

Applying Swot Model In Analyzing Characteristics Of The Elderly In Vietnam

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SUMMARY: As of 2023, Vietnam is estimated to have a population of 100.3 million, making it the third most populous country in Southeast Asia (after Indonesia and the Philippines) and the 15th most populous country in the world. According to the United Nations Population Fund, Vietnam is one of the fastest aging countries in the world and is forecast to enter an "aged" society by 2036. Data from the 2023 population report of the General Statistics Office (GSO) shows that the proportion of people aged 60 and over has increased rapidly, from 11.9% in 2019 to 13.9% in 2023. This demographic shift is occurring not only due to a decline in mortality and an increase in life expectancy, but also due to a sharp decline in fertility rates, leading to rapid aging. This highlights the urgent need for a health care system that is capable of addressing the unique needs of older adults, including chronic disease management, long-term care, and mental health support. Ensuring that older adults receive appropriate care is not only important for improving their quality of life, but also for maintaining the sustainability of the country's health care system.

Keywords: SWOT model, older adults, characteristics, Vietnam.

I. Problem statement

According to the forecast of the General Statistics Office, by 2038, the elderly group (aged 60 and over) in Vietnam will be about 21 million people, accounting for 20% of the total population. Vietnam is one of the countries with the highest population aging rate in the world. While developed countries take a century or several decades to transition to the period of aging population, such as France (115 years), Sweden (85 years), Australia (73 years), the United States (69 years), Canada (65 years) or the United Kingdom (45 years). Vietnam is estimated to take only about 20 years (UNFPA, VN, 2000).

According to the data of the 2019 Population and Housing Census, as of 2019, the whole country has nearly 12.22 million elderly people, accounting for about 12.7% of the population. Of which, the proportion of the population aged 65 and over increased the fastest (accounting for 7.7% in 2019) with nearly 2 million people aged 80 and over (accounting for 17.75% of the total elderly). It is forecasted that by 2036, Vietnam will transition from an "aging" society to a society with an "aging population", and by 2053, the number of elderly people is expected to increase to 23 million, equivalent to 20% of the total population. Recognizing the importance of population aging, the Government issued Resolution No. 137/NQ-CP dated December 31, 2017 on the Government's Action Program to implement Resolution No. 21-NQ/TW dated October 25, 2017 of the 12th Central Committee of the Party on population work in the new situation; Decision No. 1679/QĐ-TTg dated November 22, 2019 on approving the Vietnam Population Strategy to 2030, Decision No. 1579/QĐ-TTg dated October 13, 2020 on approving the Elderly Health Care Program to 2030 with the general goal of caring for and improving the health of the elderly, adapting to population aging.

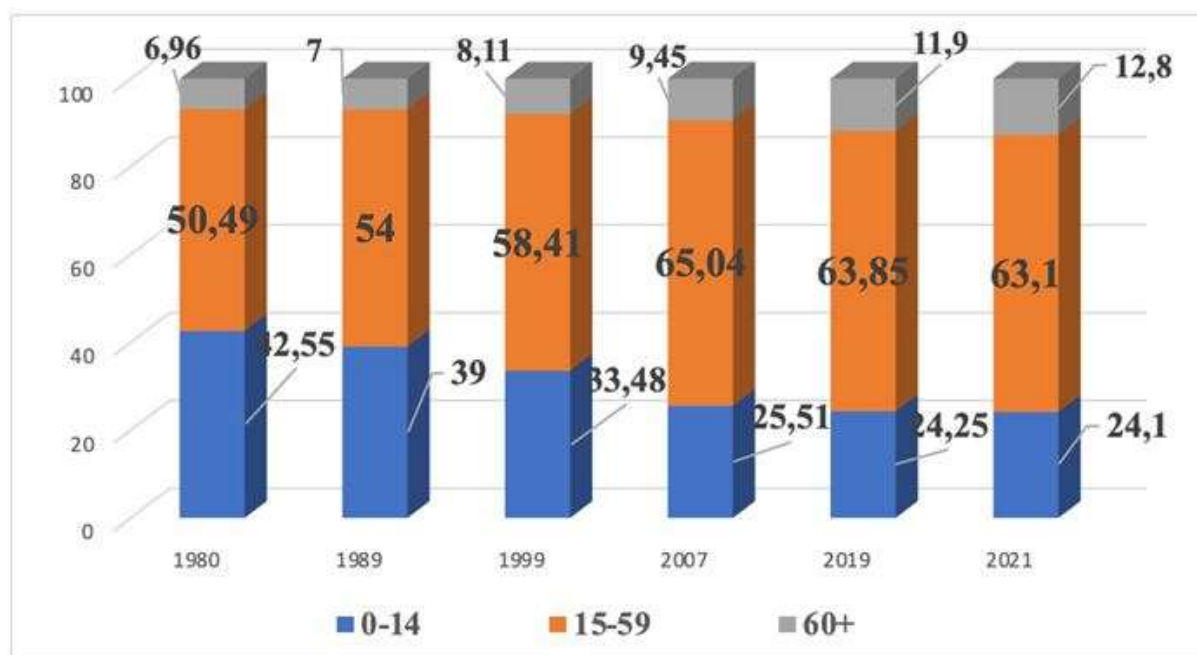
The increasing life expectancy of the people is accompanied by an increasing decline in the health of the elderly. The elderly today often face diseases such as high blood pressure, metabolic disorders, diabetes, dementia, etc. In Vietnam, the issue of elderly care is increasingly focused on through specific policies and actions, but the care and promotion of the role of the elderly still has many limitations. Due to the material conditions and the psychological concerns of Vietnamese people in particular and Asians in general, elderly care is mainly limited to the family and neighbors. The elderly are a group of people with limited economic conditions and are psychologically reluctant to access elderly care services. Furthermore, elderly care services are still lacking and weak, some services are only available in urban areas and have not yet reached rural and remote areas, where there is also a large number of elderly people but have not had the opportunity to access and hear about these services.

II. Characteristics of the elderly in Vietnam

Demographic characteristics of the elderly

According to the Law on the Elderly 2009: “The elderly are Vietnamese citizens aged 60 years or older”[4], with that concept, in Vietnam the elderly population is understood as the population aged 60 years or older. The elderly population is an important and indispensable component of the overall population. The elderly population, together with the young population (0-14 years old) and the working-age population (15-59 years old), make up the overall population of our country. The data in Chart 1 are more specifically calculated according to the concept of the Law on the Elderly 2009, showing the fluctuations in the population structure by age group in the period from 1980 to 2021.

Chart 1: Vietnam's population structure by 3 age groups, from 1980 to 2021



(Source: General Statistics Office and author's calculations)

The data in Chart 1 shows that the proportion of the 0-14 age group in Vietnam tends to decrease gradually, accordingly, in 1980, the proportion of this age group accounted for 42.55%, by 2021 this proportion decreased to 24.1%. These figures show that there is a cause from the population planning policy, and also reflect the decreasing birth rate, at the same time the rate of joining the labor force (from 15 to 59) tends to increase (from 50.49%) to 63.1% (in 2021). However, the data in Chart 1 also shows that the proportion of people joining the age group of 60 and over is increasing, in 1980 it only accounted for 6.96%, by 2019 the proportion of this group was 11.9%, in 2021 it accounted for 12.8% and the data Latest from the population database of the Ministry of Public Security, as of February 9, 2023, the whole country has 16,179,824 citizens aged 60 and over, accounting for nearly 17% of the population (higher than 10% of the total population). This situation shows the great achievements of the country's "renovation" in recent years, people have better conditions, leading to increased life expectancy thanks to better conditions in nutrition, hygiene, medical advances, health care, education and economic life. The life expectancy of people in our country has continuously improved, in 1999 it was 68.6 years old, in 2021 it was 73.6 years old. However, the above data also shows that Vietnam has officially entered the population aging stage.

The rate of population aging in Vietnam is among the fastest in Asia as well as in the world. World Bank data (2020) shows that the number of people over 65 years old in Vietnam has been increasing steadily from 1960 to 2020. The increase in the number of elderly people goes hand in hand with the increase in the gender imbalance rate. The proportion of elderly people (60 years old and over) in the total population has increased from 6.9% in 1979 to 8% in 1999 and 9% in 2009 (Steering Committee for Population and Family Planning and Population and Family Planning, 2010). It is forecasted that by 2050, the number of elderly people in Vietnam aged 60 and

over will account for 26% of the total population (Nguyen Dinh Cu, 2008). Due to the increase in the proportion of elderly people while the proportion of children under 15 years old has decreased sharply in the past 10 years,

III. Health characteristics of the elderly

*** Physiological health**

When reaching the elderly stage, the physical characteristics change in a downward direction, aging appears, and the organs in the body have functional declines: Metabolic intensity decreases, the respiratory system, circulatory system, digestive system, excretory system, sexual ability... all decrease and stagnate. The sensitivity of sensory organs is poor (dim eyes, deafness...), gray hair, tooth loss, wrinkled skin... The elderly also have many different diseases such as high blood pressure, stroke, headache, decreased vision, osteoporosis... and some diseases related to the nervous system such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's.

*** Mental health**

When entering this stage, the elderly have psychological changes, although different for each individual, but in general, there are common changes: The desire to learn is still there, thinking activities to make decisions are slow, but because they have a lot of experience, their decisions are mature. Short-term memory is poor, but long-term memory is still good, so they often forget what just happened but remember things from the past for a long time. Due to the narrowing of social influences, the elderly are prone to "retirement syndrome". The psychological manifestations of the elderly can be listed as follows: Looking back to the past; Loneliness and wanting more care and attention; Feeling helpless and sorry for oneself; Talking a lot or depressed; Fear of facing death; and Retirement psychology. With the above psychological changes, a part of the elderly will change their personality.

Socio-economic characteristics of the elderly

- Regarding marital status, the majority of the elderly are married or widowed, while other statuses (separated, divorced or never married) account for a small proportion. Over time, the proportion of married people increased (from 61% to nearly 68%) while the proportion of widowed people decreased (from 36.62% to 28.91%). Among the elderly who are widowed, elderly women account for more than 80% in all age groups.
- The educational level of the elderly population has improved significantly over time. However, by level, there are clear differences by gender and living area, in which men and people living in urban areas have a higher rate of education than women and people living in rural areas.
- In both censuses, about 35% of the elderly are still working. However, the majority are vulnerable workers (own-account or family workers) and there are clear differences by gender, age and living area.
- In terms of household living arrangements, the proportion of elderly people living alone or with only their spouse has increased, while other groups have tended to decrease. Regional differences in the living arrangements of elderly people are partly due to the impact of migration.
- Nearly 100% of elderly households have access to grid electricity; nearly 50% use tap water as their main source of drinking water; and nearly 90% use septic tanks (inside or outside the house). However, differences between elderly groups by living area and by ethnicity are very clear, in which elderly people living in rural areas and ethnic minority elderly people often live in households with lower living conditions than elderly people living in urban areas and Kinh ethnic elderly people. The difference is also evident in the ownership of household assets, especially valuable, modern household appliances.

Psychosocial characteristics

Changes in family structure and changes due to modern social life have somewhat negatively affected the psychosocial life of the elderly. The psychological state and health of the elderly depend not only on their own internal strength but also on the social environment, especially the cultural-emotional environment and most importantly, the family environment. When entering old age, each person's psychological changes are different, but in general, the common changes are:

Looking back to the past: To relieve the daily worries in the present life, the elderly often like to meet, find old friends, old scenes, join friendship associations, veteran associations... They like to reminisce about old stories,

write memoirs, recreate life experiences as well as look back to their roots: Visiting ancestors' graves, collecting antiques...

Switching from a "positive" state to a "negative" state: When getting old, the elderly must face a major turning point in work and career. That is, switching from a working state (busy with work, friends) to a resting state; switching from a positive, urgent state to a negative, relaxing state. Therefore, the elderly will have to find a way to adapt to the new life. People are prone to "retirement syndrome".

Feeling lonely and wanting more care and attention: Children and grandchildren are often busy with life. This makes the elderly feel forgotten and abandoned. They really want to spend their old age happily with their children and grandchildren, and want others to see them as not useless. They really want many people to care for and worry about them and vice versa. They are afraid of loneliness, afraid of being at home alone.

Feeling helpless and hurt: Most elderly people, if they are still healthy, can still help their children and grandchildren with some chores around the house, move around by themselves, or can participate in recreational and community activities. However, there are also some elderly people who, due to their advanced age and declining health, depend largely on their children and grandchildren for their daily activities. Therefore, it is easy to feel depressed, sad, or torment themselves, easily feel hurt and feel that they are old and are looked down upon by their children and grandchildren.

Can be talkative or withdrawn, less communicative: Because they want to pass on life experiences to their children and grandchildren, want their children and grandchildren to live according to the moral standards of their generation, they often find fault, talk a lot and sometimes even make others uncomfortable. With a part of the elderly who are conservative and have difficulty adapting to change, combined with declining health, limited ability to perform work, if they had unfulfilled dreams when they were young, or were not satisfied, dissatisfied... symptoms of depression may appear. They become contradictory, jealous people, deeply interfering in the private lives of their children and grandchildren because they think they have that right. However, on the contrary, some people feel that they are behind, cannot keep up with modern life, so they become more and more withdrawn, and have less communication with people around them.

Fear of facing death: Birth and death are the laws of nature, but the elderly are still afraid of facing death. There are also cases where the elderly discuss their funeral and write wills for their children and grandchildren. Besides, there are also those who do not accept, avoid it and are afraid of death.

If considered by the stage of old age, the elderly have some of the following psychosocial characteristics:

The first stage from 60-70 years old: The elderly at this stage are starting to retire, reducing working hours will lead to a decrease in income. Relationships with friends, colleagues... also begin to decrease. Social needs decrease, independence and creativity are also gradually limited.

The stage from 70 to 80 years old: Many people between the ages of 70 and 80 often get sick and lose loved ones. More and more friends and acquaintances pass away. In addition to gradually narrowing their communication with the surrounding, they also participate less in the work of social organizations. At this age, they are often angry and lose their temper. Health conditions often make them worried. Despite these losses, many people over 70 are still able to withstand the consequences of aging for this age. Thanks to improved medical support and a healthier lifestyle, they are better able to cope with diseases than the elderly in the past.

The period from 80 to 90 years old: The transition to the group of "very old people" - it is "a process that begins from the day people live with their memories". Most people between 80 and 90 years old have difficulty adapting to their surroundings and interacting with it. Many of them need a diet as well as a guaranteed and appropriate daily routine. They also need help to maintain social and cultural connections with the environment in the family and in the community to avoid loneliness and desolation in old age.

The stage over 90 years old: People in this age group are often very old, their health is more limited and their social relationships are also narrowed, except for some people who maintain their health and social interactions, but not many. With the general changes in the psychology of the elderly presented above, a part of the elderly

often changes their temperament. Children need to prepare mentally to accept reality and society needs to have appropriate responses.

Old age is an important stage in human life, with attention to the physiological and pathological characteristics of the age group, it is also necessary to pay attention to the psychological and social issues of the elderly. With the general changes in the psychology of the elderly mentioned above, a part of the elderly often changes their temperament. Family members need to sympathize and understand to share with the elderly in the family. The psychology of the elderly has certain instability, so we need to learn in detail to easily create harmony in the family. The younger generations need to prepare mentally to accept this reality in order to have appropriate behaviors and need to care and worry more for the elderly, regularly talk and encourage the elderly to exercise to improve the physical and mental health of the elderly. Especially take care of the material and spiritual life of the elderly, especially the lonely elderly, without support...

IV. Applying the SWOT model in analyzing the characteristics of the elderly

Strengths

The elderly in our country are a valuable asset of the nation, an important force of the country, and the pillars of the family and society of Vietnam. The elderly of the 54 ethnic groups across Vietnam are not only hard-working, creative people who contribute to building the national value system, cultural value system, family value system and Vietnamese human standards, but also witnesses of history. Many people have directly contributed to making the history of the nation under the leadership of the Party, worthy of the 18 golden words that the Central Party Committee gave to the elderly in Vietnam: "The older the age, the higher the ambition, setting a shining example for the cause of building and defending the Fatherland". Movements and models of activities for the elderly increasingly affirm the important role and position of the elderly in activities to gather forces, contributing to spreading the policy of great national unity, creating a combined strength, contributing to building and developing the country to become more and more prosperous and civilized. In the context of our country's rapidly aging population, the proportion of the elderly will continue to increase rapidly in number and proportion. According to the National Committee on the Elderly of Vietnam: By 2030, the proportion of the population over 60 years old will increase to 20% and by 2050 it will be over 30%. The proportion of the elderly over 80 years old will also increase and by 2050 it will account for over 6% of the population. This is a potential market if businesses know how to seize opportunities for development.

Weaknesses

First: The elderly and their families in Vietnam are still struggling with the East Asian culture, which considers caring for elderly parents as the responsibility of the elderly, and putting elderly parents in nursing homes as an act of disrespect. This is an inherently prejudiced view of Vietnamese people in particular and Asians in general. Even in modern cultures, there is still discrimination against nursing homes. The media's often negative portrayal of nursing homes creates a stigmatizing perception and lowers the real value of nursing homes. People often think of nursing homes with negative concepts such as: the elderly's health rapidly declines, loss of independence, and abuse by caregivers. Therefore, it is difficult to decide on a nursing home for parents when they are old and frail.

Second: The elderly in Vietnam are still facing the warning of "not rich yet old", which is due to the rapid aging of Vietnam's population due to the decline in mortality and birth rates. In 2020, the elderly aged 65 and over accounted for 8% of the population and it is estimated that by 2036, Vietnam will move from a "young" country to an "old" country, where people aged 65 and over will be 14% of the total population.

Third: On the other hand, Vietnam is still limited in both quantity and quality of elderly care services. State and private units participating in providing elderly care services are still lacking and weak, and elderly care resources have not been properly invested in terms of facilities, care staff and service quality.

For both subjective and objective reasons, access to elderly care services in Vietnam is still limited.

Opportunities

It is also from the above strengths and weaknesses that the elderly care service market in Vietnam will have many opportunities to develop in the near future.

Firstly, with a society that tends to increase the number of elderly people, if well utilized, it will promote the leadership, management, production experience, etc. of the elderly, which will bring sustainable development values in both the economy and society of the country. Accordingly, in Vietnam: "In the current new situation, the aging process of our country's population is taking place rapidly, along with the average life expectancy increasing; the elderly population is increasingly larger and larger; that is a great blessing for the nation".

Secondly, the aging process of the population will bring many business opportunities in the economy for products and services for the elderly such as: health care, entertainment services, non-public nursing homes, application of digital technology in elderly care.

Third, for the elderly, if they can still participate in the workforce in a way that is appropriate to their age and health, they will increase their independence and reduce their economic dependence on their children and grandchildren. In addition, this process will also help increase the connection between generations in the family.

Challenges

In addition to these potential market development opportunities, businesses and the economy also face significant challenges. Specifically:

First, regarding caregivers, we do not have a strong enough training system to provide caregivers for the elderly in terms of quantity and to meet the demand for service quality. Training units only meet part of the demand for care services.

Second, regarding financial constraints, many elderly people still have to rely on limited pensions and insurance, which often do not provide enough financial support for good medical care when needed.

Third, infrastructure in general, especially in rural areas, is not always accessible to older people, making it difficult for them to move around their communities, especially those who use wheelchairs. The healthcare system for older people faces many challenges, especially for those in remote areas without regular income, as regular health check-ups are not feasible. As a result, most older patients are diagnosed at an advanced stage of the disease, making treatment difficult and expensive. These issues highlight the need to improve support and resources for the aging population.

Some solutions to help the economy adapt to population aging

First, it is necessary to improve the legal and policy framework to adapt to population aging, protect the rights of individuals when they are old, help the elderly integrate into society in developing environments, especially policies related to access to high-quality health care services, prevention and response to domestic violence, employment opportunities and financial security.

Second, aim to build a system of care for the elderly and consider the elderly as a social group that needs to receive care from subjects including the state, family and community as well as services from the market. Localities need to simultaneously pay attention to building models of care for the elderly that are suitable for the characteristics of the elderly social group in terms of gender, age, education, culture, economy, and society in each region; both focusing on promoting the role of the elderly in contributing to economic development, actively participating in political and social activities in the community and connecting with the family.

Third, strengthening the social protection system along with economic growth and development, to ensure and increase income for the elderly through job creation and retirement benefits.

Fourth, developing a comprehensive care system, including both residential and community care, focusing on vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and victims of domestic violence.

V. Conclusion

The elderly care sector in Vietnam is at an important turning point. The increasing elderly population poses both challenges and opportunities for growth and improvement. The elderly care market in Vietnam is facing many challenges, of which three are particularly important: lack of caregivers, financial constraints and inadequate infrastructure in rural areas. By addressing current gaps, leveraging government support and exploring innovative solutions, Vietnam can develop a more effective healthcare system for its aging population while enabling the sector to generate economic results.

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