

# Family Transition in South Asia: Provision of Social Services and Social Protection

*Based on the existing policy, projects programmes and specific plans of action should be formulated in order to reduce the gravity of problems that is arising in South Asian countries in relation to the dynamics of family change.*

By W. Indralal De Silva\*

Family may be defined as a group of persons related to a specific degree, through blood, adoption or marriage. The difficulty is that comparative data on the family in the broad definition of the term are not available. The available statistics relate to households, defined by location, community or living arrangements. Surveys and censuses usually cover all households, not merely family households. Nevertheless, the latter type constitutes a major proportion enabling the characteristics of the totals to be identified as those of family households. For many demographic, socio-economic and political reasons, family members may disperse and consequently, the size of the household could be reduced although the size of

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\* Professor of Demography, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka (e-mail: isilva84@mail.cmb.ac.lk)

the family would remain unchanged. In Asian countries, most young people live with their parents after marriage and later move to another place whenever custom imposes or the economic condition of the new couple permits. Lloyd and Duffy (1995) believe that, beyond this natural ebb and flow of family members, families are becoming more dispersed. Young and elderly adults, spouses and other relatives who might otherwise have shared a home are now more likely to live apart from one another. In 2004, the United Nations observed the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. Thus, it appears timely to review some of the trends, such as fertility, marriage dissolution, migration, urbanization and ageing, that affect the family in the region.

### **Change in size and structure of the family**

For practical reasons, censuses and surveys deal with the household unit rather than the family unit, since the meaning of the family differs across cultures. Households grow larger when children are born or ageing parents move in and then shrink again when elderly parents die and grown children leave to start their own households (Lloyd and Duffy, 1995). A household is defined in many surveys as a person or a group of persons that usually live and eat together. It is important to distinguish between a family, where members are related either by blood or by marriage, and a household, which involves the sharing of a housing unit, facilities and food.

**Table 1. Average household size in South Asian countries**

Region and country	1970s	1980s	1990s
<b>South Asia</b>			
Afghanistan	-	5.9	7.4
Bangladesh	-	5.7	5.2
India	-	5.5	5.4
Nepal	5.5	5.8	5.5
Pakistan	5.7	6.6	6.7
Sri Lanka	5.2	4.9	4.5

*Source: Demographic Yearbooks 1973, 1987, 1995: UN.ORG – habrdd; Demographic and Health Surveys database.*

Since average household size could be considered as proxy for the average family size, estimates obtained for the former are presented in table 1. A comparison of average household size over the period of the 1970s-1980s to the

1990s for South Asian countries in general indicates a declining trend. The largest country in the region, India, indicates a marginal decline in average household size from 5.5 to 5.4 persons during the 1980s and 1990s. Over the period 1970s-1980s to the 1990s, an increase in average household size is noted for Afghanistan and Pakistan, where fertility had not declined significantly. In those countries, the nuclear family is not the norm. High fertility and social and cultural factors favour co-residence of the extended family where non-relatives also may live. Over the past three decades, Sri Lanka has demonstrated a clear decline in average household size and reported the lowest figure for the region.

Families with a large number of persons are still the norm in many South Asian countries. In the 1990s, Pakistan reported the highest percentage of households (74.2 per cent) with five or more members (table 2). While Bangladesh, India and Nepal all indicated a marginal decline in the prevalence of large households, Sri Lanka indicated the strongest decline.

**Table 2. Households with five or more members in South Asian countries**

	Percentage of households with five or more members	
	1990s	Around 2000
<b>South Asia</b>		
Bangladesh	60.2	57.4
India	63.4	59.0
Nepal	62.1	59.5
Pakistan	74.2	-
Sri Lanka	52.6	46.6

*Source:* Demographic and Health Surveys database.

With the onset of fertility decline in almost all the countries in South Asia, a strong negative impact on the prevalence of large families would soon be experienced. Thus, the declining trend in average household size would emerge in almost all countries in the region during the early part of the present century.

A few decades ago in South Asian countries, single-person households were virtually non-existent. Nevertheless, consequent on population ageing, migration and the social and economic changes occurring in the region, there is an emerging trend of single-person households. For example, over the last couple of years in Nepal, the proportion of single-person households increased from 3.2 to 4.0 per cent (table 3).

## Female-headed households

In many societies in Asia, the oldest male is designated as the head of household regardless of whether he is the primary source of economic support, the authority figure, or fulfills other tasks purportedly performed by household heads (Ayad and others, 1997). In the mean time, female-headed households have become a steadily growing phenomenon in many countries in the world, including countries of South Asia.

This increase in female-headed households could be due to a variety of reasons and, as Bruce and Lloyd (1992) indicated, widowhood, migration, non-marital fertility and marital instability could be some of the important causes. In recent decades, an increasing number of women, particularly rural women, have become heads of households because men, the traditional heads of households, have gone to the war front or are working far away. Moreover, owing to civil unrest and displacement, a refugee situation exists in a number of countries in the region, leaving the females to take over the task of running the household.

The highest proportion of female-headed households in South Asia could be observed in Sri Lanka, where the figures have increased from over 19 per cent in the 1990s to over 20 per cent in 2000 (table 3). In Sri Lanka, the increase is mainly due to political unrest and social strife in the southern areas of the country in the late 1980s, and the civil war in the north and east. Consequently, a significant number of young widows have emerged as female heads of households.

**Table 3. Percentage of single-person households and female-headed households in South Asian countries**

	Percentage of single- person households		Percentage of female-headed households	
	1990s	Around 2000	1990s	Around 2000
<b>South Asia</b>				
Bangladesh	1.2	1.5	8.0	8.0
India	2.8	3.1	9.0	10.0
Nepal	3.2	4.0	12.0	16.0
Pakistan	2.9	-	7.0	-
Sri Lanka	3.3	3.7	19.2	20.4

*Source:* Demographic and Health Surveys database.

A noteworthy feature of female-heading households is that the majority of them are widowed. In addition, the average size of their households is usually smaller than male-headed households. As noted in the 1994 Demographic Survey of Sri Lanka, 56 per cent of the female heads were found to be widowed, while only 37 per cent were married. In contrast, a mere 2 per cent of the male heads were reported to be widowed, while 95 per cent were currently married (Department of Census and Statistics, 1997).

The proportions of female-headed households are relatively low in Bangladesh and Pakistan. In Nepal and India, the proportion of female-headed households is increasing (table 3). In most South Asian societies, the incidence of female-headed households was rare, though they shoulder most of the household responsibilities.

Even though the data discussed above do not permit the identification of single-parent households, data from developed countries have shown that in the vast majority, the single parent is the mother (Kamerman and Kahn, 1988). The households in South Asian countries too may contain a substantial proportion of female-headed single-parent households (Lloyd and Desai, 1992).

**Table 4. Heads of household by household size, Sri Lanka, 1993**

Household size	Women heads	Men heads	Total
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
1	10.2	2.4	4.0
2-4	55.8	42.2	45.1
5-6	24.7	39.3	36.2
7+	9.3	16.0	14.6

*Source: National Household Survey 1993, Department of Census and Statistics, Colombo (1995).*

A new social issue in many developing countries is seen in the context of these female-headed households because they have mostly one adult who is solely responsible for earnings. A typical feature is that those households are smaller than male-headed households (table 4). The 1993 National Household Survey of Sri Lanka shows that 66 per cent of households in the country comprised 1-4 members, while male-headed are estimated to be only 44 per cent. Thus, in many instances, male-headed households comprise more than one member for economic participation. Consequent to this, female-headed households are poorer than male-headed ones.

## Determinants of change in family size and structure

### Fertility change

The reduction in the average annual rate of population growth, which is a global phenomenon, primarily occurred owing to a reduction in fertility levels. An inevitable outcome of declining fertility rates and increasing age at first birth in most countries of the world is a reduction in family size (Jones, 1995). Although the fertility rates in the rest of the Asian countries have declined significantly, in South Asia, the decline has been much slower (Freedman, 1995). The total fertility rate (TFR) of Bhutan, Maldives and Pakistan was well over five live births per woman, even during the period 1995-2000 (table 5). India, with the largest population in the region, still reports a TFR of over three children. Sri Lanka is the only country in South Asia which has reached replacement level fertility, with a TFR of 2.1. It is especially noteworthy that major fertility declines in Asia have occurred in populations that are poor, with large rural proportions (Caldwell, 1993).

**Table 5. Change in total fertility rate in South Asian countries, 1970-1975 to 1995-2000**

Region and country	1970-1975	1980-1985	1990-1995	1995-2000
<b>South Asia</b>				
Afghanistan	7.4	7.4	7.0	-
Bangladesh	6.4	5.3	4.3	3.8
Bhutan	5.9	5.9	5.7	5.5
India	5.4	4.5	3.7	3.3
Maldives	7.0	6.8	6.1	5.8
Nepal	5.8	5.5	5.1	4.8
Pakistan	6.3	6.2	5.8	5.5
Sri Lanka	4.1	3.4	2.4	2.1

Source: United Nations (2001). *World Population Prospects: The 2000 Revision*, vol. I (New York).

The aforementioned fertility decline experienced in most South Asian countries is due to the combined effect of the substantial socio-economic development achieved by those countries in the last two decades and the effective implementation of family planning programmes. In traditional societies where human labour was a source of strength to the family, more children were preferred

to less. The emphasis was on the quality rather than the quantity of children, a new concept added to family values. A main feature in the modern family system that has emerged is the changing attitude towards the value of children. Moreover, the economic benefits derived from children in a family decreased, owing to the economic development path in the economy which caused structural changes in the economy promoting non-agricultural employment. The Asian experience shows that large-scale economic development, though experienced by the West before irreversible fertility declines occurred, is not always necessary for major fertility declines. Increased consumption by a large majority of persons, improving health, the education of women, and advancing their status, can be the reasonable causation of Asian fertility decline.

### **Mortality change**

Everywhere, mortality declines, particularly infant mortality, preceded fertility declines. Improved survival rates of children mean that when women reached the age of 30, they increasingly had achieved the completed family size they desired. Earlier, much larger numbers of births had been required to achieve the desired completed family size. Many countries in South Asia that have achieved a low level of fertility also have a low level of infant mortality (table 6). Sri Lanka, compared with the rest of the South Asian countries, reports the highest life expectancy at birth and at age 60.

### **Marriage dissolution**

All marital unions, formal or informal, constituting families in society, do not progress through to complete the marriage cycle to reach the final dissolution through death. A considerable proportion of unions are disrupted suddenly at various points in the lifetime of married persons for reasons such as desertion, separation or divorce. An obvious failure in family relationship is where husband and wife cease to live together.

Divorce is the final dissolution, leaving both spouses legally free to enter another marriage contract. The variety of grounds for divorce is recognized across the countries in the Asian region, and of those, the two broad categories are cruelty and desertion. The law has not only initiated legal changes to enhance the status of women and their children within the family, but also contributes largely to the dissolution of unsatisfactory marriages. Separation or divorce may stigmatize a woman in Asian countries, reducing her social status and shrinking her support network, sometimes causing community members or her ex-partner's kin to reject her (Bruce, 1995).

**Table 6. Life expectancy at birth and at age 60 by gender**

South Asia		1975-1980		2000-2005		2025-2030	
		Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Afghanistan	At birth	39.8	39.8	43.0	43.5	53.0	54.0
	Age 60	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bangladesh	At birth	19.1	46.4	60.6	60.8	69.6	71.6
	Age 60	-	-	15.2	16.4	16.9	18.4
Bhutan	At birth	44.5	46.5	62.0	64.5	69.9	74.0
	Age 60	-	-	17.1	18.1	18.7	20.2
India	At birth	53.3	52.4	63.6	64.9	69.9	73.4
	Age 60	-	-	16.1	17.9	18.1	20.7
Maldives	At birth	55.9	53.2	68.3	67.0	74.3	76.3
	Age 60	-	-	16.6	17.4	18.4	20.3
Nepal	At birth	47.0	45.4	60.1	59.6	69.4	71.6
	Age 60	-	-	15.2	16.3	18.5	18.4
Pakistan	At birth	51.3	50.7	61.2	60.9	69.2	70.4
	Age 60	-	-	16.1	16.7	18.2	19.3
Sri Lanka	At birth	65.0	68.5	69.9	75.9	74.4	80.3
	Age 60	-	-	17.0	20.0	18.6	23.1

Source: United Nations (2002). *World Population Ageing: 1950-2050* ( New York).

In many countries in the world, the incidence of divorce is increasing and that phenomenon is no exception to South Asia. In the last decade, as indicated in table 7, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka reported an increase in the proportion of divorced women in the age group 45-49. In Nepal, divorce is virtually non-existent. It is worth noting that the risk of divorce is higher in younger women. This contention is supported by evidence gained from a number of demographic and health surveys. Nevertheless, most divorced women tend to remarry subsequently. Thus those women who are reported as divorced at later ages of the reproductive span will remain single for the rest of their lives and live with their dependants. As reported from Bangladesh and India, divorce rates are higher at younger ages, but with increasing age those rates drop off steeply (Shaikh, 1998).

Divorce is sometimes thought to be the only solution to an unbearable relationship. It frees the spouse and children from a situation which may be damaging to the entire family. The fact is widely accepted that in any society when



a couple have children it will deter their divorce. Even in Western societies, a significantly large proportion of divorced couples have no living children. Thus in South Asian culture, childlessness exerts a strong effect on the divorce rate (Shahidullah, 1979). However it is believed that in the last couple of years, even in most of the Asian cultures, a growing proportion of divorces involve couples with young children (Goode, 1993). Such a trend in marital dissolution would lead to single parenthood as experienced at present by Western societies.

**Table 7. Percentage of widowed and divorced women aged 45-49 in South Asian countries**

	Widowed		Divorced	
	1990s	Around 2000	1990s	Around 2000
<b>South Asia</b>				
Bangladesh	15.9	18.3	1.5	2.7
India	12.5	13.3	0.2	0.3
Nepal	12.0	10.1	0.1	0.0
Pakistan	6.5	-	0.2	-
Sri Lanka	12.4	10.4	0.4	0.5

*Source:* Demographic and Health Surveys database.

Widowhood is most likely to strike the elderly and therefore carry with it the economic problems of ageing (table 7). The death of a spouse can result in single parenthood for women in most South Asian countries primarily for two reasons. First, in most countries in the region, the expectation of life at birth for females is higher than that of males. Second, at the time of marriage in almost all couples, the husband is significantly older than his wife. Since marital fertility continues even in the advanced stages of the reproductive span, widows are often left with dependent children to support (Bruce, 1995).

Bangladesh reported the highest proportion of widowed women in the age group 45-49 in the 1990s and still shows a further increase. At present, approximately one out of every five women in that age group is already widowed in Nepal. Countries such as Bangladesh and India indicate an increase in the incidence of widowhood, while in Nepal and Sri Lanka, the opposite is true. Presumably in Sri Lanka the decline in widowhood is expected with the decrease in age difference between husband and wife. For instance, the age difference between male and female age at marriage in Sri Lanka in 1963 was about six years, while by 1981 the figure had dropped to 3.5 years (De Silva, 1997). This trend would have contributed to a reduction of the percentage of women widowed in the age group 45-49.

## Women's economic participation

The commercialization process which opened markets in many developing countries has succeeded in replacing the traditional cooperation in economic relationship with that of competition. In this process, the social institutions in those countries found themselves in conflict with the key aspects of the new economic systems. The family, as a social institution, has been a major victim in this respect (Wijewardena, 1996).

The economics of the family and the sexual division of labour within the family are very much determined by opportunities in the labour market. The main economic system itself has facilitated the removal of women from household chores and their entrance into the labour market. The market has invented a number of new labour-saving methods to enable women to supply their labour in the market (table 8).

**Table 8. Percentage change in women's share of the labour force in South Asian countries**

	Women's share of the labour force (Percentage aged 15 and over)		Labour force (as percentage of total population) 1995
	1970	1995	
<b>South Asia</b>			
Bangladesh	40	42	50
Bhutan	39	39	49
India	33	31	43
Maldives	36	43	41
Nepal	39	40	46
Pakistan	21	26	36
Sri Lanka	25	36	42

*Source: Key indicators of developing Asian and Pacific Countries 1998, Vol. XXIX, Philippines; Asian Development Bank (1998).*

Furthermore, the deregulation of labour markets has resulted in weakening income and employment security and the "feminization" of many jobs traditionally held by men (Standing, 1989). The declining ability of men to earn a "family wage" along with the growing need of cash for family maintenance has resulted in an increasing proportion of female members (particularly the wife) in the family to engage in economic activities (Lloyd and Duffy, 1995).

How strongly did the “feminization” of the labour market take place in South Asia? The highest female share of the labour force in 1970 was noted in Bangladesh while the least was noted in Pakistan (table 8). In almost all countries in South Asia, the women’s share in the labour force increased.

The increase of divorce and separation, female-headed households and single-parent households all indicate the pressure on females, particularly mothers, to engage in economic activities in order to maintain the family unit. However, in many instances the income that she receives is not sufficient to support her family. This trend could be noted as “feminization of poverty” in which the poorest quartiles of society are increasingly made up of women and children.

Mothers throughout the region are expected to carry a significant domestic workload which is a vital form of economic production, though often not remunerated in cash. When both wage-earning and non-wage-earning forms of economic activity are accounted for, it becomes evident that mothers provide substantial or sole economic support to a larger proportion of families in the region (Bruce, 1995).

## **Migration and urbanization**

International migration is about the movement of people beyond the defined boundaries of a country. Population movements beyond country boundaries, especially in the South Asian region, have increased, particularly during the period encompassing the last two to three decades. Issues relating to international migrants have become extremely important in international relations. Some of the major causes of such migratory trends are increasing globalization, economic interdependence, rapid population growth, ecological deterioration, civil war, ethnic and religious conflicts and the worsening of poverty.

### **International migration**

The outmigration process of professionally qualified persons in search of employment overseas from South Asian countries to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, North America and Australia dates back to the late 1960s. In recent decades, labour migrants, refugees and asylum seekers have migrated largely because of prevailing internal strife in the region (table 9). Since 1995, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have opened new avenues for permanent migration to their countries, opening their doors to all those types of migrants and paving the way for thousands of professionally and technically qualified persons to migrate to those countries. Such induced migration has amounted to a fairly massive brain drain from the third world countries (Skeldon,

1993). Contract labour migration involves most countries of South Asia. However, the major players are Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

**Table 9. Net migration and refugees: South Asian countries**

Country	Population 2000  (thousands)	Migration stock 2000		Net migration 1995-2000		Number of refugees 2000
		Number  (thousands)	Percentage	Number  (thousands)	Rate per 1,000 people	
<b>South Asia</b>						
Sri Lanka	18,924	397	2.1	-31	-1.7	0
India	1,008,937	6,271	0.6	-280	-0.3	171
Pakistan	141,256	4,243	3.0	-70	-0.5	2,001
Nepal	23,043	619	2.7	-24	-1.1	129
Bangladesh	137,439	988	0.7	-60	-0.5	22
Maldives	291	3	1.1	0	0.0	**
Bhutan	2,085	10	0.5	-1	-0.5	00

Source: United Nations (2002), *International Migration 2002: Data Sheet*, New York.

Note: \*\* Insignificant.

### **The impact of international migration on the family**

The intention of those migrants was purely to achieve a better livelihood for their families. A majority of the migrants were migrating for the first time, which indicated that they were inexperienced and had only an average level of education. A large percentage of such persons, especially females, were either semi-skilled or unskilled. Unskilled labour was provided largely by females who migrated as housemaids. The intention of some of the migrants to achieve a better livelihood was never achieved because of the absence of knowledge and guidance to utilize the earned foreign exchange at a maximum scale.

Contract migration required a temporary separation from the family and living in a culturally, ethnically and religiously different environment in the host country. Neither male nor female migrants to the Middle East are usually accompanied by their families (Ministry of Finance and Planning, 1996). For the successful implementation of such a migration policy, training for migrants and an adequate comprehension of cultural differences at the social point of destination for the migrants, and training for adjustment and coping during the period of

absence for the family at the point of destination, as well as avenues for alternative service provision for the family, are required. Nevertheless, the mechanisms for such training were not in place at the point of origin or at the point of destination during the initial phase of the process of contract migration. Since then some of the countries have attempted to put in place some administrative mechanisms to impart the necessary training and adjustment.

There seems to be a sharp impact of temporary migration on families of female migrants and on the migrants themselves. In Sri Lanka, the proportion of married persons among total migrants has been estimated to run between 50 and 70 per cent; however, an overwhelmingly large proportion of female migrants are married.

Within Sri Lanka, in the last quarter of 1995, various reports by the news media throw light on the dimension of the social impact of the migrant family. During the observed period of three months, 49 migration-related adverse incidents had been reported in the daily newspapers. Such incidents included 13 suicides and deaths of the migrant or members of the family. Other cases of clandestine love affairs (migrant or spouse) and instances of abandoning the family have been observed. Some of the evidence available at the Foreign Employment Bureau of Sri Lanka also establishes some of those contentions. The tabulations presented in this article provide useful insights into several aspects often overlooked in mapping out policy which looks at migration for employment as one answer to the high levels of unemployment prevailing in some of the countries of origin. The magnitude and dimension of the social consequences demand a serious in-depth investigation into the issue from the sociocultural angle. The negative consequences of labour exports, particularly of female migration, have led to vocal lobbies urging a ban on or regulation of such movement from time to time (*ibid.*).

Signs of stress and strain are becoming increasingly evident in marital and family relationships. Successive empirical investigations have demonstrated that the costly price paid by families were in the form of disruption of family life and disorientation of matrimonial and social relationships (Ministry of Finance and Planning, 1996; Eckenrode and Gore, 1990). Incidents of family break-up owing to migration are reported to be increasing. Sociologists have found a high tendency towards bigamy or polygamy following the separation of married couples as a result of migration. The past experiences in Sri Lanka show that the divorce rate is higher among migrant families (Dias, 1984). Another survey conducted in Sri Lanka (Hettige, 1992) indicated that wasteful consumption, an epidemic of alcoholism and gambling, devaluation of the moral values of migrant women, particularly the unmarried, and the problem of social reintegration upon return are

among the negative effects highlighted. Those are “symptomatic of the emigrant social order” (ibid.). The consequences of male outmigration have also been observed. Cases of men gambling and wasting money, obliging their wives to repeat migration as a mode of survival, were also noted in that survey.

Transfer of the dependency burden of the family from the younger to the older generations is an immediate outcome of the migration of prime working-age members of the family. This change in the age composition of the family occurs with a skewed effect in the direction of the bulged proportion of older persons in the family (UNESCO, 1982; De Silva, 1994).

Transference of decision-making in the family from traditional male heads of household to female members who are earning substantial incomes for the family from foreign employment is observed. The emergence of a new phenomenon in the form of female-dominated household planning has become a significant feature among some of the migrant families. Women’s contribution to the household economy in the poor South Asian countries is not well documented and hitherto unrecognized in the national accounts (Bruce, 1995). In recent years, that contribution enhanced foreign remittances brought into those poor countries, creating a new socio-economic scenario which significantly increased the account and recognized the economic role of women in the community and family structure.

The majority of migrants in temporary employment abroad are married and have left their spouses and children behind. The duration of stay by migrants in Middle Eastern countries is approximately two to three years with the opportunity for home leave on completion of one year of work. The workers’ long absences from their households, especially in the case of married persons with young children, make it necessary for them to seek the assistance of one parent or other siblings to attend to the needs of the young children and to assist the spouse left behind. When an immediate family member is not available, the assistance of distant relatives is sought.

A parallel development is the more active participation of the male spouse in multiple family roles hitherto performed by females only, particularly in families where married women have migrated. A redistribution of responsibilities among other members of the family has taken place. To a very large degree the migrant’s spouse takes over some of the additional responsibilities (child care, marketing etc.). In some instances, such redistribution of family responsibilities within the family has had a negative effect. For example, the elder child may be discontinued from schooling to look after the young siblings left behind or to attend to other

household chores (De Silva, 1998). Such instances are a matter of concern and have caused a breakdown of family ties and family disruption.

The consequences of parental outmigration for extended periods have to be seen in their manifold dimensions. In Sri Lanka for example, if a rough estimate could be made for 1996 on the basis of the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment estimates, the stock of contract workers currently abroad amounts to 550,000. A survey of 224 children left behind by their mothers revealed that 80 per cent of them were less than 15 years of age (Fernando, 1996). Such separations had lasting repercussions on the child's personality, development, conduct, performance in studies and even attitude to society and life. Experiences of the socio-economic, cultural and psychological impacts of contract migration on the immediate family system in Sri Lanka is also highlighted in several surveys (Fernando, 1989). Hettige (1992) refers to psychological and behavioural problems of children, deterioration of parent-child relationships, etc. Interviews with doctors and counsellors reported in the same study in Sri Lanka bring out the concern expressed by health, nutritional and education experts over those negative aspects of the migration phenomenon. The extent to which surrogate parents can make up for the deprivation of maternal care is a controversial issue. In urban areas where the extended family system is more diluted, the adverse impact on children would be stronger (Fernando, 1989).

The social impact of return migration is mainly related with the reintegration and social adjustment of returnees. The problems of readjustment/reintegration of the returnee migrant to the family and community appear to have visible manifestations, because of the prolonged exposure of that member of the family to work and distance. For example, a higher incidence of divorce is reported among migrants. The incidence of divorce and separation was found to be higher in the first year after return. One conclusion can be that migration has a negative effect on marital stability (Ministry of Finance and Planning, 1996).

### **Internal migration**

Internal migration may be defined as the movement of people from one geographical area to another within an internationally recognized State border. Two such migration streams may be rural-to-urban and rural-to-rural migration.

Rural-to-urban migration enhances the process of urbanization and is inevitably linked to the process of economic development. The flows of people from rural to urban areas occur largely for economic reasons (Naveen, 2001). Nevertheless, there are other reasons, such as the need to access the better educational or health services available in urban areas, that function as pull factors

to draw people from rural to urban areas. Two other reasons contributing to urban population growth may be changes in administrative boundaries which cause physical expansion of, and a natural increase of population in, urban areas. In India, during the period 1981-1991, the in-migration process accounted for at least 34 per cent of the urban growth (Mathur, 1992).

Social and economic disparities and lack of job opportunities in rural areas have resulted in the increased rural-to-urban migration in many South Asian countries (Perera, 1992). The process of urbanization may be described as an irreversible process. The emergence of the “big city” phenomenon in Asian countries is linked to large-scale rural-to-urban migration in Asian countries. Such a migration pattern occurs within the framework of high population growth in which the agricultural sector is unable to absorb the additional labour supply of the growing rural population. Syed (1992) notes that “population mobility whether between or within the rural and urban sectors, is related to sustainable development. People who moved out of unsustainable systems in rural areas to rapidly growing urban centres often move into urban poverty”. Thus, development planners are faced with problems of growing demands on inadequate urban infrastructure. The vicious circle of poverty continues to move from rural to urban areas. Such mass poverty associated with the process of urbanization requires immediate attention and urgent solutions.

### **Impact of internal migration on the family**

While international migration has a substantial impact of on the family, internal migration also affects the structure and functions of the family. For married women, the chance to break out from a confined role appears to be greater in urban than in rural areas. They can evade the direct control of their family, causing traditional family structures to collapse and paving the way for the development of new ones (Findly and Williams, 1991). Such outcomes are particularly important in patrilineal and patrilocal societies, when migration results in the woman living away from her in-laws, which in turn encourages the development of more intimate and egalitarian relationships between husband and wife. Thus, a study of urban neighbourhoods in a city in northern India revealed that the trend towards the incorporation of married women into their husband’s kin network was weak; nevertheless, stronger ties were observed between the women concerned and the family of origin than was typical in traditional rural India (Perera, 1992).

Married women migrating from rural to urban areas of South Asian countries often experience not only a transition from an extended to a nuclear family but also an important change in the nature of their economic activity. From being unpaid



family workers, they become wage earners. Such a change is likely to enhance the independence of women and to strengthen their role in decision-making within the family. In general, the higher a woman's income as a proportion of total family income is, the more power she holds in the family (ibid.).

### Urbanization and the effects on the family

The increased proportions of population residing in urban areas of South Asian countries, observed during the last two decades, and with a potential for faster growth in the immediate future (table 10), is a major development trend affecting families. The urbanization process tended to influence the stabilization process of the nucleation of the family system because of urban congestion and the housing patterns, particularly of the low-income groups. The demographic transition occurring in some of the South Asian countries, which had reached a stage of low mortality and low fertility (tending towards replacement-level fertility), contributed to enhancing the process of family nucleation. A gradual collapse of the extended family system in those countries tended to create new problems of family support for the young dependants and the elderly in the family. Time series data showing the age structure of urban areas of South Asian countries show that the proportion of the elderly has increased while the proportion of working-age population and of working parents has remained high. Moreover, consequent to rural-to-urban migration and rapid urbanization, a small average household size is observed for urban areas, compared with rural areas, in most of the South Asian countries (table 11).

**Table 10. Percentage of population residing in urban areas by South Asian countries (1980-2020)**

Country	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Afghanistan	15.7	18.2	22.2	28.2	35.9
Bangladesh	11.3	16.4	22.9	30.3	38.2
Bhutan	3.9	5.3	7.8	11.4	16.2
India	23.1	27.0	32.3	39.9	47.3
Nepal	6.1	9.6	14.3	20.0	26.8
Pakistan	28.1	32.0	37.9	45.4	53.1
Sri Lanka	21.6	21.4	24.2	30.7	38.6
<b>South Asia</b>	<b>23.1</b>	<b>27.3</b>	<b>32.8</b>	<b>39.9</b>	<b>47.7</b>

Source: United Nations (1991).

The adoption of urban lifestyles triggered changes in the quality of food consumed in the family. The adoption of the fast-food culture for convenience and increased preference for such food types, particularly among the younger generation, in addition to stress from work and family, brought about a change in the epidemiological profile of the urban population in the region by increasing the mortality and morbidity rates owing to diseases originating from those lifestyle changes (Eckenrode and Gore, 1990).

The various types of unhealthy housing prevalent in urban areas caused unhealthy lifestyles in the family. Congestion and pollution have become synonymous with living in slum and shanty dwellings. Unplanned industrial development in urban areas and the resultant overurbanization seen in most of the major cities and other urban centres of South Asia have caused massive environmental degradation and pollution problems. The provision of necessary services, safe water supply, sewerage and other services and facilities for the families living in urban areas have become major problems for urban planners.

**Table 11. Average household size in urban areas in 1990s**

Region and country	Urban	Rural	Total
<b>South Asia</b>			
Bangladesh	5.2	5.2	5.2
India	5.2	5.6	5.4
Nepal	5.0	5.3	5.3
Pakistan	7.2	6.5	6.7
Sri Lanka	4.8	4.5	4.5

*Source:* Demography and Health Surveys Database.

### **Ageing and retirement**

Population ageing is emerging as a serious problem in many South Asian countries. Those trends have interacted with major changes in patterns of individual and family life. In combination with economic development and social change, increases in the average lifetime of the individual allow for greater time spent in family roles (United Nations, 1994).

Improvements in mortality have contributed to higher survivorship of the populations. The adoption of new techniques to combat infectious diseases has resulted in increases in infant and child survival during the first half of the twentieth century. In more recent years, a dramatic turn of demographic events is experienced, resulting in longevity of older ages.

The ageing process and the resultant issues are an outcome of the irreversible changes experienced by the demographic dynamics in the region. Among the observed effects of mortality decline are the changes that occurred in fertility. In addition to the effects of the social change, the success of family planning programmes contributed to a decline in fertility. Lower fertility had an indirect effect on the issue of the elderly as the proportion of the elderly to the total population began to rise. International migration of younger persons further aggravated the situation. The age selectivity of migration skewing towards younger ages contributed to making the proportion of the elderly population significant in relation to the other age segments of the total population (United Nations, 1999).

Comparative to any country in the South Asian region, the highest proportion of elderly population i.e. those persons of age 60 years and more, is reported to be in Sri Lanka. The medium variant projection shows that this proportion would increase to 18 per cent by 2025 (table 12). The country least affected by ageing is Afghanistan, where at present less than 5 per cent of the population is enumerated as elderly. By contrast, owing to the advanced stages of demographic transition that occurred in the country, Sri Lanka will have the highest proportion of elderly persons by 2025 (De Silva, 1994).

**Table 12. Percentage of population aged 60 years and over in South Asian countries**

Region and country	1975	2000	2025
<b>South Asia</b>			
Afghanistan	4.7	4.7	5.2
Bangladesh	5.5	4.9	8.4
Bhutan	5.7	6.5	7.0
India	6.2	7.6	12.5
Maldives	6.9	5.3	6.2
Nepal	5.7	5.9	7.1
Pakistan	5.5	5.8	7.3
Sri Lanka	6.3	9.3	18.0

*Source:* United Nations (2002), *World Population Ageing: 1950-2050*, New York (2002).

In South Asian countries the growth rate of the population aged 60 and above exceeds that of national populations. More significant is the progressive upward trend in the growth rate of the elderly and declining trends in national growth rates. Projections indicate a pronounced increase in the elderly population in the decades

to follow. The growth of the elderly population, relative to the prime age segment of the total population, has led to changes in the dependency ratios. The effects of those changes are that increasingly large proportions of the elderly (those who are aged more than 60) will be increasingly dependent on a gradually declining proportion of the working-age population (those who are in the age group 15-59 years). Associated with those trends affecting the economy are implications related to family support of the elderly, as one would anticipate that fewer persons in the younger generation would be available to support and care for the growing number of the elderly in the family (United Nations, 1999). The potential supply ratios, which measure the number of persons in the working ages per every elderly person, have declined in most countries in South Asia (table 13). The support ratio will decline significantly in the next two decades and Sri Lanka is likely to experience the highest decline.

**Table 13. Potential support ratio in South Asian countries**

Region and country	1975	2000	2025
<b>South Asia</b>			
Afghanistan	19.4	18.9	17.8
Bangladesh	14.8	18.6	12.9
Bhutan	15.8	12.5	12.4
India	14.7	12.4	8.2
Maldives	12.2	15.0	15.0
Nepal	16.1	14.8	13.6
Pakistan	16.1	14.8	12.7
Sri Lanka	14.8	10.8	5.5

*Source:* United Nations (2002), *World Population Ageing: 1950-2050*, New York (2002).

*Note:* The Potential Support Ratio is the number of persons age 15-64 per every person ages 65 or older.

The elderly in South Asian countries face many problems such as insolvency, loss of authority, social insecurity, insufficient recreational facilities, lack of overall physical and mental care, problems associated with living arrangements etc. Ultimately those problems affect the family.

### **Impact of ageing on the family**

Caring for older persons seems to have other implications that are an outcome of changing societal norms and the resultant changes that had taken effect within families. Despite the fact that children, in the region as a whole, are given high

priority, the traditional obligations towards parents and the feeling duty-bound that they are to provide them with the love and care that they deserve in the twilight years of their lives are now difficult to fulfill. The prospect of the younger generation living with their parents is becoming increasingly difficult, if not impractical, to realize as the search for employment opportunities takes them increasingly to locations away from their homes and to distant lands (ibid.).

The process of ageing leads at a point in time to loss of occupation and loss of income, causing, in most cases, economic hardship in old age. Not only is the self-sufficiency and economic independence of the person likely to be lost, but also his/her overall standard of living is expected to decline. The contention that old age is often characterized by diminishing income is postulated by the age income cycle theory, which proposes that relative to the income of a person's working life, the income of those at retirement is low.

The bulk of employment in South Asian countries is in the agricultural sector. The large majority of persons are employed as casual and regular labourers, farmers, part-time workers and other types of wage labourers, self-employed persons, domestic labour and other minor employees. Those types of traditional occupations bring only a marginal income, sufficient for one person to lead a hand-to-mouth existence. Hence at retirement, low-income earning segments of the labour force become more vulnerable to economic hazards (Perera, 1989).

In the South Asian countries, a substantial proportion of the working-age populations, who are in the non-formal sector, are left without a secure definite source of income in their old age. This category includes those who have been employed in the non-permanent subsidiary industries. The chronic levels of unemployment prevailing in the region entail that in South Asian countries, most of the older persons have not been working in recent times.

After retirement a major proportion of people and their families feel additional economic hardship (United Nations, 1999). In the rural sector, the proportion engaged in agricultural self-employment is observed to be highest in Sri Lanka, with around 42 per cent, followed by Bangladesh and Pakistan with around 21 and 10 per cent, respectively (table 14). Only the government servants and employees in the private sector are assured of a pension or a superannuation benefit. The degree of benefits at retirement is directly linked to the type of employment of persons (Chen and Jones, 1989).

In South Asian countries, there has been a long tradition of supporting the elderly members of the family, a feature which is still dominant, providing economic security for the majority of the elderly in the rural areas. Nevertheless,

the changing family patterns and sizes have negated this security blanket for the elderly. The reduction of the family size could be attributed partly to economic difficulties, the low level of income, the high cost of living, the costs of education of children and the need to maintain a better standard of living, which is best achieved within a smaller-size family. Consequently, the nuclear family became a model and soon ruled out the traditional, extended family usually consisting of three generations. The direct outcome of such a situation is the decrease in the quantum of the family support and protection provided for the aged.

**Table 14. Distribution of elderly persons by type of occupation**

Occupation	Bangladesh		Pakistan		Sri Lanka	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Agriculture, self-employed	21.4	2.9	10.5	1.0	42.3	0.5
Agricultural workers	5.5	2.9	2.0	0.5	-	-
Non-agricultural, self-employed	2.3	9.3	2.5	14.9	5.6	25.2
Non-agricultural, private Individual employed	0.0	2.4	1.5	1.0	1.4	2.4
Non-agricultural, private company employed	0.5	1.0	1.0	4.4	0.5	1.4
Government	0.5	4.4	0.5	1.5	7.5	27.5
Non-worked	69.8	77.1	82.0	76.7	42.7	43.0

Source: United Nations (1999).

There is a wide variety of family forms in Asia's diverse cultures, perhaps with more variations now than in the past. Demographic change has altered the membership of families in terms of numbers, types and characteristics of kin, both within and across generations, and also within the age structure. Despite that, the institution of the family is the basic institution around which societies organize themselves. Changes in family structures would, therefore, affect the care and support of the elderly (Tan, 1992).

In Asian countries, there is a long-standing family tradition of mutual support between the elderly and other family members. It is therefore important to understand the demographic, social and economic facets of such mutual support, which are interrelated with the continuous concern, ability and participation of the elderly to play an active role through support, including financial given to the

family. Such support, given by the elderly reflects not only their concern for the well-being of the family but also their ability to work. To understand the demographic and socio-economic dimension of support given by the elderly, the consumption patterns of the family resources out of the total earnings, and the patterns of savings of the family, have to be examined (United Nations, 1997).

The experience of Pakistan shows that monetary assistance had been given to the family budget by older persons drawing on their savings. In such instances, the economic status of the elderly is positively associated with their ability to be self-sufficient in basic needs. Data from the same country show that the financial contribution of the older persons to the family budget is positively associated with their good health and other variables, such as not being too old, being relatively more educated, resuming work after completing a longer working life, being self-sufficient in basic needs, having a higher income at age 50, having family help in working (not monetary) and children not self-sufficient in basic needs. To achieve such a secure situation, it is assumed that the elderly drew at least some money from their savings accumulated over their working lives. Those who worked as employees of some organization may also have some money from their employment but the pensions paid in Pakistan are generally too small (United Nations, 1997).

Details of the responses given by the elderly in a survey in Pakistan –whether they helped their children in income-generating work, with or without getting paid – are contained in table 15. Of the elderly males questioned, 191 said that they did help in their children’s income-generating activities, but without being paid. This may also imply that the help was given in a family enterprise or work situation. Only 11 elderly males said that they were remunerated for their work contribution. The remainder either gave a negative reply or no response was available. The mean income of those who contributed to the work of their children was higher than those who did not do so.

Among the elderly females, 81 said that they helped their children without getting paid, while only one woman said that she was paid for her work (table 15). The remainder either gave a negative reply to the question or did not respond because they were not economically active (*ibid.*).

The need to restructure family roles appears increasingly evident. The earlier role, definition and responsibility no longer “fit”.

The large majority of elderly Sri Lankans are cared for by their families, in most cases by co-residing children. More than 80 per cent of the elderly aged over 60 live with their children and two thirds live in households along with at least four

other people. In this environment, most elderly people are expected to be cared for in their children's households.

**Table 15. Social support pattern and income of the elderly by gender: help to children in generating income**

Social support question	Gender	How	Case
Do elderly help children to generate income without or by getting paid?	Male		334
		Yes, without getting paid	191
		Yes, by getting paid	11
		No	69
		Not available	63
	Female		186
		Yes, without getting paid	81
		Yes, by getting paid	1
		No	62
	Not available	42	

Source: United Nations (1997).

In traditional agrarian societies, production tends to be family-based and unspecialized (Ogawa and Rutherford, 1994). Successive generations tend to have the same occupation, typically farming. Parental authority over children is reinforced by a parent's greater experience and expertise, while the co-residence of parents and adult children makes both economic and social sense. With modernization, production shifts to a more specialized process and modern market economies are dependent on an inherent division of labour. Increasing individualism in the labour market eventually diffuses into other areas of life, including the legal system, family relations and social values. Parental authority of elderly parents over adult children loosens, and generally weakens most of its economic and legal basis. Changing outlooks, and the need for adult children to move in search of employment, results in a decline in the coexistence of multigenerational members of the family. This is particularly the case in the event of rapid urbanization, where members of the extended family living in rural areas are left behind as children move to the cities. This is an important process affecting the family structure (IPS, 1998; De Silva, 1994).

Increased schooling may break down traditional values and norms, including the family values, which entails a specific obligation for the children to support and



care for their elderly parents. Although the evidence for such effects remains incomplete, such situations may occur for two reasons. First, increased schooling results in children spending less time receiving care and guidance from their parents and hence the feeling of a debt towards the parents is reduced. Second, because the content of classes provided in formal schooling tends to be heavily westernized, the system appears to inculcate western values of individualism and self-realization (Caldwell, 1980). Both processes make the younger generation less willing to sacrifice their time to provide physical care for their elderly parents (Mason, 1992). This may be a major problem in the family in relation to the caregiving aspects of old age support.

With further development, are the elderly in South Asia less likely to receive care and support from their children? The answer given by most experts on ageing in South Asia is a qualified “yes”. Norms about the care of the elderly by their children were traditional and strong in most of South Asia and appear to remain strong. Despite this, traditional patterns of co-residence are eroding in many countries. There are also isolated reports of physical separations between elderly parents and their children contributing to the neglect of the elderly. Intergenerational co-residence and support of the elderly by their children also appear to be less common in the more “modernized” sectors of the population, suggesting that as societies modernize, the traditional intergenerational relationship will tend to break down. Thus, although family support and care of the elderly are unlikely to disappear in the near future, family care of the elderly seems to be decreasing, as the countries and areas of the South Asian region indicate (*ibid.*).

The current levels and patterns of the prevalence of disability among the elderly need to be appropriately assessed. Mobility is one of the first things to be affected by disability. In old age, the usual weaknesses are worsened by disabilities. With increasing numbers of the elderly, the proportionate number of disabled among them is likely to grow (United Nations, 1996). This trend constitutes a major economic hardship for many South Asian families, because a major proportion of them are poor or very poor.

### **Impact of ageing on health-care costs**

Population ageing leads to increased health-care costs in almost all developing countries. The impact can be evaluated from government health expenditures as well as from an overall societal perspective.

After the age of 65, the probability of disability or of impairment in general functioning increases dramatically. While people are increasingly living beyond

70 years of age, the increased life expectancy does not necessarily mean additional years of life free of disability. As the number of disabled elderly grows, those individuals will need additional support in order to maintain themselves (Rannan-Eliya and others, 1998).

Within the domain of extended family relationships, the concern expressed and help given by the family members during sickness or disability of the aged is usually more conspicuous. In fact, the main source of social security for the elderly consists of physical, emotional and monetary support provided by the family or close relations (United Nations, 1996).

The traditional solidarity between generations who work through the institutions of the family and who receive further motivation from religious and cultural values has so far worked in Pakistan to ensure a sufficient level of social security. Such mutual help has not only been prevalent for the sustenance of family, social and economic ties but has also extended beyond the domains of the family to the community level, especially at the time of marriages, sickness, old-age disability and in the event of emergencies (United Nations, 1997).

The problem of care for the elderly is likely to be especially acute for older women, who constitute the majority of the elderly in virtually all low-mortality populations (Andrews and Hennink, 1992; Martin, 1988). Because of the greater longevity among women in most countries in Asia, and the tendency for men to marry women younger than themselves, women are more likely than men to end their lives widowed. The implication of this is a serious gender asymmetry in the support and care of the elderly (Martin, 1988).

In many South Asian countries, because of the increased life expectancy of women and the higher proportions of widowed, divorced or lonely among them, the economic and social problems for women are often worse than for men. The incidence of marriage among elderly women being low, their economic dependence on others is higher, especially in populations where female economic activity in general is low. With increasing physical and mental capacity, their economic dependence on family members is higher than that of men. The prolonged care of such women (because of their longer lifespan) necessitates that those on whom they depend for their livelihood have sufficient financial resources (United Nations, 1996).

### **Provision of social services and social protection**

Social services refer to programmes that help people deal with various social problems (Gilbert and others, 1980). Social services are responses to new social

institutions and therefore the field of social services is expanding. Social protection incorporates programmes providing social welfare that are directed to help people who cannot meet their needs by the open market system or the family. Thus, social protection is not only a welfare issue but also a social and economic development issue.

According to some schools of thought on welfare, people can meet their basic needs through two mechanisms: one is the family and the other the market. When a person fails to meet his/her basic needs through those mechanisms, social welfare comes to help. This is specially done through the State, in this case, the welfare state. The welfare state can be defined as a country with legislation and programmes that protect and support its citizens through governmental provision of direct services that contribute to improve their quality of life. However, for various reasons, the welfare state is in crisis.

According to some writers (Taylor-Gooby and Dale, 1985), despite factors of uncertainty and instability, the major contributory factor for a crisis to erupt is the scarcity of resources. This is much more applicable to the developing world, including countries in South Asia. This challenge spans all countries in that region and has major implications for many marginalized families that have emerged in the processes of rapid economic growth, economic transition, liberalization and globalization.

Most welfare programmes are remedial in nature, making recipients of welfare services dependants. Therefore, social services tend to become a burden on national economies. Slower economic growth rates have forced national Governments to borrow money from international agencies such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Those two organizations often advise Governments to cut down expenditure on social services. Therefore some experts on social services suggest community-based services as an able alternative (Jim Ife, 1995). However, without government assistance and support, communities will not be able to initiate welfare services of their own, though they are much needed by the people, particularly in developing countries.

For many reasons, the modern nuclear family is in crisis and this is making the provision of social services more urgent. For instance, caring for the older persons in the family is becoming a problem. The decrease in family size, the migration of younger members to urban areas for employment, the problems of housing in urban centres and the high cost of living are some of the factors affecting the traditional support system. As a result, greater demands are made on the welfare system of the Government in view of the increasing number of elder persons with greater dependent ratios.

Unemployment and underemployment are common problems in almost all the developing countries. Unemployment affects people's self-esteem and dignity. Further, it contributes to many other social evils such as crime, prostitution, child abuse etc.

Although Governments are highly dependent on the private sector for job opportunities, the social responsibility of the private sector is not yet recognized as a priority. Thus, private companies are mainly focused on making maximum profit. Therefore, Governments in the region must take the initiative to implement development projects that can absorb the existing labour force. However, owing to new trends in the open economic policies of the countries in the region, Governments appear reluctant to take the responsibility of unemployment and such problems are being transferred to the private sector. The available alternative to government is the introduction of a social insurance policy. Such an insurance system could cover unemployment, old age, family allowances, health and maternity, disability insurance and workers' compensation. Therefore, government intervention is very necessary in South Asian countries in order to strengthen and support the functions that the family performs through formulating family policies within the framework of socio-economic development in areas such as social protection against poverty and health. Thus, problems arising from family transition could be minimized.

### **Policy implications**

The importance of the family as a component of society needs no further emphasis but the mention of policy issues has not received the attention that it deserves. Migration of family members can have favourable or adverse effects on the family, depending on the circumstances. The provision made by households to cope with the void created by the migration of a family member is a dimension which has a far-reaching social impact.

Legislative enactments for the provision of adequate supplementary social services and social protection of occupationally mobile younger generations and the members of their eroded families have imminent policy implication. If occupational migration is to be adopted as a solution to the prevailing high level of unemployment in the country, the implementation of such a policy requires the potential employees to be temporarily separated from the family and to live in a culturally, ethnically and religiously different environment in the host country. Neither male nor female migrants to the Middle East, for instance, are usually accompanied by their families. Thorough professional training to enable the migrants to fit into the sociocultural, economic and legal environment of the host

country is needed. For the successful implementation of such a training programme, adequate comprehension of cultural differences at the social point of destination for the migrants, and training for adjustment and coping during the period of absence for the family at the point of destination, avenues for alternative service provision for the family are required. Nevertheless, adequate mechanisms for such training are in place neither at the point of origin nor at the point of destination during the initial phase of the process of contract migration. The programme that some of the countries have attempted to put in place requires further administrative mechanisms to be improved in order to impart the necessary training and adjustment.

The magnitude and dimension of the social consequences of migration-related adverse incidents reported in the various news media demand serious in-depth investigation from the sociocultural angle. Protection, training and awareness of law, the level and practice of human rights existing at the points of destination, legal implications in situations of adverse accusations and help in inquiring into the truthfulness of these various contentions, are some of the foreseen policy implications. The negative consequences of labour exports particularly related to female migration have led some countries in the South Asian region to enact regulations banning female migration for employment as domestic servants to some Middle Eastern countries.

The effects of demographic transition on the composition of the family entail the need to conceptualize and restructure family roles. In spite of the fact that in daily life, children, parents and spouses are associated with specific roles within the traditional family system, such a role division no longer fits in the transitional society.

The current growth patterns of the transitional economy have adverse implications for the prevailing traditional family support systems of the elderly, the main area of policy concern being the availability of a smaller number of younger persons in the family to support and care for a growing number of the elderly. Potential supply ratios, which measure the number of persons in the working ages per every elderly person, have declined in most countries in South Asia. The support ratio is expected to decline significantly in the next two decades and Sri Lanka could experience the highest decline.

The promotion of research to comprehend the demographic and socio-economic dimension of the support given by the elderly to the family budget, the consumption patterns of the family resources out of the total earnings and the patterns of savings of the family are matters demanding immediate policy attention. In Asian countries, there is a long-standing family tradition of mutual

support between the elderly and other family members. Awareness of the demographic, social and economic facets of the mutual support mechanisms of the transitional family, which are interrelated with the continuous concern, ability and participation of the elderly to play an active role through support given to the family matters, is important in policy formulation as well as in implementation. The support given by the elderly reflects not only their concern for the well-being of the family, but also their ability to work. Nevertheless, due consideration should be given to the fact that at retirement, the low-income earning segments, who constitute the major proportion of the labour force, become more vulnerable to economic hazards.

Other areas of policy concern associated with elderly segments of the transitional family demanding immediate attention are the problems of insolvency, loss of authority, social insecurity, insufficient recreational facilities, lack of overall physical and mental care and problems associated with the living arrangements of the elderly. Those areas are important all the more because they affect the family.

Population ageing leads to increased health-care costs in South Asian countries. In the formulation of the budgetary expenditure policies of the national budgets of countries in the region, further research is needed to understand the impact of additional expenditure on health and other costs of the growing elderly population. Such research should aim at understanding the overall effect of the aged segment on the transitional families, the societal perspectives on such issues and the impact on overall household expenditures.

In addition, the current levels and patterns of the prevalence of disability among the elderly need to be assessed. Mobility is one of the first things to be affected. In old age, the usual weaknesses are worsened by disabilities. With the increasing number of elderly persons, the proportionate number of disabled persons is likely to grow. This impact constitutes a major economic hardship for many South Asian families, because a major proportion of them are poor or very poor.

Women-focused specific policy legislation is a dire need in the current Asian society. As shown earlier, the migration of women and the associated considerations is one facet of such potential policies. In the sphere of care for the elderly, the problem is likely to be especially acute for older women, who constitute the majority of the elderly in virtually all low-mortality populations. Because of the greater longevity among women in most countries in Asia and the tendency for men to marry women younger than themselves, women are more likely than men to end their lives widowed. The implication of this is a serious

gender asymmetry in the support and care of the elderly. The economic and social problems for women are worse than for men in many cases. The incidence of marriage among elderly women being low, their economic dependence on others is higher, especially in populations where female economic activity is low. With increasing physical and mental capacity, their economic dependence on family members is higher than that of men. The prolonged care of such women (because of their longer lifespan) necessitates that those on whom they depend for livelihood have sufficient financial resources (United Nations, 1996).

Based on the existing policy, projects, programmes and specific plans of action should be formulated in order to reduce the gravity of the problems that are arising in South Asian countries in relation to the dynamics of family change. Such policies and programmes would be more effective if they were integrated into the overall socio-economic development strategy of the country. As an example, the Government of Sri Lanka recently introduced a National Policy and Plan of Action for the welfare of older persons which aimed at preparing the population for a productive and fulfilling life in old age, socially, economically, physically and spiritually and ensuring independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity for those in old age.

An act of parliament was enacted to protect the rights of the elderly in Sri Lanka in 2000. Until the enactment of the Elders Act of 2000 there was no specific legislation to provide general social and financial security for older persons. This is an important policy initiative by the Government which paved the way for establishing the National Council for Elders and a Secretariat to assist in the implementation of its policies, and the establishment of a National Fund for Welfare of Elders. One of the salient features of this Act is that the indigent elders may request maintenance from their children and boards would be established to examine such claims.

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