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**Health Status and Health Care Seeking Behaviour
of the Elderly in Sri Lanka**

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Abstract

This study analyses the health status and health care seeking behaviour of the elderly in Sri Lanka. More specifically, several health conditions, health practices and habits, and self and social perceptions on health status and health care seeking behaviour of the elderly, form the focus of this thesis. The study uses primary and secondary level data. The primary data are drawn from a purposive sample of 731 elderly persons over age 60 through an interviewer-administered questionnaire and the secondary data are from the Censuses, sample surveys, international data bases and research publications. The unit of analysis is non-institutionalized individual elderly persons. The study uses the cross sectional and exploratory analytical approach and quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse the data.

The study finds that the female elderly are predominant especially in old-old category and majority of them are widowers. The higher proportion of the elderly in Sri Lanka are still living in extended families but most of them do not hold the headship of household whilst a few of the elderly is in nuclear families but most of them hold headship in the households. The majority of the elderly are educated at least up to junior level education. A considerable proportion of the elderly engage in economic activities especially in manual jobs whilst less than quarter of the sample receives government pension. Substantial number of elderly does not engage any jobs due to weakened health conditions. Chronic diseases and degenerative diseases are remaining high among the aged people whilst the chronic conditions are higher among female elderly. The various socio-economic, demographic and personal factors have influenced the health conditions and the health care seeking behaviour. Due to negative perceptions on diseases and health status of the elderly they may neglect the health care and necessary medical treatment. The education is profoundly important towards the perception and health care seeking behaviour. The financial constraint is the major obstacle to prevent their necessary medical treatment. The elderly majority persuade to have western medical treatment whilst when the health problems become more serious they inclined to go for government western medicine. There is a significant association between western medical practices and chronic diseases. The most of the elders expected family care and community support for their healthy life. The empowerment of the family and strengthen the community care network are useful to uplift the health conditions and the health care of the elderly in Sri Lanka.

