

Egypt

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Abstract. Egypt is the most populous country in the Middle East, where over the last few decades it has experienced a gradual increase in the absolute and relative numbers of older people. In 2050 Egypt is expected to have the largest number of old (23.7 million) and oldest old (3.1 million) populations in the region. an urgent need to invest this opportunity and ensure adopting a national action plan toward ageing. Despite the fact that Egypt is still without a national strategy or plan of action on ageing, this paper highlights how the governmental policy making bodies in Egypt, universities and the academic institutions as well as non-governmental organisations have long been acting to cope with population ageing. This however is not enough, ageing must be incorporated within social and economic strategies, policies and action. The national security system umbrella must be enlarged to cover a wider range of older population. The significant increase in life expectancy implies not only heightened demand for the existing services but also for new services and alternative approaches to meet the varied and specific needs of the older persons.

Keywords: *Egypt, older persons, policy, health care, geriatrics.*

Introduction

Egypt is the most populous country in the Middle East and the third most populous on the African continent (after Nigeria and Ethiopia). The population of Egypt represents 1.20% of the world's total population which arguably means that one person in every 84 people on the planet is a resident of Egypt. One of the main features of the Egyptian population over the last few decades is the gradual increase in the absolute and relative numbers of older people. This trend is expected to continue over the next decades. Egypt is expected to maintain the highest rank in absolute numbers in both old and oldest populations in the region. In 2050 Egypt is expected to have the largest number of old (23.7 million) and oldest old (3.1 million) populations in the region.

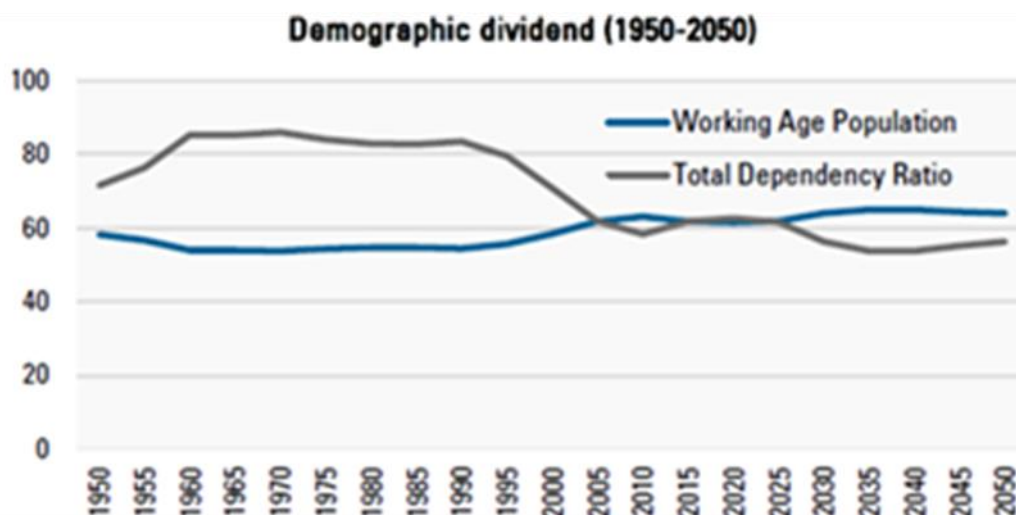
Currently Egypt is classified as one of moderately ageing countries according to the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) classification and preparing for demographic transitions towards ageing populations have become a matter of urgency

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(United Nations, 2017). The Egyptian census is carried out every 10 years; the percentage of older people “defined as 60 years of age and more” was 4.4% in 1976, 5.75% in 1996, 6.27% in 2006 and 6.9% according to last census in 2017. The percentage is projected to be 11.5% in 2031 and it is expected to reach 20.8% in 2050. This means that, around 20 million Egyptians will be categorised as older persons by that time; this is a big number that resembles a full nation in some parts of the world. Two indices measure the rate of population ageing: the old-age dependency ratio and the ageing index. The old-age dependency ratio defined as the number of persons aged 65 years and above per 100 persons aged between 15 and 64, measures the capacity of a working economy to sustain non-working older persons. The ageing index, defined as the number of persons aged 65 years and above per 100 persons below the age of 15, measures the relative weight of dependent older persons relative to dependent children.

The 2017 census provides important information about the age structure and its changes during the intercensal period 2006-2017, especially with the noticeable increase in fertility levels during these years resulting in rising of overall dependency ratios from 54% in 2006 to 61% in 2017 and the old age dependency ratio represents about 8% of the overall dependency. While the ageing index represents about 20%, indicating that Egypt despite increased fertility rate and dependency ratio could be on the verge of the demographic opportunity and that its age structure can be further generating such a situation leading to the demographic dividend, defined as the increase in economic growth that tends to follow increases in the ratio of the working-age population - essentially the labour force, to dependents. Nations undergoing this population transition have the opportunity to capitalize on the demographic dividend if the right social, economic, and human capital policies are in place.



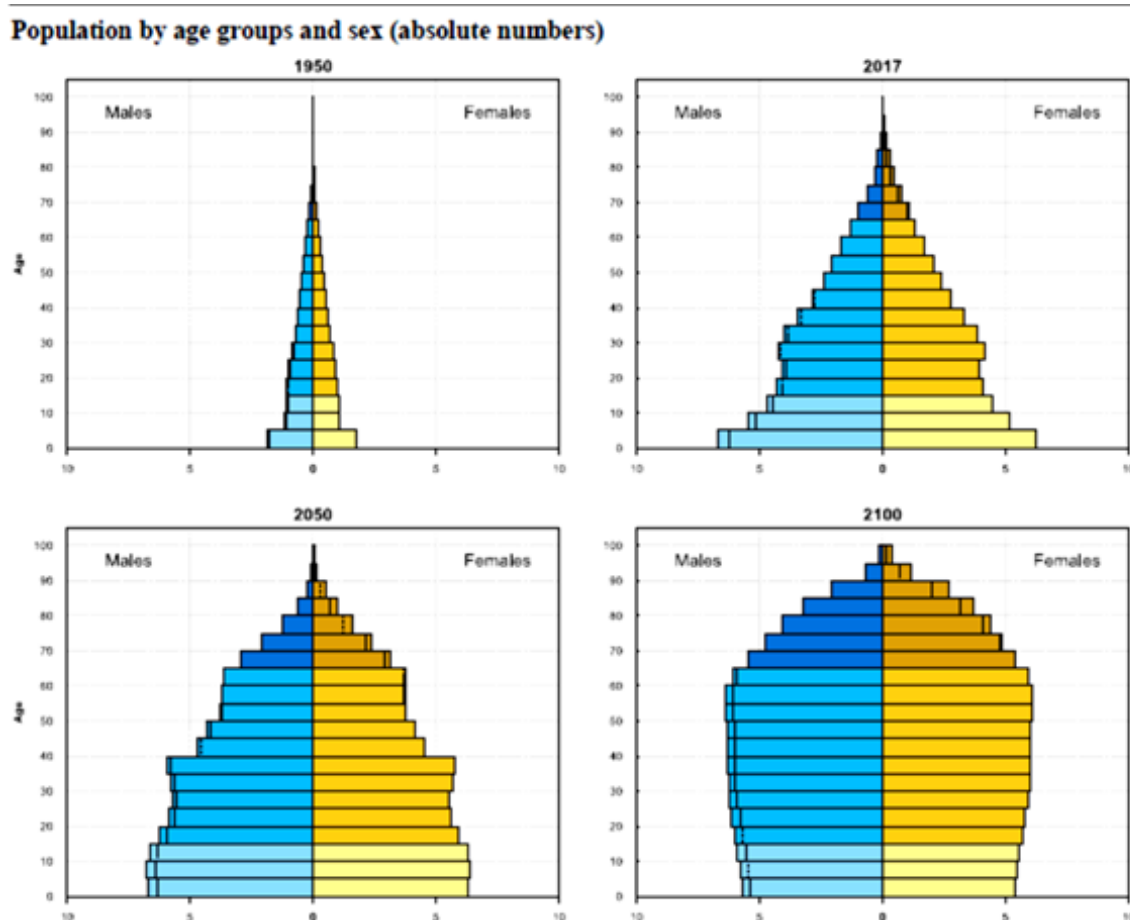
Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, (2017).

The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (2017) revealed that Egyptian female life expectancy at birth increased to 73.6 years, compared to 70.8 years for males, in 2017. Meanwhile, the average life expectancy of females in 2006 was 69.1 years, while for males was 66.5. In 2026 the expected life expectancy for males at birth will be 74.7 years and for older people at age 60 years will be 19.3 years. So the percent of increase in life expectancy for males at birth from 1986 to 2026 is 23.5% and for older people is 35%. Similarly, for females at birth the percent increase is 25 per cent and for older females 44%. The rate of population

ageing may also be modulated by migration. Immigration usually slows down population ageing, because immigrants tend to be younger and have more children. On the other hand, emigration of working-age adults accelerates population ageing.

Although the effects of migration on population ageing are usually stronger in smaller populations, because of higher relative weight (proportion) of migrants in such populations, still, the Egyptian aged population can be affected by migration. According to the International Organization for Migration, an estimated 2.7 million Egyptians live abroad and contribute actively to development of their country through remittances, circulation of human and social capital, as well as investment. Approximately 70% of Egyptian migrants live in Arab countries (923,600 in Saudi Arabia, 332,600 in Libya, 226,850 in Jordan, 190,550 in Kuwait with the rest elsewhere in the region) and the remaining 30% are living mostly in North America (318,000 in the United States, 110,000 in Canada) and Europe (90,000 in Italy). Still, this number may be much less than the actual number, if there is a defect in reporting to the embassy on arrival to a new country. In addition, there is the migration within the country from rural to urban areas, leaving older persons behind. This causes variation in the distribution of the aged population within the Egyptian governorates. According to the last Egyptian census, the absolute total number of older persons is greater in rural areas than urban ones, in spite of the fact that their percentage is more in urban (7.18%) than rural (5.6%).

Figure 4.2: Population Pyramid of Egypt; 1950-2100



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, (2017).

A distinctive feature of the older population throughout the world is the preponderance of women over men, the 'feminization' of population ageing (because of longer life expectancy among women). The greater improvement in female life expectancy than that for males will not only result in lower sex ratios for the older population as a whole, hence a predominance of females, but for the individual older females, greater longevity will very often result in loss of support from spouse, and greater economic deprivation.

Population ageing and policy response

Currently, Egypt is a youthful nation walking to ageing transition and there is an urgent need to invest this opportunity and ensure adopting a national action plan toward ageing. Although there are a lot of available services either governmental or non-governmental, Egypt is still without a national strategy or plan of action on ageing since the Public Strategy for Elderly Care in 2010. According to the Egyptian constitution, the government is obliged to provide services of medical and social security for the aged. Legislation, laws, resolutions and programmes on the protection and promotion of seniors' human rights were laid down for the social and medical security systems aiming to give older persons the maximum support they need. The policy making bodies in Egypt, mainly the Ministry of Health and Population, Ministry of Social Solidarity, the universities and the academic institutions have long been acting to cope with population ageing.

Social highlights

There are some privileges offered to older people by the government including; 25% discount for local transportation (50% for railways), 50% discount in the price of entry tickets for theatres, cinemas, clubs, and fairs, 10% discount in the price of air tickets for local/national flights and 5% for international flights, and 20% for internal tourism (trips).

Social insurance law

The law adjudicates disbursing security pensions - through the Social Insurance Fund for the governmental sector and the Insurance and Pensions Fund for the public and private sectors in the following cases: (ageing, disability and death- work injuries- illness- unemployment- social welfare for pension beneficiaries). On top of this pension beneficiaries' list includes older persons. Ministry of Social Solidarity plays a pivotal role in supporting the older population especially functionally dependent and assisted older persons; it offers a wide range of services and it is responsible for coordination between the various parties concerned with elder care. The Ministry of Social Solidarity also has laid down a number of laws and regulations over the past years supporting older persons. In 1990 the Ministry laid down the internal regulations of the geriatric clubs, in 1992 set a committee for celebrating with the international day for older persons, and in 1997 established the higher committee for geriatric care. Law 84/2002 on regulating the work of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private foundations, allowed older persons to participate in the management of some NGOs, run projects and utilizing their capabilities; it is worth noting here that most NGO's boards in Egypt consist of older persons.

Current Ministry of Social Solidarity care services for older persons

Geriatric homes

In 1980, the total number of geriatric homes in Egypt was 63, increasing to 94 in 1990, 103 in 2000, 161 in 2011 and currently there are 168 registered geriatric homes distributed over 22 governorates supervised by the Ministry of Social Solidarity. These homes provide medical, social and recreational services and full accommodation for about 6,000 elders who need either functional assistance (143 geriatric homes) or totally dependent (25 geriatric homes) regardless of their social or health status for fees, or free.

'Elderly' clubs

There are 194 clubs for older persons distributed all over Egyptian governorates offering social, recreational activities with about 70,000 older beneficiaries per year.

Home care services

The Ministry of Social Solidarity developed offices (most of them were attached to 'elderly' clubs) that provide home care services (as basic activities of daily living) for older persons especially those living alone. Currently there are 27 offices distributed all over the Egyptian governorates serving 40,000 older persons.

Physiotherapy units

Since 2011, 52 Physiotherapy units attached to the geriatric homes and clubs are offering rehabilitation for 50,000 older persons.

Care giver training programmes

Care giver training programmes in collaboration with NGOs have been offered to 300 trainees serving 900 older persons to date. The efforts are continuing to improve the current services and add other services and to optimize the use of resources in collaboration with NGOa, private sector and regional, and international organizations. As for the Egyptians themselves, the family has been and still is the main social institution, which offers support and services to the aged. According to a report from Cairo Demographic Center most older people (66.8%) live with sons and daughters and (13%) live with spouse. A small percentage (9.1%) of older people live with relatives other than mentioned above and the same percentage live alone due to different reasons. However, social changes e.g. rural-urban migration with older people left behind, Egyptian women increasingly being employed outside homes, changing in housing stock (nuclear instead of extended family) and decreasing family size with fewer people in the 'young generation' available to take care of larger numbers of people in the 'old generation', have created some demands for extra-familial services. All these factors caused changes in living arrangements resulting in an increasing number of older people living alone, especially females, raising the need for institutions for the aged.

Health Care Services

Population ageing is a great challenge for the health care systems. Although the health status of older people is improving over time now and the life expectancy is increasing, still, with ageing, the prevalence of disability, frailty, cancer, and chronic diseases (Alzheimer's disease, cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, etc.) is expected to increase, especially with the large growth in the oldest old group (+70 years old) that constitutes 31.73% of the Egyptian older persons and 2.5% of the Egyptian population. The older the person is, the more likely they are to face a compounding of multiple health, psychological and social problems that make accurate medical diagnosis and proper medical management difficult.

Older people have high risk for functional impairments with inability to perform ordinary activities of daily living (ADL) and activities related to household management, termed instrumental activities of daily living (IADL). Therefore, a country in which there are increases in the older population has to be prepared for the epidemiologic transition from infectious diseases of the young population to the chronic diseases of the old population. In such conditions health services and resources have to be directed to medical care as well as home and institutional care. Egypt has a diverse health system with numerous public and private healthcare providers. Egypt's healthcare sector is regulated and governed by the Ministry of Health and Population ('MoHP'). Various services for older persons are provided through governmental, private, and non- governmental sectors. The Egyptian Parliament has recently approved a new law covering health insurance. Law No 2/2018, is an update from a more populist system which had been in place since the 1960s. The law aims to protect the rights of less fortunate members of society including the older population. In addition to the general health services, whether governmental or private, available for the use by older persons, there are other special services for the older people that have developed in Egypt.

Since 2007, Egypt's Ministry of Health and Population has established 11 special geriatric care centres and departments to ensure the specific needs of older people are met. In 2015, The Project for the Development and Advancement of the Ministry of Health and Population Geriatric Health Care Centers has been launched in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) for evaluation of the present condition of all of the existing centres and departments and the results of the evaluation are now being used by decision-makers to develop a comprehensive plan for development of geriatric health centres and departments aimed at improving the quality of life for older people. The plan will address infrastructure, equipment and human resource needs. The Ministry of Health has also established Clinical Diagnostic Service to dementia patients (Memory clinic in hospitals) since January 2000. The service included assessment service, counselling and family support. Outside the Ministry of Health, academic units provide a very satisfactory unique model of care including;

Geriatrics and Gerontology Department - Ain Shams University

The Geriatrics and Gerontology Department at Faculty of Medicine, Ain Shams University, was established in 1982, as a day care unit providing services to older patients of the medical and psychiatry department. Then development and growth went on where an outpatient

clinic was established and the department was developed in 1994, and over time more services were developed in the department including geriatric intensive care unit in 2000, and an osteoporosis unit in 2002. Since its inception, the Department has sought to be a role model in the field of geriatric medicine. It offers diploma, master and doctorate degrees in geriatric medicine, in addition to a variety of training programmes targeting geriatric care team members.

In 2014 the new geriatric hospital was established with the collaboration of the university and the NGOs. The opening of the hospital was launched August 2018, aiming to be a unique centre of excellence in the Middle East offering specialized different levels of care (intensive care, acute care, day care) in addition to geriatric outpatient clinics (primary care clinic, general clinic, orthogeriatric clinic and memory clinic). The six-floor building has a capacity of 66 inpatient acute care beds plus 32 intensive care beds, in addition to the outpatients' clinics, and a day care center. In parallel with the establishment of the hospital, Ain Shams Ageing research center was established aiming at; stimulating the interdisciplinary study of ageing within and across the biological, behavioural and social sciences and conducting cutting-edge research that tackles prominent questions of ageing and old age, coordinating new interdisciplinary partnerships to develop innovative programmes of research and education that capture the complexities and inter-connections of ageing issues, and translating research advancements into practical understandings and interventions and promoting sound policy to enhance the quality of life and promote the health and welfare of older citizens.

Geriatric Medicine Unit - Cairo University

Geriatric Medicine is a subspecialty of Internal Medicine Department since 1989, teaching geriatrics as a part of undergraduate and postgraduate Internal Medicine curriculum. Geriatric Medicine Unit provides outpatient clinic service as well as inpatient consultation for the university hospitals' departments. Orthogeriatric unit consisting of 8 intermediate care beds started in 2017. Geriatric postgraduate curriculum and clinical training is a part of Internal Medicine Doctorate Degree as an Elective Course since 2009. Master Degree programme will start in 2019/2020 as well as a professional Diploma.

Geriatric departments, Alexandria, Mansoura and Helwan Universities

Geriatric department Alexandria University is the first geriatric department in Egypt. It is a subspecialty of Internal Medicine Department till now, also Geriatric department, Mansoura University is a subspecialty of Internal Medicine Department. In 2013 Faculty of Medicine Helwan University has been established by Presidential Decree in 2013 and geriatric medicine department is one of its basic departments. Examples of other unique centres include; centre of geriatric service, Nasr city, and Geriatric department in Palestine Hospital. Military hospitals also provide care services for older persons, and NGOs and the private sector also play a role.

NGOs and care for older persons

Encouraging the role of NGOs as an essential partner in providing services for elders is prominent and urgently required. Especially in developing countries such as Egypt which faces numerous social, economic, political and environmental challenges. There are 857 NGOs concerned with geriatric care and their branches are distributed all over the Egyptian governorates. In spite of being a large number, this represents only 1.55% of the whole Egyptian NGOs. NGOs play a key role in the field of social work in support of governmental plans. They carry out their plans within the framework of stable regulatory and structural mechanisms, namely the General Union of NGOs, regional unions and specific unions. Some of them are offering social and medical services e.g. the Egyptian society of geriatric care. Others are scientific e.g. Egyptian Society of Gerontology, Egyptian Alzheimer's Society, and Egyptian Society of Psycho-geriatrics. Some of these NGOs do provide some integrated services in the form of homes for the aged along with hospital and religious services. Still, there is a minimal role of NGOs in policy planning of care of older persons, in research work, and in media to increase the awareness of the population to the problem of ageing. Every individual organisation works separately, with minimal communication between each other. *Alzheimer Egypt society* was founded in 1999. It aims at raising awareness among the health and social care providers to persons with dementia and their caregivers. It has many activities such as monthly 'Alzheimer café' a meeting to support persons with dementia and their carers; annual celebration of the "Alzheimer day"; non-regular Alzheimer bulletin; and a health education book for caring after persons with dementia at home.

The *Egyptian Society of Geriatrics and Gerontology*, an NGO, was founded late in the year 2014. Being founded by geriatric specialists of The Geriatric and Gerontology Department, Ain Shams Faculty of Medicine, it adopted a more specific way to decide on its goals that are to be based more on the needs of the seniors in the Egyptian community goals than most others. In order to attend to actual needs of the senior Egyptian citizens on multiple levels (e.g. medical, social, financial and any other societal services) rather than the expected, the Society started a project of building a database on the needs of the Egyptian seniors.

Wikiageing, a knowledge management tool, was established in 2014 by academics from Ain Shams Geriatrics and Gerontology Department. Its mission is to promote and improve the elder care in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The tool operates by the Wiki technology based on a dynamic website (<http://wikiageing.org/>). It is a collaborative, voluntary, open access knowledge project aiming at improving the elder care in the Arab speaking region. Wikiageing as an open access knowledge tool provides a means to pool knowledge, categorizes knowledge, networking, and general knowledge management. Several conferences, symposiums, and workshops concerned with ageing have been held in Egypt over the past years. These were sponsored by either the Ministry of Health, Ministry of social affairs, Universities, and non-governmental organizations. They were aiming to orient the health-professionals and also the general people with gerontological and geriatric needs. Media also made modifications to cope with the greying of the population. The Radio developed a channel specific for old people and the television developed a programme since

1994 called 'Age Spring'. The national newspaper 'Al-Ahram' developed a page concerned with older people since 2001 named 'Age Flower'.

زهرة العمر

There is also a special Radio channel for older persons named *Elderly specialised Radio* broadcast all through the day.

"إذاعة الكبار المتخصصة"

Large amounts of research in the field of ageing was done and is still ongoing to develop a data base of the population and their needs. Bulletins are published regularly by non-governmental organizations e.g.

'towards healthy ageing', 'sound of time'

صوت الزمن

"The Butterfly",

"الفراشة"

and 'for better mental health for older persons'.

Social training programmes are presented by the Ministry of Insurance and Social Welfare including a programme for older people to prepare the population for the changes that occur after retirement. The whole health system in Egypt has become oriented to the phenomenon of ageing. For several years now, the Ministry of Health started to have residents for geriatric medicine with training courses and residency programmes offered to them in collaboration with the academic departments. As mentioned above several services were established to cope with the needs of older persons. A large number of Egyptian geriatric specialists and consultants are available nowadays across the country. Health professionals were trained and are being trained for geriatric care.

Training programmes for health professionals

With the greying of the population, geriatric medicine specialty was developed and well established in Egypt with continuous education and training programmes for the health professionals dealing with older patients.

Geriatric medicine education programmes

The Geriatrics and Gerontology Department at Faculty of Medicine, Ain Shams University

The Geriatrics and Gerontology Department at Ain Shams University is the only academic department in Egypt that offers Diploma, Master Degree and Doctoral Degree in geriatric medicine connected to a specialized residency programme and clinical training courses. The Ain Shams geriatrics and gerontology department is a centre of excellence specialized in

gerontological and geriatric care in Egypt and the MENA region. The scope of the department involves three main domains; education, research and medical services. By now there are more than 80 trained physicians working in the department with positions and titles of professors, associate professors, consultants, lecturers, and residents fulfilling the residency programme. In addition, the department has trained and graduated many physicians to work in the Ministry of Health in Egypt and in some Arab countries. Establishing a stable system and advocating the specialty led to training of new generations of geriatricians and spreading the department mission locally and regionally. The department is also involved in the teaching process of the undergraduates and introduced the first undergraduate curriculum in geriatrics in Egypt to promote skills of handling older patients, and to spread knowledge about geriatric medicine and gerontology. Also courses are designed for physicians of the Ministry of Health, nurses and caregivers. The department is helping build capacities and training doctors for other equivalent departments in Egyptian universities (Mansoura, Suez Canal and Helwan) and the Ministry of Health. A large amount of research has been carried out by the department covering varying fields of geriatric medicine and gerontology and has been published in varying national, regional and international journals and still ongoing research is being carried out to study the old aged population and their needs. In 2014, the department developed the Egyptian Journal of Geriatrics and Gerontology, a peer-reviewed journal aiming to address the most significant ageing issues affecting health status and quality of life of older individuals. The journal addresses research on biological, clinical, epidemiological, and psychosocial aspects of later life.

Geriatric Physical therapy education programmes

Geriatric physical therapy education is available in three Physical therapy colleges. The study of geriatrics is introduced at the third year undergraduate for two terms. Postgraduate studies are available to attain higher diploma, Master and Ph.D. degrees.

Geriatric Nursing education programmes

At the colleges of nursing, there is a module in geriatrics nursing both at the undergraduate level as well as postgraduate level at the diploma level, M.Sc., and Ph.D. in geriatric nursing.

The Higher Institute for Public Health, Alexandria University

This is a postgraduate institute for public health. There are 9 academic departments of which one is the Department of Health at old age. This department offers postgraduate training in geriatric health at the diploma level, Master degree level and Ph.D. degree level in Geriatric public health.

Colleges of Social Services

Helwan, and Assiut Universities, provide Diploma, Master degree and Ph.D. in geriatric care. Also in the other Universities, geriatric care is included in the undergraduate curriculum with

training courses and field training. The Ministry of Health and Population started from 2001 to develop health programmes targeting older people within its structure. These include:

- Short term training programme for family physicians held with the collaboration of experts from Ain Shams University. These programmes are held twice a year and aim to train such physicians to acquire skills in geriatric practice.
- Short term training programme for community nurses held with the collaboration of experts from Ain Shams University. These programmes aim to train such nurses in geriatric nursing skills.

Training courses for professional caregivers

Different governmental and non-governmental organizations are involved in training of professional caregivers. These programmes are very variable in terms of method of training, length of training, and course objectives. Some of these programmes would link such training with mechanisms to employ the trainee either in long term units or home care programmes, but others would just offer the training. The Geriatrics and Gerontology Department at Ain Shams University has been offering these training courses since 2010 till now, in collaboration with NGOS with a total of 400 trainees.

What is next?

Egypt is a large, central country facing a combination of socio-economic, political and security challenges, against a background of regional instability, and passing through significant demographic transition. All efforts must be united to take advantage of demographic dividend which is a small window and is often followed by strain on the economy, as an ageing population no longer has a proportionate young workforce to support them in their retirement. Ageing must be incorporated within social and economic strategies, policies and action. The national security system umbrella must be enlarged to cover a wider range of older population. The significant increase in life expectancy implies not only heightened demand for the existing services but also for new services and alternative approaches to meet the varied and specific needs of the older persons. A good health status of older people can have a positive influence on public budgets in this context; hence, an increase of preventative measures may pay off in the long-run.

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