

# **Cross-national differences in living arrangements among older adults in Southeast Asia**

**Jeofrey B. Abalos**

## **Background**

The proportion of older people in Asia is increasing. Concomitant with this population aging are rapid changes in demographic, economic and social landscape that are known to impinge on the family and household. This paper attempts to shed light on how these various changes impact on the family and household by examining the living arrangements of older persons in five Southeast Asian countries: Cambodia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. These countries are very diverse in terms of culture and tradition; level of economic development; stage in the demographic transition, and pace of population aging. This study aims to: 1) compare the trends and patterns of living arrangements of the older persons in Southeast Asia to see if there are significant similarities and differences that transcend the diversity of this region; and 2) examine the factors affecting their living arrangements.

Living arrangement is a good indicator of family support to the older persons because with whom the older persons live reflects the residential dimension of their family life and is an important social context of their day to day lives. For most of the countries covered in the study, the family takes a major role of providing economic, social and physical support. It is interesting to investigate whether this family support has remained resilient over time or it has disintegrated as a result of these rapid changes. Moreover, examining the factors influencing the living arrangements of the older persons can help policy makers in addressing the demands for formal and informal support systems.

## **Data and variables**

We use census data for Cambodia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam from 1970 to 2009, provided by the Minnesota Population Center, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS). We defined older persons as those ages 60 years and over. Living arrangement was categorised into: (1) one person household; (2) nuclear household; (3) extended household; and (4) other household classification. Nuclear household includes single-parent family and household with married or co-habiting couple, with or without children while extended household includes both family and non-family members of the household. Other household classification includes non-family households, those living in group quarters and household that cannot be classified. We will focus on the proportion living in an extended household and present

its differentials across age groups, level of education, marital status, employment status and place of residence. Given the gender differences in living arrangements of older persons separate analyses are conducted for men and women.

### **Preliminary results**

Table 1 shows that there is higher proportion of older women than men who live alone. The gender gap is more pronounced in Malaysia and Vietnam. In 2000 about 4 percent of Malaysian men live alone compared to 9 percent among the women. The comparable figures for Vietnam in 1999 are 3 percent for the men and 8 percent for the women. For both men and women, there is an increasing trend of solitary living, except in Malaysia. Although one-person household among older persons in Malaysia has been declining over time, the proportion living in this type of household is still one of the highest in the region, especially among the women.

Extended household remains the predominant type of living arrangement of older persons in these five Southeast Asian countries, although the proportions living in this type of household have been declining over time, especially in Malaysia where the decline has been sharp. Moreover, the decline in the extended households in the region has been accompanied by a steady increase of older persons living in nuclear household in most countries. Notable gender differentials in the proportion living in extended and nuclear household are also observed. More women than men live in extended households while more of the latter than the former live in nuclear household.

Table 2 shows that living in an extended household increases with age and is more common among the formerly married and the unemployed. The table further shows that education exhibits a mixed pattern in the propensity of men and women to live in an extended household. In the Philippines, the proportion of men and women residing in an extended household increases with advancing education. In contrast increasing education corresponds with declining proportion of living in an extended household among men and women in Thailand and Vietnam. Finally, the proportion of men and women living in an extended household is higher in urban than rural areas, except in Vietnam where the reverse is found.

## **Summary**

Living in an extended household remains the most predominant type of living arrangement among older persons in Southeast Asia, although the trend has been declining over time. In contrast, the proportion living in a one-person and nuclear household has been on the rise in these Southeast Asian countries. Gender differences also persist in the choice of living arrangements among older persons in the region. More women than men live in a one-person and extended household while more of the latter than the former reside in a nuclear household. Finally the proportion living in an extended household differs by age, marital status, level of education and place of residence.

**TABLE 1 - Living arrangement of older persons in Southeast Asian countries**

Country and year	Men					Women				
	One-person HH	Nuclear HH	Extended HH	Other type	Total	One-person HH	Nuclear HH	Extended HH	Other type	Total
<b>Cambodia</b>										
1998	1.5	40.0	55.2	3.3	100	4.4	17.9	76.0	1.8	100
2009	2.0	42.6	53.1	2.2	100	5.8	21.8	71.0	1.4	100
<b>Malaysia</b>										
1970	10.2	47.6	34.1	8.1	100	13.0	23.7	58.9	4.3	100
1980	5.6	33.5	53.7	7.2	100	9.4	14.8	72.2	3.6	100
1991	4.9	39.5	52.7	3.0	100	9.0	20.2	68.1	2.7	100
2000	4.4	49.3	44.3	2.0	100	9.2	28.4	60.5	2.0	100
<b>Philippines</b>										
1990	3.2	44.5	51.6	0.7	100	5.6	28.7	64.8	0.9	100
2000	4.6	46.0	48.3	1.2	100	6.6	32.7	59.2	1.5	100
<b>Thailand</b>										
1970	2.3	31.6	61.6	4.5	100	4.8	16.2	76.9	2.2	100
1980	2.8	32.6	60.5	4.0	100	5.4	18.5	74.5	1.7	100
1990	3.0	36.9	55.7	4.4	100	5.1	23.7	69.8	1.4	100
2000	4.7	39.5	52.3	3.4	100	6.9	27.2	64.8	1.1	100
<b>Vietnam</b>										
1989	3.6	46.0	48.9	1.5	100	10.7	26.3	61.4	1.5	100
1999	2.7	43.1	9.7	44.5	100	7.9	25.3	21.2	45.6	100
2009	4.5	47.7	16.6	31.2	100	12.9	28.3	27.1	31.8	100

**TABLE 2 - Percentage of older persons living in an extended household by demographic and socio-economic characteristics, Southeast Asian countries**

<b>Men</b>	Philippines (2000)	Cambodia (1998)	Malaysia (2000)	Thailand (2000)	Vietnam (1999)
<b>Age</b>					
60 to 64	44.0	44.9	38.2	49.0	5.7
65 to 69	47.8	53.7	45.3	51.3	6.7
70 to 74	50.6	61.6	48.0	54.0	10.3
75 to 79	52.6	68.3	50.9	56.3	16.2
80+	57.4	73.2	55.4	61.6	23.0
<b>Marital status</b>					
Never married	70.0	51.9	51.1	54.1	3.5
Currently married	45.0	51.6	42.1	51.4	7.4
Formerly married	59.0	74.9	58.9	63.0	23.3
<b>Educational attainment</b>					
Less than primary completed	45.2	55.6	46.6	53.6	11.3
Primary completed	48.3	53.3	37.3	47.5	7.4
Secondary completed	51.3	58.1	43.7	42.9	5.2
University completed	55.8	50.9	30.8	42.5	4.6
<b>Employment status</b>					
Employed	45.5	45.8	37.6	49.2	4.4
Unemployed	58.0	77.0	49.3	56.1	12.5
<b>Place of residence</b>					
Rural	N/A	54.4	42.0	52.5	10.9
Urban	N/A	60.6	45.9	51.9	5.6
<b>Women</b>					
<b>Age</b>					
60 to 64	53.5	68.0	52.7	58.5	9.1
65 to 69	57.9	74.8	59.5	63.3	15.1
70 to 74	61.1	80.4	64.2	66.8	24.9
75 to 79	64.8	84.9	69.2	71.2	33.1
80+	70.4	89.7	73.6	78.4	39.6
<b>Marital status</b>					
Never married	78.4	85.5	61.5	70.5	6.5
Currently married	48.6	67.6	50.8	57.1	9.9
Formerly married	67.9	82.1	70.5	72.9	30.6
<b>Educational attainment</b>					
Less than primary completed	56.8	76.0	61.5	64.9	22.1
Primary completed	59.2	71.4	51.4	62.9	10.6
Secondary completed	61.1	80.6	45.9	55.3	7.3
University completed	63.6	93.3	36.3	57.6	6.8
<b>Employment status</b>					
Employed	59.5	61.9	45.4	57.7	8.8
Unemployed	59.1	86.1	62.0	69.1	24.1
<b>Place of residence</b>					
Rural	N/A	75.0	55.5	64.2	23.2
Urban	N/A	81.8	63.9	66.2	13.6