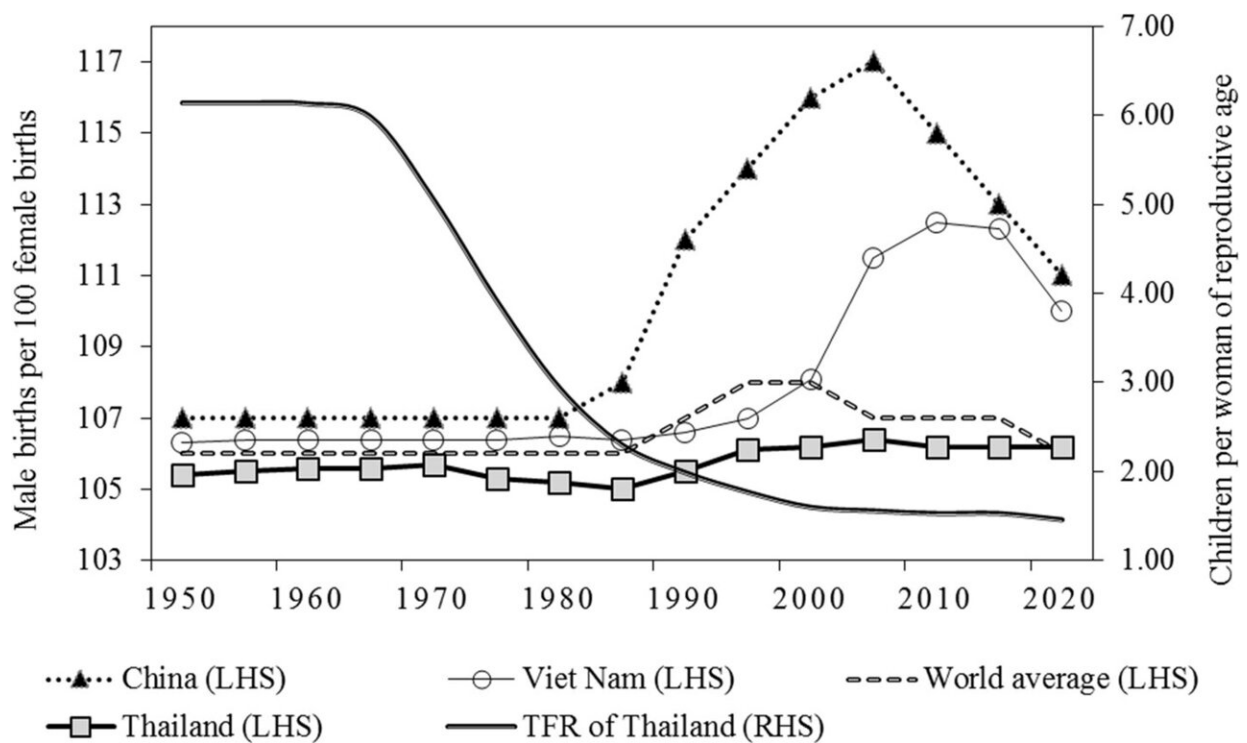


# Study: Despite Asia's preference for sons, happiness in old age has everything to do with daughters

November 21 2023



Total fertility rate in Thailand and comparison of sex ratios at birth in Thailand vis-à-vis China, Vietnam and the world average, 1950–2020. Sources: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, custom data acquired via website. Sex ratios at birth (as in male births per 100 female births) in Thailand, China, Vietnam and the world average are plotted on the primary vertical axis (LHS) and total fertility rate (as in children per woman of reproductive age) in Thailand is plotted on the secondary vertical axis (RHS). Credit: *Journal of Happiness*

*Studies* (2023). DOI: 10.1007/s10902-023-00655-1

Researchers from Monash University Malaysia's Business School warn that the traditional preference for a son rather than a daughter, may worsen gender inequality in rapidly aging Asian societies.

The paper, "Happiness in Old Age:The Daughter Connection," [published](#) in the *Journal of Happiness Studies* outlines the unique demographic crisis Asia faces and confirms that although having a son is thought best, living with daughters brings greater [happiness](#).

By 2030, Asia will have the largest elderly population in the world, and while an aging mother is seen as an unwanted burden in patriarchal Asia, concerns are growing over a new form of intergenerational inequality.

Lead researcher Professor M. Niaz Asadullah, Professor of Development Economics at Monash University Malaysia, said more than half of the older population in the region is female, and many continue to suffer multiple forms of economic discrimination and [social exclusion](#) . All these culminate in the feminization of elderly poverty.

As elderly parents look to [adult children](#) for old age care, another form of gender bias in the supply of care is being created where sons are preferred to daughters.

Research confirms that in Vietnam, most older people co-reside with a married son. Equally, in India, up to 79% of [older people](#) live with sons compared with only 39% who live with daughters. In Thailand, 29 and 32% respectively of older persons live with sons and daughters. Whereas in China, only 4.8% of fathers and 6.46% of mothers choose to live with their daughters.

"Our research in Thailand, an aging Asian country with no legacy of sex selection in fertility, confirms that daughters can be just as valuable for parents in aging societies. Compared with China and Vietnam, Thailand offers an interesting context in which one can reinvestigate the link between old-age happiness and children's gender," said Professor Asadullah.

The results show that living with daughters is associated with happiness in four ways:

1. an improvement in self-rated health (for older females)
2. a reduction in loneliness (for both older males and females)
3. a reduction in emotional ill-being or worry for older females, in the case of daughters with a good relationship with their parents or a university education or higher
4. improvement in [economic conditions](#) in terms of income sufficiency in both older males and females, where a daughter has a university education or higher.

"Our findings have important policy implications for other rapidly aging emerging Asian economies. They suggest that children's human capital can have added social returns on the well-being of the elderly population.

"Policies that increase investment in female schooling are likely to have long-term effects on the well-being of [older persons](#) and ensure that demographic benefits are fully appreciated," said Professor Asadullah.

**More information:** Pataporn Sukontamarn et al, Happiness in Old Age: The Daughter Connection, *Journal of Happiness Studies* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s10902-023-00655-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-023-00655-1)

Provided by Monash University

Citation: Study: Despite Asia's preference for sons, happiness in old age has everything to do with daughters (2023, November 21) retrieved 6 May 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2023-11-asia-sons-happiness-age-daughters.html>

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