

Paper name: Population and Settlement Geography

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Topic: Age-Sex Composition: Global Context

The term 'population composition' refers to the distinguishing attributes of population of a country such as occupation, education, life-expectancy, age, sex, place or residence, etc. Population composition is the description of a population according to characteristics such as age and sex. These data are often compared over time using population pyramids. The main elements of population composition are age, sex and ethnicity.

Age Structure

The age structure of a population refers to the number of people in different age groups. A larger size of population in the age group of 15-59 years indicates the chances of having a larger working population. On the other hand, if the number of children in the population is high, the dependency ratio will be high. Similarly, a growing population in the age group of 60 plus indicates greater expenditure on the care of the aged. There are three types of age structures, viz.,

- (i) the West European type in which children constitute less than 30 per cent, and 15 per cent of the population are old;
- (ii) the North American type where 35-40 per cent of the population are children and 10 per cent, old people; and
- (iii) the Brazilian type where 45-55 per cent of the population are children, and old people constitute only four-eight per cent of the total population. The type of age structure has a direct influence on the future of a nation, since both extremes, i.e., old age dependency as well as young age dependency proves to be a severe burden on the economy of a country.

Demographers use population pyramids to describe age distribution of populations. A population pyramid is a bar chart/graph in which the length of each bar represents the number (or

percentage) of persons in an age group. We may take the youngest segment of the population at the base, and move on to the older segments till the oldest comes at the top.

The principal factor contributing to a change in the age distribution of a population is the rate of fertility: a change in fertility affects the number of people in the single age group of age zero, or the newly born. Hence a decline or increase in fertility has a significant effect at one end of the age distribution and can thereby influence the overall age structure. This means that youthful age structures correspond to highly fertile populations, typical of developing countries. The older age structures are those of low-fertility populations, more common to the industrialised nations.

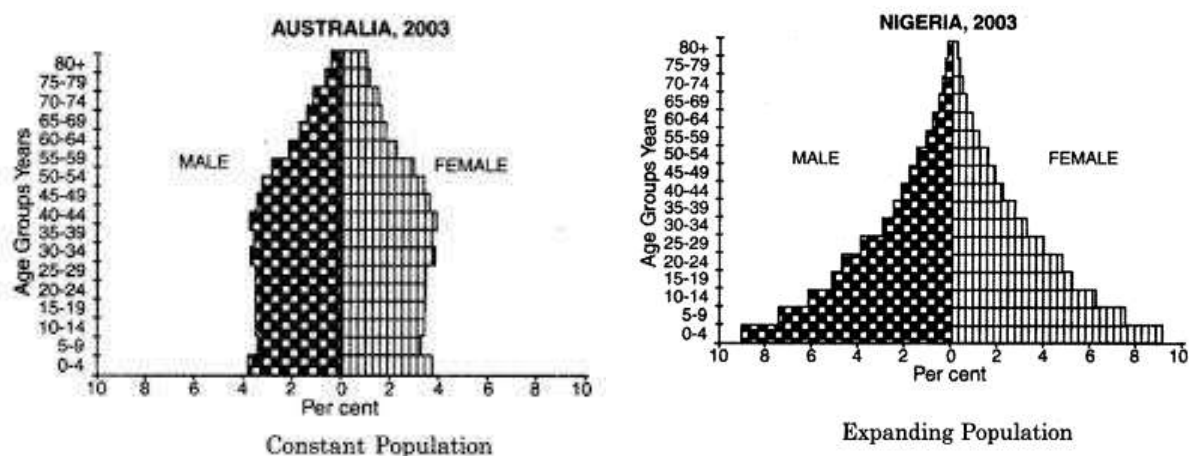


Fig.: Age-Sex Pyramid of a Developed and a Developing Nation

Characteristics of Age Structure

Following are the four characteristics of age structure of age composition of the world population:

- 1) **Population composition:** The age group 0-15 is called young population, 15-59 age group of working population and above 60 years represents an ageing population which require more expenditure on health care facilities.
- 2) **Age-Sex Pyramid:** The age-sex structure of the population refers to the number of females and males in different age- groups.'

- 3) **Expanding population:** Nigeria, Bangladesh, Mexico, India and other developing and under developed countries of the world is having the characteristics of expanding population which have triangular shaped pyramid with a wide base. These have larger population in lower age groups due to high birth rate.
- 4) **Constant population:** The developed countries like Australia, has age-sex pyramid of bell shaped and tapered towards the top. It shows birth and death rates are almost equal leading to a near constant population.
- 5) **Declining population:** The developed countries having low birth and death rates come under this category which shows the pyramid of narrow base and a tapered top. The population growth in developed countries is usually zero or negative. Example; Japan, Britain, France, etc.

Significance of Age Structure

Age structure represents the number of people of different age groups

1. This is an important indicator of population composition, since a large size of population in the age group of 15-59 indicates a large working population.
2. A greater proportion of population above 60 years represents an ageing population which requires more expenditure on health care facilities.
3. Similarly high proportion of young population would mean that the region has a high birth rate and the population is youthful.
4. Age structure reflects the demographic and socio-economic history of a population over a period of about a century. Certainly it is the result of various and interrelated factors such as fertility, mortality and migration, which have operated during the lifetime of the oldest inhabitants.

Sex Composition

Another structural feature of populations is the relative numbers of males and females. Defined as the number of females per 1000 males in the population, sex ratio is an important social indicator of the equity prevailing between males and females at a given point of time. Factors influencing the sex ratio are, mainly, the differentials in mortality, sex selective migration, and sex ratio at birth and, at times, the sex differential in population enumeration.

By nature, slightly more males are born than females (a typical ratio being 105/106 males for every 100 females). However, males experience higher mortality at virtually all ages after birth. By implication, during childhood males outnumber females of the same age; the difference decreases as age increases; at some point in the adult life span, the numbers of males and females become equal; as higher ages are reached, the number of females becomes quite large.

India shows an uneven composition of population as compared to most of the developed countries. The reasons put forward for such a state of affairs are: high maternal mortality, female infanticide, sex-selective female abortions, neglect of the girl child leading to a higher mortality among girls at a young age, and change in sex ratio at birth.

The sex composition of the population in India is a matter of concern, being much lower than 950 for a long time.

Factors Responsible for Imbalances in Age-Sex Composition

The following factors are responsible for imbalances in the age-sex found in different parts of the world:

- 1. Lower sex ratio-** In regions where gender discrimination is rampant, the sex ratio is bound to be unfavourable to women. Such areas are those where the practice of female foeticide, female infanticide and domestic violence against women are prevalent. On an average, the world population reflects a sex ratio of 102 males per 100 females. The highest sex ratio in the world has been recorded in Latvia where there are 85 males per 100 females. In contrast, in Qatar there are 311 males per 100 females. In general, Asia has a low sex ratio. Countries like China, India, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan have a lower sex ratio.

- 2. High male mortality rate-** In developed countries male mortality rate is higher than females. In all developed countries, women outlive men, sometimes by a margin of as much as 10 years. In the U.S., life expectancy at birth is about 79 years for women and about 72 years for men. The sex ratio is favourable for females in 139 countries of the world and unfavourable for them in the remaining 72 countries listed by the United Nations.

- 3. Migration-** A deficit of males in the populations of many European countries is attributed to better status of women, and an excessively male-dominated out-migration to different parts of the world in the past. The Persian Gulf cities (Doha, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Manama, Kuwait City, and Riyadh) have the world's largest gender gaps. In 2012, there were 300 men to 100 women in Doha, while the respective figures in Delhi were 115 men to 100 women, this being the highest male to female ratio outside the Persian Gulf. Large-scale immigration of male labourers often unable to bring their families with them has been a major cause of the current gender imbalance in the Persian Gulf cities.
