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ABSTRACT

**Ageing Parameters for Selected Caribbean Countries
A Pilot Study**

By

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Ageing has traditionally been measured using indicators such as the proportion of a nation's population aged at least 60 years in some instances or at least 65 years in other instances, in other words, by gauging the proportion considered to be elderly. While such a standard hinges upon arbitrary ages that signal mandatory retirement in several labour market cultures, it bears no evidence of the magnitude of the ageing phenomenon among younger sub-populations. Moreover, it ignores age distribution dynamics among those aged at least 60 years and altogether, is likely to bias estimates of parameters associated with the ageing process. Such biases impact negatively upon thrusts to use such indicators in informing social policy geared towards meeting the human needs of an ageing population which, in the context of the paper, is concomitant with meeting the needs of growing elderly populations but at the same time, introducing other considerations that are more relevant in the context of ageing processes and their implications for social structures within and across nations.

Alternative measures such as median age of a population and the ageing index have been considered to be among a set of other useful measures that permit analysts to gauge ageing processes. To this end, the median age is insensitive to the age distribution of the population on either half of the overall distribution of the national population according to age and thus, could also misrepresent thrusts to gauge population ageing. The ageing index is insensitive to ageing in the context of the sub-population aged 15-64 years and also could represent population ageing. Often times, these indicators render countries as having similar ageing characteristics when in fact, they might be different. This paper strives to reinforce difference in ageing characteristics over and beyond the traditional measures.

This paper explores a novel conception of ageing that can be interpreted as a demographic process in which human populations experience greater cumulative exposure-time to lifetime rewards and challenges both of which may have positive and/or negative implications for sustaining individual and by extension, the collective well being. Thus, ageing is evident if the number of person-years lived by all persons who were alive at one point in time is greater than the number of person-years lived by all persons who were alive at an earlier reference point in time within a given spatial context. In the context of this exploratory paper, the reference points are the respective census dates for the rounds of censuses in the 1980s, the 1990s and the 2000s in four Caribbean countries. The four countries include Grenada, Barbados, St. Lucia and Jamaica and a range of ageing parameters are estimated and compared for the respective populations including disaggregation according to sex.

Insofar as this paper adopts an alternative conception for gauging ageing as a human phenomenon, it facilitates an exploratory account that would examine similarities and differences in ageing dynamics when compared to those emerging in the context of the use of traditional measurement standards. The paper discusses likely implications of unexpected findings from the standpoint of interpreting ageing dynamics, reflects upon challenges associated with data availability and offers some direction for refining proposed measurement strategies.