

Ageing at high speed. The Indo-UK ‘Ageing’ Workshop, Mumbai

Ageing is a global achievement that deserves to be celebrated. At the same time it is a phenomenon with human, social, health and economic implications that need to be understood. There are both opportunities and challenges arising from ageing, which need to be addressed. PSSRU’s Adelina Comas-Herrera reports from the Indo-UK “Ageing” Workshop in Mumbai.

Last week’s workshop on Ageing was organised by the **British Deputy High Commission**, the **Tata Institute of Social Sciences**, the **UNFPA** and the **Institute for Population Sciences**, and supported by **Research Councils UK**. The workshop consisted of presentations by both Indian and UK-based academics and stakeholders, providing an overview of the issues and research around ageing in both countries, followed by discussions on potential future collaborations.

In the “West” we are used to thinking of countries such as India as having relatively ‘young’ populations. However, the Indian population is ageing at a much faster rate than what we have experienced in the West. And the volumes of population involved are of a completely different magnitude. 9% of the population in India is aged over 65, which may not seem like a huge problem, but this is a country with a population of 1.2 billion, so it translates into a 100 million older people. In contrast, in the UK, the proportion of people aged 65 or more is 16%, which is just over 10 million people.

Another hugely important factor is that in Western countries the ageing of the population has happened during a sustained period of economic growth and improvement in the living standards of older people. The situation in India is very different, particularly for people in rural areas. There, a large proportion of the older population are below the poverty line, have not benefitted much from economic development and have very little access to social protection (including pensions) or services. Younger people are increasingly migrating to other areas in search of work and are therefore not able to provide informal care for their parents. This challenges the sustainability of the family care model.

Ageing is clearly an issue that needs to be taken very seriously in India and, to that effect, the **UNFPA**, in partnership with local academics, are putting in considerable effort into understanding how ageing and its implications in different parts of this vast country. A major longitudinal survey of the health, economic, and social well-being of older people in India, the **Longitudinal Ageing Study in India** (LASI), based on the US’s Health Retirement Study and the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, is currently underway. This will no doubt provide a much sounder knowledge base for the formulation of future policies to tackle the challenges posed by ageing.

As a UK-based researcher it was a great opportunity to begin to learn about Ageing in the Indian context, and also to understand which bits of the research that colleagues and I have been carrying out in the UK may be relevant from the perspective of a developing country. For example, mapping current care needs and resources and modelling of future needs for care and their resource implications, as we have done at **PSSRU**, could provide valuable information for policy planners and service development in India. I also learnt one or two things on methodology that may well help improve the way we do things in the UK too, particularly with regards survey recruitment incentives. Overall, the workshop was fascinating and very constructive, with researchers from both countries working to understand the realities of ageing in these two very different societies.

About the author

Adelina Comas-Herrera is Research Fellow within the Personal Social Services Research Unit at LSE. Much of Adelina’s work has involved investigating the determinants of future long-term care

expenditure, in particular dementia and chronic conditions, both for the UK and for other European countries.

January 24th, 2014 | [Long-term Care](#) | [2 Comments](#)

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