

International Journal on Ageing in Developing Countries

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International Journal on Ageing in Developing Countries

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Editorial

Marvin Formosa¹

In November 1990, the first Issue of BOLD, the in-house periodical of the International Institute on Ageing, United Nations - Malta, was published. It was a modest publication, with four to five short articles from practitioners and academics working in the field of ageing in developing countries. BOLD was published uninterruptedly until November 2014, during which years it also published short reports on training programmes held in Malta and in developing countries, brief book reviews, and The International Institute on Ageing, United Nations - Malta, international calendar. Under the editorial guidance of Gillian Tipping (1990-1991), Joanne Valentino (1992), Victor Griffiths (1992 – 2012), and subsequently, Laurence Grech (2012 – 2014), BOLD accomplished the aim and objectives that one expected of a news quarterly prior to the coming of the Web 2.0 revolution. In recent months, a decision was taken to cease this publication as its goal and purposes were taken on in a more efficient and cost-effective manner by online strategies - namely, the Institute's overhauled and interactive website, across-the-board electronic postings, and online social network services. A broad consensus exists in both academic and advocacy fora that newsletter agendas are nowadays better served through the Internet Protocol Suite to which most computers and smart phones are now connected to.

Since its establishment in 1987, the International Institute on Ageing, United Nations - Malta, has gone a long way in fulfilling its mandate - namely, to train personnel from developing countries who are working or who intend to work in the field of ageing or with older persons; provide advocacy to developing countries in matters concerning capacity building; and act as a practical bridge between developed and developing countries in the area of information exchange in the field of ageing. Indeed, the past quarter of a century has seen the Institute acquiring unique experience and expertise in organising training programmes in various areas of policy development, services and practices all over the world. Up to 30 June 2016, the Institute has trained 2,189 participants from some 150 countries in its regular international short and long-term training programmes held in Malta. Since 1995, the Institute has also carried out 102 *in-situ* training programmes in 28 different countries - thus training more than 3,200 various professionals in the field of ageing. In China alone, the International Institute on Ageing has collaborated with various government and non-government organisations to train more than 600 candidates.

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Now, in 2016, the International Institute on Ageing (United Nations - Malta) is launching a peer-reviewed journal under the title of *International Journal on Ageing in Developing Countries* which, partly evolving from BOLD, will - nevertheless - be governed by new ethos. Ethos, which will strengthen the Institute's information exchange directive. Why launch a new journal in this field? There are other journals concerned with ageing, older persons, and later life, which sometimes publish articles focusing on gerontological and geriatric concerns in developing countries. However, INIA does not believe that the presence of these journals have filled the gap when it comes to our knowledge on human capacity building in low-income countries and other nations with economies-in-transition. It is evident that a journal that combines the unique critical blend of research, scholarship, policy, and practice concerning developing countries - something to which the *International Journal on Ageing in Developing Countries* clearly aspires to - is in rare supply. Nor do available journals focus on the emergent inter- and multi-disciplinary issues, as well as evidence-based practices, in the field of ageing in far-afield developing countries that, generally, remain flying under the radar.

Of course, it would be highly presumptuous of INIA to consider that the *International Journal on Ageing in Developing Countries* is taking the study of ageing in completely uncontested territories, or that it is somewhat akin as to re-inventing some academic wheel. The scope of this international journal is, in a nutshell, to take the current state of affairs a step forward, to bring closer to the surface that interface between ageing and development, and in doing so, document the work of professionals toiling in subaltern geographical avenues who rarely find cost-effective opportunities to learn from each other's studies through an unrestricted dissemination of information. It is hoped that the journal will be essential reading for those engaged in research and scholarship related to ageing in developing countries, for trainers of those who work with older people in difficult socio-economic circumstances in 'peripheral' geographical zones, for managers or users of services in community- and long-term care facilities that operate in absence of those norms and taken-for-granted assumptions so prevalent in high-income countries, and for those working in older people's movements which deal with advocacy issues and human rights of older persons.

Any publication will ultimately be judged by the quality, clarity and relevance of what it contains, and the *International Journal on Ageing in Developing Countries* must also stand this test in the coming years. The editors hope and intend that the journal will foster new approaches to research, theory, and practice, and their application to ageing, later life, and older persons in developing countries. Whilst acknowledging the fact that research in gerontology and geriatrics does not have any fixed and well-defined borders, researchers are urged to pay great attention to theory, since this is such a crucial component to the process of creating cumulative knowledge - that is, the construction of explicit explanations in accounting for empirical findings. Contrary to what many journals on ageing studies may seem to assume, theory is not a marginal, meaningless 'tacked-on' exercises, which accompany empirical results. Rather, cumulative theory-building represents the core of the foundation of scientific inquiry and knowledge.

In terms of methodological strategies, the *International Journal on Ageing in Developing Countries* encourages mixed methods research. Mixed methods can refer to using unlike epistemological beliefs, different methods of data collection, and different forms of data analysis. It is necessary to integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches because gerontological and geriatric research deals with multi- and inter-disciplinary structures. Phenomena under focus are always best described in terms of highly complex, multifaceted, and diverse processes of social constitution or construction, in which no simple causality is present, and which build on the principle of continuous change. Therefore, middle-range theories, as opposed to 'grand' theorising, will be especially appropriate. Space will also be given to practice-based research, especially the study of models of best practice. Alongside person-based approaches, and those based on the history of ideas, hermeneutic approaches drawing from the tradition of the humanities are also eagerly anticipated.

Issue 1 of the *International Journal on Ageing in Developing Countries* contains five original entries and two book reviews - namely, the most recent International Institute on Ageing's (United Nations - Malta) publication *Ageing and Later Life in Malta: Issues, Policies and Future Trends* (Formosa, 2015) reviewed by Suhana Bhatia and *An Insight into Dementia Care in India* (Emmatty, 2009) reviewed by Jacqueline Parkes.

The first contribution, by Rachel Bennett and Asghar Zaidi, is titled 'Ageing and development: Putting gender back on the agenda'. This article highlights the potential of global population ageing as a vehicle for socio-economic development and demonstrates the value of taking a gendered approach to ageing and development. With the use of country level data on gender equality, education, health and life expectancy in later life, Bennett and Zaidi's analysis shows that older women in low-income countries face disproportionate disadvantages relative to both their male counterparts in low-income countries and female counterparts in high-income countries. Bennett and Zaidi conclude that the new, broader, post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals provide unparalleled opportunities to place gender back on the emerging ageing and development agenda, support both older men and women to realise their potential and in the process maximize opportunities for prosperity and wellbeing for all.

The second contribution, by Alexandre Sidorenko, is titled 'Challenges and opportunities of population ageing in the CIS+ countries'. This article reviews the main characteristics of population ageing, its societal implications and possible policy responses in the twelve countries of the former Soviet Union. In spite of demographic, cultural, and economic diversity the countries under consideration share several common characteristics, such as joint political history, as well as the context and content of social policy. These characteristics are essential for understanding the specifics of the ongoing process of multifaceted transition, including demographic transition, in these countries. Sidorenko concludes that, as elsewhere in the world, population ageing in the ex-soviet states presents both challenges and opportunities, which should be carefully examined and taken into consideration while designing and implementing the measures of adjustment to population changes.

The third contribution, by Peng Du and Yongmei Wang, is titled 'Population ageing and the development of social care service systems for older persons in China'. The authors highlight how China's population ageing has the characteristics of having an enormous number of older persons with an accelerating ageing pace, a weakened traditional elder familial care capabilities and vast regional and rural-urban differences. The elder social care service system of 'families serving as the foundation, communities as the base and institutions as the supplementation', has initially formed in China but there remains various problems. Du and Wangmei conclude that the Chinese government is now making efforts on the reconstruction and consolidation of elder family care capabilities to support elder care capacities of the families through social services, the development of long-term care insurance system and relevant service systems, and narrowing the gap amongst various areas of service provision.

The fourth contribution, by Mohammed Taghi Sheykhi, is titled 'State of widowhood in Iran: Challenges of ageing spouses'. The article represents how ageing, widowhood, and loneliness are surging in Iran. Due to rise in longevity in Iran in recent years - 76 years for women and 72 years for men - Iranian women are very likely to lose their spouse than ever before, and become widows albeit under the lack of adequate infrastructures. For Taghi Sheykhi, shortages of social security and pensions in the third age make the remaining spouse very vulnerable which is sociologically worth studying. Similarly, their social links and relations are impaired under such circumstances. Taghi Sheykhi concludes how the loss of interactions within the ageing people become problematic and demoralizing. Many remaining spouses experience poverty in this stage of life and need planned supports and services.

The fifth contribution, by Ritu Sharma and Rupinder Kaur, is titled 'Elder abuse, depression, relationships, and attachment: Determinants of mental health in later life'. The purpose of this article is to explore the issue of elder abuse and depression among older persons in India. In addition, relationship and attachment with relevant others, and its effect on positive mental health of older persons were also examined. Data was collected from 200 older persons living either with their families or in care homes for older persons. Schedules of social support, socialization, depression and elder abuse were used. Immediate support system, relationship with relevant others, mental health and abuse were assessed, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The study revealed that depression was prevalent among both groups, with incidents of elder abuse least admitted by people living with their families.

All five articles, which come from a range of disciplinary backgrounds and use a variety of models and concepts, are prime examples of research and/or scholarship. I trust that you will find them intellectually stimulated and welcome additions to your library. On a final note, I can never overestimate how much I welcome critical comment on the policy and content of the journal, and how much I look forward to enlarging my own horizons through receiving manuscripts (which are peer-reviewed) from many new people, places and perspectives.

Marvin Formosa

Editor-in-Chief

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