

Frailty and disability in Hong Kong & Asia

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Motivation

- ❖ A chapter focusing on Hong Kong in the *'Handbook on Ageing and old-age in Asia-Pac'*.
- ❖ Hong Kong (HK SAR) – one of the most demographically matured economies in Asia.
- ❖ Theme on frailty and old-age disability.
- ❖ Draw parallels with rest of Asia.
- ❖ Importance of 'health of older adults' in understanding the global ageing burden.

Outline

I. Overview of Population Aging in HK

- demographic transition
- epidemiologic transition

II. Old-age Frailty

- prevalence in Asia
- risk factors

III. Disability among Older Persons

- measures
- prevalence in Asia

IV. Care Provision

(I) Overview HK

- ❖ Densely populated global trade hub & financial center.
- ❖ Census & stats dept: share of aged 65+ is 15% in 2014, projected to increase to 36% by 2064.
- ❖ UN data:
 - number aged 65+: 1.1 million in 2015
→ 2.8 million in 2065
 - number aged 80+: 0.3 million in 2015
→ 1.4 million in 2065

Overview HK

- ❖ Demographic transition over 1960s – 2000s.
 - declining infant & childhood mortality.
 - industrialization and urbanization.
 - falling death rates & fertility rates. Rising longevity.
 - enjoyed accelerated economic growth.
 - Now, an aging population.
- ❖ Epidemiologic transition
 - Prior to 1960s, leading causes of death were infectious, respiratory, and intestinal diseases.
 - Now, chronic disease & degenerative illness (e.g. cancer, heart diseases, circulatory system diseases)
 - 'diseases of wealth' (Director of Med. & Health Services).

Overview HK



Overview HK

“Old people are commonly seen scouring streets looking for cardboard paper and bottles to recycle, often with their backs badly bent.”



(II) Health & Frailty

- ❖ Elderly prone to becoming frail as they age:
 - “state of increased vulnerability.”
 - “set of symptoms including weakness, involuntary weight loss, exhaustion, & limited mobility.”
- ❖ Some frail elderly become chronically ill, disabled, institutionalized, etc.
- ❖ Frail older adults require care and support in various daily tasks → Higher levels of dependency.
- ❖ Aged care & LTC is expensive. Weakening of traditional family models in Asia.

Frailty Asia

Prevalence / trends

- ❖ Studies measure prevalence of frailty among community-dwelling older adults using established criteria (e.g. deficit model or phenotype model).
- ❖ **HK/China:** proportion of frail elderly in HK and urban Beijing ~12.9% and 12.8%. Only 4.5% in rural Beijing.
- ❖ **Japan:** 6-9%
- ❖ **Korea:** 9-16%
- ❖ **Australia:** Women frailer than men. Average frailty levels fell over time. Stochastic aging model.

Sources: Woo et al. 2015; Imuta et al. (2001); Chen et al. (2015); Jung et al. (2014); Fong et al. (2015).

Frailty Asia

Risk factors

Older Asian adults have higher risk of frailty if:

- ❖ more aged; female; less physically active
- ❖ cognitively impaired; visually impaired
- ❖ lower education level
- ❖ more emotionally reliant on another person
- ❖ more chronic diseases (e.g. diabetes, stroke, heart disease)
- ❖ more falls; higher number of functional disabilities
- ❖ depressed; rate their health as poor

Cultural- or gender-specific:

- ❖ weak grip / upper body strength (esp. Japanese)
- ❖ hypertension (esp. Chinese men)

Sources: Woo et al. 2015; Imuta et al. (2001); Ng et al. (2014); Lee et al. (2011);

- *Yukawa and McCormick (2000).*

(III) Old-age Disability

- ❖ Disability = a physical, mental, or psychological condition that limits a person's ability to undertake daily activities.
(N.B.: related but somewhat distinct from frailty)
- ❖ measured by:
 - limitations in basic activities of daily living (**ADLs**).
e.g. eating, bathing, dressing, toilet
 - limitations in instrumental activities of daily living (**IADLs**).
e.g. light housework, shopping for groceries, paying bills, preparing meals.

Disability Asia

Across Asia-Pacific

- ❖ Efforts to gather data on disability **at the national level** either through large-scale census or household surveys. Also, other small-sample studies.

- ❖ Example 1
 - Australia: Commonwealth government collect info on people with disability since 1980s.
 - 4 levels of severity {mild, moderate, severe, and profound} based on ADL/IADL & amt of help req.
 - In 2012: prevalence of profound or severe disability among Australians aged 70-79 is ~ 12-15% (males); 13-21% (females).

Disability Asia

❖ Example 2

- India: Govt of India relies on large-scale census.
- In 2011: 5.4 mil (or 5.2%) persons aged 60+ are disabled (impairments in sight, speech, hearing, movement, or mental).

❖ Issues:

- Disability data and prevalence may not be comparable across countries in Asia-Pacific.
- Differences in the conceptualization and definition of disability, mode of data collection, disability severity thresholds, study design, etc.
- Shift to a 'social model of disability' – disability as arising from the interaction of a person's functional status with the physical, cultural, and policy environments.

Disability Asia

Recommendations?

- ❖ Provide a supportive physical & social environment for disabled elderly.
- ❖ Creation of “age-friendly cities” (WHO).
- ❖ Appropriate accommodations and supports.



- ✓ No lifts?
- ✓ Poorly maintained?
- ✓ Cramped interiors?
- ✓ Fire hazard?
- ✓ Nearby community facilities?

● Photo of HK old urban districts (Sham Shui Po)

(IV) Care provision

Care for the elderly in Hong Kong:

- ❖ Ethnic Chinese, > 90% of population
- ❖ Ancestors originating from various regions in Guangdong, China.
- ❖ Traditionally, care for the elderly primarily responsibility of the individual and the family → older parents usually lived with the eldest son & family in three-generational households.
- ❖ Aged are cared for by their immediate/ extended family.
- ❖ Strong values and practices of 'filial piety'.

Care provision

Weakening of familial supports:

- ❖ lifestyles & aspirations changed with economic dev.
- ❖ greater emphasis on individual rights & occupational aspirations.
- ❖ women's increased participation in employment.
 - proportion of the females aged 15+ with post-secondary education 50% in 1986 → 78% in 2014.
- ❖ shifts in living arrangements.
 - preference to live alone, or with spouse only.
 - out-migration of younger people during the 1980s and 1990s following 1997 handover to China.
- ❖ 'westernized' value systems.

● Sources: Tam and Yeung (1994); Leung (2002); Chow (2006).

Care provision

Recent years:

- ❖ Governments and civil society started to assume a greater role in eldercare.
- ❖ A number of NGOs provide community and home care services to elders in need.
- ❖ Public long-term care services (but screening process).
- ❖ Health subsidies.
- ❖ Various income supports.
- ❖ Encourage lifelong learning.
- ❖ Extension of productive working lives.

**Thank you for your
kind attention.**

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