources of social support across gender, marital status and rural-urban residence. The PSNEE is part of a comparative study on the elderly and near elderly in four Asian societies (Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan Province of China and Thailand) aimed at investigating how rapid demographic change in these societies has affected the elderly. A complete description of the PSNEE is contained in a forthcoming country report on the Philippines.

Table 1: Background characteristics of the Filipino elderly aged 60+ (weighted and unweighted values)

	Unweighted percentage distribution (percent)	Weighted percentage distribution
Age		
60-69	56.0	56.5
70+	44.0	43.5
Total	100.0	100.0

(N)	(1,311)	(1,264)
Sex		
Male	39.7	41.8
Female	60.3	58.2
Marital status		
Currently married	50.4	54.1
Widowed	44.0	41.0
Others	5.6	5.0
Type of residence		
Urban	46.0	43.4
Rural	54.0	56.6

Results

The basic characteristics of the sample population are presented in Table1 which also shows both weighted and unweighted sample sizes.

Table2: Measures of living arrangements for the Filipino elderly aged 60+

Current living arrangement	Total	Age (percent)		Sex (percent)		Marital status (percent)			Type of resident (percent)	
		60-69	70+	Male	Female	Currently married	Widowed	Others	Urban	Rural
Percentage living:										
Alone	5.5	2.8	9.1	4.4	6.4	0.6	10.0	22.2	4.6	6.3
With spouse (60+)	7.9	8.4	7.3	8.9	7.2	14.5	0	0	5.3	9.9
With any child	69.2	74.2	62.7	71.9	67.4	72.2	70.5	25.8	71.7	67.3
With any child or adjacent to any child	76.8	81.5	70.7	79.5	74.9	81.1	76.8	30.2	79.4	74.8
With a single son	28.6	36.1	18.7	34.6	24.2	36.5	21.2	3.2	28.2	28.8
With a single daughter	21.7	26.3	15.6	22.1	21.5	26.9	17.6	0	23.0	20.8
With an ever married son	20.3	19.9	20.9	17.4	22.4	17.6	25.9	3.2	25.0	16.6
With an ever married daughter	24.0	23.9	24.0	22.2	25.3	20.9	28.4	20.6	24.8	23.4
With a three-generation household	45.5	45.5	46.6	42.2	47.8	40.8	54.1	23.8	48.6	42.9

Patterns in living arrangements of the elderly

Table 2 is a summary table of various types of living arrangements of the elderly broken down by age, gender, marital status and residence. Some of the categories are mutually exclusive, others overlap. In general, the table captures the prevalent types of living arrangement ranging from living alone and living with a spouse to living with children of different characteristics (single vs. married, daughters vs. sons). Table 3 provides additional summary information about living arrangements in a set of mutually exclusive categories.

Table 3: Current living arrangements for Filipino population aged 60+

Current living arrangement	Total	Age		Sex		Marital status			Type of resident	
		60-69	70+	Male	Female	Currently married	Widowed	Others	Urban	Rural
Living alone	5.5	2.8	9.1	4.4	6.4	0.6	10.0	22.2	4.5	6.3

Living with spouse only	7.9	8.4	7.3	8.9	7.2	14.5	0.2	0	5.3	9.9
Living with others only excluding spouse or children	9.8	6.6	14.0	4.4	13.7	0.9	17.4	44.4	10.9	8.9
Living with single but no ever married children (regardless of whether spouse or others are present)	28.4	34.5	20.5	35.2	23.5	36.8	20.5	3.2	26.0	30.3
Living with one or more ever married children only (regardless of whether spouse or others are present)	28.5	25.1	33.0	23.5	32.2	20.9	39.2	23.8	31.3	26.5
Living with never and ever married children (regardless of whether spouse or others are present)	13.4	16.0	10.0	13.8	12.9	15.2	12.5	0	15.6	11.6
Other types of arrangement ^a	6.5	6.7	6.2	9.8	3.9	11.1	0.2	6.3	6.4	6.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

^a Includes the following: living with children with unknown marital status, and living with spouse and other persons.

Living alone

From the survey's household screening form, the elderly who lived alone were identified to be those who did not report any other member of the household apart from themselves. From the main questionnaire, data on non-co-resident children weeded out those who reported living alone on the household form but had at least one non-co-resident child living in the same housing unit. Since the questionnaire contained no comparable information on the proximity of kin other than children, the final estimate of elderly who live alone may be biased towards over-representation of the unmarried and the childless, who nevertheless may be living close to other relatives under the same arrangement as non-co-resident children. Being childless and being unmarried are two uncommon states among elderly persons in the Philippines. To make up for the perceived deficiency in available support for these groups, focus group data point to a social support network provided by siblings, nephews and nieces (Domingo and Asis, 1993), which the data presented here do not quite capture.

In Philippine society, where the norm is for the elderly to be taken care of by kin -- chiefly spouse and/or children among the ever married and other relatives such as siblings, nephews and nieces for the never married or widowed without children -- living alone in the twilight of one's life is almost unthinkable as it means that the family has somehow reneged on its implied duty to care for its own. This normative standard is mirrored in the overall low proportion of elderly respondents who were living alone, reported at 5.5 per cent (as contrasted with 4 per cent from the 1988 NDS and 3 per cent from the 1984 ASEAN Survey).

The overall proportion living alone increases with age. Also, there are more rural residents who live alone compared with urban residents. With regard to marital status, the category "others", which includes the separated and the unmarried, has the highest proportion living alone. Of these two subgroups, more people separated from their spouse lived alone than those who never married.

Because divorce has not been legalized in the Philippines, there is a mark of social unacceptability for those who are separated. This is especially true among those in the age groups under study who were socialized into a more strict code with regard to staying married. The comparatively high prevalence of the separated among those who are living alone may reflect this unacceptability. In contrast, the never married who also represent an uncommon, albeit not an unacceptable, status do not have such a high prevalence of living alone. The latter are likely to live with siblings or nephews and nieces.

To probe further for the characteristics of the elderly living alone, these cases were singled out for additional analysis. Table 4 shows a profile of their characteristics. The age categories for the elderly were collapsed into one (60 years and older) because of the small sample size involved. Females predominate in this group, a reflection of their higher survivorship. It is interesting to note that those who lived alone were more likely to come from the rural areas where common-sense knowledge in the Philippine context presumes living alone is more uncommon because of more traditional values. Nevertheless, data on place of residence of the nearest child show that few of the elderly truly live in isolation as their nearest child was more likely to live nearby in the same barangay (village), same city/province, or next door.

Table 4: Profile of Filipino elderly who live alone (aged 60+)

Marital status (percent)

Never married	8.1
Married	6.5
Widowed	14.5
Divorced/separated	71.0
Total (%)	100.0
(N)	(62)
Sex	
Male	34.9
Female	65.1
Place of residence	
Urban	33.9
Rural	66.1
Place of residence of nearest child	
No children	16.2
Next door	10.8
Same <i>barangay</i>	61.9
Same city/province	20.6
Outside province	5.3
Abroad	1.3

Living with spouse only

Couples living by themselves after the children have grown are considered to be in the "empty nest" stage of the family life-cycle. This type of living arrangement is prevalent in western cultures where grown children are expected to leave the parental home upon reaching adulthood. In the Philippines, as in other Asian countries, the empty-nest situation appears almost as rarely as living alone (7.9 per cent living with spouse only compared with 5.5 per cent living alone). The proportion living with spouse only does not vary much with age or gender but there are variations by residence, with more rural than urban residents living with spouse only.

While few of the elderly live with spouse only, other data from the survey suggest that many may actually find this living arrangement to be a desirable one. As seen in Table 5, when asked what they thought the best living arrangement would be for elderly couples, the most common choice was for couples to live by themselves, followed by live by themselves but near one or more children. Living with a child came in a poor third and so did rotating residence among children. Females are just as likely to choose living alone with a spouse as are males, while rural residents are slightly more likely to prefer this arrangement than urban residents.

Table 5: Preferred living arrangements for older couples, widows and widowers (aged 60+)

Preferred living arrangement	Total	Age		Sex		Marital status			Type of resident	
		60-69	70+	Male	Female	Currently married	Widowed	Others	Urban	Rural
Older couples										
Live alone	41.8	43.6	39.3	41.5	42.0	42.5	41.4	37.7	38.2	44.6
Live alone but near one or more children	22.4	23.1	21.6	23.1	21.9	24.9	19.2	21.3	24.1	21.1
Rotate residence among children	8.8	7.2	10.9	7.5	9.8	7.7	10.5	8.2	11.3	6.8
Live with a child	22.9	23.4	22.3	23.3	22.6	21.3	25.1	23.0	20.3	24.9
Depends	2.2	1.7	2.9	1.8	2.5	2.0	2.2	3.3	3.2	1.4
No information	1.9	1.0	3.1	2.8	1.3	1.7	1.6	6.6	2.8	1.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Widow										

Live alone	27.7	29.2	25.6	24.3	30.0	24.9	31.8	25.0	25.2	29.6
Live alone but near one or more children	21.4	21.8	20.8	21.7	21.2	23.4	19.2	16.7	24.2	19.3
Rotate residence among children	12.6	11.9	13.6	14.2	11.3	12.4	12.1	16.7	12.2	12.6
Live with a child	34.8	34.7	35.0	35.8	34.2	36.0	33.8	31.7	33.3	36.1
Depends	1.5	1.3	1.7	2.0	1.0	1.8	0.6	3.3	1.7	1.3
No information	2.0	1.1	3.3	2.0	2.2	1.5	2.4	6.7	3.2	1.2
Widower										
Live alone	27.1	32.3	19.3	28.4	26.1	29.7	24.7	15.4	28.4	26.3
Live alone but near one or more children	20.9	17.7	25.7	24.1	17.8	20.0	22.6	15.4	23.3	18.6
Rotate residence among children	11.0	9.1	13.8	6.9	14.0	8.5	16.1	0	12.1	10.3
Live with a child	36.6	36.0	37.6	38.8	35.7	38.2	33.3	46.2	32.8	39.7
Depends	4.0	4.3	3.7	1.7	5.7	3.6	2.2	23.1	3.4	4.5
No information	0.4	0.6	0	0	0.6	0	1.1	0	0	0.6

The concept of ideal living arrangement changes when the elderly person in question is widowed. Yet, while living with a child is the most common choice under this condition, the change in the distribution of responses suggests that there is no dramatic shift towards choosing this living arrangement. About one out of four believes that the best living arrangement is for a widow to live alone, while one out of three believes that she should live with a child.

Among married respondents, about four out of ten said that the best living arrangement for older couples is to live by themselves even though a much lower proportion of them are actually in this living arrangement. Again, focus group data from Domingo and Asis (1993) provide insight into what goes on behind such seeming inconsistency. They showed that elderly respondents desire to live independently of their children because of the strains that dependence causes on both sides, especially the child on whom the parents depend. The strains are more acute when the coresident child is married. Their respondents also expressed the desire to maintain a certain autonomy that may be threatened by coresidence with an adult child, especially a married one. Yet the elderly focus group discussion participants are constrained to coreside by the exigencies of the situation, either by their own inability to care for themselves and provide for their needs, or their children's continued need for the support they can provide -- among these, a house to stay in or both.

Table 6: Ownership of respondent's current residence among Filipino elderly (aged 60+)

Current living arrangement	Total	Age		Sex		Marital status			Type of resident	
		60-69	70+	Male	Female	Currently married	Widowed	Others	Urban	Rural
Respondent and spouse	74.4	80.2	66.8	81.4	69.2	83.9	65.6	41.3	69.4	78.0
Respondent, respondent's spouse and children	3.0	2.4	3.8	2.1	3.7	2.3	4.1	1.6	3.8	2.4
Children	13.5	8.6	20.0	9.7	16.3	7.0	22.6	11.1	11.5	15.2
Others	9.1	8.8	9.4	6.8	10.9	6.7	7.7	46.0	15.3	4.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

One concrete way to express one's autonomy is by ownership of one's residence. Table 6 shows that the ownership of the house where the elderly respondent currently resides most commonly remains with the elderly couple (or with the surviving spouse). In the Philippines, it is not normal practice to turn over ownership of property to the children while a parent is still alive. In urban areas, it is also a fact that it is very difficult to acquire a house because of high costs. Therefore, in the majority of cases where an elderly person coresides with an adult child, it is the latter who lives with the elderly person rather than the other way around. Because he/she owns the house, the elderly person retains a titular claim to authority in the household even when he/she no longer provides for its needs.

Co-residence with children

Data on coresidence were derived from the survey's household screening form and referred to the elderly as the unit of

analysis. A child is someone whom the respondent identified as his/her child, whether a natural or adopted child, or a step-child. In view of the Philippine cultural environment, coresidence with a child refers overwhelmingly to the respondent's natural children. Owing to the near absence of divorce, step-parenting is not a common occurrence and almost always refers to parenting the children of a widowed spouse. Adoption is not commonly legalized either, although de facto adoptions occur often among close kin such as nephews and nieces.

As in other Asian countries, coresidence with a child, with or without the presence of spouse and other kin, is the most common living arrangement, with 69.2 per cent coresiding with a child, a proportion comparable to the 68 per cent reported by Domingo and Casterline (1992) from the 1988 NDS. The percentage increases to 76.8 when children who live adjacent or next door to the respondent are included. Living adjacent to a child means that the child resides within the same housing unit or compound as the parent. This arrangement ensures a degree of independent living for both the child and the elderly person while retaining the close proximity that is a basic feature of coresidence.

Overall coresidence with a child is not affected by the number of living children (Table 7). The most noticeable aspect of the observed pattern is that elderly persons with two children are the least likely to coreside. Interestingly, elderly persons with one child are more likely to coreside than those with two children. The only possible effect of having fewer children is on limiting the parent's range of choice as to which child to coreside with. However, coresidence with any child is related to other factors. Generally, coresidence increases with age and is slightly more common among males, married, urban residents compared with females, never married/widowed/separated and rural residents, respectively. The magnitude of difference tends to vary with the child's gender and marital status.

Table 7: Percentage with coresident children by number of coresident children among Filipino elderly (aged 60+)

Number of living children	Percentage with coresident children	
	Per cent	(N) ^a
1	66.0	(55)
2	60.9	(72)
3	70.3	(106)
4	73.8	(136)
5	67.1	(166)
6+	74.5	(716)

a Ns are unweighted.

Table 2 shows that the total percentage living with a single son is higher (28.6 per cent) than the percentage living with a single daughter (21.7 per cent). This difference persists with age, gender, marital status and rural-urban residence. Apparently, single sons tend to live with parents more than single daughters, suggesting that single females leave home at a higher rate than single males by migration or earlier marriage or both. Reflecting the increasing marriage rate of children as parents age, the percentages living with either a single son or a single daughter decreases with age.

Turning to coresidence with an ever-married child, the reverse picture is observed. As parents age, there is an increasing percentage residing with a married child, with a slightly higher percentage coresiding with a married daughter than a married son. Since it is unlikely for the elderly person to live with both a married son and a married daughter in the same household, the two categories are less likely to contain elements of both, such that the difference may indicate a preference, though not a marked one, for living with a married daughter rather than with a married son.

Comparing coresidence with married and single children, Table 3, which shows a mutually exclusive and exhaustive breakdown of living arrangements, indicates that coresidence with a married child is more common among the older old (70 years and older) when expectedly the pool of available single children has been diminished by marriage or migration from the household. But it is interesting to note that the percentage who live with a single child (but with no married child present) remains relatively high (about one out of five) even at these ages. Given that the number of single children associated with older parents is rarer as marriage is almost universal in the Philippines, this high percentage may be an indication that the elderly prefer to live with a single child than a married one if given the choice.

Living in a three-generation household refers to a household where there is a grandparent, a child and a grandchild. The elderly who live in a three-generation household constitute 45.5 per cent of the total. More females and more widowed/separated persons are in this type of living arrangement than others, a reflection of the higher survivorship of females and higher proportion of females among the widowed. Because it is generally more difficult to establish an independent household in urban areas owing to housing shortages, more urban residents are in three-generation households than rural residents.

Intergenerational support to and from the elderly

The 1996 PSNEE collected information on the flows of exchanges in material and social support among the elderly and various types of kin, exchanges which are typical of the Filipino kinship network. This analysis focuses on the quite detailed information referring to the exchanges between parent and each child, both coresident and non-coresident, and covering the financial, material and non-material aspects such as mutual visits within the year preceding the survey. Overall, 96.1 per cent of the respondents had at least one living child.

By the mere act of living together, parent and coresident children are assumed to be in a relationship of mutual economic, social and emotional support. But the actual magnitude of flows of economic support are not easy to keep track of as household expenses are likely to be pooled. Among Filipinos it is generally considered selfish and "nit-picky" in an offensive way to openly discuss the sharing of household expenses with other household members. Normally the principle for sharing is that whoever has more will provide more. This can mean either the parents or child at different times. When the elderly person is not able to contribute much to household expenses, his/her ownership of the house they all live in can be considered his/her rightful share of the household expenses. Nevertheless, it is not expected that an older parent pay his share of the expenses if he has no means to do so (no income from pension, no farm or other income-producing assets).

Table 8: Support exchanges between Filipino elderly persons (aged 60+) and non-coresident children

Within the past year	Total	Age		Sex		Marital status			Type of resident	
		60-69	70+	Male	Female	Currently married	Widowed	Others	Urban	Rural
Percentage who received money from any non-coresident child	80.5	78.6	82.0	78.6	82.0	80.6	81.2	67.9	78.6	81.9
Percentage who received significant amount from any non-coresident child	21.0	20.2	22.1	20.8	21.0	22.1	19.6	18.5	27.1	16.6
Percentage who received any non-monetary support from any non-coresident child	82.5	82.5	82.4	77.2	86.3	81.7	84.8	59.3	80.7	83.7
Percentage who gave money to any non-coresident child	28.8	34.9	20.6	30.3	27.6	31.1	26.1	22.2	30.7	27.4
Percentage who gave significant amount to any non-coresident child	6.9	8.7	4.5	5.3	8.1	8.1	5.4	3.7	8.3	5.8
Percentage who provided any non-monetary support to any non-coresident child	38.5	45.3	29.4	38.4	38.5	41.2	34.9	33.3	37.1	39.5

Support from non-coresident children on the other hand indicates the degree to which other children who have left home keep their "obligations" to provide for their parents in their old age while support from parents to non-coresident children attests to continuing ties of dependence that grown children maintain with parents despite their having left the parental home. In Table 8 it can be seen that there is a high percentage of parents who received some amount of money from at least one non-coresident child within the past year. This percentage increases with the age of the parent.

The same table shows that there is a reciprocal flow of money from the parent to at least one non-coresident child in the past year. Though the proportion of parents who gave money to a child is much lower than the proportion receiving money, the numbers are not insignificant. Giving and receiving a significant amount (defined as 1,000 pesos, or about US\$33) was less common. Fewer rural residents received a significant amount compared with urban residents.

Other types of support (provision of food, clothing and personal belongings) are also being exchanged with the elderly

who hold their own by not being so far behind in the proportion who gave non-monetary support. In general, the picture that emerges is one of active exchange.

Apart from support to their children, both coresident and non-coresident, grandchildren are also recipients of support. A significant support role that the near elderly and elderly perform is that of parental surrogate for their grandchildren. In the survey, the respondents were asked if they were taking care of any grandchild, i.e. a child of any of their children (natural, adopted and step-children). "Taking care" was defined as being responsible for the care of the young child on a regular basis. The proportion of elderly who regularly care for a grandchild is quite sizable (92.5 per cent of all respondents who had a grandchild). It appears more common among females, the widowed and urban residents. The data further indicate that some elderly persons perform other support functions for grandchildren similar to what they provide their own children both in monetary and non-monetary terms.

Anticipating future living arrangements: attitudes towards living in a home for the elderly

While coresidence with children generally remains the most common living arrangement for the elderly and the near elderly in the Philippines, there are a number of indications that this is not necessarily a preferred choice. There are glimpses of a desire for autonomous living that are overridden by the more practical concerns that favour coresidence.

Living in a "home for the aged" is a choice that few families would make for their elderly members. The most famous home called Golden Acres, which is run by the Government, caters only to the abandoned elderly. In fact, to qualify for admission, the elderly must show proof that no close kin is available with whom he or she could coreside. Yet, future social and demographic change may call for the establishment of more such homes for the elderly. In fact, if the 1988 NDS estimates of living alone can be considered just as representative of the elderly population as the PSNEE, a conclusion of increasing proportions of elderly living alone can be made (4.5 per cent from the 1988 NDS vs. 5.5 per cent from the 1996 PSNEE).

To find out prevailing attitudes towards "homes for the aged", two questions were posed to the respondents: "Do you think it is a good idea to have `homes for the aged' in the Philippines?" and "If there were `homes for the aged' in your province, would you want to live there if you were older?"

Table 9: Attitude towards home for the aged among Filipino elderly (aged 60+)

	Percentage who think it is a good idea to have a "home for the aged"	Percentage who want to live in a "home for the aged"
Total	73.7	29.6
Age		
60-69	76.1	31.7
70+	70.6	26.9
Sex		
Male	76.7	35.2
Female	71.7	25.5
Marital status		
Currently married	75.9	30.2
Widowed	71.0	28.4
Others	72.6	33.3
Residence		
Urban	73.1	29.1
Rural	74.0	29.9

The results shown in Table 9 were somewhat unexpected in that there is more openness to the idea of putting up more "homes for the aged" in the country than had been anticipated, given the strong tendency towards coresidence (76.2 per cent answered "yes" to the first question). It was also surprising to find that a sizable percentage indicated willingness to live in such a home at some future time, i.e. when they were older (Table9). It is unfortunate, however, that the qualifier "if you were older" was added because this makes the answer somewhat ambiguous (for example, would an 80-year-old's affirmative answer mean the same as that of a 50-year-old's?). On the whole, more males than females said they would want to live in a "home" when they were older. The other characteristics (age, marital status and rural-urban residence) showed no discernible pattern.

Summary and conclusions

The 1996 PSNEE provides a rich set of data, the first of its kind on a nationally representative sample of the elderly population and their successors in the Philippines. This first look at living arrangements and support exchanges across age, gender, marital status and urban-rural residence provides a picture of the state of living arrangements and social support flows involving the elderly at this juncture of rapid social change. It also highlights future directions for more focused analysis on specific aspects of living arrangements and social support between the elderly and their children.

In general, the results echo findings from the 1988 NDS as reported by Domingo and Casterline (1992) which showed coresidence with a child as the most common living arrangement for the elderly, a higher likelihood of coresidence with an unmarried child than a married child and a higher percentage of living alone among the unmarried and the formerly married (separated/widowed).

The results also corroborate findings from other studies which challenge the myth of the rural household as predominantly of the extended family household type (Morada and others, 1986; Castillo, 1979). The survey shows that in fact the predominant pattern of living in an extended family household composed of the elderly person(s), his/her spouse, married children or married and unmarried children is more pronounced among urban (48.6 per cent) than rural-based elderly persons (42.9 per cent).

The matter of implied preferences in living arrangements also challenges common notions that the elderly will coreside with married children as a matter of course. In fact, the data imply that coresidence with a single child if one is available may be more preferred. This is related to indications of a desire to retain some control over running a household, manifested in the retention of ownership of the house, in preferring a single to a married child as coresident, in expressing the belief that the best living arrangement for older couples is not to coreside with a child.

According to Castillo (1979), the Filipino family is "residentially nuclear but functionally extended", meaning that living arrangements may favour nuclear households but the functional household actually includes other relatives. If in fact this is true, the strains of coresidence may be relieved if living arrangements allow for non-coresidence in the same household while maintaining the traditional support networks. This is realized more readily in rural areas where establishing a separate dwelling for married children is not difficult. In urban areas the strains of coresidence may be more pronounced because establishing a separate household for the children is costly. As the Philippines rapidly urbanizes, more and more elderly persons will find themselves in the latter situation.

There are more questions to be asked after this first look at the 1996 PSNEE data on living arrangements, one of which lies along the track of investigating further the seeming points of tension between actual coresidence and what the elderly truly want.

Finally, the data on support exchanges validate what most Filipinos already know and what other studies in the Asian context have also shown, that the elderly are not passive recipients of support from children. Rather they are active participants in a web of exchanges that puts them in the significant role of being providers of support, not just to their children but also their grandchildren. Support exchanges involving grandchildren is also an important topic for further analysis, especially during these times in the changing social and demographic picture of the Philippines where many children of the elderly seek employment outside the country, which leave many grandparents with the task of caring for grandchildren.

In closing, the seeming acceptability of homes for the aged in the Philippines is a finding that is worth noting, especially as earlier studies found the idea of institutionalization of the elderly "almost taboo" (Abaya, 1991). Coupled with data which point towards a perception of living alone with a spouse as a better ideal arrangement compared with living with a child, there may be reason to suspect that living arrangements for the elderly of the future will not necessarily continue to be predominantly with a child as coresident.

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Endnote

The 1984 ASEAN Survey, which covered 1,321 persons aged 60 and older, was not a nationally representative sample but referred to specific regions only.

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