

How Do Current Demographic Trends Affect Aging in Rural Nepal?

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Abstract

The global trend of demographic transition reduces fertility and mortality and creates societies that have fewer children and more elderly. One outcome is “the invention of retirement as the third stage of life” (Lee and Reher 2011). Although the association between longevity and leisure time may describe demographic transition effects in wealthy nations where people typically have pensions and retirement savings, what happens in rural Nepal where care for the elderly is usually provided by younger family members? Nepal’s ongoing demographic transition has been accompanied by a noticeable outmigration of young people seeking labor and educational opportunities. This presentation uses Nubri, a highland valley in Gorkha District, to illustrate how contemporary demographic processes, most notably educational migration, are hindering the ability of the elderly to live out their final years in a culturally salient manner. The absence of youths is causing a decline in the family-based elderly care system, forcing people to work longer in life while devoting less time to activities that prepare them for death and reincarnation.

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About the Speaker

Geoff Childs is an anthropological demographer who specializes in the study of population processes in the Himalayan region and their social, economic, and cultural ramifications. He is co-author of the forthcoming book *From a Trickle to a Torrent: Education, Migration, and Social Change in a Himalayan Valley of Nepal* (October 2018, University of California Press).