
The Well Being of Older Persons in Southeast Asia with a Focus on Thailand and Family Support

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on National Transfer Accounts (NTA)

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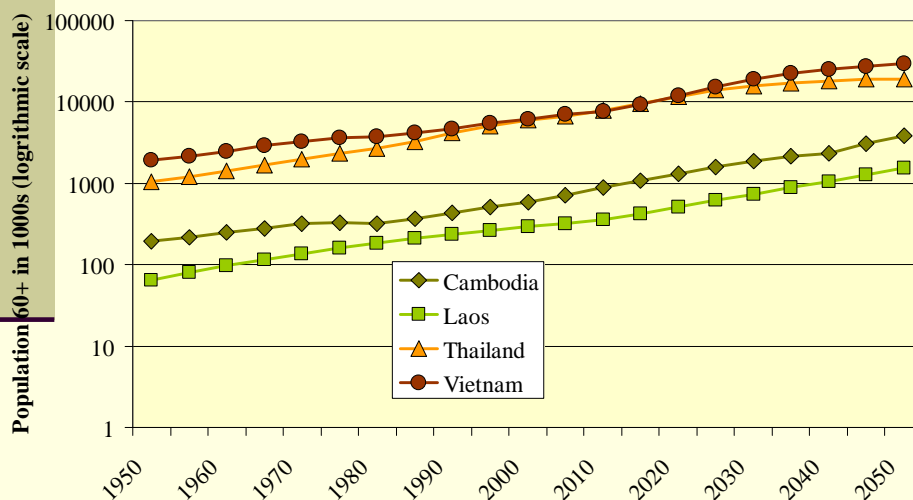
First some basic demographics for Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam

Source: United Nations *World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision*
(Medium Variant)

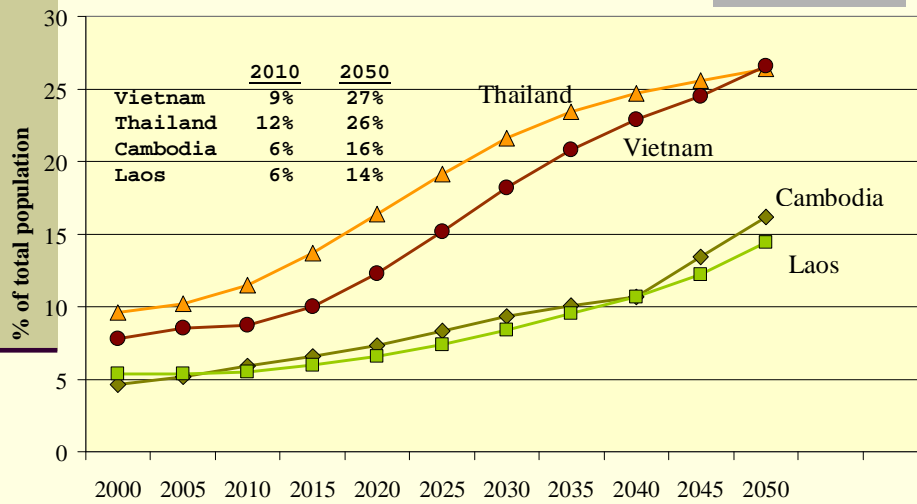
The size of the older population (60+) and their share of the total populations differ substantially among the four countries

| | Absolute numbers 2010 | As % of total population, 2010 |
|----------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Cambodia | 882,000 | 5.9% |
| Laos | 357,000 | 5.5% |
| Thailand | 7,868,000 | 11.5% |
| Vietnam | 7,777,000 | 8.7% |

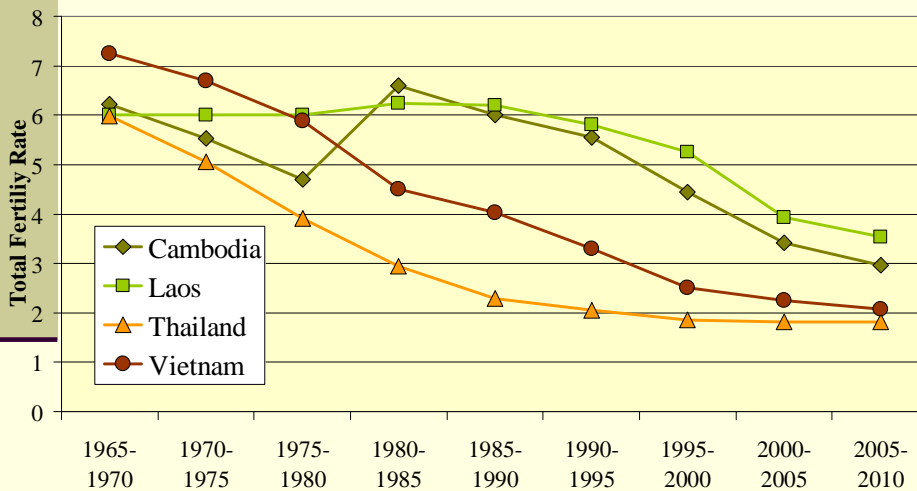
But past and expected relative increases in the size of the population 60+ are similar in all four countries



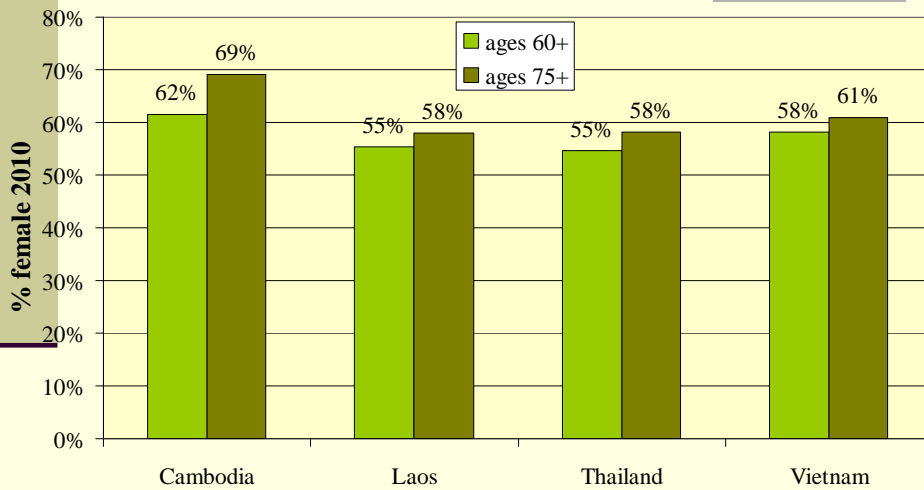
Population 60+ as % of total is expected to rise in all four but far more so in Thailand and Vietnam



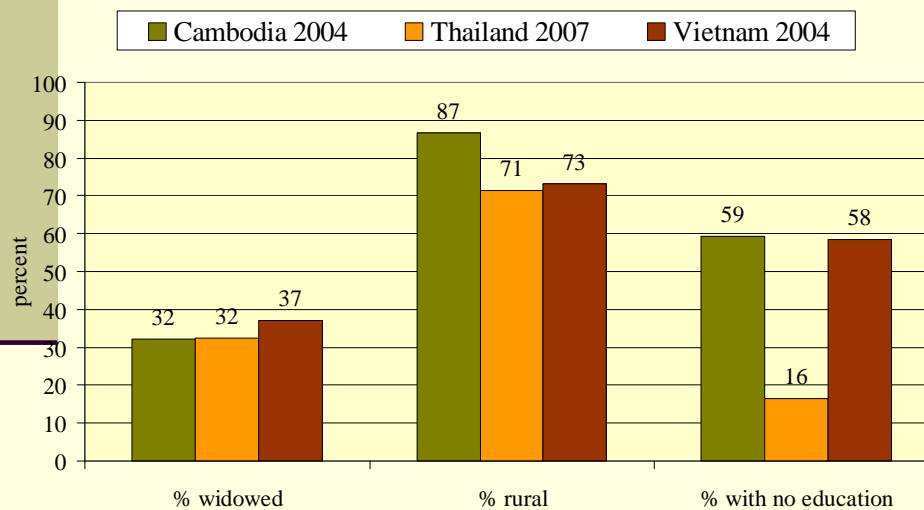
Past trends in fertility largely account for the difference in population aging and have important implications for family size of elderly in the future



Women outnumber men among older in all four countries persons (especially at the oldest ages)



Some basic characteristics of the population 60+ (from National Surveys)



Now for more detailed information about older persons with a focus on Thailand

- Why Thailand? Far more data available to permit an evidence based assessment of the wellbeing of elderly over time.
- In Thailand five major nationally representative surveys of the older population were conducted between 1986 and 2007.
- Also Thailand has specialized studies related to older persons including an extensive study on the impact of rural to urban migration of adult children on older persons left behind.

No nationally representative surveys of older persons in other three countries but....

- For Cambodia the 2004 Survey of Elderly covered the 6 most populous is provinces and is representative of about half of the country.
- For Vietnam two coordinated regional surveys of older persons were conducted in the north and the south in 1996/97; also a series of Vietnam. Living Standards Surveys (1992/93 – 2004) have been analyzed to study the older population.
- For Laos no detailed information on older population is available.

Mass media accounts of older persons in Thailand tend to emphasize anecdotal cases of elderly who are deserted by their families and in dire poverty.

Circle of Life – Popular weekly TV spot

รายการวงเวียนชีวิต

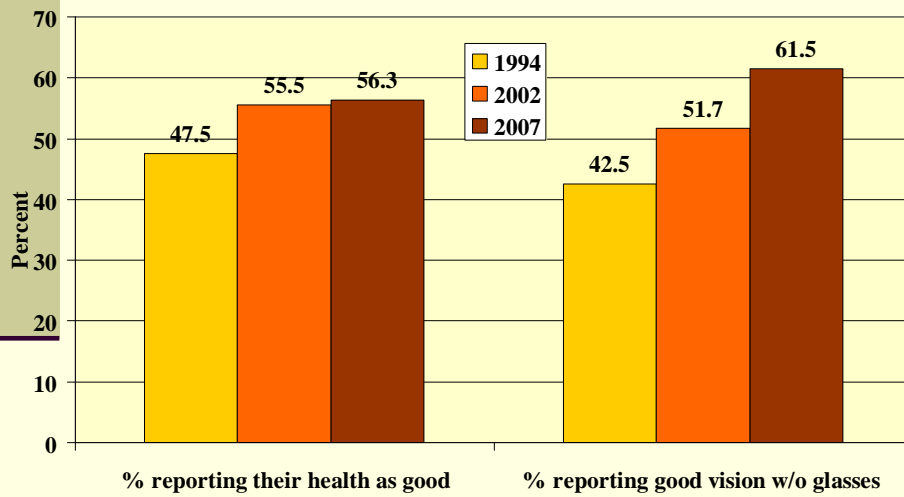




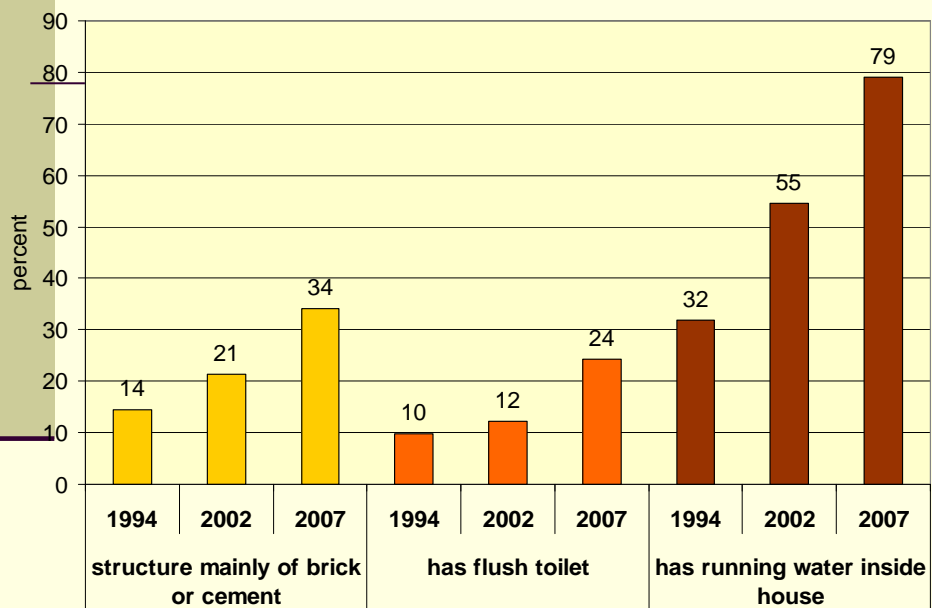
But what do the nationally representative surveys show?

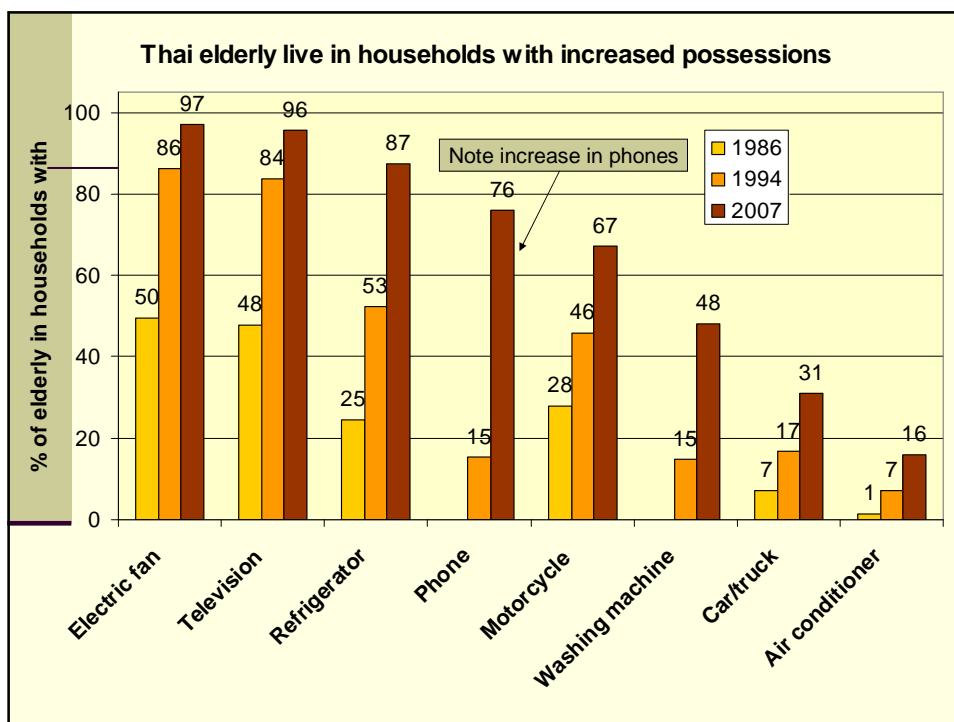
Contrary to the anecdotal portrayals in the mass media, much of the survey evidence is encouraging with respect to the health and material situation of older Thais as well as the family support they receive and the social contact they have with their adult children.

Self reported health and vision among Thais 60+ are improving



Housing quality of older population has improved, Thailand



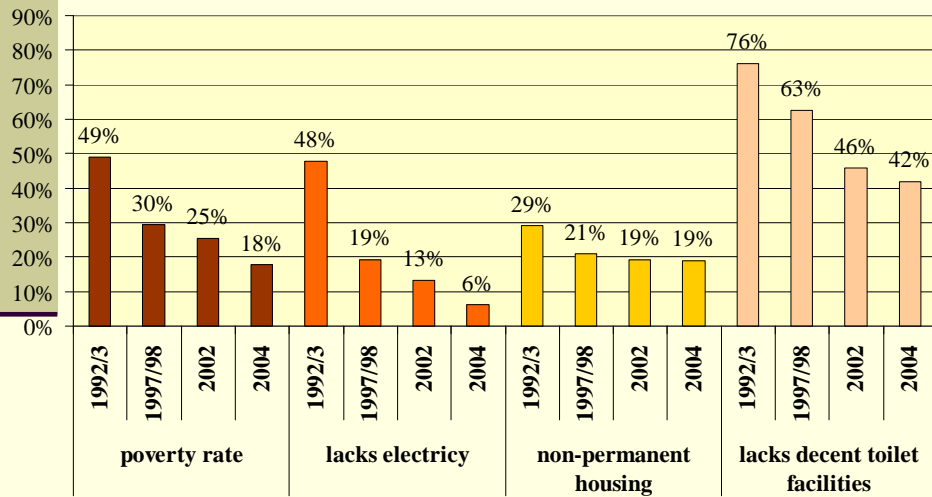


Annual income (in 2007 Baht) of older Thais has been increasing

| | All persons age 60 and older | | | | Residence 2007 | |
|-----------------|------------------------------|------|------|------|----------------|-------|
| | 1986 | 1994 | 2002 | 2007 | Urban | Rural |
| Under 10,000 | 56.4 | 38.6 | 23.8 | 16.8 | 7.3 | 13.2 |
| 10,000 - 99,999 | 39.9 | 53.9 | 65.8 | 67.8 | 55.9 | 72.2 |
| 100,000+ | 3.8 | 7.5 | 10.5 | 15.4 | 36.9 | 14.7 |
| Total % | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

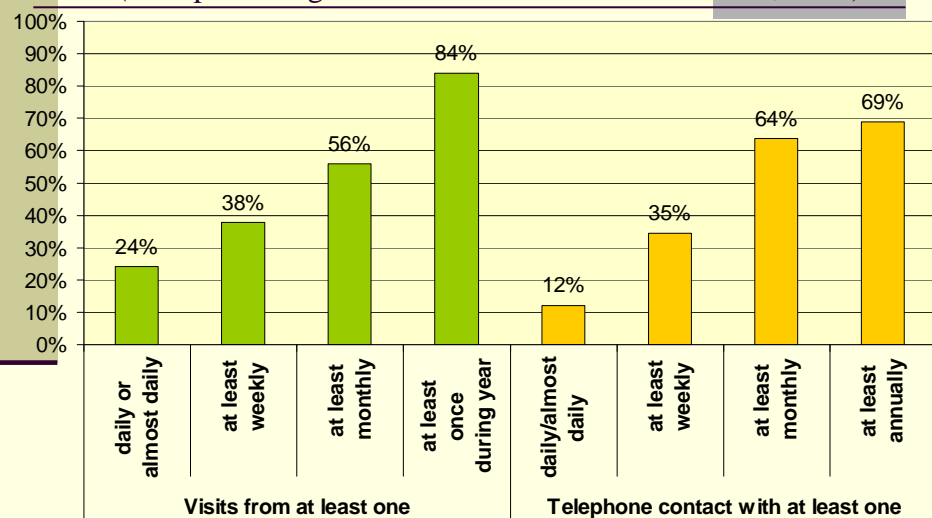
Economic situation and housing quality of elderly is also improving in Vietnam

(Giang & Pfau 2007 based on VLSS)



Social contact with non-co-resident children is high, facilitated by the spread of cell phones

(Thai parents age 60+ with non-co-resident children, 2007)

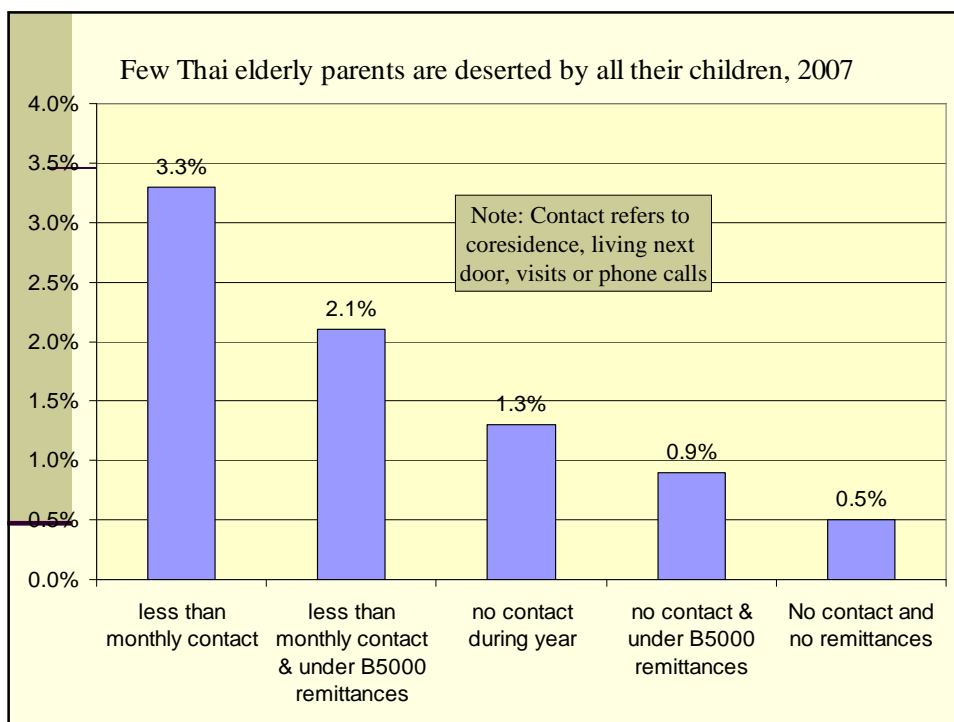




Respondent taking a break from the interview to receive a cell phone call from one of her children in Bangkok

Elderly parents in a remote Northeast village with list of children's names and the phone numbers posted on rafter

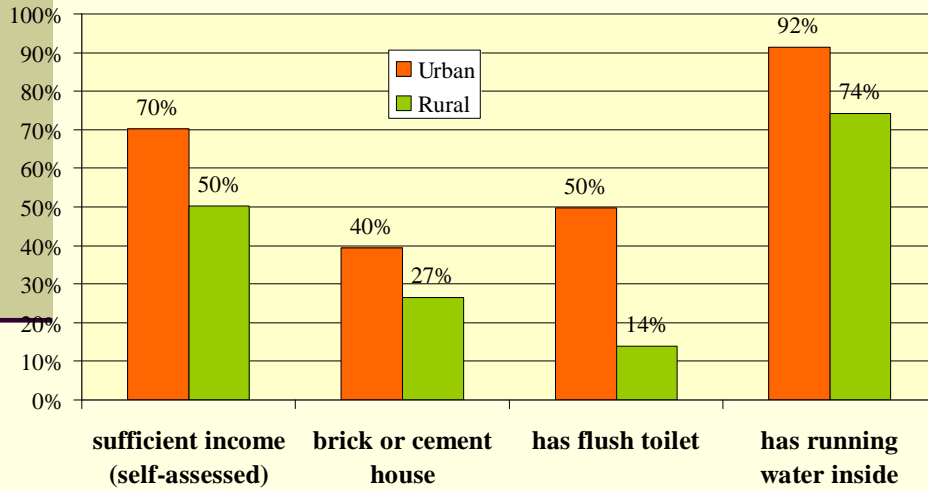




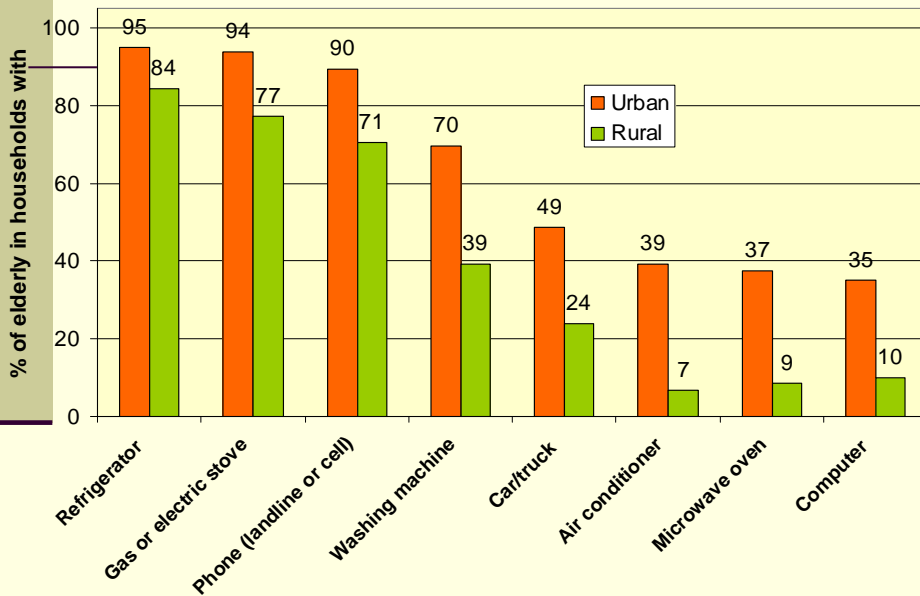
But...

Despite improved material well-being, substantial numbers of elderly in Thailand and elsewhere in the region still suffer economic hardship and a considerable rural-urban gap remains.

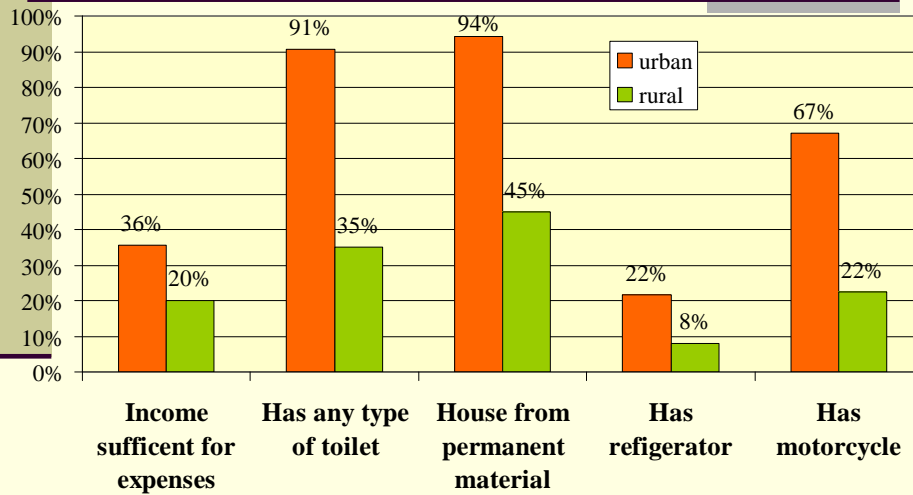
Income sufficiency and housing quality are distinctly worse for rural elderly, Thailand, 2007



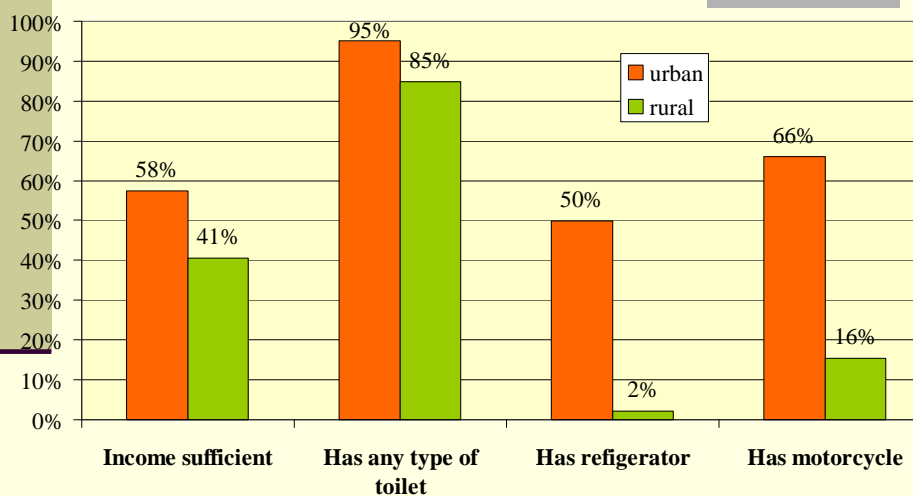
Urban-rural differences in household possessions remain pronounced in Thailand 2007



Rural-urban gaps are even larger among Cambodians age 60+, 2004



Rural-urban gaps are also large among Vietnamese age 60+, 1996/97



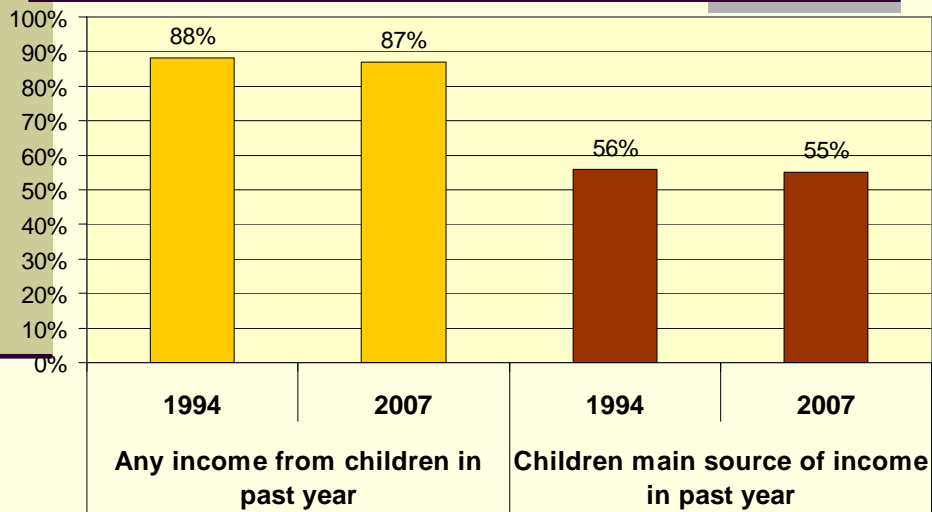
Intergenerational exchanges of material support

Traditionally and still currently most Thai elderly depend on their children as their main source of material support, especially elderly at more advanced ages while work remains important for younger elderly.

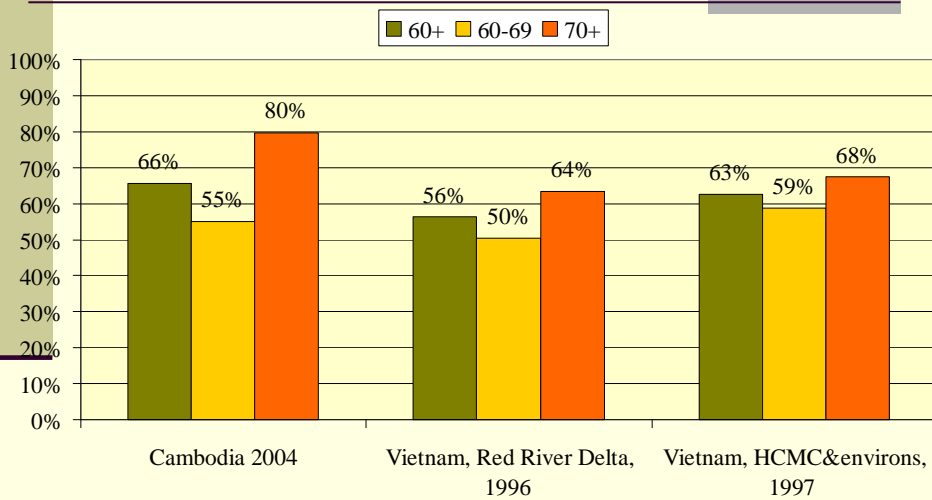
Main sources of income in previous year, all persons age 60 and older, Thailand, 2007

| | All 60+ | 60-69 | 70+ |
|-----------------------|---------|-------|------|
| work | 29.0 | 39.7 | 13.7 |
| pension | 4.4 | 4.9 | 3.7 |
| elderly allowance | 2.8 | 1.2 | 5.0 |
| interest/savings/rent | 2.9 | 2.6 | 3.3 |
| spouse | 6.1 | 7.9 | 3.6 |
| children | 52.5 | 41.9 | 67.8 |
| other relatives | 2.3 | 1.8 | 3.0 |
| total % | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Monetary support to elderly parents from children remains substantial



Children are also main source of household income for elderly in Cambodia & Vietnam



Adult children also provide parents with more than just routine monetary support

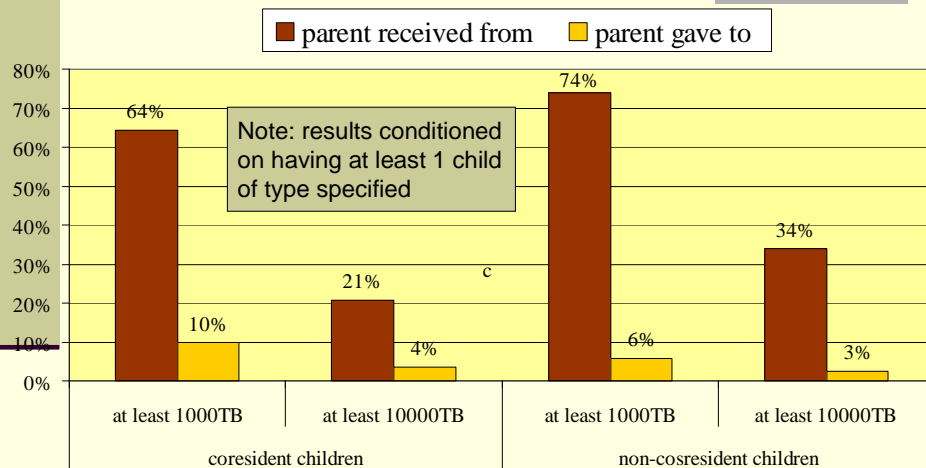


- Father in his bamboo shack with refrigerator bought by his migrant son

Older couple whose children all lived elsewhere in front of new house paid for their migrant children (one soldier and one nurse proudly represented by the statues).



Thai parents age 60+ are far more likely to receive than to give money to children during previous year, 2007



But Thai parents contribute to the material support of their adult children in ways other than routine monetary support

- By providing major financial help or collateral for loans when special circumstances arise
 - 35% had provided major financial help at some time to an adult child (2006 Migration Impact Survey)
- By providing agricultural produce to migrant children in urban areas
 - 58% of rural parents reported doing so (2006 Migration Impact Survey)

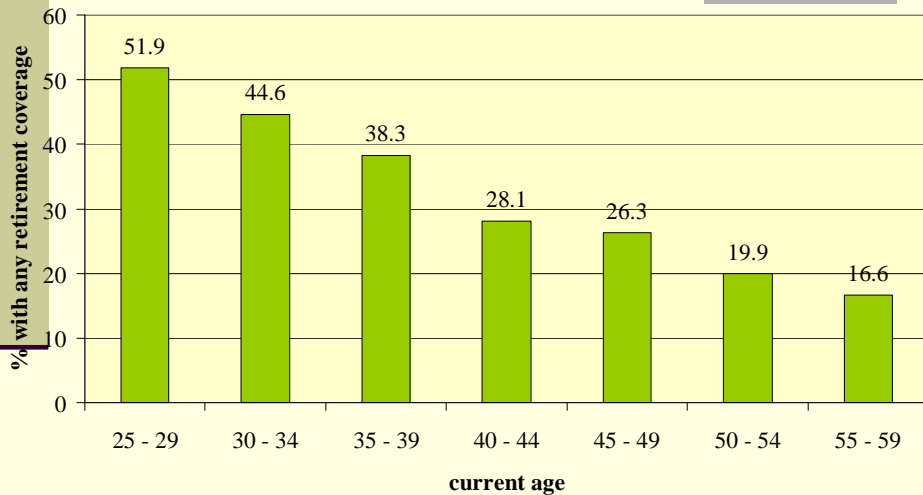
Thai parents facilitate their adult children's ability to work by providing grandchild care and other services

- In 2007, 25% of Thai elderly had a young grandchild in their household whose parents lived elsewhere.
- In just over half of these cases, grandparents were the main carers of the grandchildren.
- In most cases (84%), the grandchild's absent parents provide the financial support.
- Thai elderly also help care for grandchildren for coresident adult children and often help with household chores and food preparation.

State support of older persons in Thailand has been increasing

- Medical and pension benefits for government employees existed for a very long time.
- Free medical care at government facilities for disadvantaged elderly started in 1989 and was extended to cover all elderly in 1992 and is still in effect.
- Monthly allowances for indigent elderly began in 1993 and progressively expanded to become virtually universal by 2009 (currently 500 baht).
- In 1999, the Old-age Pension Fund was established within the Social Security system that currently covers all private sector employees (full benefits after 15 years of contributions).
- Efforts are underway to launch a nationwide savings program for informal sector workers and the self-employed.

Future cohorts of older Thais will increasingly have some formal retirement coverage as indicated by the age differences among adults in 2007



How about government support in the other countries?

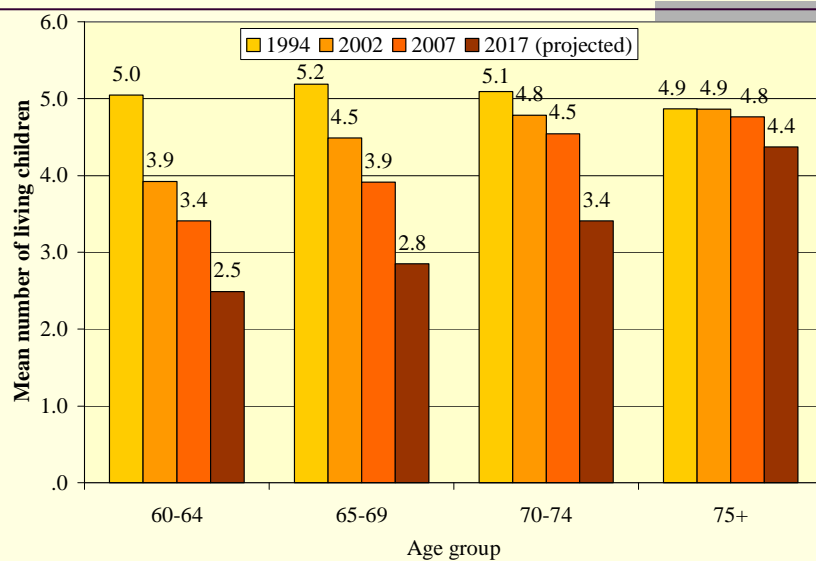
- In Cambodia there is very little government support for older persons but NGOs play some role.
- In Vietnam, economic renovation (Doi Moi) initially promoted a transfer of social welfare functions from public institutions back to the family. More recently social protection schemes that affect the elderly are expanding.
- In Laos ???

Several demographic trends are underway that pose challenges for family support for Thai elderly

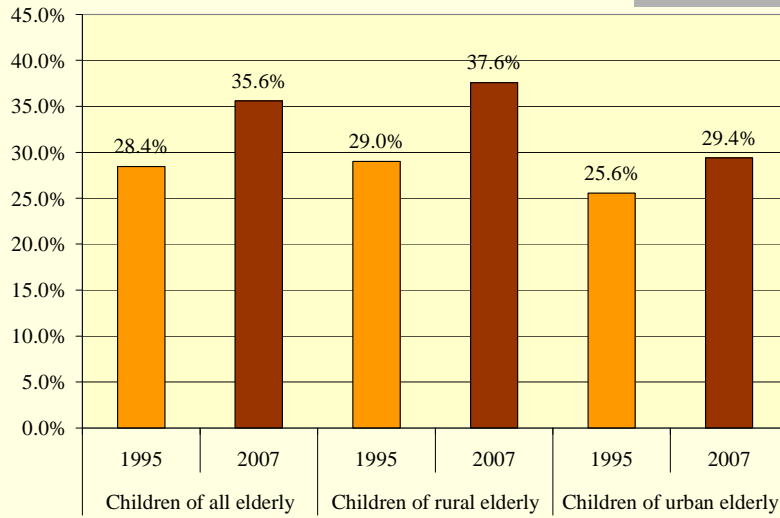
- 1) Older persons are living longer thus prolonging the period assistance from children may be needed.
- 2) The family size of persons in older age groups is declining and will accelerate in coming years.
- 3) Adult children are increasingly likely to migrate from their parents' locality to find employment elsewhere.

Note: Although timing and extent differ, similar trends are underway in the other countries as well.

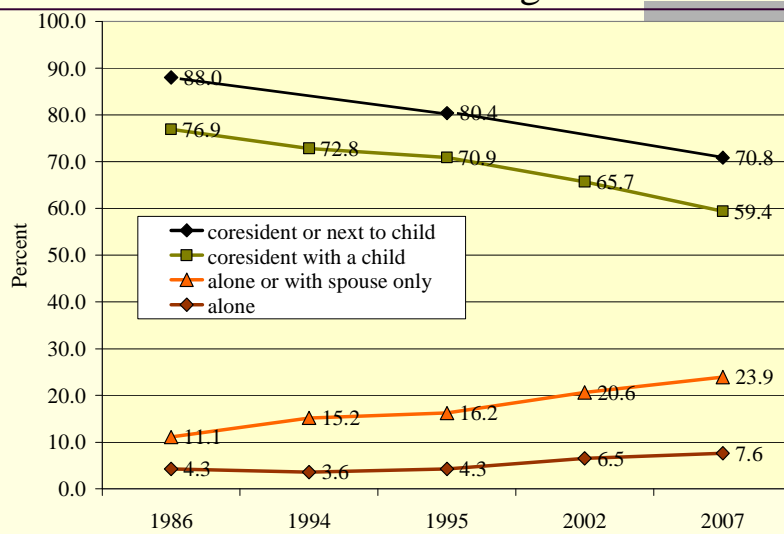
Mean number of living children by age group of parents, 1994-2017, Thailand



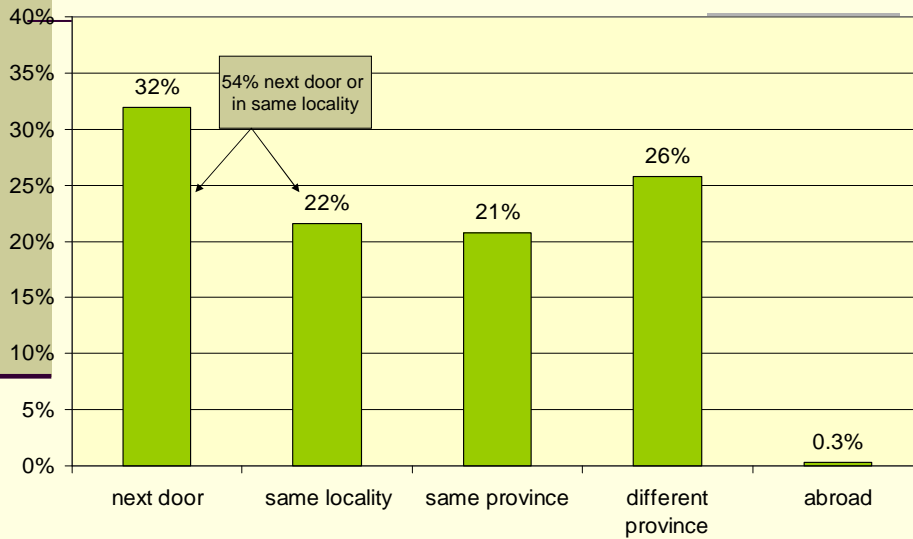
The percent of children of Thais age 60+ who live outside their parents' province has increased substantially in recent years



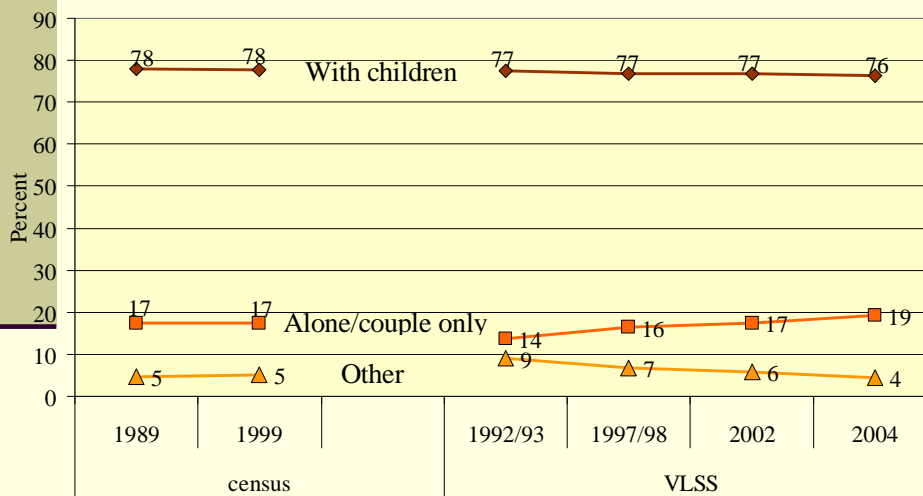
Living arrangements of Thais 60+ are changing as a result of declining family size and increased migration



Although coresidence is declining,
non-coresident elderly parents often live near a child
(% distribution of noncoresident Thai parents by nearest child, 2007)



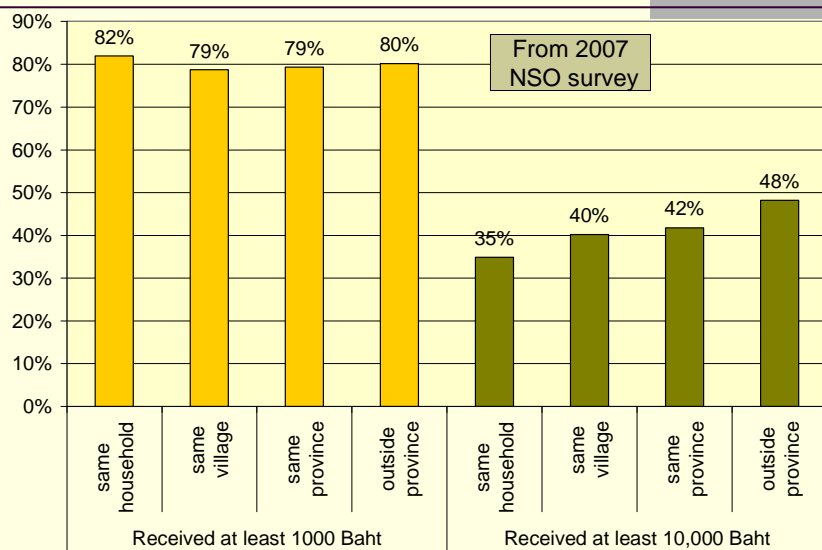
In Vietnam, despite increased migration,
coresidence of persons 60+ with children has
been rather stable

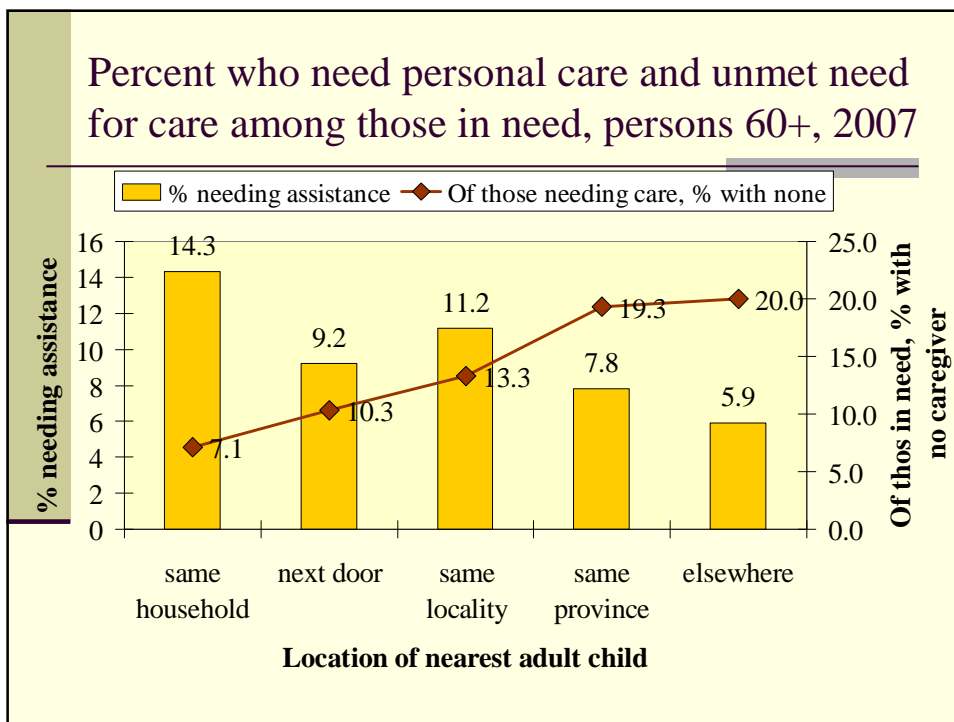
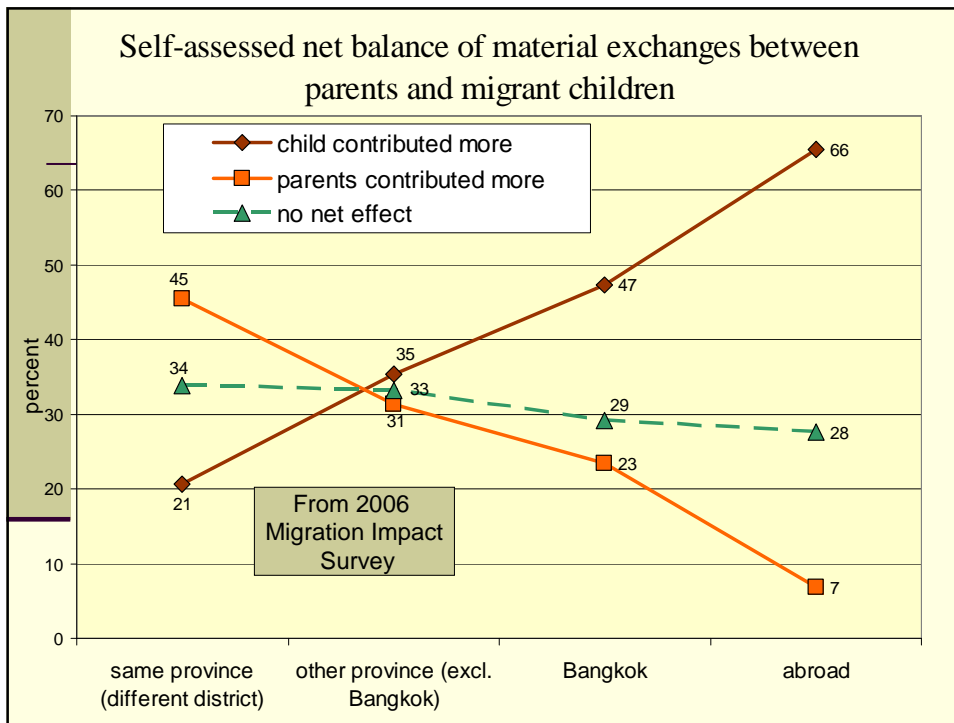


The consequences of reduced family size and increased migration of children will likely to vary in relation to the type of support and services under consideration

- Material support from children does not require physical proximity; monetary contributions may be enhanced by better employment opportunities that migration facilitates.
- Social support in the form of frequent face-to-face interaction requires some level of physical proximity but telephone contact does not.
- Routine personal care clearly does require continuous physical presence.

Percent of Thai parents age 60+ who received monetary support from children by location of nearest child





Does having fewer children matter?

- The change in family size will be dramatic with the elderly eventually averaging fewer than two children.
- Fewer children will increase the chance no child will be near enough to provide personal care when needed.
- But the decline will take longest to affect the oldest age group, i.e. those for whom personal care is most likely to be needed.
- Also children will be better educated and likely have better incomes.

Some issues to consider about future prospects for older persons in Thailand and elsewhere in the region

- Will increasing retirement benefit coverage discourage continued filial support or will the two complement each other and lead to improved elderly material well-being?
- Will the higher education and changing employment patterns of adult children compensate for their lesser numbers in an ability to provide financial support to ageing parents?
- Will improving health of older persons encourage them to work longer and support themselves?
- Since filial personal care requires physical proximity, how will families deal with the increasing probability that no adult child is nearby?

Some caveats when considering what the future holds for the older population in the region

- Future elderly will be better educated and in better health than today's elderly and hence better able to live independently.
- Future elderly and their families will be living in a different and changing economic, social, political and technological environment.
- Parents and their adult children are unlikely to stand by passively but rather to exercise human agency to adapt in ways that minimize negative impacts and maximize potential benefits.
- All these considerations complicate assessing how the situation of older persons will change in the coming years.

UNFPA Report Available with more detailed information on Thailand

Papers in Population Ageing No. 5, Population Ageing and the Well-Being of Older Persons in Thailand: Past trends, current situation and future challenges
By John Knodel and Napaporn Chayovan



You can download the publication from
<http://asiapacific.unfpa.org/public/cache/bypass/pid/1977>
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Thank you and time for discussion