

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As the world's population ages, strategies to address the elderly population's increasing needs are being sought. In the past government solutions to care for the elderly were taken for granted. However, the increasing number of elderly, and their increasing needs and demands, together with decreasing family support for this population, group are outstripping available resources. Demographic and epidemiological transitions in developing countries have followed different models, as a consequence of health interventions to improve health status without greater improvements in socio-economic conditions. In some developing countries, populations are ageing more rapidly than in developed countries and there is, therefore, a need to confront the same problems but with less resources and in a shorter period of time.

Alternative models for delivering services for the elderly are required, while cost containment policies are also being implemented. These policies, unfortunately, appear to have had negative effects on the elderly population since neo-classical economic policies and ethical values seem to be in conflict.

Rationalisation of decision making has meant fewer resources and more barriers to accessing health services for this population group. Health economics and health policy analysis have only recently been applied in developing countries and their influence is gaining ground in decision making and the allocation of scarce resources.

In Mexico, the health policy and economic consequences of population ageing have only recently begun to be analysed and policy makers have started to look for alternatives. In the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS), the largest provider of health services in Mexico, the proportion of people

aged 60 years or over is higher than the average Mexican for the total population and is comparable with figures from some developed countries. As Mexico's population grows older, IMSS is considered as the cheapest alternative option by most of the elderly seeking medical care for chronic diseases.

Elderly people and their relatives look for voluntary schemes available in this institution. The economic crisis exacerbated that situation, since the number of workers paying into compulsory schemes decreased while their health needs increased. However, in the last years the number of workers seems to increase.

In consequence, it has become necessary to analyse the current health situation of this IMSS population, as well as the health services and their cost. It is also important to analyse the feasibility of some present IMSS policies, given the projected population increases for 2000, 2010 and 2020.

Apart of this introduction, there are thirteen further chapters. In the second the consequences of the ageing process are reviewed. Chapter three presents the conceptual framework for an analysis of health services for the elderly and the fourth reviews ageing in the Mexican context. In chapter five the characteristics of the IMSS are described and in the sixth the study methodology, including the epidemiological, statistical and ethical design to reach the objectives.

Chapters seven to eleven present the results divided into the following sections: Characteristics of the population, health status, health services utilisation, health services costs and predictions for years 2000, 2010 and 2020. Each chapter includes the presentation of the results and a final summary. Chapter twelve is the discussion of the results emphasising the conceptual and methodological strengths of the study, as well as its limitations. Final conclusions and recommendations are listed in the chapter thirteen. Finally there are the bibliography and annexes.