

New Dynamics of Ageing Programme Research Project

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Ageing, poverty and neo-liberalism in urban South India

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Introduction

- In the context of limited welfare provision for the poor in developing countries, rapid rates of population ageing, urbanisation and growth of urban slums present substantial and challenging policy issues for developing countries.
- Yet the impacts on the older urban poor of social and economic transformation under the conditions of neo-liberal globalisation, privatisation and commodification of goods and services are little understood.
- Discriminating conceptualisations of need across generations inform public policy and its implementation. They also negatively impact on older people's capacity to secure the means to earn a livelihood, to retain control over their assets and incomes, to secure access to family and state resources and to have control over their lives.

Aim

The aim of this project is to examine the forces and processes shaping the capacity of the older urban poor in developing countries to be self-supporting and to access family, market-mediated and state resources to supply subsistence with a view to identifying policy and implementation measures with user groups.

Chennai, a South Indian city of over 4 million residents that is seen as a neo-liberal success story has been chosen as the subject of this study for two reasons: first, because India has the world's second largest population of older people in an emerging economy (following China) and, second, because the research team has extensive fieldwork experience in Chennai's low-income settlements that pre-dates the period when neo-liberal policies shaped development processes there.

Methods

The study is conceptualised as a set of three interlinked and co-terminous phases of research.

Phase I – Critical examination of discourses on the older people and inter-generational relations including legal and policy formulations and frameworks (culled from official and legal sources at international, national and local levels) and from the media in order to:

1. benchmark the rights of older citizens and the standards to measure policy and practice.
2. identify the alignment between rights, policy and policy implementation
3. identify changes in the national and local legal, social, cultural, political and economic contexts that have impacted on the urban poor
4. hypothesise how these changes could be impinging on the *older* urban poor
5. identify the potential impacts on older people of proposed urban renewal programmes.

Phase II – A randomised 800 household-survey to be conducted in 5 settlements from which a stratified sample of 200 households will be taken for in-depth interviews. Key informant interviews will be held with user groups. The following questions will guide collection and analysis of data:

1. What determines older people's capacity to secure their livelihoods?
2. What determines their capacity to control and benefit from their assets and income?
3. What determines their capacity to access family resources, including family labour?
4. What determines their capacity to access state resources – including services that have become privatised/commoditised?
5. To what extent are patterns of access determined by socio-economic location (including gender, caste, religion, housing tenure) and spatial location within the city?

Phase III – Participation in public hearings, workshops and conferences with key informants and user groups, including potential user groups, throughout the research in order to:

1. Mainstream age in social and economic policy through the creation of alliances with individuals, networks, organisations and institutions not currently utilising or sensitive to an 'age perspective'.
2. Identify the policies and implementation regimes that will improve the welfare and livelihood of the older urban poor locally.
3. Identify aspects of the project's findings which can be extrapolated for reference and use elsewhere in India, the South Asian region and other emerging economies.

The disciplines brought together include anthropology, economics, socio-legal studies, social policy and geography. Older people and user groups will be involved at all stages of the project.

