CHAPTER 12

Challenges to the Human Security of Elderly Sámi in Finnish and Swedish Lapland

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Abstract

The indigenous Sámi people inhabit the northern parts of Finland and Sweden. They adhere to a traditional way of life and practice a distinct culture connected to their natural surroundings, forming a unique cultural identity. In this chapter, we look into how the concept of human security applies in assessing the well-being of elderly Sámi in the region. Climate change and developments such as mining and other industrial activities are causing significant socio-environmental changes that affect elderly Sámi. While both positive and negative impacts can be identified, risks pertaining to health and well-being are prevalent. We analyse these risks in light of data collected in Finnish and Swedish Lapland during the years 2012 and 2014. In particular, we examine the concerns and challenges which elderly Sámi face as regards the economy, environment, food and health. In concluding, we offer some recommendations on how the well-being of elderly Sámi can be promoted in response to the prevailing human security challenges.

1 Introduction

The article undertakes to determine the degree of human security in the lives of elderly1 Sámi. Well-being and human security are intertwined. The concept of well-being is a broad, multidimensional one.2 Human security is also a

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1 ‘Elderly’ in this paper refers to ‘elder persons’, ‘old people’, ‘senior persons’, including ‘elderly men and women’. Since in Finnish and Swedish research an elderly person is a person aged 65 and over, we also take this age as our point of reference.
multifaceted construct, one whose component features span many disciplines. It combines security, rights and development. In this research, we have applied human security in its people-centred aspect, which places the individual at the ‘centre of analyses’. Well-being is socially defined based on the historical and cultural context and also on the different stages of life. As used here, the concept denotes an absence of the particular challenges that elderly Sámi people face in their communities, examples being health-related problems exacerbated by climate change, social isolation, mining activities and out-migration of the younger generation. In this chapter well-being is viewed as a component of human security.

The northern parts of Finland, Sweden, Russia and Norway are home to both non-indigenous and Sámi populations. The area known as the Sámi homeland, or Sápmi, stretches from Central Norway and Sweden through the northernmost part of Finland into the Kola Peninsula. While the Sámi inhabit a rather large area, our focus in this chapter is on Sámi living in the Finnish and Swedish parts of the homeland and, in particular, the elderly members of the Sámi communities. In Finland the Sámi homeland comprises the municipalities of Enontekiö, Inari and Utsjoki, as well as the reindeer-herding area of the municipality of Sodankylä.

Several statistics show that elderly people now live longer than earlier. Longevity has increased all over the world because of developments such as urbanization, industrialization and improved standards in health care and in social services. Living longer does not mean that everyone is guaranteed a healthy and happy life, however. Elderly persons are treated as an expensive

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