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**TECHNICAL MEETING ON POPULATION AGEING AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF  
OLDER PERSONS: CRITICAL ISSUES AND POLICY RESPONSES**

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**Living Arrangements of Older Persons and Family Support in Less Developed Countries\***

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Living Arrangements of Older Persons and Family  
Support in Less Developed Countries

Jay Sokolovsky

Now here is a story to show you how things have changed and what the young think of the old these days. After they married, 35-year-old Slobodan and his wife moved into the small house of his parents near the center of Belgrad, the capital city of Yugoslavia. When the younger couple started having children they began taking over more of the limited space in the dwelling. By the time Slobodan's wife had their third child, his mother was dead and his 74-year-old father, Zvonko, was becoming frail. Slobodan requested that his father give up his larger bedroom to him and his wife. As his children grew, Slobodan haphazardly built a tiny room onto the house and "encouraged" the father to move into this new space, which he did. Eventually, although he was still able to take care of himself, Zvonko was asked by the son to move into a large, new residential complex for pensioners on the outskirts of the city. Two years passed and the father died. A month later, Slobodan receives a call from the director of the residence for the elderly, asking when he and his family were moving out of the house. Puzzled, Slobodan inquired why the director should ask such a crazy question. He was then informed that Zvonko had been so appreciative of how he was treated at the residence that he had deeded his house to the facility for its use.

-Story told to Jay Sokolovsky, while studying residential homes for the elderly in Croatia and Serbia 1983-5.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. *Discourses of neglect*

It was intriguing to hear this story in a country where care of the elderly by their children is constitutionally mandated. Interestingly enough, similar tales of forsaking the aged can be found in such divergent places as Japan, among foraging peoples of Botswana, rural villagers in Kenya or both rural and urban India. These "discourses of neglect," as some have labelled them (Cattell, 1997b; Rosenberg, 1997), act as

powerful narratives of caution which can have deep cultural roots. In India, which maintains one of the highest levels of elderly coresidence in the world, Linda Martin notes that as early as the 9th century, the Hindu philosopher Shankaracharya spoke of the harsh dilemma of very late adulthood. In stressing the need for material detachment during the last phase of adult life he said "Your family is attached to you as long as you can earn. With frail body and no income, no one in the house will care for you" (1990, p. 108).

At the beginning of this new millennium, in countries such as Croatia, India, China and Thailand, Ghana, or Mexico, only a small fraction of the elderly population resides in the kind of non-familial residential setting described above. However, the existence of such places combines with specific discourses about aging to reveal pervasive anxiety about becoming an unwanted burden or of families being unable to sustain growing cohorts of persons living past their 6th and 7th decades of life (Vatuk, 1990). Such countries as China, Mexico, Thailand and Ghana are facing transformations in generational population dynamics and arrangements at a pace more rapid than experienced in the industrial West. It is easy to sympathize with the assessment of the West African Tempe peoples of Sierra Leone, who refer to themselves as the "short-changed generation." As Nana Apt puts it, "They have paid their dues when they were young but, because of social change, their time for the pay-off was begrudged" (1998, pp. 13-14). Similarly, in India during the 1990s, Sarah

Lamb encountered the following everyday reality while studying a West Bengal village:

The young girl who worked cleaning my home, Beli Bagdi, responded when I asked her what would happen to her when she became old, "Either my sons will feed me rice or they won't; there's no certainty." In Bengal's villages and cities, wandering beggars, mostly aged, do drift from house to house in search of rice, a cup of hot tea, or a few coins. Old widows dressed in white crowd around the temples in pilgrimage spots waiting for a handful of rice doled out once a day...The powerful documentary film, "*Moksha* (Salvation)" directed by Pankaj Butalia (1993), portrays destitute Bengali widows at a Vrindavan ashram, who recall poignantly the fights and rejections they experienced in the homes of their sons and daughters-in-law, and their utter loneliness in the world of kin (Lamb, In Press.)

Nana van Apt (1996) elucidates this perception of "'caring' in crisis" in her recent book on Ghana's elderly. In contrast, however, survey-grounded data show that throughout much of the developing world, especially in Africa and East Asia, the aged for the most part are still entwined in multigenerational living arrangements, most often with an adult child. In certain contexts the discourse of neglect is part of a traditional pattern of reminding community members about expected ideals of support; in other cases it is a window through which one can see how the modern world has profoundly altered the accepted social contract between generations. Among the most common processes to provoke this reaction in the developing world is the delocalization of economic resources that sustain and connect families with their natal communities. Throughout Africa, Latin America and Asia, increasing numbers of a family's young adults must seek employment far from their natal home (Vatuk, 1996; Kalache,

1995). Viewing this process in Africa, Weisner uses a construct of "multilocal" families to think more realistically about the support of children (Weisner, 1997). This social pattern, the contours of which are still emerging, has great applicability to an analysis of how the old are sustained in most developing nations.

In this paper I will focus on how families are trying to adapt traditional patterns of living arrangements to the powerful changes encountered in less-developed nations. In examining this issue I will review some of the basic data on living arrangements and support in developing nations in light of urbanizing change. Finally, I will use my own longitudinal research in a Central Mexico village to show the need to go beyond the surface structure of living arrangement to understand the changing circumstances in which Third World aged find themselves.

#### B. THE DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL BASIS OF FAMILY SUPPORT

There has been a recent and quite dramatic demographic revolution in the developing nations. At the beginning of the 1990s, these countries for the first time contained a majority of the world's elders (Kinsella 1997). By 2015 most will still not have reached the level of "societal aging" now faced by North America, much of Europe, and Japan, but they will have to contend with an extraordinary increase of 78 percent in actual numbers, from 214 to 380 million aged. And, over the coming three decades, currently "young/youthful" nations such as Brazil, Indonesia, and Mexico will witness the oldest part of their population (over

age 65) at least double--and quadruple in the case of Indonesia.

Table 1: Some demographic comparisons between more and developed regions

Region	Population aged 60 years or older Percent age of total population		Percentage 80 years or older		Potential Support Ratio (number of persons aged 15-64 years per aged 65 years or older)	
	1999	2050	1999	2050	1999	2050
More developed regions	19	33	16	27	5	2
Less developed regions	8	21	9	17	12	4
Least developed regions	5	12	7	10	18	8

*Source:* "Population Aging, 1999." United Nations, Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, <http://www.undp.org/popin/wdtrends/a99/a99toc.htm>

Despite the oncoming rapidity of aging in many developing nations, their demographic profile, especially for the least developed nations, will still show a relatively youthful population by 2050 [see Table 1] and maintain a moderately high Potential Support Ratio (8 younger adults for each person over age 65). It is of more demographic concern that the middle range countries ("less developed regions") will see a near doubling of the portion of the elderly over age 80, occurring at the same time as a three-fold drop in the Potential Support Ratio. By mid-century nations in this category, especially those in Latin

America and industrializing Asia, will present a demographic aging profile that is similar to the one shown by the more developed nations today.

While in most of Africa the population will remain quite young, unprecedented demographic changes are occurring in other parts of the developing world. Within twenty years, for example, China will equal Japan's world aging record - making the transition from a "young" (7% over age 65) to a "mature" (14% over age 65) population in just a quarter of a century (Kinsella, 1997). Most nations have taken 2-5 times longer to alter their demographic makeup so profoundly. People in such third world nations are not only living longer; overall fertility rates are plummeting. In Asia and Latin America, these rates have fallen about 50 percent during the period 1965 to 1995, from 6 to 3 children per woman (Kinsella and Gist, 1995). Over the next two decades, countries such as China, Mexico, Ghana, India, Indonesia and most of the Caribbean nations will reverse the dramatic demographic thrust of the past century by actually having minimal or even negative annual growth among 0-14 year olds, while those over age 65 will grow at rates between 2.1 and 3.2 each year (World Bank, 1999).

At the extreme edge of these kinds of changes is China, which began a one-family/one-child policy during the 1970s. There has ensued a great public worry around the "4-2-1" dilemma, premised on one child taking care of two parents and four grandchildren. Since, 1978, the country has sought in the process

of decollectivization to restore the family as the main local economic unit and reassign to that unit much of the care of the elderly which had previously come from the public sector. However, the dislocations of the economic transformations of the socialist economy are clearly seen among urban elderly. During the late 1990s in some areas pensions were lost when state-sponsored enterprises folded and increasingly as housing is privatized urban aged are being moved out of long familiar neighborhoods to the outer fringes of cities.<sup>1</sup> Municipal governments have tried to assume some of the pension debt of defunct state-owned businesses, but a persistent question keeps arising: In the market economy, will children have time to care for parents? The 1992 national China Survey on Support systems for the Elderly indicated that in both rural and urban areas social and financial support tend to be need-based, with familial support attempting to compensate for inequalities in elderly persons' access to public resources (Lee and Xiao, 1998). However, in discussing the Chinese intergenerational contract of support by sons, Ikels talks about the changes wrought by the economic transformations of the 1980s and '90s and how they are challenging some of the presumptions of this 1992 survey:

Material and psychological incentives along with the threat of social and supernatural sanctions usually made living up to the contract more attractive to the younger generation than renegeing on it. In the reform era the strength of these forces has been weakened as the young take advantage of the new opportunities to live and work in communities other than the ones in which they were raised. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the rural area, where the shift from the collective to the individual household as the unit of

production has undermined the power of the village (formerly team or brigade) head to penalize neglectful adult children by withholding their wages (Ikels, 1993, p. 332).

Throughout the 1990s in China there have been strong official expressions of concern over both the desire of adult children to sustain their parents and the need to prevent abuse. Ikels notes that a 1990 report in the Chinese *Legal Daily* makes note of abuse and neglect being associated with 187 deaths among the elderly between 1989 and 1990. The report states that "These 'abnormal deaths', of which many were suicides, were the result of being denied medical treatment, being coerced into turning over property, and being bullied and tortured. Local authorities were accused of not paying much attention to these cases and of failing to prosecute the persons responsible" (1993, p.332).

#### 1. *Women and the dilemma of widowhood*

Perhaps the greatest challenge over the coming decades will be support of elderly women, especially widows. As can be seen in Table 2, throughout the developing world typically half or more of women over age 60 are widowed. This is dramatic in comparison to men. In Africa, for example, fewer than one in ten are widowers and elsewhere this figure is typically lower than 20 percent (Cattell, 1997a). Even where the incidence of widowhood dips below half, in Brazil and Mexico, men still had rates three times lower than women.

The consequences of differential rates of widowed status are no less dramatic in the numbers than in the typical cultural consequences. Older males are more likely to receive social and

material support within extended family networks due to their status as older males, greater access to economic resources, and the much higher likelihood of becoming remarried and having the personal support of a spouse. In many areas of India, there are strong cultural prohibitions against widow remarriage, and even as old age brings some measure of prestige, such women are still considered inauspicious (Lamb, forthcoming). More concretely, work by Jean Dreze shows that households headed by widows have 70 percent less spending power than the national average (1990). She identifies five factors creating constraints on widows in India: their inability to return to the parental home; restrictions on remarriage; very limited access to self-employment outside of agricultural wage labor; difficulty in inheriting property in a patrilineal system; and lack of access to credit. These factors will become increasingly important as the size of local close family networks continues to shrink with decreasing fertility and migration.

Table 2 Percentages of Widows and Widowers in Selected Countries Age 60+ Who are Widowed

	Percent widowed	
	Men	Women
<b>Selected Nations Sub-Saharan Africa</b>		
Cameroon	10	62
Sudan	6	54
Botswana	9	53
Kenya	7	50
Uganda	9	48
Mali	5	46
<b>Other Developing Countries</b>		
Indonesia	17	68
India	19	64
Korea, South	13	64
Egypt	12	60

China (PRC)	27	58
Brazil	12	47
Mexico	12	38

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*Source:* Adapted from Cattell 1997a, p. 73

Moreover, there are substantial numbers of widows who have no sons, or any biological children for that matter. In the 1980s Hugo found that in five countries of Central Africa (Gabon, Cameroon, Zaire, Central African Republic and the Sudan) there were regions where 20-50 percent of females over age 50 had never born children (Hugo, 1985). Similarly in Indonesia's West Java region he found childlessness to exceed 15 percent. In Mexico and Chile, De Vos (forthcoming) found that 18-19 percent of elderly women were also childless. These figures are much higher than either China or Thailand, with figures under 5 percent.

In Africa and elsewhere this dilemma is moderated by high levels of fostering, adoption, and the support of collateral kin such as siblings and sometimes nieces and nephews. Within the Mexican village where I worked, widows, if they are living alone after the death of a spouse, will usually be assigned a teenage grandchild to live with them. This person might remain in the household and eventually inherit the house and agricultural lands assigned to it. Some countries such as China have also begun to encourage older widowed men and women to remarry, relieving some of the pressure on the broader kinship network for support.

#### C. RECENT DATA ON LIVING ARRANGEMENTS IN THE THIRD WORLD:

Over the past three decades a great deal of survey data has

accumulated on living arrangement and support of the elderly in Third World nations. Projects such as the "Collaborative Study on Social and Health Aspects of Aging" in the Western Pacific region (Andrews, et al., 1986), "The Comparative Study in Four Asian Countries Project"/"Rapid Demographic Change and the Welfare of the Elderly," in East Asia (Ofstedal, Knodel and Chayovan 1999), the seven nation study, "Social Support Systems in Transition," within Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (Hashimoto, 1991; Kendig, Hashimoto and Coppard, 1992) and the United Nations Fertility Survey among Six Latin American Nations (De Vos, 1990) have provided some of the most important demographic/structural sources of information.<sup>2</sup> This survey work has been complemented by more focused sociological research in Africa, which has begun to detail how these family structures are adapting to dramatic global changes (Apt 1996, Okharedia 1999); Asia (Hermalin, 1995; Knodel and Saengtienchai, 1999) and Latin America (de Lehr, 1992; Ramos, 1992; Lloyd-Sherlock, 1997).<sup>3</sup>

On a more local level, a voluminous body of anthropological work now exists on the cultural dynamics of aging within family networks for most regions of the globe (Foner, 1984; Albert and Cattell, 1994; Keith, et al., 1994; Rhoads and Holmes, 1995; Sokolovsky, 1997a; Aguilar, 1998; Putnam-Dickerson and Brown, 1998; Ikels and Beall, forthcoming). Such community-based and culturally focused study is crucial for helping us understand the dynamic context which is now testing the capacity of families in developing countries to sustain the elderly. Throughout this

paper I will attempt to integrate this largely qualitative research with the quantitative data sources listed above.

1. *Patterns of living arrangements and support*

Leo Simmons, in his classic examination of the role of the aged in seventy-one nonindustrial societies, observes that "throughout human history the family has been the safest haven for the aged. Its ties have been the most intimate and long-lasting, and on them the aged have relied for greatest security" (1945:176). If the survey data collected over the past two decades is any judge, Simmons' simplistic axiom about the aged and family living still holds in much of the Third World, even in urban areas where a majority of older adults still reside with younger relatives and must rely exclusively on familial resources for survival (Hashimoto, 1991). In the Western Pacific Survey, for example, it was found that in the nations of Fiji, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia and the Philippines, between 75 and 85 percent of the elderly reside in extended family settings. Importantly, within each country, variables such as gender, age of elder or marital status had little impact on the likelihood of coresidence. As Albert and Cattell suggest, there seems to be a strong cultural prescription at work in this region (1994, p. 99). Similar findings from surveys done in the mid-1990s show a continuing pattern of high coresidence in the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand (Ofstedal, Knodel and Chayovan 1999).

In Table 3, which is based on surveys conducted during the

1980s, we see two notable differences between the "middle-income" countries of Central and South America and the "low-income" countries drawn almost exclusively from Asia and Africa. First, during the 1980s in the "middle-income" set of nations barely a majority of the elderly were residing with adult children or other family (the exception is Argentina), versus more than 3/4ths in the latter grouping. Second, for all except Costa Rica, over 10 percent of elders lived alone in "middle-income" countries compared to typically 5 percent or less among the lower-income" nations listed.

Table 3: Living Arrangements of Older Persons, 1980s  
Percentage of persons over 60 living:

	With children or family	Alone	Other <sup>a</sup>
<hr/>			
Middle-income countries			
Argentina	25	11	64
Chile	59	10	31
Costa Rica	56	7	37
Panama	76	10	14
Trinidad and Tobago	41	13	46
Uruguay	53	16	31
<b>Average</b>	52	11	37
Low-income countries			
China	83	3	14
Urban	74	5	22
Rural	89	1	10
Cote d'Ivoire	96	2	2
Guyana	61	2	38
Honduras	90	5	5
Indonesia	76	8	17
Malaysia	82	6	12
Philippines	92	3	5
Thailand	92	5	4
<b>Average</b>	84	4	
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*Source:* Adapted from World Bank, 1994, p. 63.

*Note:* Averages are unweighted.

a. Includes persons living with spouse.

More variation was seen in the United Nations University study of seven countries (Table 4), although in all sampled nations except Brazil, a majority of elders live in multigenerational settings, with the highest percentages in India, Zimbabwe and Thailand (Hashimoto, 1991). One of the significant differences is seen in both Zimbabwe and Thailand, which had the highest percentages of "skipped generations" households where elders resided with their grandchildren or other young relatives.<sup>4</sup> In the Zimbabwean rural community of Manguwende, this study found that the grandparent/grandchild household was the most frequent living arrangement for older adults. The especially high figures of "skipped generation" households for Zimbabwe reflect not only heavy migration patterns but also a cultural pattern whereby married sons often reside in another house compound or area of the locality.

Insert Table 4 here

Additionally, economic dislocation and one of the world's highest rates of the HIV infection (United Nations, 1999) have conspired to force reformulation of local support systems. One result of the AIDS pandemic is the loss of young and middle-aged adult caregivers, compelling the elderly to work much harder to support themselves and their grandchildren. The government has

asked that local headman set aside a plot of land to help support stressed grandparents. NGOs such as HelpAge International are trying to establish small businesses and collective farms to bolster the economic efforts of destitute seniors.

More subtle but equally profound changes can be seen in the indigenous belief system. One noted example is the loss of traditional ancestor worship associated with conversion to Christianity. Previously, there was a widespread ritual of ancestor pleasing - *kupira mudzimu*. It was believed that if people did not care for their parents, the ancestors would curse them. This seems now to have lost its effectiveness in an era when cross-generational interdependence is seldom a mainstay of gaining economy maturity for young adults.

The limited survey research on living arrangements in Africa, such as that by Peil conducted during the 1980s (1985), shows consistently high levels of coresidence and family-based support in both rural and urban areas. She reported that about 80 of her respondents over age sixty were receiving help from children, grandchildren or siblings. However, it is important to note that there is an enormous variation in family and descent systems in Africa, as well as some basic and important differences in informal support systems compared with other regions of the world. Typically, one finds that family-based systems of support tend to encompass a broader definition of kin support than is typically found in many regions of Asia or Latin America (Cattell, 1997a). Especially in West Africa, widespread

matrilineal descent systems coupled with the traditional importance of women in local market economies appear to provide older women with a more secure late life support network. Support in old age from siblings is also more a part of caregiving than in Asia and cultural traditions of child fostering and adoption potentially expand the number of persons one can "claim" as his or her child (Apt, 1996; Cattell, 1993). In some matrilineal systems, where marriage pulled women to the homesteads of their spouses, after menopause they will be reintegrated into their natal households, where they will be supported for the remainder of their lives.

a. *Stability in the face of Change?*

On the surface, survey measures in a number of regions show relative stability for elders living in extended families. Kolenda's 1987 longitudinal analysis of family structure in a village of India shows joint family formations actually increasing from 29 percent in 1819 to 45.6 percent in 1967. In the same country, a regional study of 13 rural communities shows the proportion of those past age 60 residing with sons to have remained at about 80% from 1960 to 1982 (Biswas, 1985). In Martin's (1990) analysis of this data set, she concludes that these patterns reflect relatively stable attitudes toward generationally shared households during a period of increased longevity connected to decreased late life and younger adult mortality. This kind of residential stability is supported by two new community based studies, one in a New Delhi middle-class

neighborhood (van Willigen, John and Narender Chadha 1999) and another in rural West Bengal (Lamb, In Press).

Elswhere in Asia, Knodel et al.'s (1999) work in Thailand (see table 5) shows a similar general stability in living arrangements among the elderly during a period of rapid socio-economic changes during the past decade. Importantly, this team's work on the non-coresident, networks of family support finds that those not living with adult children are nevertheless, in "living arrangements which can be construed as consistent with the prevailing normative mandate assigning family responsibility for support and care of the elderly," (Siriboon and Knodel, 1994, p. 32.)

Table 5 Living Arrangements Among Persons Aged 60+, Thailand

Year	1986	1994	1995
% living Alone	4.3	3.6	4.3
% Living with Spouse Only	6.7	11.6	11.9
% living with a child (Among Elderly with at least one child)	79.7	75.4.	74.2

Source: Adapted from: Knodel, et al. 1999 Aging in Thailand: An Overview of Formal and Informal Support.

Among the important research indicators emerging from the recent work on living arrangements and aging in Asia is the need for attention to regional variation, even within relatively small

nations. For example, research in Vietnam (Anh, Cuong, Goodkind, and Knodel, 1997) shows a variation between the Red River Delta area - with an extreme preference for residing with married sons - compared to Ho Chi Minh City and its surrounded regions where this preference was much less pronounced. In looking at these types of variation one should always expect *both* context and culture to shape the reality of household formation. For example, data from the senior sample of the Second Malaysian Family Life Survey show that more than two-thirds of Malaysians age 60 or older coreside with an adult child. Chan and Davanzo's analysis (1996) indicates that coresidence is influenced by the costs, opportunities, and preferences for coresidence versus separate living arrangements. They found, married seniors are more likely to coreside with adult children when housing costs are greater in their area or when an elderly spouse is in poor health. This work suggests that married parents and children live together to economize on living costs or to receive help with household services. Wealthier unmarried seniors are less likely to live with adult children, presumably because they use their higher incomes to "purchase privacy."<sup>5</sup>

Place Figure 1 here

In the same study Chan and DaVanzo found that ethnic, cultural factors more strongly influenced coresidence than the variables of health, wealth, or marital status of the parents. As seen in figure 1, Chinese and Indian seniors with at least a son

and a daughter are more likely than Malay age-peers to live with adult children. Chinese elders, however are more likely to reside with a son than with a daughter, whereas Malay and Indian elders are about equally likely to live with a child of either sex. This diversity points toward two distinct family systems at work in the region. In East Asian and the northern sector of South Asia, cultures based on either Confusian, Hindu or Moslem philosophies and an authoritarian, patrilineal system stress coresidence and care by sons and their spouses. In Southeast Asia and the southern zone of South Asia, Buddhist spiritual orders within a less rigid, bilateral kin system push adult daughters to play equal and sometimes more important support roles in elder care than sons (Mason, 1992).

An important variant of this second pattern occurs in Thailand where there is a decided preference for elder parents residing with daughters. This example is particularly important in showing that despite steep drops in family size during the 1990s, the number of children in a family network has only a very modest impact on an elder's chances for coresidence and support. In fact, those elders with only one or two children reported that they felt as well cared for as those with five or six (Knodel, Saengtienchai and Obiero, 1995). Focus group interviews throughout the country showed that Thai parents saw strong benefits in small families, by being more able to invest in the educational future of children and increasing their material potential for support and even feeling that this increased the

chance of developing a stronger sense of gratitude to bolster future care taking.

In another part of the world, Solis's (1999) analysis of national census data from Mexico (table 6), for the period 1976 to 1994 show strong consistency in the moderately high percentage of elders residing in complex multigenerational households, and a low percentage of seniors living alone. There is little comparable longitudinal data for elsewhere in Latin America (Palloni, De Vos and Pelaez, 1999), although Agree's (1993) work in Brazil indicates a sharp increase in living alone, especially among unmarried older adults.

Table 6. Living Arrangements of the Elderly in Mexico, 1976-1994

	1976	1987	1990	1992	1994	
Solitary		6.9	5.6	7.8	8.5	7.2
No Family		1.4	0.8	1.7	0.8	0.6
<b>Simple</b>	<b>39.9</b>	<b>39.0</b>	<b>41.2</b>	<b>39.2</b>	<b>39.7</b>	
<i>Couple only</i>		15.6	15.5	14.4	15.6	17.2
Couple with children		19.0	18.1	20.9	18.5	16.6
Single parent with children	5.3	5.4	5.9	5.1	5.9	
<b>Complex</b>		<b>51.9</b>	<b>54.6</b>	<b>49.2</b>	<b>51.5</b>	<b>52.5</b>
Single parent, married children and their family*						
Couple, married children and their family*						
Other complex*						
		n 4118	2568	49345	18853	5159

Source: Solis, 1999.

\*"Other complex" households cover all the elderly living with at least one relative different than their spouse, children, in-laws and grandchildren

A factor in understanding how the situation in this region

differs from much of Asia and Africa is that in a majority of Latin American nations, seniors are now primarily city dwellers; and within two decades it is projected that in all but a few countries, two-thirds or more will live in such settings. In Mexico, both limited ethnographic information (Velez, 1978) and the analysis of Solis (1999) strongly indicate that while there may not be a significant drop in the percent of urban multigenerational households, there are likely to be high numbers of fluid and amalgamated family formations. This is reflected in the statistics Solis analyzed for the 1990 Mexican census which showed that of "complex" households, the largest subcategory was "other complex," in which with a wide variety of younger kin other than children, in-laws or grandchildren were incorporated into the home (1999).

What to make of this kind of stability in the face of the rapid change going on in places like India and Mexico. Martin argues that while there can be seen a shifting away from massive joint extended families, the transition from a high to low, mortality and fertility demographic picture can actual maintain a very high level of multigenerational "stem" families as has happened in India and China (1990, p. 106). As will be seen in this paper's last section, this is exactly what I have seen in my work over the past twenty-six years in rural Mexico.

#### D. THE MODERN URBANIZING CONTEXT OF FAMILY LIFE IN DEVELOPING NATIONS

##### 1. *Tradition unbound*

The dramatic upsurge in the longevity of older citizens in Third World countries is a legacy of the last two decades. This demographic change has been intertwined with powerful modernizing events including alterations in economic production, wealth distribution, an explosion of super-sized cities and the often violent devolution of large states into smaller successor nations. The primary model for considering the impact of major worldwide changes on the elderly has been "modernization" theory. Third World countries are said to develop/progress as they adopt, through cultural diffusion, the modernized model of rational/efficient societal organization. While such a transformation is often viewed as an overall advance for such countries, a strong inverse relationship is suggested between the elements of modernization as an independent variable and the status of the aged as a dependent variable. Validation of this paradigm has been uneven and has spurred a small industry of gerontological writings which debate the proposed articulation of modernization and aging (see Rhoads and Holmes 1995:251-85 for an excellent review). Historians in particular have sharply questioned the model, saying it is not only ahistorical but that, by idealizing the past, an inappropriate "world we lost syndrome" has been created (Laslett 1976; Kertzer and Laslett 1994). For example, summing up research on the elderly living in Western Europe several hundred years ago, historian Andrejs Plakans states, "There is something like a consensus that the treatment of the old was harsh and decidedly pragmatic: dislike and

suspicion, it is said, characterized the attitudes of both sides" (1989).

Goldstein and Beall (1981) argue that the concept "status of the aged" must be constructed as a multidimensional variable with no necessary assumption of covariance between the different dimensions of status. The ethnographic evidence shows that the impact of change on the elderly is quite varied and depends on such factors as gender, class, social organization of the local community and how the nation-state's political economy transfers modernizing changes into the local region.

A good example of the complexity of this issue is seen in a study of three untouchable communities in the South Tamil Nadu area of India (Vincentnathan and Vincentnathan 1994). The authors show how in the poorest communities, the assumption of respect and high status as a prior condition did not hold. Here the elders had no resources to pass on. Modernization programs which included providing material resources for the elders became a new basis for binding together the young and old. However, increased education of the young led many children and young adults to feel superior to parents. This fostered a distinct negative change in generational relations - sometimes involving high levels of abuse and even gericide - closer to the predictions of modernization theory.

In India, increasingly since the 1980s there has been much public discussion of the "problem of aging," evoked in emerging protective legislation, new gerontological societies, popular

magazines, and other forms of popular culture. In the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, the Maintenance of Parents and Dependents Bill was passed in 1997 making it mandatory to provide for aging parents. In the preface to the bill a Himachal Pradesh minister proclaims, ". . . [A]ged and infirm parents are now left beggared and destitute on the scrap heap of society. It has become necessary to provide compassionate and speedy remedy to alleviate their sufferings" (quoted in Lamb, forthcoming). Sarah Lamb notes that in some sectors of Indian society (especially urban areas and more prosperous rural zones) a "bad old age" is viewed as a paradigmatic sign of the evils brought by modernization, urbanization, and changing attitudes and behavior of young women. In the West Bengal community where she lived, she heard people constantly talking about how these modern changes, provoked families to break up, old people to be left alone and society in general to be undergoing a general deterioration. Working elsewhere in India during the early 1990s within a lower-caste Nagwa slum of Varanasi, Lawrence Cohen found that problems of the elderly were discussed in quite different terms. Old age afflictions set in the context of family conflict were perceived to be neither new nor unusual (1998, pp.223-248). They were blamed on the caste order, impoverishment, the debilities of old age itself, and the splitting of joint families through conflict between coresident brothers.

a. *An urbanizing developing world*

As this new millennium opens we find, for the first time,

that a majority of the world's citizens will soon be living in urban places (United Nations, 1998). Those who are not still feel the effects of urban cultural desires, witness the outflow of those seeking-city based jobs, and experience the impact of huge portions of national resources being gobbled up by their mega-metropolises and unpayable international debt. Incredibly, only four of the top fifteen largest cities in the world are in "developed" countries, all the rest are found in nations like Mexico, India, Brazil and South Korea. Mexico City, estimated to house over 25-million people in its metropolitan area, looms as a dramatic example. At mid-century Mexico was three-quarters rural. Now the same ratio of its citizens live in cities, with almost one-quarter of the entire population living in Mexico City alone (World Bank 1999). Recently, the country has endured very difficult economic times, as in the 1990s when the value of wages dropped by one-half. For the urban elderly, especially females, there has been increasing destitution. This is reflected in Bialik's study of 1000 older women from Mexican cities and their high degree of impoverishment: a third had no personal income and 12 percent earned only \$5 per month (1992).<sup>6</sup> At the same time, as I will detail below, my own work in an indigenous village 65 miles east of Mexico City indicates that elderly villagers and their families have, in fact, improved their quality of life by exploiting the metropolitan expansion visible from its mountain reaches.

Since the 1980s a new residential pattern has been emerging

in some Third World nations as a result of rapid urbanization. For example, in Malaysia, the Philippines, and South Africa Kinsella (1988) found that "rural households were ... smaller and less likely than urban households to include elderly persons living with their offspring. Three-quarters of urban Filipino households with one or more persons aged 60 and over had at least four members, compared with slightly more than half of similar rural households" (p. 28). A similar pattern was found in a recent study of the living arrangements of the aged in Vietnam (The Cuong, et al., n.d.) Two major factors linked to this unexpected variation are the greater tendency of younger rather than older adults to migrate to cities and the scarcity of urban housing.

Although strong support can be provided by children and other close relatives not living in the household, rapid out-migration can mortally disrupt the fabric of intergenerational caring and reciprocity. This can be an especially hard blow to the life satisfaction of rural aged, who spent much of their life caring for their own aged parents in the prescribed manner and now find that they are often on their own. Rural Surveys in Kenya found that almost all respondents felt their children did less than they did for their parents; a large majority were experiencing severe poverty and 50 percent of the poor attributed their condition to neglect by the immediate family (Kinsella, 1988, p.29). Interestingly, historical research has found a similar pattern during the process of industrialization in 19th

century New England (Gratton and Haber 1993).

b. *Generations unbound: What surveys miss*

The work of Knodel and Saengtienchai (1999) in rural Thailand is most instructive in demonstrating the limitations of survey instruments and the importance of a case study approach in delineating the dynamics of intergenerational care. Indeed, among the worst mistakes policy makers can make is the assumption that the social status and well-being of elders can be inferred from the residential structure of households. Looking at four South Asian countries (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka), Linda Martin cautions not to place inordinate import on younger and older generations living together. She suggests that "status of the elderly...appears not to be guaranteed by virtue of their coresidence with offspring. Rather, status more likely is a function of sex, health and economic resources" (1990, p. 110). Martin concludes that modernization itself has not dramatically altered the status of the elderly in the family; the largest factor influencing this is the control of economic assets. In another context, Ramos' in his work on the elderly in Brazil notes that "contrary to some prevailing beliefs, it might be the elderly living in multigenerational households who will first require formal support" (1995, p. 6). Ramos, in fact, found that elderly persons living in multigenerational households had the lowest scores for physical and mental health. This part of the population was predominantly very poor, aged, and female, and had few alternatives but to live with relatives (1992).

The consistent survey reports on the living arrangements of the elderly in East Asia must be balanced against the impact of extremely rapid industrialization, which can mimic the dislocations families suffered throughout Europe during its industrial growth in the first half of the last century. For example, in the early 1990s, Australian epidemiologist John McCallum was reviewing a program seeking to create awareness of aging in Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. National experts from these countries consistently told him that despite rapidly increasing geographic family mobility, families were still very effective in providing for the day-to-day needs of the aged. However, contrary data were obtained when he ventured outside the information network of predominantly male public analysts and spokespersons. McCallum gives as an example the situation in a fast-growing urban fringe settlement which provides workers for new industries at one of the research sites. The pressures of work and getting children to school were such that "a majority of families were placing their elderly early each day, sometimes with little sustenance, in an open field without shade and collecting them in the evening" (1993:2).

Even where the structure of the extended family persists in "traditional societies," policy makers should not harbor unqualified optimism about intergenerational kindness or the capacity of family systems to ensure the well-being of aged relatives (Levine 1965; Nydegger 1983). This was powerfully illustrated by the results of an anthropological study of Hindu

households in Kathmandu, Nepal, where 61 percent of all aged individuals lived with at least one son. It was noted that while the "ideal" form of the patrilineal extended family existed, not only did it give a false picture of intergenerational relations, but the material and psychological foundations of filial support were rapidly disintegrating. For example, in about 50 percent of the households in which elders lived with married sons, the aged were essentially supporting themselves and not getting support from their resident son. The authors found it particularly ironic that given the Hindu ideal value of depending on a male child in old age, "the most truly miserable elderly parents were the very ones who objectively were completely dependent upon a son" (Goldstein, Schuler, and Ross, 1983, p. 722).

Some Asian scholars are beginning to strongly question the continued reliance on family support systems as the best cultural medium to sustain the aged. For example, Yow-Hwey Hu shows that in East Asian industrial societies such as Japan, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong, the high level of three-generation families, even in urban areas, is found in conjunction with exceedingly high rates of suicide by those over age 65 (1995). The difference between East and West is particularly noteworthy for older women. Prior to their mid-forties, women in countries like Japan and Taiwan kill themselves about at the same rate (11.6 and 10.4 per 100,000) as their counterparts in the United States and France (8.8 and 13.9 per 100,000). Yet past age 65,

women in the former two nations end their own lives at a dramatically higher rate (39.3 and 34.6) compared to the latter countries where the level of female suicide actually drops (6.6 and 9.7). Yow-Hwey Hu also finds that there is a subtle bias in the questionnaires such countries use to find continued support for elders preferring three-generation residential life. He argues that more objective questions would change the results dramatically, toward a preference for separate but nearby residences.

#### E. CASE STUDY, MEXICAN ELDERS AND FAMILIES FACE THE MILLENNIUM

##### 1. *A paradox of tradition promoting change*

In 1972-73 I conducted anthropological Ph.D. research in the central Mexican village of Amatango about 65 miles east of Mexico City (Sokolovsky 1995). This rural community is one of 27 *pueblos* (rural villages) in a municipal unit politically led by the city of Texcoco, about 12 miles away.<sup>7</sup> In 1972, Texcoco was a sleepy municipal capital of 25,000, but by the mid-1990s its population had swelled to about 140,000. Its old market had acquired a wide array of electronic gear with accompanying audio and video tapes, allowing families from Amatango to become consumers of North American-inspired global popular culture.

When I first lived in Amatango the village economy centered around subsistence corn farming combined with occasional wage labor, playing music in traditional fiesta bands and the sale of decorative flowers and wooden crates in Texcoco or Mexico city. Travel to Texcoco was hampered by a very rough dirt road, strewn

with large boulders and often impassable to bus traffic. The roughly 2,000 villagers of Amatango, who identified themselves as *indios* (Indians), were thought to be the most ardent followers of indigenous traditions in their region. Close relatives, especially elders, were greeted by a distinctive bowing and hand kissing respect gesture, and they continued a regular system of communal labor and a very traditional *fiesta* complex in which families took on time-consuming and costly responsibilities for ritually celebrating the lives of various Catholic saints. In return visits to the village in 1977-8, 1989, 1993 and 1998, I have been able to examine how household arrangements, reproductive strategies and cross-generational authority patterns have been altered in the light of dramatic modernization (Sokolovsky, 1997b). My work illustrates how local control over vital economic resources can become the catalyst for very traditional cultural systems to initiate modernizing change in ways which support the interests of their oldest citizens.

Today, newly installed speed bumps mildly beset the drive to Amatango on a relatively smooth, paved road. The village itself boasts satellite broadcast reruns of Bonanza, several fledgling teenage street gangs, six popular music bands, adolescents wearing "Metalica" tee-shirts, and minibuses running every ten minutes to Texcoco. However, one can still hear and see the face of tradition holding a very tenuous sway against the hurricane winds of modern urban culture sweeping rural Mexico. It is reflected in the eyes of young children as they cautiously

approach an older relative, gently bowed to plant a ritual kiss on the uplifted hand as they whisper in classic Aztec, *nocultzin* (revered grandparent). It can also be observed in the public fiesta dances, where a child of eight shares the same dance platform and ritual significance with a man or woman of 40, or even 70. So far, such symbolic acts are still embedded in familial and public domains which give aging adults a place in their society which transcends simple platitudes such as "show respect to your elders."

What originally drew me to study Amatango was a seeming paradox. How could its strong traditional cultural features coexist with a series of locally initiated, "modernizing" changes which also made the village the most rapidly transforming of the *indio* communities in its region? Some changes, such as village electrification and the building of a new elementary school, had begun a few years before I arrived. Others were transpiring during and within five years of my initial research stay. These changes included construction of a passable road, a medical clinic building and a high school, plus the creation of a potable water system. Amatango was not a passive receptor of these changes, but initiated them through the collective efforts of the local civil-religious hierarchy. In doing so, it has sought to recast itself in terms of local concepts of a "civilized" place. Fortunately for the elderly, Amatango has resolved this paradox of remaining the most traditional while also being the most changing community by relying upon its most customary aspects of

belief and village organization to pursue the goal of community transformation.

I found that this was possible due to the community's continuous access to vital economic resources such as agricultural land, mountain forests and pastures, and a still functioning irrigation system which their ancestors' helped build in the mid-15th century. When population began to explode in the 1970s and early 1980s, villagers were able to use these resources to intensify traditional agricultural pursuits and to employ extended family labor in the production of items for urban markets. The community-wide cooperative labor system was also employed to plant and harvest communal fields, with the proceeds going to maintain the new school and other village projects.

Fortuitously, it was in the late 1960's and early 1970s that the state government, with Mexican federal assistance began to selectively invest in improving rural infrastructure through electrification, road building and eventually the expansion of rural health care services. As a start, the community combined its traditional communal labor system with state government provided materials and engineers to improve their irrigation system and build a small bridge over a ravine, which had been a serious obstacle to motorized vehicles entering the community. With these initial successes in the 1960s, Amatango's leaders began to petition for the other "modernizing" changes mentioned previously.

a. Demographic transitions

Between 1972 and 1993 the population of Amatango had almost doubled, from 2100 to about 3800, while the percent of persons over age 65 remained low and unchanged at 3.5 percent.<sup>8</sup> The birth rate, averaging 9.39 per family in 1975 (Millard 1980), had declined by more than half to about 3.5 in 1995 (estimate by local nurse). Early childhood mortality, 390 per 1000 in 1960, had plummeted to 53.5 by 1990 (Mindek 1994) along with a similar decline in general mortality, from 33 per 1000 to 6.5 over the same period.

TABLE 7. Amatango Household Patterns of Persons over Age 60, 1973, 1993.

	<i>Extended Households</i> Elderly Parents/Parent with		<i>Nuclear Households</i> Elderly Parent(s) unmarried children/ or other kin	<i>Living Alone</i>
	1 married son/daughter	2 married sons/daughters		
1973* n=81	44(54.3%)	5(6.2%)	28(34.5%)	4(5%)
	[60.5%]			
1993** n=45	25(55.6%)	6(13.3%)	11(24.4%)	3(6.7%)
	[68.8%]			

\*Source: total household survey by author

\*\*Source: limited household survey by author

Yet, the general way elders fit into household structure has remained quite stable. In 1973, a clear majority (60 percent) of persons 60 years of age or older (Table 7), lived in three-generational settings, with 90 percent of such households having no more than one married son in residence. This statistic alone does not give a true picture of family life, then or now. More

often than not, at least one other married son resided in a physically independent house, a moment's walk from his elderly parents' dwelling--just across a courtyard or down a dirt path. In only four instances did aged individuals live alone. One-third of the aged lived with unmarried children or other single kin, most typically a grandson. In 1993 a survey I did of 45 households which included a person over age 60 showed that almost two-thirds were organized around extended family settings. The other living arrangements did not show significant structural alterations since the 1970s. It should be noted that in 1998 the only elder villagers considered abandoned was one widower, age 68. Even though he resided with an adult son and two other married sons lived next door, they refused any support as the father was a serious alcoholic, who had not only sold away most of the family land but had severely beaten his wife when she was alive.

Behind this strong statistical consistency lay some important changes related to the position of the elderly in Amatango's families. From the 1920s to the early 1970s, a major shift has involved the significant reduction of very large extended households, where two or more married sons stayed in the house compound to work with and eventually care for their parents. By the early 1970s, reductions in per capita land holdings and the rise of new money making activities outside the village had stimulated a shift from "joint" to "stem" patrilineal groupings where only one married son would remain with the

parents.<sup>9</sup> At that time the proportion of joint, patrilineal households with more than one married son living under the parents' domain had been reduced by about half. Of more recent vintage is the formation of extended households by incorporating an adult daughter's family into her parents' residence, either by themselves or along with a married son.

In 1973, only two women with their families lived with parents and in each case their married brothers also resided with them. In 1993, I found five of the regular extended families being formed with married daughters exclusively; in another four households, married daughters or single daughters with children joined their married brother in living with their elderly parents.

Despite the dominance of patrilineal descent, kinship ties generated through one's mother are also acknowledged by hand kissing *respeto* behavior and have great practical importance. Maternal relatives comprise a significant portion of a household's total personal network of support. It is through the exchange of labor, tangible goods, and money that families are able to carry out costly and time-consuming public ritual.

b. *"Pero cuatro es el maximo!"*

The sharp drop in birth rates noted above came about when Amatango's young women adopted new reproductive strategies despite strong initial resistance from their husbands and mothers-in-laws. Birth control was introduced slowly in 1983 by a locally born nurse who worked at the village clinic; by 1993 some

form of birth control was used by about a third of the almost 900 women still in their reproductive years. In 1973 when I would ask young men and women what the ideal family size was, the standard response was "only God knows." At that time, couples almost universally sought to have as many children as they could. By the 1990s, attitudes had changed dramatically. Almost like a Greek chorus, adults in their 20s would repeat the maxim, "*dos hijos es mejor, pero cuatro es el maximo!*" (two kids is ideal, but the maximum is four). Of the women who were practicing some form of birth control, the majority would only begin after they had given birth to three or four children. This shift in reproductive behavior was influenced by plummeting infant mortality rates noted previously, and the rising costs of supporting children, especially in the area of education.

In the early 1970s the emotional structure of family systems was quite authoritarian, dominated by the elder couple, especially the male. Following Aztec legal tradition, parents could take disobedient children to the community judges for punishment in the form of hard labor for the community or a fine. I witnessed several such cases during 1973.<sup>10</sup> Yet, since my first fieldwork stay, indelible change has clearly occurred in generational dynamics. Most notable has been the reduced control of senior kin over the actions of junior relatives. For example, the last public trial for parental disobedience was held a decade ago. On a more subtle level, in the early 1970s when I talked to aged parents about divergence from customary behavior they

accepted that such things were possible but adamantly insisted that the *costumbres* (traditions) would be enforced. Now, in the late 1990s, when confronted with a daughter-in-law who uses birth control or a son who prefers urban factory work to cultivating corn fields, they are likely to respond with a shrug, saying *cada quien* or "to each his own." This is strongly mediated by the fact that about 60 percent of young adults who are living in the house of their elder parents get a majority of their income from work outside the village.

c. *Elders in the family*

Significant changes in village life have not altered the fact that the lives of the aged remain thoroughly embedded in the social matrix of surrounding households, headed by adult children, siblings and cousins. Elders are in constant contact with children, if not with a resident grandchild then with a wide range of very young kin and godchildren living within a few hundred yards.<sup>11</sup> As has been noted in other parts of the developing world, the child-minding aspect of grandparenting has, in fact, increased over the last decade, as in many households at least one parent is working in the city during the day.

Most marriages (about 75 percent) take place within the village, imparting a particularly intense geographic density to the social networks of the aged, especially for males. While a women's kin group is more physically dispersed from her abode than a male's, this does not imply that females are more isolated in old age. In fact, due to their greater role continuity, women

past age 65 will typically maintain reciprocal support networks with more personnel and have greater frequency of exchange than their male age peers.

d. *The public realm of aging*

Beyond the family, the most important source of prestige, respect and power during middle and old age derives from the carrying out of community ritual and civil responsibilities.

In Amatango, community roles are loosely ranked, with the higher ones generally requiring more money and/or time but yielding more prestige and authority. There is an expectation that over a lifetime, men and their wives will have undertaken at least one important ritual sponsorship of a major *fiesta* and thereby be worthy of public esteem.<sup>12</sup>

Wealth conditions, to a certain degree, the extent of public prestige and power men and their families will garner as they age.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, virtually all older men from Catholic families carry out at least once the sacred burden of ritual *fiesta* sponsorship, which gives them lasting honor in the eyes of the community and the saints.<sup>14</sup> By the time most males reach age 60, even those who are relatively poor also will have shouldered at least some local political responsibility.

Besides ritual sponsorship, the *fiesta* system affords other opportunities to enhance public esteem in old age. All of the *fiestas* involve dance troops and elaborate processions. Elderly men, and to a lesser extent women, can volunteer to take roles as dance leaders, instructors, special musicians or simply as

participants.<sup>15</sup> Such activities proclaim not only moral uprightness and continuing prestige, but also that one is still actively involved in the life of the community.

Although the *fiesta* system performs an implicit age-grading function, it also provides one of the only community-wide arenas where males and females of all ages can participate as relative equals. This occurs in the large dance groups that perform at most *fiestas* as part of the community's "folk" version of Roman Catholic pageantry. Even in the case where teenagers introduced a new dance formation based on an urban model, middle-aged villagers eagerly volunteered to dress up and perform as *caballeros y caballeras* (cowboys and cowgirls). Such groups have provided the social and psychological model for the public cooperation between young adults and their elders. This was essential in developing the community consensus for initiating and accomplishing the transformation of Amatango.

Although women participate in the masses, processions and dancing and associated with each *fiesta*, they assume no overt public leadership position in these activities. Yet, during major public ceremonies, older women operate behind the scenes, directing the production and serving huge quantities of the special foods required for successful ritual sponsorship. In accomplishing this they rely on, and in turn support, a wide circle of female age-peers and younger women drawn from their bilateral kin network. The reciprocal flow of assistance stimulated by the annual cycle of fiestas provides a regular

source of extrahousehold engagement for all but the most frail women.

e. *Why is Amatango different?*

The information I gathered over about the aged in Amatango seems at variance with some of modernization theory's predicted dire consequences for the elderly. This is particularly unusual as under similar conditions of "modernizing" change, the aged of Amatango have fared better than those in many other Latin American peasant communities, studied in earlier decades. One reads, for example, that in the Colombian highland village of Aritama: "There is no room and no use for them. Old people are not respected, feared or loved. Their advice is not sought by the younger generation, nor are they thought to possess any special knowledge which might be useful" (Reichel-Dolmatoff and Reichel-Dolmatoff 1961).

This is an extreme case, but judging from other ethnographic studies the situation of the aged in rural communities of the region unfortunately seems closer to the conditions in Aritama than in Amatango. All too commonly, one finds a despairing elderly population rapidly becoming bereft of support. They are caught in a demographic vacuum caused by departing young adults and in a cultural lacunae epitomized by the withering away of *fiesta* systems (Kagan. 1980).

Why is the situation for the aged more favorable in Amatango? Ironically, its isolated location and the mediocre quality of its agricultural lands protected the community from

severe exploitation by a landed gentry in pre-revolutionary times. Substantial land and irrigation resources were retained and eventually expanded upon in the early twentieth century. While the onset of economic pressures caused the demise of indigenous institutions and beliefs in similar villages, Amatango's economic strength helped sustain cultural features through which the aged have maintained societal value in the light of rapid change. In fact, when a rising population provoked the need for new sources of revenue and the development of village capital infrastructure, some of those very patterns of traditional life have been used to carry out ongoing economic development projects. An interesting comparison of the creative use of family and community resources to support the elderly can be made with the recent work of Joseph and Phillips in rural China (1999).

For Amatango, the familial and village niches providing roles for elder individuals have not been dramatically altered. Particularly crucial has been the vitality of the civil-religious hierarchy which not only serves as a bulwark of indigenous identity but also provides the organizational basis for community transformation. In other Latin American peasant communities, either the total collapse of this system or the sharp separation of political and ritual components has severely limited the possibilities of maintaining public esteem in old age (Moore 1973).

For Amatango, community solidarity bolstered by an economic

base has enabled the village to transform itself largely on its own terms. This is the answer to the paradox of how the village could be both the most traditional and the most changing community in the region. While many aged are ambivalent about such things as the new schools, which downplay the use of the Aztec language, they are still vitally engaged in the system that brought these changes about.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Beginning in the 1990s Neo-liberal economists began to expand their catastrophic view of the "aging crisis" to a global arena (Peterson, 1999). The basic argument as put forth by the World Bank in *Averting the Old Age Crisis* (1994) is that informal and public sector programs are incapable of handling the impending demographic imperatives brought about by aging in the developing world. Their stress is on allowing the private and voluntary sectors fill the coming needs in social welfare and reducing state provision of support to only the most extreme cases of need. A presumption in such a model is that universal public pensions and other public support programs undercut "informal," family-based systems of support for the elderly. The work of Lloyd Sherlock (1997, pp. 24-29) provides a strong critique of this perspective based on his work in Latin America. Another important examination of this issue was conducted by Briller (2000) during the mid-1990s in rural Mongolia. She showed that pensions can have a very positive effect in reinforcing the preexisting family-centered sentiments and practical support of

the aged and do not "crowd out" traditional systems of filial devotion and assistance.

The reality of how living arrangements can continue to sustain elders in the developing world has been succinctly described by African sociologist Nana Apter. In a recent keynote address she chided international donor organizations, including the United Nations, of operating in a policy void which ignores the workings of traditional welfare systems in favor of modern forms. She suggests:

It is not enough to talk about the bind of tradition, and it's not enough to talk about its disintegration. We must find ways and means of transforming it into a modern form that will make multigenerational relationships much more viable (1998:14).

I would add that, as I found in Mexico, these traditional systems will only be sustained if they blend local meaning with regionally-based economic systems to give both youth and elders reason to support each other.

#### Endnotes

1. As of January 1, 2000 all housing construction by state industries for workers has stopped.

2. For a comprehensive guide to comparative gerontology research up until 1994 see *International Directory of Research and Researchers in Comparative Gerontology*, Charlotte Nusberg and Jay Sokolovsky, editors, Washington: American Association of Retired Persons. There are a good number of other data sets which are now available

pecially for demographic analysis in East Asia. These include: Philippine Elderly Survey, 1996; National Survey of Senior Citizens in Singapore, 1995; Survey of the Idle Aged and Elderly in Taiwan, 1996; Survey of the Welfare of the Elderly in Thailand, 1995.

To date, the best academic summaries of these materials are found in two books *Old Age in Global Perspective* (Albert and Cattell, 1994) and *Averting the Old Age Crisis* (World Bank, 1994).

For a discussion of the role of grandparents in Thailand see Hermalin, Roan, and Perez, 1998.

The Malaysian government provides adult children with various economic incentives to have parents live with them--e.g., priority in low-cost housing. The work of Yanzon and Chan (1994) suggests that such policies are likely to succeed with families who need to economize on living costs: The higher housing costs are in an area, the study found, the more likely seniors and adult children are to coreside. However, seniors who are better off economically are less likely to coreside, a result suggesting that they value privacy and independence.

For other discussion of older women in Mexico see, Robles 1987; Contreras De Leizaola, 1992. For a broader view of older women in Latin America see, Pan American Health Organization 1989.

A *municipio* is a Mexican political subdivision similar to the American township. A *pueblo* is a politically dependent rural community. However, the *pueblos* in the *municipio* of Texcoco are comparatively independent, owning their own lands and forming distinct socio-political organizations.

The 1972 figures are based on a house to house survey I conducted early in 1973 and the 1993 data is based on a similar survey conducted by the local nurse who grew up in the village.

In 1994 there were still some huge joint households. The two largest in the village had 24 and 22 persons respectively living within single bounded house compounds, where 4-6 nuclear families lived under the direction of the elder parent

both cases the households were among the more prosperous and entrepreneurial in the village.

In the most traditional families, all money earned by the sons would be given to the parents, who would then decide how best to spend the collective resources. This could be the source of simmering conflict, especially in those families where the sons started to work for salaries in factories in Texcoco or Mexico City.

As in most Latin American rural communities there is an elaborate system of personal ritual sponsorship, whereby a couple will be asked to be godparent for a specific event such as baptism or marriage. Accepting this responsibility in Amatango creates a very strong bond not only between the godparents and godchild, but also between the godchild's parent who will be called *compadre* (co-parent).

Since the early 1970s the *fiesta* complex in Amatango has changed in two important ways. First, the number of annual celebrations has been reduced from eight to four and the number of ritual sponsorship positions from 32 to 20, eliminating the low level positions such as bell ringers. Secondly, whereas previously each cargo for a particular fiesta had a variable cost to the individual, now the expenses for a particular saint's celebration are shared equally by its ritual sponsors. This reduction in the number of fiestas is happening throughout Mexican peasant villages. In the case of Amatango this is related to several factors. In 1992, Amatango became the center for a new Catholic parish serving the Indian speaking communities in the mountains and as such has had a parish priest residing there since then. He has decided to concentrate on the fiestas which are least "Indian" and more connected to ritual recognized by the Catholic church. Also, during the period since my first

eldwork there has a significant increase in households practicing religions other than Catholicism. In 1994, there were about 100 households practicing either protestantism or some form of spiritualist religion. Finally, with more adult men working outside the village and becoming dependent on wage labor, it has become more difficult to recruit men to take their ritual responsibilities.

. Unlike other peasant areas of the world such as rural India or Africa where distinct class formations are completely embedded in the local social order, Matango's rich and poor share a common ideology and lifestyle. Men from the wealthier did not form any permanent landlord-tenant relations with poorer village members. Not only did they all work in the typical round of agrarian tasks but they made an attempt to avoid giving the appearance through dramatically different clothing or house styles of being a class apart from poorer neighbors. However, during my research in the 1970s I showed that men from wealthier families had a significantly higher chance of being selected to the highest political posts.

. It should be noted that since the 1950s there has been a gradual growth in the number of protestant families in the community. In 1994 at least 70 families were non-catholic and did not participate in the *fiesta* system.

. A special honor is bestowed each year to several men over 50 who will guide sacred processions dressed as particular saints.

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<http://www.worldbank.org/wdr/2000/fullreport.html>

TABLE 4  
Household composition of the aged in seven countries (%)

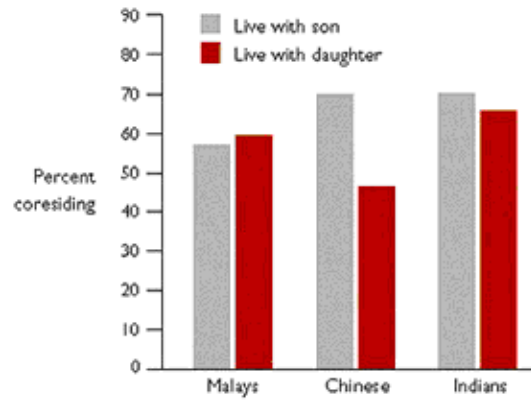
Households	Singapore		S. Korea Brazil		Thailand	Zimbabwe	Egypt India	
Single	1.7		7.3		25.8	3.6	5.3	9.1 3.0
Conjugal <sup>a</sup>	2.3		11.3		19.0	8.1	2.7	13.2 1.0
Nuclear <sup>b</sup>	36.3	24.8		28.8	17.8	9.7	42.9	10.0
Multi-generational <sup>c</sup>	56.3	53.6		16.3	67.6	75.7	30.8	85.1
2 generation	[12.0]	[3.3]	[1.4]		[4.5]	[5.0]	[4.1]	[8.7]
3-4 generation	[43.3]	[46.0]		[14.2]	[50.2]	[35.0]		[24.0] [73.7]
Skip generation	[1.0]	[4.3]		[0.7]	[12.9]	[35.7]		[2.7] [2.7]
Other	3.3	3.0		10.2	2.9	6.7	4.1	1.0
	n=300	n=302		n=295	n=309	n=300		n=296 n=300

Source: adapted from Hashimoto, 1991, p. 364

<sup>a</sup> Elderly couple only.

<sup>b</sup> Elderly parent(s) and unmarried child(ren).

<sup>c</sup> The Multi-Generational category is the total of 2 Generation, 3-4 Generation and Skip Generation households. It includes married children and/or grandchildren along with the elderly parent(s).



**Figure 0.** Proportion of seniors in Malaysia coresiding with a son or daughter, by ethnicity.  
*Source:* Chan and Davanzo, 1994