Population forecasting underestimates elderly

Demography

Australia's aged population is increasing faster than the government realises, population forecasting by Monash University researchers has shown. Among other findings, the study noted that the number of elderly people was increasing faster than official estimates and that the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) was underestimating the future number of people aged over 65.

"The ABS forecast of that sector of the population for 2041 is 660,000, while ours is 845,000 - a difference of 180,000 or 28 per cent," he said.

"This discrepancy could mean that we will be supporting more elderly citizens in 20 to 40 years than the government has provided for with health and community services.

"The projected growth in the proportion of elderly Australians means some hard decisions need to be made about the provision and funding of services for the aged over the next 20 years."

Professor Hyndman, director of the university's Business and Economic Forecasting Unit, said that while Monash and the ABS both used mortality and fertility rates to make their predictions, the university's predictions were more accurate because they allowed for complex dynamic changes in those elements.

"Mortality and fertility rates don't fall out of thin air," Professor Hyndman said in an interview. "In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the mortality rate for people aged between 18 and 25 annually increased due to AIDS, suicides and road deaths. It has since started dropping again," he said.

The ABS was also inherently conservative in its predictions, Professor Hyndman explained, and worked on the assumption that the overall mortality rate would not continue to decline at the same rate that it had for the past 100 years and extrapolate it into the future, he said.

"Our approach is unique because, for the first time, we can put probability limits around the population for different ages, and we can also attach a probability rating to the forecast itself - about how certain we are that it will be correct.

"So instead of just predicting that in 50 years there will be about one million people aged between 50 and 60, we can predict with 95 per cent probability that there will be, say, between 800,000 and 1.2 million in that age group.

"This Monash methodology could also supply vital information to determine the future cost to the government of age pensions, he said. "Currently, Australia doesn't produce probabilistic forecasts for population, and to my knowledge nobody does anywhere in any other country."

The ABS and the Federal Treasury have agreed to run the new Monash methodology in tandem with their existing methodology in order to compare them over the next few years.

Professor Hyndman said the ABS, if required, would see the benefits of the Monash forecasting.

"It's our goal to get them to switch to our methodology along," he said.

The unit's forecasting has been used successfully in prior budgetary requirements for the Pharmacare Benefits Scheme after it ran over budget two years in a row.

Monash has also developed commercial software for automatic forecasting that is used in Australia and overseas including in the US.

"We are constantly refining our methodology - we aim to be the best in the world in all areas of forecasting," said Professor Hyndman, who has just been appointed a director of the International Institute of Forecasters and editor-in-chief of the International Journal of Forecasting.

Professor Hyndman will also co-chair the International Symposium on Forecasting, co-sponsored by Monash University, to be held in Sydney in June - the first time the symposium has been held in Australia.

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Population forecasting underestimates elderly

Paid maternity leave – only for the high-flyers

Management

Access to paid maternity leave in Australia is unequal within organisations and across industry sectors, Monash University research has found.

Dr Susan Mayson, of the Department of Management in the Faculty of Business and Economics, said that of the approximately 30 per cent of Australian women who had access to paid maternity leave, most were well paid and highly qualified workers.

"They are also usually employed in the public sector, where paid maternity leave is accepted as a legitimate and important entitlement," said Dr Mayson, who is also a researcher with Monash's new multiplicity and migration of talent in Australia.

"However, paid maternity leave was more readily available at the university examined in the study because it was regarded as a legitimate entitlement in the public sector, although managerial discretion also emerged as an issue for some women.

"If paid maternity leave is to become more widespread or universal, it will have to involve small businesses whose priorities, concerns and financial resources, in many cases, will be different from those of big corporations," Dr Mayson said.

From this month, Dr Mayson's research will take on a new direction, looking into access and attitudes to paid maternity leave in small and large firms in the finance sector. Joining her in the research will be Monash colleagues Dr Paul O'Connor, a senior lecturer in the Department of Accounting and Finance, Associate Professor Rosena Barret, lecturer in the Faculty and Small Business Research Unit, and Ms Wendy Webben, a lecturer in the Department of Management.

"Women in the finance sector because it has a large proportion of female employees at all levels, with many different kinds of employment ranging from full-time to casual, and it is part of a global industry," Dr Mayson said.

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Monash University

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www.monash.edu.au/news
From the vice-chancellor's desk

Monash University is entering an exciting new era. It has already achieved an enormous amount, but has a great deal of unexplored potential.

The recent planning conference, which was attended by 150 staff and students, addressed the strategic framework for Monash over the next five years.

I believe that Monash will have consolidated its position as a university known and respected around the world for its excellence in education and research, and its international focus and influence.

Monash will continue to develop its campuses in Australia and overseas in the next five years. These campuses will be linked by common governance and shared resources, and each will be strongly integrated with the local region or country, helping to drive the local and regional economies and attract students and the international focus of Monash.

I believe one of the key foundations of Monash's future strength and prominence will be its strategic alliances and partnerships with other leading universities and research institutes, including the CSIRO.

Commercialization and collaboration with industry, while not taking away from the significance of fundamental research, has added a new dimension to the roles of universities and will play an important part in Monash's future.

The Australian Synchrotron and the Clayton Engineering Research and Innovation Precinct at the Clayton campus will provide opportunities for links between science and industry and help to drive the state and federal economies.

Scholarship and creativity for their own sake are still driving forces at the best universities, and Monash is no exception.

Richard Larkins
Testing times for cognition

Psychology

A computer-based test that detects impaired cognition has been developed by researchers from Monash University's Psychology department and could be used to identify people who are affected by chronic fatigue or even hangovers.

The test, which measures cognition — the ability of brain cells to talk and connect to each other effectively and quickly — is also being trialled on heart surgery patients at Monash Medical Centre to determine how their cognitive abilities are affected by surgery.

Associate Professor Stephen Robinson from Monash's Department of Psychology said it could also be used to screen elderly drivers for signs of cognitive impairment. He said the test could be used to detect people at high risk of developing Alzheimer's, raising the possibility of early treatment for the disease.

The test was developed because existing tests lacked sensitivity and some could not be re-used for up to six months because test subjects could 'learn' the appropriate response to give. Dr Robinson said. He developed the test with Dr Yelland and doctoral researchers Mr Carl Huskinson and Mr Tim Friedman.

The test, which takes about five minutes, is awaiting patenting. The study at Monash Commercial, the university's commercialisation arm, is seeking commercial partners who could help bring the test to the marketplace.

"It is a visual discrimination test that requires the test subject to make a decision based on what they see," Dr Robinson said. "The information is presented to the observer at such a rate that they can't possibly take in all the information at once."

"Where I see the real strengths of our test is in people who are undergoing some sort of clinical treatment either from drugs or surgery. The study at Monash Medical Centre with Professor Julian Smith is looking at the effect of various medications on cognition."

"People who have any sort of impairment perform a lot worse on this test. For example, we have used the test to look at the cognition of patients with HIV and have tested it alongside the gold standard psychological tests for cognitive impairment in that group. Our test was as good as any others on the market at predicting the cognitive impairment of HIV patients."

The test has also been trialled on 90 people aged between 60 and 85. "Within that group we have detected a subgroup who, by most tests, show a mild decline in cognition, whereas our test has revealed a significant impairment."

Testing the brain: Dr Greg Yelland (left) and Associate Professor Stephen Robinson.

Water institute

Water parks that could serve as reservoirs for stormwater and unmanned aircraft that could play a part in flood warnings are just two of the projects being investigated by the newly formed Institute for Sustainable Water Resources at Monash University.

The institute is based in the Faculty of Engineering and involves staff from all the university's engineering departments, it was set up by Dr Tim Fletcher, Dr Ana Delerici and Dr Tony Laddon from civil engineering, with funding support from the Monash Research Fund (new research areas) as well as the Department of Civil Engineering and the Faculty of Engineering.

The institute is also working closely with the Water Saldiers Centre in the School of Chemistry and the Monash Environment Institute and aims to pursue innovative research and teaching in water sustainability.

Dr Fletcher, who is acting director of the institute, said the drought currently being experienced across Australia has highlighted water resource issues and the need to come up with novel ways of using water.

"We could be harvesting stormwater, for example, so we're not starving our rivers as much," he said. "In this area, we're investigating water recycling within businesses, homes, farms and shopping centres, including their car parks.

"Technology allows us to build porous pavements, which help infiltrate the structural integrity of the pavement, so we're looking into having tanks below roads, malls or shopping centres. Car parks that collect storm water, which can then be used for non-drinking purposes such as watering gardens or flushing toilets."

The aim of the project is to establish piloted stormwater recycling in areas such as car parks in Melbourne and Brisbane. Institute members are working with the Brisbane City Council, Melbourne Water and the environment protection agencies in Victoria and New South Wales to achieve this goal.

"For example, we're investigating for stormwater harvesting to occur more information is needed on the quality of stormwater that might be collected from roads, roofs or car parks. Dr Fletcher said two systems had been set up at Monash — one from a building roof and the other from a car park — to monitor the quality of storm water. "This allows us to determine pollution levels and design treatment devices that will provide a suitable quality of water for its intended use," he said.

Water-wise: From left, Dr Tony Laddon, Dr Ana Delerici and Dr Tim Fletcher.

Other projects being investigated by the institute include the following:

- Using unmanned aircraft to monitor floods in real-time. This would provide data for the development of mathematical models to predict how much damage the floods will do so that timely warnings can be sent out.
- Examining the amount of water rivers need to sustain healthy fish populations.
Professional development for Japanese teachers

Teacher training

Monash University’s Faculty of Education at Clayton campus has recently conducted an intensive two-week teacher training program for a group of 15 primary and secondary teachers from Japan.

The program was designed to enhance the teachers’ capacity in integrated studies – the integration of various disciplines and subjects to make learning more holistic and meaningful – and improve their understanding of Australian culture. It was initiated by the Australian-Japan Foundation and endorsed by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Technology (MEXT).

Areas covered included curriculum development, student evaluation skills, methods to encourage inquiry learning and problem-solving skills among students. Participants also spent two days visiting local primary and secondary schools to observe the teaching of various subjects.

AACE project coordinator Ms Mayumi Serikawa from AACE, and Education faculty lecturer Ms Libby Tubbell coordinated this particular program. Ms Tubbell said the teaching of integrated studies, though well established in the Australian education system, was a relatively new concept in Japan.

"Since its introduction to Japanese primary and junior high school in 2002, MEXT has placed high emphasis on the articulation of program. The program was a specific opportunity to showcase the Australian education system."

A further 25 Japanese teachers are expected at Clayton campus in August to take part in the program.

-- Karen Stichtenoth

Fine-tuning the music teacher’s craft

Mozart effect

The use of DVD animations in teaching music theory, the latest and challenging music education and motivation issues among Year 7 students were some of the issues being investigated by students in Monash’s Master of Education (Music Education) course.

Student lecturer and course coordinator Dr Ross Smith said most of the research topics had been solutions to particular workplace problems or concerns.

"For instance, one of our students, who has taught music in both boys and girls schools, is doing her research thesis on why boys in her prep class are less interested in singing than girls at the same level," Dr Smith said.

"She is looking at the reasons for this and as ways of dealing with it, ways of trying to make the boys more positive about singing."

Students in the course also investigated and discussed the work of other researchers in the music education field. The students also published a number of papers in the music education field, according to Dr Smith, involving the Mozart effect, a term based on US research in the early 1990s suggesting that listening to Mozart could improve learning abilities.

US researchers found college students who listened to about 10 minutes of a certain Mozart piano sonata experienced short-term improvement in the ability to solve specific problems.

The course has a largely online and off-campus study mode to meet the teachers’ unique needs.

"Music teachers usually have a lot of extra-curricular commitments, with practice and concerts and performances after school making it difficult for them to attend classes after work, which is why the off-campus mode was developed," Dr Smith said.

"There’s a mix of online and more traditional forms of contact between students and lecturers, and people can choose the balance that suits them."

Earlier this year, a group of eight students participated in a three-week visit to Europe, where they attended classes and seminars at leading music education institutes in Geneva and Hungary.

"We’re very pleased to be able to offer this experience and to engage with other students and lecturers at these leading institutions," Dr Smith said. "It’s a fantastic opportunity and one that’s highly valued by our students."

Exposing music teachers to a range of issues and research: Dr Jane Southcott (left) and Dr Ross Smith. Photo: Melissa Di Cerio
Time for changes in graduate business education

Graduate business education has been a success story for Australian universities but several things need to change in order to ensure continued growth, writes Monash's Dean of Business and Economics, Professor Gill Palmer, and director of Postgraduate Business, Professor Owen Hughes.

The growth of graduate business education has been one of the success stories of the past 20 years, especially with master of business administration (MBA) programs. Today, however, the demand for the traditional MBA is static or declining. At the same time, the demand for other specialist business degrees - masters programs in accounting, marketing, international business or human resource management - has been growing rapidly. Undoubtedly, there has been a real shift in the focus of graduate business education around the world.

Universities once believed that the best way they could differ the graduate business education was to sift off their graduate business courses - typically MBAs - into separate business schools. The separated business school model had the advantages of freedom from university restrictions on staff salaries and expectations of research grants and research outcomes and the ability to draw from practices in adjacent faculties.

However, the advantages of the separated business school have evaporated as universities themselves have changed. The flexibility once found only in separated business schools is now within the cores of universities, particularly as they become progressively less dependent on government funding.

Separated school structures also have disadvantages that are now becoming more apparent. There are limits to the resources that one major degree can provide in terms of research and student choice. There are serious conflicts of interest if the business school attempts to expand into specialist areas provided by theparent university. In some instances, separated business schools have paid insufficient attention to controlling costs and are now in financial difficulty. Having staff remote from the much larger commerce faculties has made it difficult to maintain intellectual cohesion, and the business schools' research records have not been as good as those of the parent universities. There is also the problem of competition within the same university for both staff and students. Some business schools have started to diversify into specialist masters programs, but have had little success so far, due partly to competition with the parent university.

Another problem has been caused by the massive growth in undergraduate business education that has occurred alongside the growth in graduate business education. In Australia, business education starts at first-year undergraduate level, but more and more students take a business course early in their academic career. For many, business education is now a part of their study, especially with master of business administration (MBA) programs. However, it cannot be assumed that growth rates will continue. Success in future is likely to be in the informed market; the universities that survive and thrive will be those that deliver real quality.

International students need to be seen as a long-term asset. They provide insight and expertise for the university and, if they experience what universities can provide, they provide a source for future business. Australian business schools are well placed in their knowledge of the American and European traditions in business education, their teaching in English and their interest and proximity to Asia.

There needs to be greater engagement with post graduates. Australian universities can learn a lot from US universities in the way they look after their alumni. Graduate alumni are especially valuable and possibly easier to engage than undergraduates.

Graduate business courses need to face up to the issue of accreditation. There are two major, internationally recognised accreditation systems for business education: the AACSB from the US, and EQUIS from Europe. A number of Australian business schools are now making a considerable investment in time and resources to gain accreditation. However, it cannot be assumed that growth rates will continue. Success in future is likely to be in the informed market; the universities that survive and thrive will be those that deliver real quality.

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Young Women in the Twenty-First Century Western world. While educated, young professional married women and glamorous consumer lifestyles appear to be everywhere, the book argues that there is another story behind this representation of young women as winners in rapidly changing societies.

The author suggests that young women are living more complex lives than suggested by the dominant images of girls' freedom, power and success and that class and race inequalities continue to shape opportunities and outcomes.

Dr Harris explores how and why young women have emerged as the central subjects of discourses about how to prevail in the modern world and seeks to shake the notion that 'girl power' and new socioeconomic opportunities have simply created brilliant prospects for all young women.

Dr Anita Harris is a Lecturer in Sociology at Monash University's School of Political and Social Inquiry. Her research interests are young people and globalisation.

A Dictionary of Sociolinguistics

Compiled by Joan Swann, Ana Deumert, Theresa Lillis and Rajend Mesthrie

This is the first comprehensive dictionary of the field of sociolinguistics and covers topics relevant to a range of disciplines including anthropology, psychology, sociology, education, and linguistics. It is intended as a useful resource for students, teachers and researchers in sociolinguistics, or any area of language study that takes a socially oriented approach.

Sociolinguistics is characterized by increasing diversity, giving rise to a proliferation of theories, concepts and terminology. This is sometimes a minefield, with similar terms used rather differently within different academic traditions.

Organized alphabetically with terms explained in a non-technical way, the dictionary maps out the traditions and approaches that constitute sociolinguistics in a way that is designed to help readers find their way through this complex subject.

The authors have taught and researched widely across different areas of sociolinguistics and in different geographic areas, including the US, the UK, Europe, Australia, southern Africa and the Indian subcontinent.

Dr Ana Deumert is a Lecturer in the School of Languages, Cultures, and Linguistics within the Faculty of Arts at Monash University.

On the War-Path

An Anthology of Australian Military Travel

Edited by Robin Gerster and Peter Pierce

This is the first comprehensive anthology of war narratives by Australians, drawn from different perspectives and genres, that sheds light on our experiences of war.

The stories cover a wide range of war experiences, including those of soldiers, civilians, journalists, and others who have been involved in military conflicts. The anthology includes works by well-known Australian authors, as well as new voices, and covers a wide range of genres, from fiction to non-fiction.

The anthology provides a valuable resource for students, researchers, and readers interested in Australian military history, war literature, and the experiences of soldiers and civilians during times of conflict.
China’s first steps on the plastic path

When China was admitted to membership of the World Trade Organisation in 2001, it marked a milestone on the communist nation’s path to free trade.

As a condition of the prized WTO membership, China will officially lift restrictions on foreign banks entering its financial markets, starting in 2005. The following year the country will host the Olympic Games. These two events are linked, and the thread that joins them is plastic – credit cards in particular.

The Beijing Games, of which Visa is a major sponsor, will attract thousands of foreign tourists, who will mainly want to pay for travel, accommodation, meals and souvenirs using Visa and MasterCard.

The only problem is that China does not yet accept foreign credit cards; nor does it have a consistent national infrastructure to process them.

So before the Olympic flame reaches Beijing, China must install a national data processing system. At the same time, it must mount a massive public education campaign to persuade its debt-averse population that credit is good.

Monash academic Professor Steve Worthington, of the Faculty of Business and Economics, is a credit card expert who has been researching the history of bankcards in China.

"In January this year, the world’s two largest banking groups, Citigroup and the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank of China (HSBC), were given permission to launch co-branded credit cards with local Chinese banking partners," Professor Worthington says. "This makes them the first foreign organisations to launch cards in China."

The People’s Bank of China and the China Banking Regulatory Commission have allowed Citigroup to launch a co-branded dual currency card with the Shanghai Pudong Development Bank, and HSBC has received permission to launch a similar card with its partner, the Bank of Shanghai.

"Australia’s ANZ bank also has a strategic alliance with the Shanghai Rural Credit Cooperatives Union, which has more than one million customers," Professor Worthington says. "The intention is to launch credit card products using ANZ’s expertise in risk management and marketing."

The organisation charged with the overall job of turning China on to credit and making the system work nationwide is the China UnionPay Corporation (CUP), a shareholding financial institution established by 84 domestic financial institutions.

"The corporation’s major tasks are to establish and operate a nationwide bankcard information switch and interchange network; to enable inter-operability of bankcards nationwide and to process credit that don’t match. It’s like a national railway system whose gauge sizes alter from region to region."

Even after the China UnionPay Corporation overcomes the installation of technology to process cards, will the Chinese people have faith in that system and use credit cards?

"The card system absolutely has to work. It is a huge loss of face in China if your card is rejected or does not process," Professor Worthington says.

"People may be cautious about the safety of their money when using the new credit cards, especially as there has been anecdotal evidence that card-holders have experienced technical problems in using their cards and that it took them months to get back money that was wrongly deducted. "Also, the Chinese population is steeped in the belief that you save then spend and that you must always try first borrow from a family member. It is considered shameful, and a last resort, to borrow from a bank. "In China today, there is pent-up demand for almost everything. When China does install an end-to-end data processing system and the people begin to use credit cards in earnest, it will represent a huge seismic shift in the country’s economy and its philosophy."

- Robyn Anns

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Photo: AP
Pharmacists’ vigilance can save lives

Pharmacy

Fifteen Australian lives were saved in one month at only eight hospitals equalled hundreds of patients a year in all of the nation’s hospitals, Mr Dooley said.

Mr Dooley said the changes were recommended by pharmacists in order to increase the effectiveness of medicines and reduce potential adverse events. Some of the interventions involved a pharmacist identifying that although a doctor had prescribed the right drug, the dose was incorrect. Other common errors were doctors neglecting to prescribe the drugs that the patient needed or prescribing drugs the patient didn’t need.

With colleague Ms Kirsten Galbraith, also a senior lecturer in the Department of Pharmacy Practice, Mr Dooley and the study team tracked pharmacist interventions in relation to almost 25,000 patients over one month. In what is probably the world’s first audit of pharmacist interventions, the study found 111 admissions due to poisioning or toxic drug effects and nine admissions due to heart attack.

Mr Dooley said the study emphasised the importance of pharmacists in hospital care. Preventing the deaths of 15 patients in one month at only eight hospitals equalled hundreds of patients a year in all of the nation’s hospitals, he said.

"In financial terms, the study showed that for every dollar spent on a pharmacist for an intervention in medication management, the hospital saves $2.50," he said. "Over the four weeks of the study, the calculated savings were $263,221 for the eight hospitals. This included $150,307 for length-of-stay reduction and $111,948 for readmission reduction."

When extrapolated over a year, the interventions worked out at a saving to the eight hospitals of more than $4.4 million.

"The issue of medication treatment in hospital is very complicated," Mr Dooley said. "It’s very difficult for everyone involved in pharmacy treatment to get it right. That’s where pharmacists play a role — they can save lives, improve patient care and reduce the length of stay in hospital for many people."

-Penny Fannin

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Language barrier an issue in South Africa

Linguistics

People migrating to cities from rural areas of South Africa are facing difficulties with employment and social services access due to language barriers, a Monash researcher has found.

Dr Ana Drumetz, research director of Monash University’s Language and Society Centre, spent two months last year surveying internal migration to Cape Town from other parts of South Africa.

The survey formed part of a larger research project, "Global Markets, Human Mobility and Social Postcolonies", led by Professor Chris Nyland from the Faculty of Business and Economics and funded by the Monash Institute for the Study of Global Movements.

Dr Drumetz said that in post-apartheid South Africa, large numbers had left the main language of upward mobility, political access and economic power but that Afrikaans still played an important role in the lives of many employees in the Western Cape as Afrikaans-speaking.

However, she said many of those interviewed were unable to communicate even basic information in English and their knowledge of Afrikaans was also low.

"Those who participated in the survey repeatedly commented that their inability or exposure to English in English-speaking towns and social services and government institutions," she said.

"Doctors in clinics and hospitals usually have a little knowledge of Xhosa, the main language spoken by most of the internal migrants, and rely on the patient’s knowledge of English and sometimes Afrikaans. As one respondent put it, patients from rural areas are unable to communicate in hospitals: ‘I understand doctors, doctors not understand me.’"

Dr Drumetz said many rural migrants only had minimal contact with English and typically settled in areas which had had little knowledge of English or Afrikaans.

"In many parts of South African society, English is a second language, but in many of the townships migrants from nearby villages had established themselves and where Xhosa remained the dominant language of everyday communication."

For Postcolonial Writing in collaboration with the State Library of Victoria. The evening with V S. Naipaul includes a welcome address from Monash vice-chancellor Professor Richard Larkins, and features a classical Indian dance performance.

Dr Larkins said the forum was a milestone for the Centre for Postcolonial Writing.

"We aim to provide a stimulating platform for the exchange of creative and intellectual inquiry on postcolonial studies," she said.

"The forum’s theme — globalisation and identities — is currently one of the most popular areas of postcolonial creative writing and scholarship."

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