

AGEING AND CARE CRISIS IN CHINA

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Executive Summary

1. China's population is ageing fast. The country mainly relies on the family to provide care for the old. The family support for the elderly, however, has been weakened by dramatic demographic, economic, and cultural changes. An ageing population and care crisis is thus emerging in China.
2. The number of elderly people in China is extremely large compared with other countries. In 2010, it had 178 million people aged 60 and above (13.3% of its population), making it the only country in the world with more than 100 million old people.
3. The number of disabled and frail elderly people is large too. In 2010, China had about 33 million disabled and frail elderly people (19 % of its total ageing population). Meeting the long-term care needs of these people is an enormous challenge.
4. Population ageing will accelerate in the next two to three decades in China. It is projected that by 2050 China will become one of the countries in the world with at least 30% of its total population aged 60 or older.
5. China is the first nation to get old before getting rich. It became an ageing country in 1999 when it registered only US\$806 of per capita GDP, far below that of most developed countries. China is still a developing country without a sound social system for its ageing population.
6. The family remains the cornerstone of elderly care in China today. The majority of the elderly people rely on their family members to provide care for them. Sons and daughters-in-law were reported by national surveys to be the main caregivers.
7. However, family size is shrinking rapidly (4.4 to 3.1 between 1982 and 2010). In the urban areas, the majority of the new generation of elderly people only

has one child to rely on. A Chinese “4-2-1” family structure (four grandparents, two parents and one child) will quickly gain prevalence.

8. Declining fertility rates and massive population migration have greatly reduced multi-generational families. More than half of the elderly people (in some major cities the percentage is as high as 70%) live separately from their adult children. About 40 million elderly (37% of rural elderly) are left behind in rural China by their adult children who have migrated to the cities.
9. Social norms are also changing. The traditional value of filial piety is eroding gradually in China. The traditional give-and-get contract between elderly parents and their adult children is undergoing rapid changes. The capacity and willingness of Chinese families in long-term elderly care remain uncertain.