

The Familial Support System of Thai Elderly: An Overview

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The future of the support system for the Thai elderly is uncertain

In Thailand, there is a widespread expectation that the elderly will be taken care of by their children and that at least one child will co-reside with them (Cowgill, 1972; Knodel, Havanon and Pramualratana, 1984; Pramualratana, 1990; Tuchrello, 1989). Results of a recent survey among rural adults in two different regions of Thailand indicate virtually universal agreement that "it is the children's responsibility to take care of their parents when the parents get old" (Wongsith, 1990). Evidence from earlier surveys makes clear that such responsibility is typically perceived to include some form of co-residence (Knodel, Chamrathirong and Debavalya, 1987). National estimates of the extent to which elderly parents actually live with children and the nature of intergenerational exchanges of types of support, however, have been lacking.

The present study is intended as an overview of the familial system of support for the elderly as it currently exists in Thailand. The focus is on living arrangements and material support of elderly Thais in relation to their children. Data come from a nationally representative survey of the elderly in private households conducted in 1986 as part of a project entitled *Socio-economic Consequences of the Aging Population in Thailand* (SECAPT). The project was carried out by the Institute of Population Studies, Chulalongkorn University, as part of the ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) Population Programme. Following the usual definition of elderly used in Thailand, the survey focused on respondents 60 or more years of age. In total, 3,252 elderly respondents were successfully interviewed.^{1/} In addition, limited reference is made to qualitative data collected during 1990 and 1991 by the Institute of Population Studies through a series of focus group discussions with Thai elderly and their adult children throughout Thailand (Knodel, Saengtienchai and Sittitrai, 1992).

Living arrangements

The most prominent feature of the living arrangements of the Thai elderly and the most crucial aspect of the familial system of support and assistance as it currently exists in Thailand is co-residence with an adult child. There is unlikely to be any other arrangement that can meet the wide range of needs of the elderly as fully as shared residence in a household with adult children. Traditionally the elderly continue to live in the residence they have occupied since early in marriage and at least one child remains co-resident. During much of the period of co-residence, an interdependent relationship is likely to exist with forms of support and assistance going in both directions between parents and children. Eventually, however, as the health and physical ability of the elderly deteriorate with age, the balance of services presumably flows increasingly from the younger to the older generation.

The norm of living with children during old age is clearly evident in focus group discussions. Participants point out that children have a moral obligation to care for parents later in life and view this as a form of repayment for the fact that parents brought the children into the world and reared them. This obligation generally includes having at least one child live with the parents.

- Mr. Kaew: *We are old. If we don't stay with our children, with whom can we stay? They have to take care of us as we have done for them.*

(Northern elderly focus group participant)

- Mr. Jai: *Children have to take care of their parents who brought them up.... They must not forget parents' meritorious acts....*
- Mr. Chote: *They can't complain about us living with them because we have looked after them since they were little.*

(Central elderly focus group participants)

General patterns

Results from the SECAPT survey verify the pervasiveness of familial living arrangements of the elderly, particularly with

their children.^{2/} Only 4 per cent of the population aged 60 and over were found to live in single-person households and an additional 7 per cent to live only with a spouse (Knodel, Chayovan and Siriboon, 1991). As table 1 indicates, over three-quarters of the elderly overall (77 per cent) live with at least one child (including step-children and adopted children) and, if only the elderly who have a living child are considered, fully four-fifths (80 per cent) co-reside with one or more of their children.^{3/}

One limitation of household surveys and censuses in Thailand is the general convention of treating dwelling units with separate addresses (house numbers) as separate households in accordance with the Government's household registration system. As a result, co-residence in the same household is of necessity defined rather narrowly to mean living together in the same dwelling unit. Situations where elderly parents and children live in separate dwelling units but belong to a common cluster of dwellings that are in some degree interdependent clearly occur in Thailand, especially in rural areas, and can serve many of the same functional purposes as more narrowly defined co-residence for meeting the needs of the elderly (Cowgill, 1972; Tuchrello, 1989). Thus, defining co-residence as living together within the same officially designated household (i.e. dwelling unit) is likely to understate somewhat the extent to which the living arrangements of the elderly and their families are intertwined.

While no direct information was collected in the SECAPT survey on whether an elderly respondent lived in a house adjacent to or very near that of a child, some insight into the prevalence of such arrangements can be gained from responses to the frequency of contact that the elderly have with non-coresident children. Results (not shown here) indicate that about half of those elderly with at least one non-coresident child and almost three-fourths of those with a non-coresident child in the same village or town, see a non-coresident child daily. Daily contact no doubt reflects a close proximity of residences and affords the adult child the opportunity to provide a variety of services to the elderly parent (and vice versa). In many cases, it probably reflects the fact that the elderly and their children live in related dwelling units that in some sense form a type of broader multiple household in which various responsibilities are shared to some extent. Indeed, in many cases, there may be little qualitative difference in the nature of support received from children by elderly parents who co-reside in the same dwelling unit and the elderly who appear to live in separate households but are in daily contact with one or more adult children. As table 1 shows, 88 per cent of all elderly and 91 per cent of the elderly with at least one child either live together with a child or are in daily contact with at least one of their children.

Table 1: Selected indicators of living arrangements of the elderly (aged 60 and above), by sex and urban-rural residence, Thailand, 1986

(per cent)

	Total elderly	Sex		Residence	
		Male	Female	Urban	Rural
Co-resident with a child					
All elderly	77	77	77	77	77
Elderly with living children	80	79	80	82	79
Co-resident or in daily contact with a child					
All elderly	88	87	88	82	89
Elderly with living children	91	88	92	88	92
Co-resident with a child or younger generation relative					
All elderly	88	86	90	90	88
Co-resident with a child or younger-generation relative or in daily contact with a child					
All elderly	94	93	96	93	95

Source: SECAPT survey.

Co-residence between older and younger generations need not necessarily involve parents and children. In Thailand, grandchildren or nephews and nieces may live with their elderly relatives and, if they are old enough, provide the same assistance and support that adult children of the elderly do. Table 1 indicates that the percentage of elderly who are co-resident with at least one younger generation relative (including the elderly person's own children) reaches 88 per cent overall when grandchildren, nephews and nieces are counted. In a substantial proportion of cases where a grandchild, nephew or niece but not a child of their own is co-resident, however, the younger-generation relative will still be quite young and probably be taken care of by the elderly person rather than vice versa. Unfortunately the coded data from the SECAPT survey does not distinguish such cases from those where the co-resident relative has already reached adulthood.^{4/}

The final row of results in table 1 shows that 94 per cent of the Thai elderly overall either live in the same dwelling unit as their own child, are in daily contact with one of their children, or live with a younger-generation relative other than their own child.

While such a combined indicator exaggerates somewhat the extent to which living arrangements provide a means for adult children and other younger-generation relatives to assist elderly Thais, it serves to point out that a broader concept of the term "household" would undoubtedly reveal higher levels of such support than co-residence defined strictly in terms of living in the same dwelling unit with one's own children. In any event, the results of the SECAPT survey make clear that most of the Thai elderly are involved in living arrangements that are integrally linked to a familial system of support.

Regardless of the indicator considered, little difference is evident between elderly men and women in the extent of co-residence. Even more interesting is the apparent lack of pronounced differences between the urban or rural elderly in terms of co-residence, contrary to what might be expected concerning a detrimental role of urbanization on support for the elderly (United Nations, 1991).^{5/} Indeed, based on the strictest definition (i.e. living with one's own children within the same dwelling unit), co-residence is slightly more common among urban than among rural elderly. This is more than compensated for, however, by the higher percentage of rural elderly who have daily contact with their children. Thus, the combined measure of co-residence and/or daily contact is slightly higher for rural than urban elderly. These findings probably reflect differences in land availability and housing styles between urban and rural areas. Having separate dwelling units either within the same compound or nearby is undoubtedly more feasible in rural villages than in towns or cities where land and housing prices make such arrangements prohibitive for many.

Preferences by sex of children

In many East Asian societies as well as in most of South Asia, there is a distinct and, in some cases, a relatively inflexible preference among the elderly to co-reside with one or more adult sons (Mason, 1991). In contrast, anthropological studies as well as considerable survey evidence indicate that the ethnic Thai majority prefer to co-reside with daughters and that such a preference is particularly pronounced in the north-eastern and upper northern part of the country (Tuchrello, 1989; Cowgill, 1972; Keyes, 1987; and Limanonda, 1989). Equally noteworthy about the Thai situation, however, is that even where this preference for a co-resident daughter is strongest, there is still considerable flexibility enabling individual families to adapt to their particular situations.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of the elderly (aged 60 and above) who co-reside with a child according to the sex composition of the co-resident children, among elderly with living children of each sex, Thailand, 1986

Sex of co-resident children	All co-resident children *		Ever-married co-resident children *	
	National	North and North-East	National	North and North-East
Sons only	28	26	33	27
Daughters only	45	51	59	66
Both sexes	27	23	8	7
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: SECAPT survey.

Notes: * = Refers to elderly with at least one living child of each sex regardless of the marital status of the children.

** = Refers to elderly with at least one living ever-married child of each sex.

Table 2 illustrates the preference for co-residing with daughters. The results shown are limited to those elderly who potentially have a choice with respect to the sex of co-resident children, i.e. those elderly who have a living child of each sex (or, when ever-married co-resident children are considered, have at least one ever-married child of each sex). When all co-resident children are considered, regardless of their marital status, elderly Thais are substantially more likely to live with daughters than with sons. This tendency can be seen to be even more pronounced when the sex of only ever-married co-resident children is considered. In both cases, the results also indicate that the tendency favouring daughters for co-residence is stronger in the northern and north-eastern regions than in the country as a whole.

Table 3: Indicators of living arrangements among the elderly (aged 60 and above) with children of only one sex, Thailand, 1986

(per cent)

Sex composition of living children	Co-resident with child		Co-resident or in daily contact with a child	
	National	North and North-East	National	North and North-East
Sex of children of the elderly whose children are all the same sex				
Sons only	66	72	79	89

Under 15	92	94	93	87	94	90	-	-	-
15-19	75	69	72	81	74	78	26	49	41
20-29	36	43	46	61	66	63	20	32	26
30+	14	20	17	55	67	61	10	15	13
Total	23	27	25	63	68	66	12	19	16

Source: SECAPT survey.

Table 5: Indicators of availability of children and living arrangements of elderly (aged 60 and above), by age of the elderly, Thailand, 1986

	Age of elderly person				
	60-64	65-69	70-74	75+	Total
% With at least one					
Living child	97	96	96	97	97
Child 25 years or older	93	95	95	96	95
Ever-married child	94	95	94	96	95
Child under 25 years	65	36	14	8	36
Single child	63	45	34	22	44
% Co-resident with					
Any child	81	77	74	72	77
A child 25 years or older	58	64	70	69	64
An ever-married child	55	58	60	63	59
Number co-resident					
All children	1.6	1.3	1.0	0.9	1.2
Ever-married children	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.7

Source: SECAPT survey.

Results in [table 4](#), referring to the children of the elderly interviewed in the SECAPT survey, illustrates clearly that the age and marital status of the child are related to co-residence in the parental household.^{8/} Co-residence with elderly parents decreases rapidly with the age of the child, declining from over 90 per cent of those under 15 years of age to only 17 per cent of those 30 or more years of age. In addition, at every age, single children are far more likely to co-reside with elderly parents than their married siblings, whereas sex differences are relatively more pronounced for married than for single children. These patterns reflect customary practices regarding post-nuptial residence whereby newlyweds typically co-reside with one set of parents, preferably the wife's, for a temporary period and then move to their own house, often nearby or even in the same compound. Only the last child (or last daughter) to marry is likely to remain co-resident indefinitely (Limanonda, 1989). Thus, differences in the life-course stages of children are likely to exert an important influence on the living arrangements of elderly parents at different stages of the elderly's life course.

As [table 5](#) shows, almost all Thai elderly regardless of age have at least one child and in most cases this includes at least one child aged 25 or older (thus clearly past the dependent ages) and/or at least one ever-married child. Thus, the vast majority of the elderly at all ages have an adult and/or married child potentially available for co-residence. The younger elderly, however, are considerably more likely to also have younger and single children available than are the older elderly. This reflects the fact that as elderly parents become older so do their children who in turn then marry.

The fact that co-residence, when defined in terms of living with any child, declines with the age of the elderly is largely a reflection of children leaving the household as they get older and seek jobs or education away from their parental home or as they marry and establish their own households. These same developments account for the decline in the mean overall number of co-resident children. In contrast, co-residence with at least one child aged 25 years or older or with at least one ever-married child generally increases with the age of the elderly. The mean number of co-resident ever-married children varies little with the age of the elderly respondent, reflecting the stem-family nature of co-residence that ultimately characterizes the Thai familial support system.

The key concern among most of the elderly is that at least one adult child reside in the household with them. This child typically is married, at least after some point, and brings his or her spouse to live in the parental household as well. In some cases, the parents may move to join children, or a child may move back into the parental household. But probably most

commonly, the child who co-resides with the parent(s) at the end of the elderly person's life-span has remained in the parental home most of the time since childhood. Thus, although many parents start out their elderly years with several children co-resident, over time children move out until typically only one is left. Once this child marries and has children, a stem-family structure results, with the elderly parents, a married adult child with spouse and grandchildren all living together. This is reflected in the fact (not shown) that over 90 per cent of co-resident elderly respondents whose children have all married live with only one of their adult children.

The evolution of the elderly parents' household into a stem-family structure and its relation to the life course is also evident from the focus group discussions.

- Mr. Loar: *If there are many children, each goes to live separately but one of them must remain with the parents. It could be anyone. Usually the youngest daughter stays. However, if there is only one child, parents have no choice.*

(Central elderly focus group participant)

- Mr. Paitoon: With either many or few (children), there must be one child left to care for parents... With only two of them, one will move out and have his own family and one lives with the parents.

(North-eastern adult focus group participant)

Childless elderly

In a society such as Thailand where the normatively prescribed living arrangement for the elderly is with their adult children, the childless elderly are of particular interest. Only a small proportion of current Thai elderly (6 per cent) have no living biological child. In the past, however, this proportion was probably greater owing to higher mortality levels and consequently the higher chances of children dying before the parents reached old age. One solution for arranging care during old age among persons who have no biological children of their own is to adopt children or to rely on step-children acquired through marriage. Among present day elderly, a substantial proportion (44 per cent) of those who have no natural child of their own have at least one step-child or adopted child, further reducing to 3.5 per cent the proportion with no child available for potential co-residence.

Table 6: Percentage distribution of the elderly (aged 60 and above) who have no living children according to living arrangements, by sex and age, Thailand, 1986

Living arrangement (living with whom)	Sex			Age	
	Total	Male	Female	60-69	70+
Alone	13	14	13	17	8
Spouse only	20	27	15	22	17
Younger-generation relative	35	40	32	27	48
With sibling	20	11	25	25	11
Other relative	6	4	7	4	8
Other *	6	5	7	5	8
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: 1986 SECAPT survey.

Notes: Based on information in the household schedule, unless respondent is living alone or with spouse only, the classification does not take into account whether or not a spouse is present. In addition, the last four categories are hierarchical with each previous category taking precedence over subsequent categories.

* Includes two weighted cases in which inconsistent information has been coded with respect to co-residence with child.

Table 6 shows that few (13 per cent) of the childless elderly interviewed in the SECAPT survey live alone and that only a modest proportion (20 per cent) live with their spouse only. The latter arrangement is substantially more common among men than women, however, reflecting the fact that elderly men are more likely to be currently married. In the majority of cases, the childless elderly live in households which include relatives; in over a third of the cases (35 per cent), they live with a younger-generation relative, typically a niece or nephew. As noted previously, the younger-generation relative may be a dependent youngster, but even so might be being reared as a quasi-adopted child who will be expected eventually to care for the elderly.

Overall, the results give the impression that even for the childless elderly, the familial system of care operates in Thailand and that most of the elderly with no children are incorporated into households with other family members. This impression merits some qualification in light of the fact that the SECAPT survey excluded the elderly in collective households and that the childless elderly are likely disproportionately represented among collective households. Results from the 1980 census indicate that only 1.7 per cent of the Thai population aged 60 and over live in such households, primarily in temples where they live a celibate life presumably as Buddhist monks or nuns (Chayovan, Knodel and Siriboon, 1990). Virtually no elderly reside in nursing homes or special homes for the elderly (Pichyangkura and Singhajend, 1991). Indeed, those elderly who have been life-long monks or nuns, having entered the monastery as young adults or even earlier, are likely to have no children precisely for this reason. In other cases, the childless elderly may have joined or moved to the monastery at a later stage in their lives, in part, seeking a refuge for themselves in old age. Nevertheless, as some focus group participants make clear, the norm is for the family to be responsible even for the childless elderly.

- Moderator: *If you have no children when you are old, on whom can you depend?*
- Ms. Tui: *Are there siblings? Siblings won't desert us.... If the siblings are good, they won't abandon each other.*

(Central elderly focus group participant)

- Ms. Pim: *If (old people) don't have children, they will have brothers and sisters who have children. They expect to depend on one of them.... If we can't depend on relatives, on whom can we depend?*

(Central adult focus group participant)

Material support from non-coresident children

While co-residence undoubtedly involves the most comprehensive type of support exchange arrangement between elderly parents and their adult children in Thailand, non-coresident children are also typically expected to share in the support of their parents. Such support can be critical for the parents' well-being in cases where the parents are not living with others who help in the upkeep of the household and, even where the elderly parent is co-resident with one or more children, material support from non-co-resident children presumably eases the burden of their siblings who are co-resident.

The SECAPT survey provides some limited information on the support provided by children from outside the household. Respondents were asked whether or not each of their children had ever provided regular support and, if so, what kind of support was provided during the past year. Based on this information, some determination can be made about the extent to which elderly parents received material support from non-coresident children. Given the open-ended nature of the question and lack of systematic probes about types of support not spontaneously mentioned, the results are likely to understate the extent to which non-coresident children provide such support to their parents. Nevertheless, the information should serve at least as a rough indication of material assistance from children outside the immediate household.

Table 7: Selected indicators of material support received by the elderly (aged 60 and above) from non-coresident children, by sex and urban-rural residence of the elderly, Thailand, 1986

(per cent)

	Total elderly	Sex		Residence	
		Male	Female	Urban	Rural
Received food and/or clothes					
All elderly	56	56	56	31	61
Elderly with non-coresident children	63	62	63	38	68
Received money					
All elderly	58	57	59	57	58
Elderly with non-coresident children	65	63	66	69	64

Source: SECAPT survey.

Note: Results in this table are based on questions regarding the receipt of regular support during the previous year.

Two types of material support from outside the household can be distinguished from the SECAPT data: the provision of food and/or clothes and the provision of money.^{9/} As shown in table 7, over half of the elderly parents (56 per cent) indicated that they received regular support in the form of food and/or clothes from non-co-resident children and a similar proportion (58 per cent) indicated that non-co-resident children provided money on a regular basis.^{10/} If only elderly parents with at least one non-co-resident child are considered, the results suggest that almost two-thirds received each of these types of support from children outside the household.

Elderly men and women are about equally likely to receive material assistance from non-co-resident children. There is also little difference between rural and urban elderly with respect to receiving money from children living outside the household. However, the rural elderly are almost twice as likely as those in urban areas to receive food and/or clothes from non-co-resident children. This probably reflects in part differences in living arrangements, with the rural elderly more likely to live adjacent to or near a non-co-resident child than the urban elderly.^{11/} As previously noted, in some cases, particularly in rural areas, a cluster of related dwelling units in which elderly parents and married children reside may function in ways similar to a single household with a substantial amount of sharing of food and resources, especially with the elderly parents.

Table 8: Percentage of non-co-resident children who are reported to have provided material support to their elderly parents during the prior year, by residence relative to their parents, sex and marital status, Thailand, 1986

Residence relative to parents and marital status of child	Provided food and/or clothes			Provided money		
	Total	Sons	Daughters	Total	Sons	Daughters
Live in same place as elderly parents						
Total	55	50	59	32	31	34
Ever-married	56	51	60	33	31	34
Single	26	25	27	27	21	34
Live in other place						
Total	30	28	33	41	39	42
Ever-married	32	29	34	40	39	41
Single	17	15	20	48	42	57
Total	39	35	43	38	36	39

Source: SECAPT survey.

Whether or not a child provides material support to an elderly parent from outside the household is clearly associated with the life course of the child. Obviously, such support can be provided only after the child moves out of the household. In addition, as the results presented in table 8 show, the type and probability of such support is influenced by whether or not the non-co-resident child lives nearby (defined as in the same village, or the same town, or the same district of Bangkok) and whether or not the child has married. The provision of food and/or clothes is far more likely from non-co-resident children who have married than those who are still single, and it is far more common from those who live in the same locality as the parents than from those who live further away. The provision of money, on the other hand, is more likely from children who live away from home. Among the children living away from home, single children are somewhat more likely to provide money than married ones. Although single non-co-resident children who live in the same locality as their parents are less likely than their married counterparts to provide money, they constitute a very small group as most non-co-resident single children live away from the parents' locality. While daughters are more likely to provide either type of support than sons, in general the same pattern in relation to marital status and residence relative to the parents characterizes both sexes.

The focus group participants are well aware of the help provided by non-co-resident children and that it can be an important supplement to the support which elderly parents receive. They also know that whether or not children have families of their own makes a difference in their ability to contribute such support.

- Mr. Plaeng: *The married ones have to pay attention first to their children. The single ones pay attention only to us.*
- Ms. Kum: *When they are married, they pay us only half of the attention.*

(Central elderly focus group participant)

- Mr. Suchart: *Children who live with parents may not have money to spend on them when they are taken ill. Those who are not with parents may be able to provide the sum. They have different advantages.*

- Mr. Somjit: *But we can get more money from a single child. He will give us what he can earn. We won't get any from children who are just married because they have to provide what they need for their family first.*

(Bangkok adult focus group participant)

Conclusions

Despite rapid and substantial social and economic change over recent decades, the familial system of support for the Thai elderly appears still to be largely intact. This is evidenced both by the high levels of co-residence of elderly parents with their adult children and the relatively common receipt of material support from children living outside the household. Whether this familial system of support will be undermined by the on-going process of social change associated with economic development remains an open question with important implications both for the future elderly themselves and the Government under which they live.

Given the rapid increase in the absolute size of the elderly population that is certain to occur in the coming decades, any meaningful shift of responsibility for their welfare from the family to the State will require massive outlays of government funds. Undoubtedly in recognition of this, the current Seventh Five-Year Economic and Social Development Plan (1992-1996) of the Thai Government and the latest draft of the Long-Term Policies and Plans for the Elderly (covering the period 1992-2011) appear to rely on and emphasize the responsibility of the family for providing welfare for elderly members. One government programme being publicized as being actively undertaken under the current five-year plan is the provision of free health care for the elderly. It is too early, however, to evaluate the effectiveness of this programme or the persistence with which it will be pursued. In addition, while social security schemes to provide old-age financial assistance are scheduled to be implemented by the end of the decade, details of such schemes are still under discussion. Thus, the future role of the Government in providing support for the elderly in Thailand is still quite uncertain.

Not all changes in the current support system need be viewed with alarm, however. The current system of co-residence and material support from non-co-resident children, while normatively ingrained in Thai culture, is also rooted in the economic poverty and limited financial resources that traditionally have characterized the majority of the population. Under such circumstances, co-residence can be in part an economic necessity. That co-residence is considered by many of the elderly as a mixed blessing is evident from qualitative data from the focus groups (Knodel, Saengtienchai and Sittitrai, 1992). The most common complaints refer to the lack of peace and quiet and difficulties of interfering with each other when living in close quarters with others of different generations, including grandchildren. To the extent that the substantial economic growth of recent decades persists and translates into increased per capita income for broader segments of the Thai population, future elderly may become more self-supporting and in some cases may choose to purchase with their increased wealth greater privacy in living arrangements.

In brief, the future of the support system for the Thai elderly is uncertain. The fact that adequate descriptive data documenting the support system has only recently been available makes it difficult to judge how and to what extent change has already taken place. The pervasiveness of co-residence with adult children and of material support from non-co-resident children that is still apparent, even after several decades of rapid and substantial socio-economic change, clearly indicates, however, that a familial system of support for the elderly is still largely intact. Thus, it is not a simple matter to predict the shifts that are likely to occur in the system in the foreseeable future.

Continued monitoring will be necessary to determine the nature and extent to which changes in living arrangements and other forms of familial support occur as well as their implications for the elderly's welfare. To the extent that a decline in co-residence becomes evident, careful scrutiny will be needed to determine how much such a trend reflects increased financial independence of the future generations of elderly rather than a breakdown of the familial system of support. This distinction will have obvious implications for the need for government intervention and assistance. At a minimum, the data provided by the SECAPT survey provide a relatively sound base from which future change can be better assessed.

Footnotes

1. Overall non-response was 25 per cent, almost half of which was attributable to hearing problems or illness. Thus the sample over-represents the elderly who are in better physical and mental health. Although the sample was intended to be representative and self-weighting, circumstances affecting field-work resulted in a disproportionately urban sample. A set of case-weights (normalized to 1.00) are applied to obtain representative results (Chayovan, Wongsith and Saengtienchai, 1988).

2. Unless specifically stated to the contrary, children of the elderly include both step-children and adopted children as well as biological children.

3. Given that the elderly age-range is defined as starting at age 60 in the SECAPT survey, a small proportion of the children of the elderly respondents, especially children of younger elderly males whose wives were often below age 60, were non-economically active minors dependent entirely on their parents rather than providing support or sharing household expenses. Nevertheless, in 98 per cent of the cases where an elderly respondent was co-resident with a child, there was at

least one child aged 18 or over in the household and, in 99 per cent of the cases, there was a child aged 15 or over present.

4. Since the Thai word *laan* means grandchild, nephew or niece, it is not possible to distinguish between them. Moreover, since the term tends to be used rather generically for younger relatives, on occasion it encompasses more distant relatives such as younger-generation cousins. A spot-check of the household schedules of elderly who co-reside with a younger generation relative, other than their own child, indicates that in approximately half of the cases the younger-generation relative was still in a childhood age group (under 18) and not yet economically active.

5. Urban residence refers to municipal areas including the Bangkok Metropolis and rural refers to the remaining areas.

6. The fact that co-residence is lower among the elderly with all children of the same sex than the elderly in general reflects in large part the fact that such elderly people are self-selected for having small numbers of living children, which in turn is associated with a lower probability of co-residence.

7. Given that the SECAPT survey refers to a cross-section of the elderly and their children at one point in time, it is not possible to trace actual changes in living arrangements over the life course of the respondents. However, the relationship between living arrangements and age of the elderly respondent or their children can serve as an indication of how such arrangements are likely to evolve over the life course.

8. Information was collected from each elderly respondent about each of their children resulting in information for a total of approximately 16,000 offspring. However, since all the elderly in each sample household were interviewed, in cases where both a husband and wife were included, their children are represented twice in the data set.

9. Although the question on types of support provided was open-ended, it is not possible to distinguish provision of food from provision of clothes, since they were coded as a single item. In cases where the elderly respondent indicated that the child "provided everything", we assume that food, clothes and money are involved.

10. It appears that despite the reference in the question to "regular support", this was occasionally interpreted as including support provided as infrequently as once a year.

11. The rural elderly are almost twice as likely as the urban elderly to have at least one non-co-resident child living in the same locality: 68 per cent of the rural elderly have at least one non-co-resident child living in the same village compared with 35 per cent of the urban elderly who have at least one non-co-resident child in the same town or city.

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