Ageing in the Global South: A case study on life in old age from Nepal

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REFERENCES

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AUTHOR’S NOTE

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Worldwide, 703 million people are aged 65 years or older, with two thirds of the older population residing in the Global South. In many countries this demographic transformation occurs alongside increasing migration, therefore leaving behind a growing number of older people in regions of outmigration. The emigration of younger generations not only affects the composition of different age groups but also fundamentally changes the local social and economic context, creating new challenges for older people who are left behind. Hence, this paper-based thesis explores how the current living conditions of older people in five rural Nepali villages in the middle hills of western Nepal are shaped by rapid demographic and socio-economic change. One particular concern is to show the way in which living conditions are changing for older people and how they experience, perceive and assess these changes. Due to its combination of rapid demographic change in conjunction with continuous mass emigration, Nepal presents an ideal setting to study the challenges older people, their families, society at large and policymakers face when dealing with an ageing population.
Part I of the thesis provides the frame and research design. It outlines the applied conceptual approaches: a critical livelihood perspective providing a lens to capture real life problems and to focus on what is actually important for the people concerned; the concept of the family as a social institution and the intergenerational contract. A triangulation of qualitative methods was applied for data collection, including 71 problem-centred interviews with older villagers, 18 expert interviews, participant observation and six visits to social institutions caring for the elderly. Part I closes with a synthesis, concluding that the current generation of older people are undergoing a transitional and uncertain period where familial support and care are declining while the Nepalese state is ill-prepared to mitigate the issues resulting from an ageing population. The challenges reported by older villagers centre primarily on social, financial and health issues and present significant challenges to their families, society at large and policymakers. Part II of the thesis consists of four peer-reviewed research articles. The first article assesses older people’s current situation and the everyday social and economic challenges they face in five mountain villages in the context of outmigration. The second article discusses the implications of combined outmigration and demographic change for the family composition, while particularly reviewing the changing roles, responsibilities and status of the elderly within the family. The third article examines the role of organisations and institutions which have recently emerged in urban areas and which are concerned about providing older people with support. The fourth article looks at the social security allowance in Nepal and the difficulties older people experience when attempting to access financial security services.

This doctoral thesis makes a timely contribution to the nascent discipline of geographical gerontology and contributes to an under-researched topic relevant to the mountain regions of the Global South and draws attention to a social group that has frequently been overlooked in both development and migration research.

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Keywords: family change, rural Nepal, outmigration, older people, ageing population, social security

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