

# **Correlates of cognitive impairment among the Sri Lankan elderly**

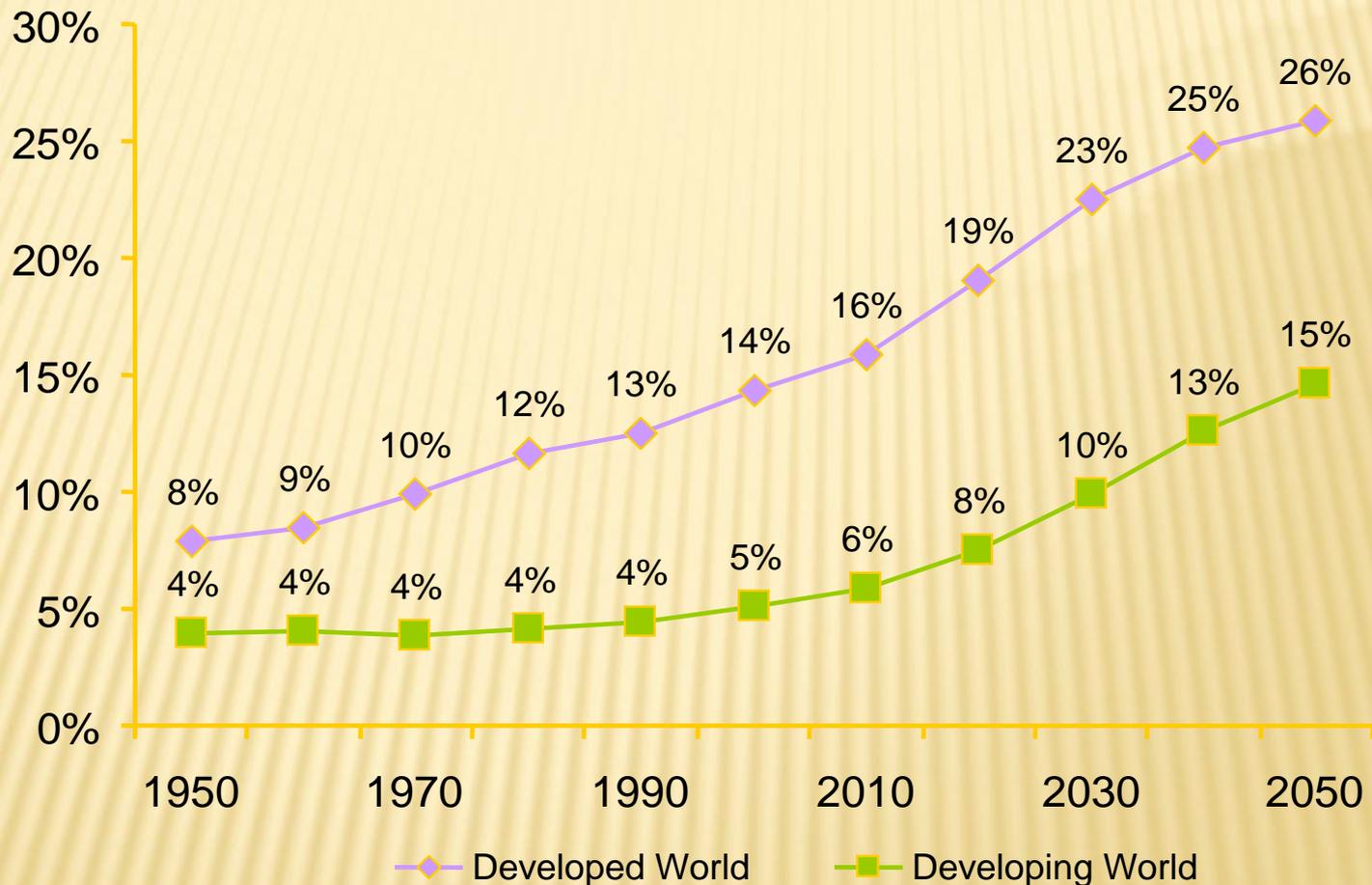
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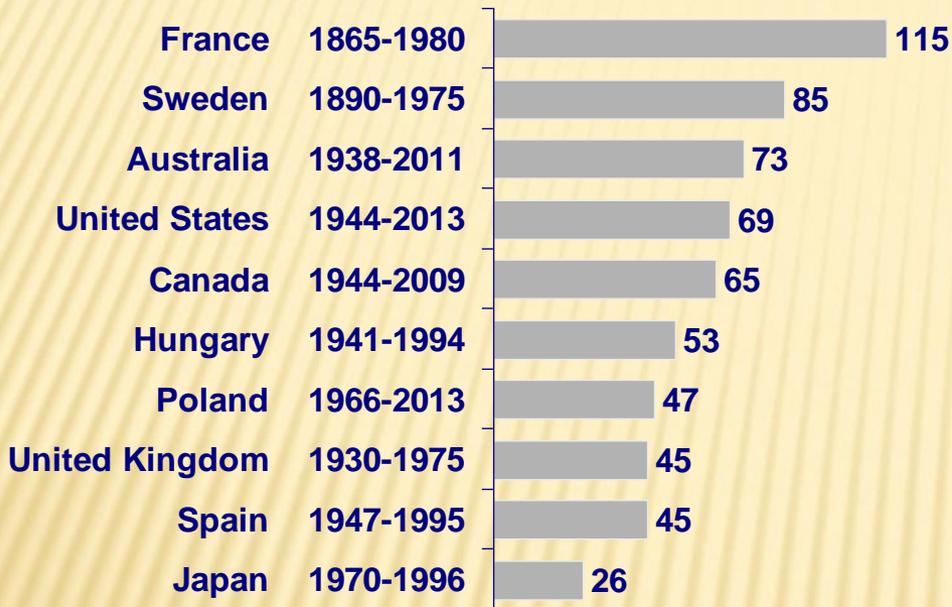
# Percent of Elderly (aged 65 and over) Population – Global Trends



Source: UN (2005)

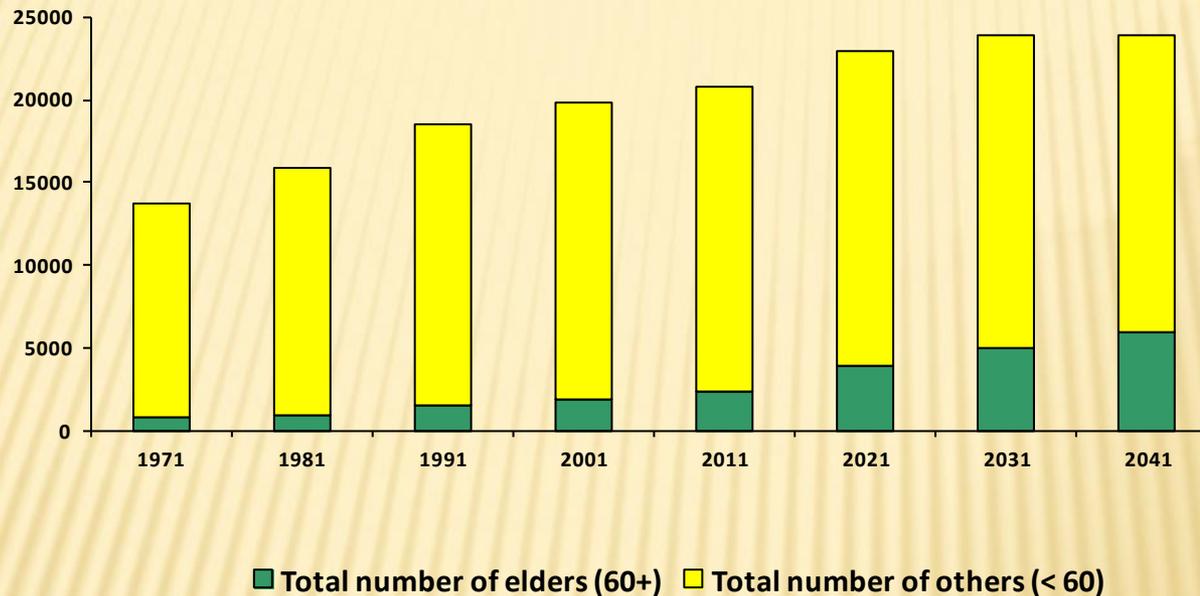
# Number of Years for Percent of Population Age 65 or Older to Rise from 7% to 14%

These countries are getting older faster than they are getting rich



The growth of the elderly population has contributed to accelerate the growing burden of chronic diseases and other ill-health conditions in low-and middle-income countries

## Size of the Total and Elderly Population in Sri Lanka (1971 – 2041)



In 2000, 9.8% of the population in Sri Lanka was elders compared to 7.6% in India, 5.8% in Pakistan and 4.9% in Bangladesh. It is estimated that by the year 2030, the proportion of elders in the Sri Lankan population will grow up to 22%, and the corresponding figures for India, Pakistan and Bangladesh will be 14%, 8% and 10% respectively.

Aging will become the  
single most important  
Public Health Issue in Sri  
Lanka in the coming  
decades

Psychological problems in the elderly are emerging as a major public health concern, and depression and cognitive impairments are the most prevalent psychological disorders found in the Sri Lankan elderly

Source : Nugegoda DB, Balasuriya B. Health and social status of an elderly urban population in Sri Lanka. *Social Science and Medicine*, 1995; **40(4)**: 437-442.

# Objectives

A cross sectional survey was conducted to identify levels of cognitive impairment and its correlates: physical activity, social participation and level of education, in elders aged 65 years and over, living in Southern Sri Lanka.

# Focus Group Discussions with 32 elders

Explore ideas of  
“Successful Aging”

# Quantitative Methods

An interviewer-administered questionnaire was used. Culturally appropriate questions that were taken from the standard measurement tools were used to measure physical activity and social participation. The Mini Mental State Examination (MMSE) was used to measure cognitive impairment. Those who scored 24 or below were considered as having possible cognitive impairment.

# Results

A sample of 320 elders (54.2% were women) was surveyed.

The sample was a representative sample of both urban and rural elders residing in the study area.

Women were more likely than men (62.1% versus 51.7%) to have cognitive impairment ( $p = 0.06$ ).

Irrespective of gender, those who were physically active, compared to those who were less active and inactive ( $p < 0.05$ ), and those who were involved in social and community activities, compared to those who have less interactions with the society ( $p < 0.05$ ) were less likely to have cognitive impairments.

# Qualitative research

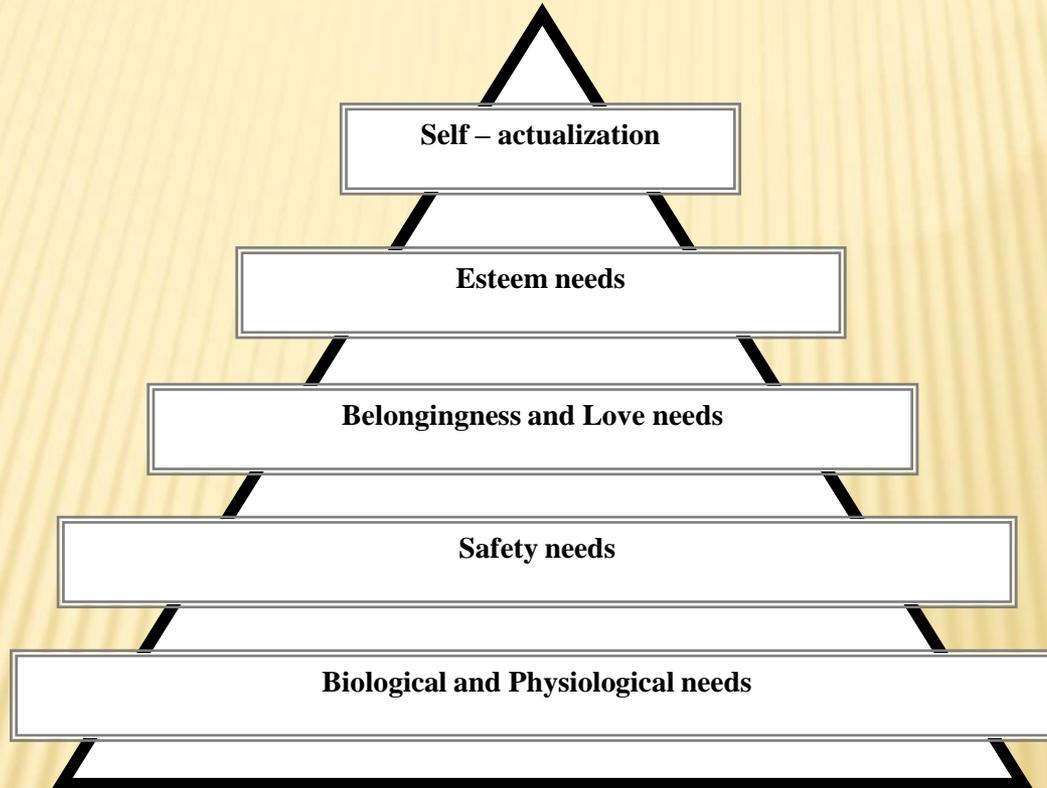
Participants emphasized the importance of having a sound mind free from financial, health and family dilemmas in order to age successfully.

Participants didn't talk much about *happiness* as a psychological construct, but seemed to reflect more on being satisfied.

“Happiness” was related to having one’s basic needs met.

*Things we need for this happiness are food to eat, money to spend, and meritorious activities, then everything will become perfect. [Rural female].*

# Maslow's hierarchy of needs



Cognitive impairments and depressive thoughts were considered as natural processes in old age that required little or no attention.

*Yes, there are people with these (psychological and cognitive) problems. Obviously, when a person gets old, sadness, forgetfulness and depression occur more often. It's hard to get rid of such conditions... it is quite natural.... [Rural male].*

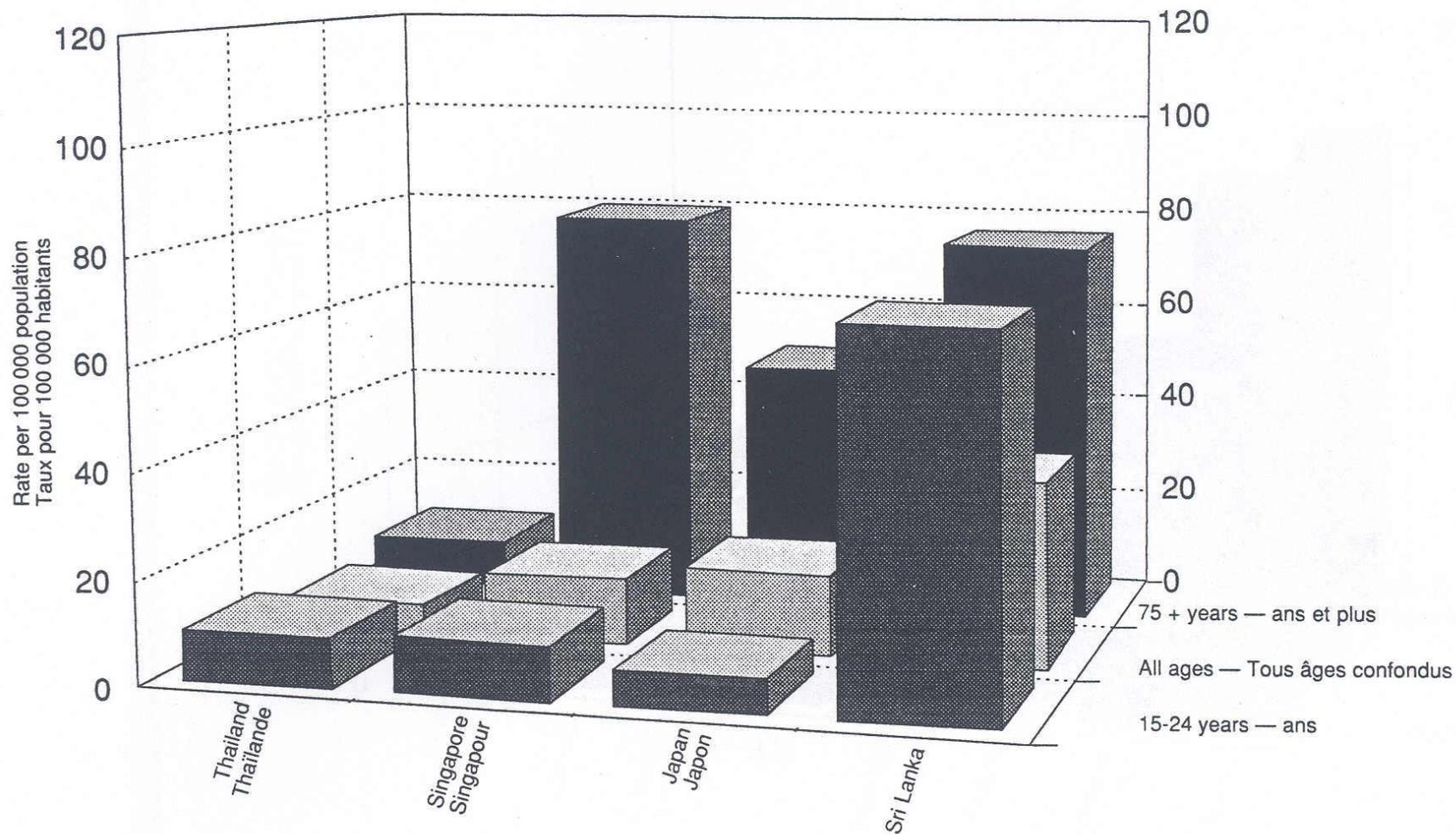
# Suicide and suicidal ideation

About 8% of the elderly  
reported having suicidal  
ideas in the last year.

**Fig. 5**

Suicide rate per 100 000 population, by age group, selected countries in Asia, latest available year

Taux de suicide pour 100 000 habitants par sexe et selon l'âge dans certains pays d'Asie, dernière année disponible



Sri Lanka has one of the highest suicide rates in the world and among men a significant proportion are alcohol users.

Thus, substance use and suicidal behavior are important modifiable risk factors that should be considered seriously in developing healthy aging policies in Sri Lanka.

Although we cannot elucidate cause-effects relationships between cognitive impairments and other variables studied here, a substantive body of research has shown a protective association between social participation, physical activity and cognitive function in the elderly.

Thus, our results suggest that creating environments that motivate elders to have physically active and socially active life would eventually assist them in having a psychologically healthy life.

Try to live as a creative human being, diseases and illnesses are part of our life (Self Actualization)

Enjoy being a creative and a matured elder who have understood the human nature.



Towards a healthy old age

Thanks