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The Elderly in Singapore

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Introduction

With better nutrition, advancement in medical science and an increased awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle, the life expectancy of the Singapore resident population has improved over the years.

On average, a new-born resident could expect to live to age 82 years in 2010. The life expectancy at birth was lower at 75 years in 1990.

For the average elderly person in Singapore, life expectancy at age 65 years rose from 16 years in 1990 to 20 years in 2010. Compared to 1990, there are more elderly persons aged 65 years and over today.

This article provides a statistical profile of the elderly resident population aged 65 years and over in Singapore.

Basic profiles such as:

- age
- sex
- type of dwelling
- geographical distribution

were compiled using administrative records from multiple sources.

Detailed profiles such as:

- marital status
- education
- language most frequently spoken at home
- living arrangement
- mobility status
- main source of financial support

were obtained from the Census 2010 sample enumeration of households staying in residential housing, and thus excluded those living in institutions such as old age or nursing homes. The resident population comprises Singapore citizens and permanent residents.

Size of Elderly Resident Population

Of the 3.79 million Singapore residents as at end-June 2011, 352,600 residents were aged 65 years and over (Table 1).

Reflecting the faster growth rate of the elderly population compared to the resident population, the proportion of elderly residents increased from 6.0 per cent in 1990 to 7.2 per cent in 2000 and further to 9.3 per cent in 2011.

Geographical Distribution

Of the 352,600 elderly residents in 2011, 56 per cent were concentrated in ten planning areas¹.

Bedok had the highest number of elderly at 32,900, followed by Bukit Merah (24,400) and Ang Mo Kio (22,300) (Table 2).

While Bedok had the highest number of elderly, it was not among the top 10 planning areas in terms of proportion

TABLE 1 SIZE AND GROWTH OF RESIDENT POPULATION

	Resident Population	Resident Population Aged 65 Years & Over			
		Total	65 – 74 Years	75 – 84 Years	85 Years & Over
Number ('000)					
1990	2,735.9	164.5 (6.0%)	104.9	49.9	9.6
2000	3,273.4	235.3 (7.2%)	155.3	62.5	17.5
2005	3,467.8	279.7 (8.1%)	177.6	79.5	22.6
2010	3,771.7	338.4 (9.0%)	204.1	105.0	29.2
2011	3,789.3	352.6 (9.3%)	212.5	109.1	31.1
Annual Change (%)					
2000*	1.8	3.6	4.0	2.3	6.2
2005	1.6	5.7	5.4	6.3	6.0
2010	1.0	2.5	0.2	6.5	5.1
2011	0.5	4.2	4.1	3.8	6.4

* For year 2000, growth rate refers to the annualised change over the last ten years.

Note: Figures in parentheses refer to elderly residents as a proportion of resident population.

1 Planning areas refer to areas demarcated in the Urban Redevelopment Authority's Master Plan 2008.

TABLE 2 TOP 10 PLANNING AREAS RANKED BY NUMBER AND SHARE OF RESIDENTS AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER, 2011

Rank	Planning Area	Number of Residents Aged 65 Years & Over	Planning Area	Share of Residents Aged 65 Years & Over (%)
1	Bedok	32,900	Outram	18.2
2	Bukit Merah	24,400	Downtown Core	16.6
3	Ang Mo Kio	22,300	Rochor	15.8
4	Hougang	20,300	Queenstown	15.7
5	Toa Payoh	19,000	Bukit Merah	15.6
6	Tampines	19,000	Toa Payoh	15.2
7	Jurong West	16,100	Kallang	14.5
8	Queenstown	15,300	Marine Parade	14.2
9	Geylang	14,900	Novena	13.3
10	Kallang	14,800	Ang Mo Kio	12.5

of elderly². The proportion of elderly was the highest for Outram in 2011, where 18 per cent of residents staying in Outram were aged 65 years and over.

The proportion of elderly was next highest in Downtown Core (17 per cent) and Rochor (16 per cent).

There were five planning areas which were ranked top ten in both number and proportion of elderly residents, namely:

- Ang Mo Kio
- Bukit Merah
- Kallang
- Queenstown
- Toa Payoh

Type of Dwelling

About 97 per cent of the elderly resident population were staying in residential housing, mainly in HDB 4-room (29 per cent) and 3-room (24 per cent) flats in 2011 (Table 3). The remaining were largely living in institutions such as old age and nursing homes.

Compared to the general resident population, a higher proportion of elderly residents were staying in HDB 1- and 2-room flats (7.3 per cent versus 3.2 per cent), HDB 3-room flats (24 per cent versus 17 per cent) and landed properties (9.4 per cent versus 6.6 per cent) in 2011.

2 In 2011, 11.1 per cent of residents in Bedok were aged 65 years and over.

TABLE 3 TYPE OF DWELLING OF RESIDENT POPULATION, 2011

	Resident Population	Resident Population Aged 65 Years & Over			
		Total	65 – 74 Years	75 – 84 Years	85 Years & Over
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
HDB Dwellings*	82.4	81.1	82.7	80.5	71.9
1- and 2-Room Flats	3.2	7.3	6.7	8.2	7.7
3-Room Flats	16.6	24.0	24.8	23.7	19.6
4-Room Flats	33.9	29.5	30.2	29.1	25.7
5-Room and Executive Flats	28.4	20.1	20.7	19.4	18.7
Condominiums and Private Flats	10.0	6.1	6.5	5.5	5.4
Landed Properties	6.6	9.4	8.7	10.1	11.6
Others	1.1	3.4	2.1	3.9	11.1

* 'HDB Dwellings' includes other HDB dwellings.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Sex Composition

Reflecting the longer life expectancy of females³, the male to female sex ratio was lower among the elderly resident population than that of the overall resident population.

In 2011, there were 795 elderly resident males per 1,000 elderly resident females, compared to 972 males per 1,000 females for the resident population. The sex ratio declined with age from 893 for those aged 65-74 years to 491 for those aged 85 years and over (Chart 1).

The following analyses on marital status, educational profile, language most frequently spoken at home, living arrangement, mobility status and main source of financial support are based on elderly in residential housing and exclude those living in institutions such as old age or nursing homes (2.3 per cent in 2010).

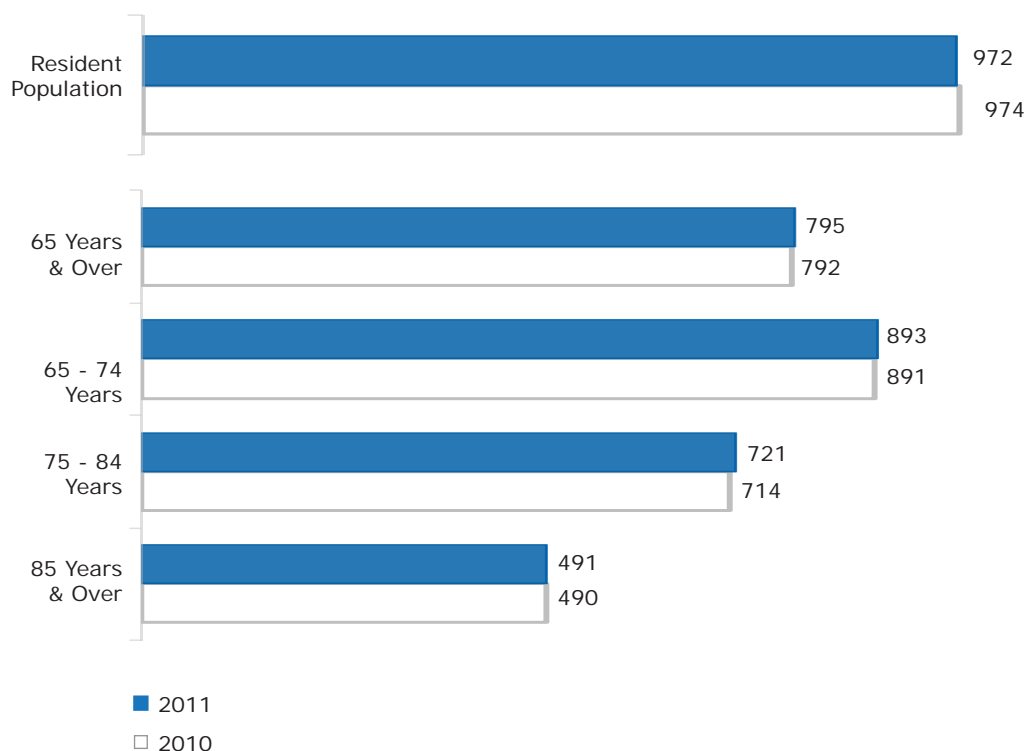
Marital Status

In 2010, one third of the elderly in residential housing was widowed (Table 4). With more females living longer than males, the proportion of widowed persons was higher for elderly females (50 per cent) than for the males (12 per cent).

3 The preliminary life expectancy of a resident male at birth and at age 65 years were 79.3 years and 18.1 years respectively in 2010. The corresponding figures for a resident female at birth and at age 65 years were 84.1 years and 21.5 years.

CHART 1 SEX COMPOSITION OF RESIDENT POPULATION

Males per 1,000 Females


TABLE 4 MARITAL STATUS OF RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER, 2010

	Per Cent								
	Resident Population Aged 65 Years & Over			65 – 74 Years		75 – 84 Years		85 Years & Over	
	Total	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Single	4.6	4.9	4.4	5.5	5.6	4.2	3.0	2.7	1.7
Married	59.1	80.9	42.0	84.5	55.8	76.8	27.8	60.9	9.6
Widowed	33.3	11.6	50.3	7.0	34.2	17.2	66.9	35.0	87.8
Divorced/ Separated	3.0	2.6	3.3	3.0	4.3	1.8	2.2	1.4	1.0

The proportion of widowed elderly increased with age to reach 88 per cent for females aged 85 years and over and 35 per cent for males aged 85 years and over.

Educational Profile

The elderly in residential housing were less educated than the overall residents, given the relative lack of formal educational opportunities in the past. Nearly eight in ten elderly had below secondary qualifications, compared to about three in ten among the resident non-students aged 15 years and over in 2010 (Table 5).

The proportion of elderly with below secondary qualifications was 91 per cent

for residents aged 85 years and over, 88 per cent for residents aged 75-84 years and 74 per cent for residents aged 65-74 years.

A higher proportion of elderly females (86 per cent) had below secondary qualification than elderly males (71 per cent) in 2010. This reflected the social climate in the past, which saw more families sending males than females for education.

Language Most Frequently Spoken at Home

The usage of English as home language was less prevalent among the elderly resident population than the general resident population in residential housing.

TABLE 5 HIGHEST QUALIFICATION ATTAINED OF RESIDENT NON-STUDENTS, 2010

	Resident Non-Students Aged 15 Years & Over	Per Cent					
		Resident Non-Students Aged 65 Years & Over					
		Total	Males	Females	65 – 74 Years	75 – 84 Years	85 Years & Over
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Below Secondary	32.4	79.6	71.3	86.2	73.9	87.8	91.0
Secondary	18.9	9.7	12.8	7.3	12.4	5.7	5.1
Post-Secondary (Non-Tertiary)	11.1	4.1	5.6	2.9	5.2	2.4	1.8
Diploma* & Professional Qualification	14.8	2.9	4.3	1.9	3.8	1.8	0.8
University	22.8	3.7	6.1	1.8	4.8	2.2	1.4

* 'Diploma' includes Polytechnic and other diplomas.

Among the elderly resident population, the proportion who spoke English most frequently at home was 12 per cent for the Chinese, 3.1 per cent for the Malays and 27 per cent for the Indians in 2010 (Table 6).

In contrast, the corresponding proportions for the resident population aged 5 years and over were 33 per cent for the Chinese, 17 per cent for the Malays and 42 per cent for the Indians.

Chinese dialects were the most frequently spoken language for majority of the Chinese elderly (64 per cent), with the proportion

increasing with age. Among the Chinese elderly aged 85 years and over, 84 per cent spoke Chinese dialects most frequently at home.

Most Malay elderly (97 per cent) spoke Malay most frequently at home in 2010. Among the Indian elderly, 48 per cent spoke Tamil most frequently at home.

Living Arrangement

In 2010, 86 per cent of elderly residents in residential housing lived with their spouse or children (Table 7). Elderly who lived alone formed a relatively small

TABLE 6 LANGUAGE MOST FREQUENTLY SPOKEN AT HOME OF RESIDENT POPULATION, 2010

	Resident Population Aged 5 Years & Over	Resident Population Aged 65 Years & Over			
		Total	65 – 74 Years	75 – 84 Years	85 Years & Over
Chinese	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
English	32.6	12.2	14.3	9.2	7.1
Mandarin	47.7	23.1	28.9	15.3	7.9
Chinese Dialects	19.2	64.3	56.4	75.0	84.3
Others*	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.7
Malays	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
English	17.0	3.1	4.1	1.4	3.2
Malay	82.7	96.7	95.8	98.3	96.8
Others*	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.3	-
Indians	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
English	41.6	27.4	29.8	23.6	22.9
Malay	7.9	7.8	8.2	6.7	9.9
Tamil	36.7	48.2	47.4	50.2	46.1
Others*	13.8	16.6	14.7	19.5	21.2

'-' refers to nil or negligible.

* Not elsewhere included.

Note: Data exclude persons who were unable to speak, and those in one-person households and households comprising only unrelated persons.

proportion at 8.2 per cent. Given their longer life expectancy, elderly females were more likely than males to be widowed and hence lived with their children. In 2010, 46 per cent of elderly females were living with their children in the absence of their spouse compared to 12 per cent among the elderly males.

Similarly, elderly residents aged 85 years and over had higher proportion living with children in the absence of their spouse (63 per cent), compared to 42 per cent for those aged 75-84 years and 21 per cent for those aged 65-74 years.

Mobility Status

In 2010, some 8,200 or 2.4 per cent of elderly in residential housing were non-ambulant (i.e. unable to move around). Among the non-ambulant elderly, 91 per cent were

living with spouse or children (Chart 2). The proportion living with spouse or children was 86 per cent among those who were semi-ambulant (i.e. able to move around with some help such as walking aids, or when supported) and ambulant (i.e. able to move around independently).

Main Source of Financial Support

Majority of the elderly residents in residential housing (63 per cent) depended on their children's allowances as their main source of financial support in 2010 (Table 8).

Compared to the ever-married elderly, a higher proportion of never-married elderly depended on income from employment or business, savings or interests earned or other sources as their main source of financial support.

TABLE 7 LIVING ARRANGEMENT OF RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER, 2010

	Per Cent					
	Resident Population Aged 65 Years & Over					
	Total	Males	Females	65 – 74 Years	75 – 84 Years	85 Years & Over
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Living With Spouse	55.1	76.9	38.0	65.6	43.3	22.0
No Children in Household	19.4	26.0	14.3	22.5	16.5	7.8
With Children in Household	35.7	50.9	23.7	43.1	26.8	14.2
Living With Children but Without Spouse	31.0	12.1	46.0	20.8	42.5	63.3
Not Living With Spouse or Children	13.9	11.1	16.1	13.6	14.3	14.6
Alone	8.2	6.3	9.6	7.9	9.0	6.7
With Other Elderly Persons Only	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.2	0.8
Others	4.4	3.5	5.2	4.2	4.1	7.1

CHART 2 MOBILITY STATUS AND LIVING ARRANGEMENT OF RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER, 2010

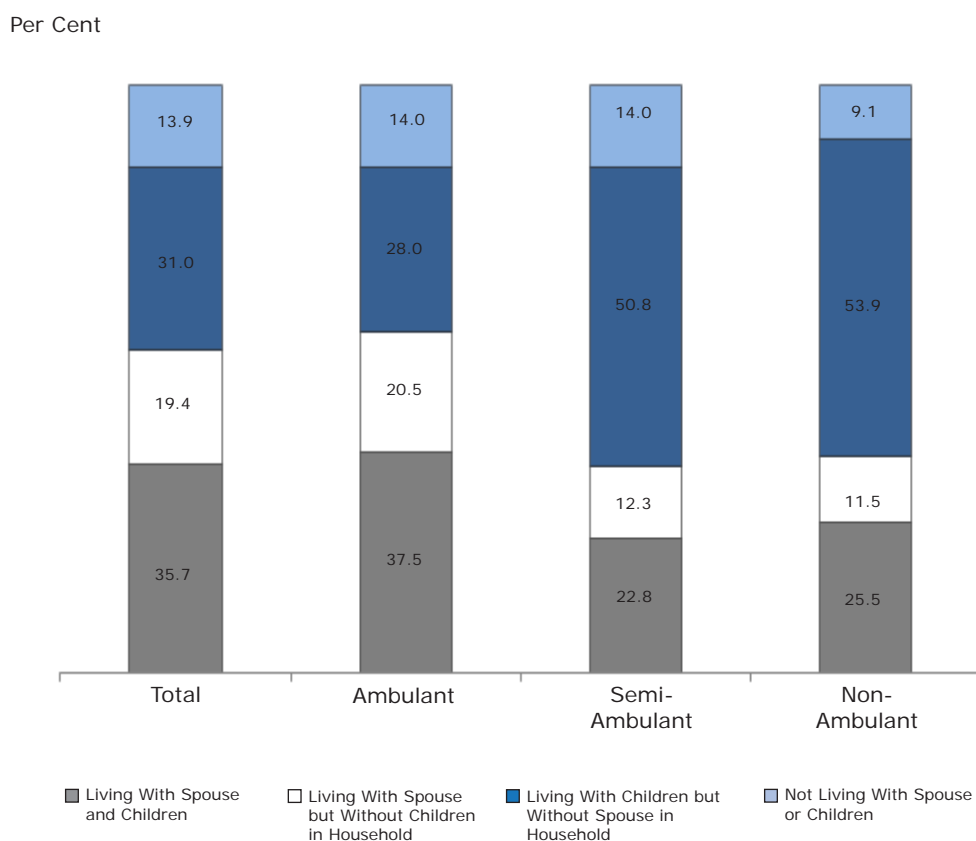


TABLE 8 MAIN SOURCE OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER, 2010

	Per Cent				
	Resident Population Aged 65 Years & Over				
	Total	Single	Married	Widowed	Divorced/ Separated
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Allowance Given by Children	62.8	5.7	56.8	82.3	53.3
Allowance Given by Spouse	3.2	-	5.4	-	-
Income from Employment/Business	12.3	20.1	15.8	4.6	17.7
Savings/Interests Earned	10.7	27.3	11.9	6.1	11.9
Income from Rental/Dividends/Annuity/Trusts	2.9	4.9	3.1	2.2	4.1
Other Sources*	8.1	42.0	7.0	4.8	12.8

'-' refers to nil or negligible

* 'Other Sources' includes allowances given by relatives/friends, contributions from charitable organisations/public assistance, and CPF Withdrawals (e.g. CPF Life), etc.