Living Arrangements of the Elderly in Fiji

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the patterns and factors influencing the living arrangements of the elderly in Fiji. Very few studies have been undertaken on ageing and living arrangements of the elderly in Fiji and in the South Pacific. This study is expected to contribute to literature on ageing in the South Pacific and encourage further research in this area. Given the reduction in retirement age to 55 years in Fiji, a large number of the elderly was, as a result, relegated to below the poverty threshold. The situation is, therefore most likely to influence the living arrangements of elderly.

The study employed a multi-stage sampling procedure in urban areas to produce a sample of 411 while in rural areas a purposive selection of villages and settlements was made producing a sample 404 respondents. The respondents were aged 55 years and over. First, a bivariate analysis was used to establish the relationship between the socio-economic variables and living arrangements before a multinomial logistic regression model was employed to predict the extent of the contribution of selected socioeconomic variables on choice of living arrangements. A questionnaire was employed to elicit required data. The variables that were used in the study include: age, sex, current residence, ethnicity, marital status, education level, income level, number of children, decision making power and health.

Ethnicity and marital status are the two factors with the most influence on living arrangements of the elderly in Fiji. For instance, Indo-Fijians are most likely to live alone compared to Ethnic Fijians. Co-residence is common especially in the urban areas where cost of living is high. Married elderly mostly co-reside with their children whereas ever-married including singles are most likely to live alone. In general co-residence is still common among the majority of the elderly given their declined financial status on one hand and children dependent on their elderly parents on the other. The majority of the elderly in Fiji are not self-sufficient to provide accommodation and economic support for themselves in old age. Economic hardship is the main cause of cohabitation.

The family will continue to be the main unit looking after the elderly in Fiji and institutional care will continue to be provided by the charitable organizations.