

Executive Summary

The ageing population is a global trend. According to the Census and Statistics Department's recent estimate¹ of Hong Kong's population, the proportion aged 65 or above is projected to rise markedly, from 13% in 2011 to 30% in 2041. This means a gradual change from one elder for every three persons in the population, to almost one for every seven.

The rise in the median population age may also reflect this trend. It is estimated that the median age in Hong Kong will rise from 41.7 in 2011 to 49.9 in 2041. This shows that the trend towards an ageing population is expected to continue.

Until the end of 2014, the population aged 65 or above in Hong Kong was about 1.09 million, or about 15% of the total. According to Florian Coulmas' definition of the "Aged Society", if the population aged 65 or above exceeds 14%, the society can be said to be an "Aged Society". Hence, this description seems to fit Hong Kong.

On the other hand, the life expectancy of the Hong Kong population is expected to continue to increase. According to population projections, the life expectancy of men and women in 2041 will be 84.4 and 90.8 respectively, while the family structure will continue to shrink. The mean household size in 2041 is expected to drop to 2.7. The role of family in providing medical and other care services to the elderly will face challenges accordingly.

The issue of the ageing population is not solely about the elderly themselves. The trend has a long-term influence in terms of the personal, family and social perspectives. The younger generations, in particular, will face heavier social and economic burdens as a result. How will they face the challenges brought about by the ageing population? How will they bear the responsibilities of taking care of the elderly? And how can they prepare for becoming elderly themselves?

This study is based on poll interviews with young people across Hong Kong, as well as focus groups with both young and elderly people. It aims

at an in-depth understanding of the above questions, ultimately leading to enhanced care for the elderly population and proposals for change based on the responses of today's young people. As well as this, experts and scholars in this area were also interviewed to analyse the challenges and opportunities facing the ageing society.

Based on this analysis, this report provides suggestions about three aspects of the ageing society, namely increasing economic incentives to alleviate the pressure of taking care of the elderly; improving services and facilities to enhance community and residential care services for the elderly and promoting harmony between young and old to consolidate the virtue of respect for elders.

Key Figures of the Survey

1. Young respondents think that they do respect the elderly.

A total of 529 young people aged 15-29 were successfully polled via a territory-wide random sampling telephone survey. The respondents thought that they respected elderly people. On a scale of 0-10, with 10 the highest, the average score for the statement "I respect the elderly" was 7.57. The statement "Hong Kong citizens value the virtue of respect for the elderly" received a slightly lower average score of 6.06.

2. Young respondents are willing to take responsibility for caring for their own parents, but have little confidence that the next generation will take care of them.

These young respondents were, to a large extent, willing to take care of their own parents, with the average score for this item being 8.31. They were also confident, to a degree, that they had the ability to support their parents, with a slightly lower average score of 7.14. However, respondents had less confidence that the next generation would provide and care for them, with this item receiving an average score of 5.26, barely more than half.

Meanwhile, around 70% (68.4%) of respondents said that they would choose “Home Care Services” to take care of their parents. This shows that these young respondents are willing to take responsibility for caring for their parents and they would prefer them to be looked after at home.

3. Young respondents think that the notion of the “Aged Society” is closely related to their lives in all aspects, and do not consider the elderly to be a burden on society.

Respondents thought that the idea of the “Aged Society” was closely related to all aspects of their lives, with an average score for this item of 6.81. Although the interviewees agreed that the burden on young people to provide for the elderly would increase (average score 6.66), they thought that society should allocate more resources to older people (average score 7.24). Furthermore, they did not consider the elderly a social burden (average score 4.51). These results indicate that young people in Hong Kong are feeling the pressure of providing for the elderly, but do not regard them as a burden on society.

4. Young respondents are worried about their future lives, mainly in terms of finances, health and care.

Just under one-third (30.6%) of the interviewees expressed worries about their future lives as elder people, slightly higher than the proportion of those who said they had no worries (27.3%). For the former group, their main concerns were financial difficulties (66.9%), health problems (54.1%) and having no-one to take care of them (38.2%). As a better preparation for old age, the interviewees believed the most important thing would be savings (56.1%), investments and financial management (48.5%) and maintaining good health (40.7%).

5. Young respondents believe the family should bear the main responsibility for taking care of the elderly. If the government implements a Universal Retirement Protection Scheme, they are willing to pay a contribution.

Over half (52.2%) the young respondents believed that family should take the greatest share of the responsibility for taking care of the elderly. For those who believed old people themselves or the government should take the lead, the corresponding figures were 19.0% and 20.5%, respectively.

When asked a hypothetical question about the introduction of a Universal Retirement Protection Scheme by the government, 58.3% of the interviewees said they would pay the contribution. Of those respondents, most would like to contribute 1-15% of their monthly income. Furthermore, 23.5% were willing to bear 5%; and 21.1% would contribute 10%. However, 18% of interviewees were not willing to pay any contribution.

Key Findings

This report is based on the results of the poll interviews, focus groups (young and older people) and interviews with experts and scholars. Five main observations can be summarised as follows.

- 1. Hong Kong has entered the stage of being an “Aged Society”.**
According to Florian Coulmas’ definition, when the population of those aged 65 or above exceeds 14%, the society is an “Aged Society”¹. According to data from the Census and Statistics Department², at the end of 2014, the Hong Kong population aged 65 or above was around 1.09 million, or 15% of the total. Within the above definition, therefore, Hong Kong has already become an “Aged Society”.

The findings indicated that young people in Hong Kong have recognised the existence of an “Aged Society”, which is closely linked to youth on an individual level. Furthermore, the

¹ According to Coulmas, there are three different types of society based on the proportion of elderly as follows: (1) Ageing Society: 7-14% of the population is 65 or older; (2) Aged Society: 14-21% of the population is 65 years or older and (3) Hyper-aged Society: 21% or more of the population is 65 or older.

² HKSAR Census and Statistics Department: *Hong Kong Population Projections 2012-2041*

respondents find themselves having more contact with the elderly in different aspects of society. When facing the problems and phenomena arising from the ageing of society, whether or not young people can shift from being passive to active and embrace the challenges as opportunities depends greatly on whether their generation can transform its attitude, knowledge and actions.

2. **Younger people are living within a generation gap.** The study shows that young people in Hong Kong are willing to take responsibility for caring for their parents with confidence. However, they have less confidence that the next generation will take care of them. This suggests a gap situation where today's young people have to worry not only about providing for the previous generation, but also their own old age.

Hong Kong's young people are willing to take up their responsibilities and agree that they ought to do so, but they are not optimistic about their career prospects. They do not expect to earn high salaries and fear that it will be difficult for them to provide for their parents financially, leading to a struggle between their wishes and abilities. On the other hand, the perceptions of the young respondents towards marriage and children have changed. The traditional value of providing for the elderly while the younger generation supports its parents are gradually being questioned by young people. If society can provide more economic incentives, it is suggested that young people's sense of obligation to support their parents could be consolidated, while relieving the financial pressure of doing so.

3. **People should be doing some preparation for their own old age.** The findings show that having no money, poor health and nobody to take care of them are the main concerns of young people about their later lives. In the meantime, they have to face their worries squarely and make suitable preparations such as having a steady and safe financial management plan, cultivating a healthy lifestyle and expanding their social circles. They should also equip themselves with diligence to improve their personal competitiveness so as to make better preparations for later life.

Meanwhile, as young people cannot rely on their own children to provide for them, all they can do is save more for their future. The problem, however, is their low wages. How can they build up savings if they also have to provide for their own parents? Hence, retirement protection becomes essential. This study shows that if the government implements a Universal Retirement Protection scheme, most of the interviewees will be willing to contribute. Nonetheless, many working young people in the focus group expressed diverse views about the scheme, demonstrating the wide range of standpoints in society towards its establishment. Society faces a challenge in how to find consensus and how to improve the proposed scheme.

4. **In the meantime, young people are willing to support the “Aged Society”, but they are also worried.** The results show that the pressure on young people is increasing in the light of the ageing population, even though they do not feel the elderly are a burden on society. Conversely, they agree that society should allocate more resources to the elderly. This shows the support of Hong Kong young people for the “Aged Society”.

On the other hand, however, these young people feel under pressure. Their main concern is the misallocation of resources between the generations. If social resources were to become too skewed towards the elderly, investment in young people would be affected. This would, in turn, adversely affect the attitudes of young people towards the elderly. If this problem is not handled properly, it may intensify conflict between the generations and undermine social harmony and cohesion.

5. **The government has an irreplaceable role in society.** The findings of the study show that many interviewees believe the family should be responsible for taking care of the elderly, but also that old people themselves and the government should also have a role. Some who support the concept of “Home Care” believe that if extra support services are provided to families, this will help implement the idea of caring for the elderly at home. If elders’

health deteriorates, and home services can no longer provide the necessary specialist care, they would be allocated to suitable residential facilities.

Services to support ageing in place are currently inadequate and the market far from mature. The government needs to face the problems of shortage and mismatch as well as supervision. The subsidized community and residential care services provided by the government still have room for improvement. Indeed, the government has a significant responsibility in this matter.

Recommendations

Based on the results and analysis set out above, this study gives rise to suggestions in terms of the following three aspects: (1) Enhancing economic incentives to alleviate the pressure of providing for the elderly; (2) Improving service facilities to promote “ageing in place as the core, institutional care as back-up”; and (3) Promoting harmony between young and old to enhance education and consolidate the virtue of respect for the elderly.

1. Enhancing economic incentives

(a) The government should raise tax allowances for providing for parents and grandparents.

The government currently offers a tax allowance for those providing for their parents and grandparents. To further encourage such support, it is suggested that the government should raise the amount of this allowance.

(b) The government should allocate more resources to improve education and training opportunities for young people to enhance their competitiveness.

The government should provide more and more diverse choices and opportunities for young people to improve their

competitiveness in the job market. They should also provide resources to improve education and training opportunities so as to cultivate a more dynamic and prospective work environment, such as providing more promotion opportunities and training in the field of medical care.

2. Improving service facilities

(a) Different policymaking authorities should take account of the elderly population when developing their policies.

The issues faced by the elderly engage with many different aspects of policy, such as welfare, medical care, housing and education. Different policymaking bodies, while planning and designing their policies, should account for the problems of ageing. They should also conduct assessments and research on the elderly so as to provide services suitable for their use.

(b) Social facilities for the elderly, such as Elderly Canteens, should be constructed along with spaces to enhance harmony between young and old (such as the Greeneries Rest Area and Benches).

The mobile elderly can access Elderly Community Canteens for meals. Meanwhile, provision of enough Greeneries Rest Area and Benches can help enhance interactions between young people and elderly in the community.

(c) There should be service quotas for community care services to reduce waiting times.

The relevant authorities should gradually increase the quotas for Comprehensive Household Care Services, Improvement of Community and Residential Care Services so as to reduce waiting times.

(d) The supply of elderly hostels should be increased and their supervision strengthened.

There is an acute shortage of subsidized elderly hostel quotas, with demand exceeding supply. Some private elderly hostels do not provide uniform services. The government should continue to look for suitable sites on which to build more elderly hostels and consider tightening the licensing system as well as enhancing supervision.

- (e) Welfare should be provided to encourage and support social enterprises that will help provide daily necessities to the elderly.**

The government should consider providing benefits to encourage and support social enterprises that will help to provide daily necessities so as to alleviate the impact of the ageing population.

3. Promoting harmony between young and old

- (a) A Grandparent's Day should be established** to recognize the contributions older people have made to society and promote the concept of respecting the elderly.
- (b) Youngsters Love Homes should be promoted** so as to encourage young people to love and care for the elderly, starting with those living at home.
- (c) Young people should be encouraged to show support for elderly people living alone or with their spouse only.** For example, they could have more contact with those so-called hidden elderly, to foster a community-wide sense of caring for older people across the board.
- (d) Young people should also be encouraged to become friends with older people** by sharing new trends and new developments in society with them.