

Abstract

Consequences of Demographic Transition on Thai Elderly Living Arrangements

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Fertility and mortality have declined dramatically over the past three decades in Thailand, which has affected the age-structure by increasing the aged population, both in number and proportion. In Thai society, where the family has an obligation to care for the elderly, these declines have been a matter of increasing concern as they may result in a shortage of familial caregivers for the elderly. Two main purposes of the study are: 1) to investigate the patterns and trends of elderly living arrangements with respect to prevalence and share of average expected life years lived and 2) to examine the effects of fertility decline and longer life expectancy on old-age living arrangements.

Data sources are the 2% sample from 1970 and the 1% samples of the 1980, 1990 and 2000 Thai Population and Housing censuses, from the National Statistical Office (NSO), Thailand. Abridged life tables from the NSO's Survey of Population Change in 1964-67, 1974-76, 1985-86, 1989, 1991 and 1995-1996 are also utilized to calculate life tables for the elderly in the four census years. Cross-tabulation is used for investigating changes in elderly living arrangements and effects of independent variables on their living arrangement prevalence. To examine the effects of both fertility and mortality declines, the Schoeni method, using multiple-decrement life tables and decomposition, is employed. The analysis is based on persons aged 60 and over.

The findings indicate that there has been a decline in the proportion of elderly living with at least one child, although it remains the most prevalent living arrangement.

Meanwhile, both proportions of Thai elderly living alone and living with a spouse only have increased, particularly for females in the arrangement of living alone and for males in the arrangement of living with a spouse only. Various subgroups of the elderly are associated more strongly with different types of living arrangements. Expected life years lived in each arrangement is affected by changes in fertility and mortality. Fertility decline has led to an increase in the number of life-years lived for every living arrangement except the arrangement of living with at least one child. Meanwhile, a decline in mortality has resulted in a rise in the number of life-years lived for every type of living arrangement studied. Mortality decline had more effect on elderly living arrangements than fertility decline during the period of time of demographic transition in Thailand.