

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF OLDER PERSONS AND FAMILY SUPPORT IN MORE DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

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INTRODUCTION

Promoting an age-integrated society that encourages the participation of older persons is one of the main elements of the set of recommendations on Ageing for the Year 2001 as proposed by the United Nations General Assembly. In the present paper, two important avenues to social integration of older persons¹ will be

There are major differences in attitudes and beliefs about marriage (versus unmarried cohabitation and living alone as a never-married person) and marriage dissolution (especially as far as social acceptance of divorce is concerned). These differences, together with gender-specific discrepancies in life expectancy, affect the patterns of marital status as realized by older persons. Life expectancies at birth differ significantly for men and women in the four countries studied here; women live an additional 7.7 years in Finland, 5.4 years in

The distribution of marital status characteristics over the elderly population is directly related to the nuptiality patterns of the populations under study. “What percentage of the population has ever been married?” is one of the crucial questions in this context. For men, table 1 indicates a more or less stable percentage of never-married as far as the older age groups are concerned, followed, especially in Finland and to a lesser extent in the United Kingdom and Italy, by a remarkably higher percentage among the younger elderly. The data in table 1 show that the proportions of never-married women in the oldest age groups are

countries in Southern Europe, the third group is the Eastern European cluster, and Ireland and Iceland trail behind. Research into these regional European patterns has focused on changes in fertility patterns and family formation, including divorce patterns (Bosveld, 1996). Empirical research concentrates on persons between about 18 and 48 years of age. Research into the acceptance of, and participation in, new behavioural patterns among persons aged 48 and over is, de facto, absent. Now that younger cohorts, raised and educated in the 1960s, are entering the ages of 50 and above, new norms and behavioural patterns are taking shape among younger cohorts of older persons. The relatively large proportion of men who never married in the younger old age groups (see table 1) is thought to be a result of the trend away from marriage and towards long-term, lifelong variations of unmarried cohabitation. The same conclusion can be drawn for the higher percentages of divorced men and women, a phenomenon affected by increased divorce rates among the youngest cohorts entering older ages. In the near future, the proportion of divorced elderly is expected to rise tremendously as this phenomenon, which is widespread among the middle age groups (40-49 years) in Finland, Hungary and the United Kingdom, will reach the elderly population, the more so because remarriage rates do not appear to be keeping pace with divorce rates.

Transitions in marital status among older persons

The transition from marriage to widowhood is one that is broadly expected to happen in this phase of life. However, the age at which the transition is experienced is rising rapidly, more or less parallel to the rise in life

Trends in several Western European countries indicate a decrease in differences in gender-specific life expectancies, in contrast to the situation in Hungary and other countries in transition. This trend will affect the percentage of couples ageing together.

Thus, in conclusion, in the first half of the twentieth century, older cohorts of men and women and their

persons who happened to be in the household, such as children, other family members, servants or lodgers. Investigating the marital status of older adult persons as the basic characteristic of households is no longer sufficient or adequate when addressing the determinants and outcomes of household types and family relationships. However, in the absence of detailed information about partner and marital histories in census data, we have to use the current marital status position as the first determinant of differences in living arrangements.

Figures I to IV provide information about living arrangements by age category and country, subdivided for married, widowed and divorced men and women.

(FIGURES I – IV HERE)

The data for married men indicate a high percentage living with a spouse and without others in each of the four countries. Even in the oldest age categories, living with a spouse and without others is the most characteristic living arrangement of older married men. Going from the younger towards the older age groups, living with a spouse and young adult children decreases and is replaced! to a certain extent! by co-residence with adult children. Living with one's spouse, children and grandchildren is uncommon in the United Kingdom, but more prominent in the other countries, especially in Italy and Hungary. Insofar as older women are still married, their living arrangements! to a large extent! resemble those of their spouses. There is one exception: in the oldest age groups, married women more frequently live alone than do married men, especially in the United Kingdom. This might be related to the institutionalization or hospitalization of their spouses.

A large proportion of the older population consists of widows. Figures I to IV provide information about their living arrangements. Among widows, the proportions living alone are highest in Finland and the United Kingdom, considerably lower in Italy, and much lower in Hungary. This is in line with the ideas of the second demographic transition, namely, that living alone as an indicator of individualistic living arrangements will become more and more prominent, starting in the Northern and Western European countries, followed by the Southern European countries. In Finland, older widows, for the most part, continue living alone until the age of 85 and over. In the United Kingdom and in Italy, a decrease in living alone is registered for those aged 85 and over and 75 and over, respectively. The proportion of older widows living alone in Hungary lags behind those in other countries, gradually decreasing from the age category 70-74 years. Nevertheless, living alone is the most common living arrangement among older widows in each of the four countries. During the second half of the twentieth century, a dramatic increase in the proportions of the widowed population living alone across the more highly developed world has been documented (de Jong Gierveld and van Solinge, 1995;

Living arrangements of older people and related guarantees for familial support

Living as a couple and reciprocal support

Living together as a couple without others is the living arrangement that is most frequently realized by older married persons in each of the four countries studied (see figures I-IV). It is also the living arrangement that provides older men and women with the greatest possibilities to live independently and to realize reciprocal support on a daily basis, if needed. This may be attributed firstly to their financial situation, based on state and company pension and social security schemes of at least a male person and perhaps additionally of women's past earnings, which tends to be much better than the situation of those living alone, especially women. If household incomes allow, paid helpers to clean the house, wash clothes and dishes, and perhaps cook meals are an option for those who wish to continue living independently. Secondly, one's spouse can and will serve as the optimal long-term provider of emotional as well as instrumental support. Nearly all husbands and three quarters of the wives rely on their spouses (Kendig and others, 1999). Spouses have the proximity, the long-term commitment and the similarity of interests and values that underlie this type of support (Dykstra, 1993). Now that older men are much more likely to be married than are older women, with surprisingly little variation between European regions, being very old proves to have different implications for men and women. For men, being old generally means being attached, that is, having a spouse available for assistance and care. For women, it generally means being spouseless, that is having to turn to others when they are no longer able to cope by themselves.

Living ! with or without a spouse ! with children (and/or grandchildren and parents): co-residence and reciprocal support

The microdata set of the Population Activities Unit of the Economic Commission for Europe allows us to reliably compare the co-residence situation of older persons in the four countries under study. Assuming that persons aged 69 and under are generally not frail or totally support-dependent, our focus is on men and women aged 70 and over. Table 2 gives the patterns of co-residence for each of the countries, subdivided by marital status and sex.

(TABLE 2 HERE)

As expected, co-residence is most prominent under formerly married persons. Widows and widowers are the top scorers in this respect, with Italy and Hungary in a leading position. In these two countries, 30 per cent or more of the non-institutionalized widowed men and women aged 70 or over co-reside with their children

the percentage of older persons involved in institutional care increases sharply with age, and is higher among women than among men in each of the three countries studied. The higher percentage of older persons in institutional care compensates, to a certain extent, for the lower proportions of co-residing older people in Finland and in the United Kingdom as compared with Italy and Hungary.

(TABLE 3 HERE)

Major changes appear to have occurred in the past few decades. A declining proportion of elderly persons live with their children. Statistical data for several European countries and for the United States show that a decreasing proportion of older persons live together with kin in a multigeneration household and that years lived in old-age co-residence have declined substantially. In Europe, more and more elderly! after the death of the spouse! tend to choose to live independently for as long as possible. They appreciate good

greater privacy and individualization, resulting in higher percentages of divorce, living alone or living as a parent without a partner. And, as mentioned above, the preferences of older adults in the more developed countries are increasingly moving towards a continuation of independence, by living in a one-person household.

Intentions that today shape specific decisions about future behaviour have been viewed as being part of people's more encompassing ideas about how they want their lives to evolve. Giddens (1991, p. 85) suggests that life planning constitutes a general feature of modern life. In a world of alternative lifestyle options, strategic life planning is of special importance. Through life planning, people can prepare a course of future actions. The concept of individual-level strategic behaviour covers decision-making in a wide variety of domains of life, including partner selection, the start and continuation of a specific type of living arrangement, and other personal relationships. In opting for either "living alone" or sharing a household with adult others, one has to weigh the pros and cons of both options. Sharing a household may provide people with personal care, reciprocal attention and support, solidarity, division of household tasks and other positive goods.

kinds of support, such as health care, social companionship and housekeeping assistance, for disabled old people who continue to live independently. This informal, private-sector support still prevails across the more developed world, despite the availability of institutional care and other types of social services. Families still provide most of the support needed. Within the realm of the present paper it is not possible to provide an in-depth overview of all the data available about children who are involved in the changing networks of ageing individuals, as well as information about care given to non-co-resident older parents in need of support. More information about this phenomenon can be found in, among others, Grundy (1999) and Van Tilburg (1998).

In today's developed world, the decision to start giving informal support to frail older parents is not a matter of course. The decision depends on the ongoing quality of social relationships between parents and children, on voluntary principles and on individual agreement (Keith, 1992). As pointed out earlier in the present paper, within each of the countries studied, co-residence is more frequently reported by older widows and widowers and less frequently by older divorced women and men. The same pattern has been found for informal support provided to non-co-resident older parents. Research has shown that about half of the older widowed persons who live independently, with children alive, and who are in need of support, mentioned that one (or more) of the children were active in the support network, compared with less than a quarter of all the ever-divorced older persons (de Jong Gierveld and Dykstra, 1997). In such a situation, those most likely to be at risk are fathers who did not maintain a high-quality relationship with their children following divorce (Bornat and others, 1999). The latter have to rely more heavily on support from community volunteers ("meals on wheels"), as well as on support that has to be paid for, or formal support arrangements.

However, national surveys from several countries indicate that a majority of older persons can rely on, and receive assistance from, informal helpers. This enables the elderly to continue living independently, which is welcomed by many older persons.

AN AGENDA FOR FUTURE POLICY-MAKING AND RESEARCH

The present paper provides a comprehensive picture of some characteristics of the living arrangements of older persons in four countries in Europe. We can conclude that new ideas, attitudes and demographic behaviour are not restricted to young adult persons, but are also found in the lives of persons aged 50 and over. New behavioural patterns such as divorce and living alone, unmarried cohabitation and LAT relationships are

residence in Italy and Hungary continue to decrease? Will higher percentages of older persons opt for new types of living arrangements? Ideally, one needs cohort data to investigate changing patterns of living arrangements, and the determinants of these developments. The present paper contains data about four countries. In total, more than 12 countries were involved in the Unit's undertaking. Most of the countries involved are located in Central and Eastern Europe; many Western European countries were not included. A new programme elaborating on this initiative is urgently needed. The new initiative should preferably include more detailed information about the important themes under investigation. In particular, and in conclusion, we shall identify some areas in which more detailed information and more research are needed. This could serve as a basis for the improvement of existing policies and for ideas about new avenues for policy-making in the field of ageing.

There is an urgent need for improved statistical information about

- Marital status, including partner and marital history;
- New types of living arrangements among older people (e.g., unmarried cohabitation, "living apart but together");
- Determinants of multigeneration households (including information about the timing, and motives for starting such households, and support given and received).

Research is needed on how and why decisions are made to live alone, to start a couple relationship, to enter the household of one of the children, and so on. More research is needed on the effects of types of living arrangements on independence and self-reliance, and on personal and social well-being (of each of the household members of each of the generations involved).

NOTES

¹When we refer to older persons or elderly persons, we address a category that is not clearly defined. Not only does the minimum age fluctuate ! 55, 60 or 65 ! but various classifications are used within the group as well.

²Data of national censuses have been recoded ex post to harmonize answer categories as accurately as possible in order to facilitate comparative analysis. This ex post data manipulation cannot compensate for intrinsic discrepancies in census question-and-answer categories between national censuses. In particular in the area of complex types of living arrangements and of housing equipment, intrinsic differences still exist, making between-country comparisons difficult. In other fields, comparisons are difficult because not all national censuses include questions about specific themes, such as older persons' institutionalization in Italy, and housing equipment in the United Kingdom.

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TABLE 1. MARITAL STATUS OF PERSONS AGED 50 AND OVER ACCORDING TO AGE AND SEX, IN PERCENTAGES

Age	Never-married men				Never-married women			
	Finland	United Kingdom	Italy	Hungary	Finland	United Kingdom	Italy	Hungary
50-54	13	8	9	5	9	4	8	47
85+	6	5	5	3	17	12	11	6
	Married men				Married women			
	Finland	United Kingdom	Italy	Hungary	Finland	United Kingdom	Italy	Hungary
50-54	73	82	87	83	70	80	82	73
55-59	75	83	87	85	66	76	76	67
60-64	76	82	86	84	59	70	67	59
65-69	77	79	84	83	49	59	57	47
70-74	76	77	81	79	36	47	44	33
75-79	70	71	75	71	24	33	30	22
80-84	60	62	66	59	14	21	19	12
85+	42	47	49	41	6	12	9	4
	Widowed men				Widowed women			
	Finland	United Kingdom	Italy	Hungary	Finland	United Kingdom	Italy	Hungary
50-54	1	2	1	3	7	6	8	13
55-59	2	3	3	4	12	10	14	20
60-64	4	5	4	7	20	18	22	30
65-69	7	9	7	10	32	29	31	43
70-74	12	14	10	15	46	43	45	57
75-79	20	21	18	24	58	57	60	69
80-84	31	31	27	36	66	66	69	80
85+	49	47	45	55	73	76	80	88
	Divorced/separated men				Divorced/separated women			
	Finland	United Kingdom	Italy	Hungary	Finland	United Kingdom	Italy	Hungary
50-54	13	8	3	9	14	10	3	10
55-59	11	7	2	7	12	8	3	9
60-64	9	5	2	6	10	6	2	8
65-69	7	4	2	4	8	5	2	6
70-74	5	3	1	3	7	4	1	5
75-79	4	2	1	2	6	3	1	4
80-84	3	2	1	2	5	2	1	3
85+	3	1	1	1	4	1	1	2

Source: Collection of census-based microdata samples of the Population Activities Unit of the Economic Commission for Europe: Finland, 1990 census; United Kingdom, 1991 census; Italy, 1991 census; Hungary, 1990 census.

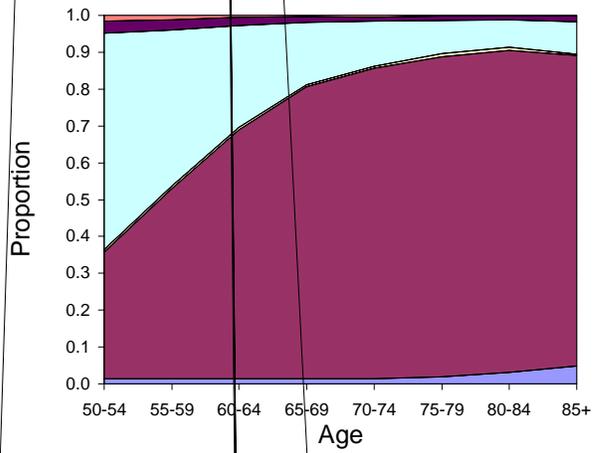
TABLE 2. PERSONS AGED 70 AND OVER LIVING IN TWO- OR THREE-GENERATION HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT OTHERS,^a
BY SEX AND MARITAL STATUS, IN PERCENTAGES OF NON-INSTITUTIONALIZED POPULATION

	<i>Finland 1990</i>	<i>United Kingdom 1991</i>	<i>Italy 1991</i>	<i>Hungary 1990</i>
<u>Males</u>				
Married	15.9	11.4	27.1	21.8
Widowed	16.8	16.6	35.1	29.8
Divorced	6.1	9.7	11.8	12.6
<u>Females</u>				
Married	13.4	8.9	23.1	20.7
Widowed	16.2	17.3	36.4	30.8
Divorced	7.9	15.5	27.7	20.3

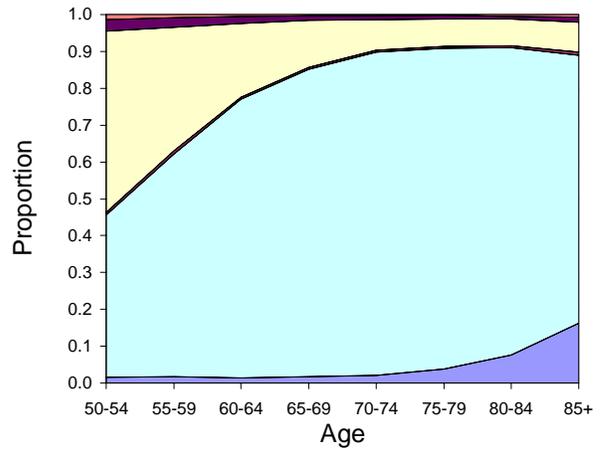
^a Households including spouse and/or children, children-in-law, grandchildren, parents, parents-in-law.
Source: PAU collection of census-based microdata samples.

TABLE 3. PERSONS AGED 70 AND OVER LIVING IN INSTITUTIONS, BY SEX AND AGE,

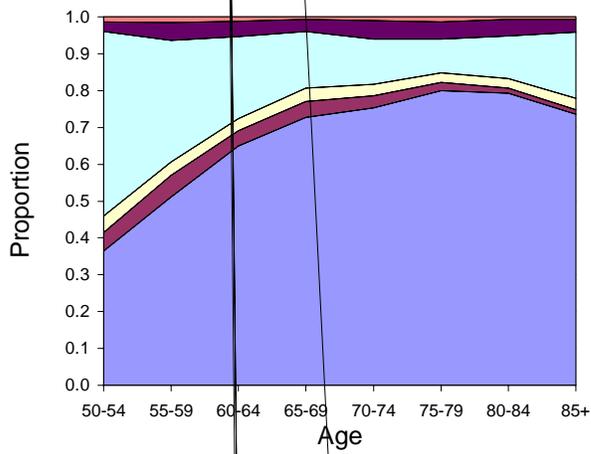
Married men



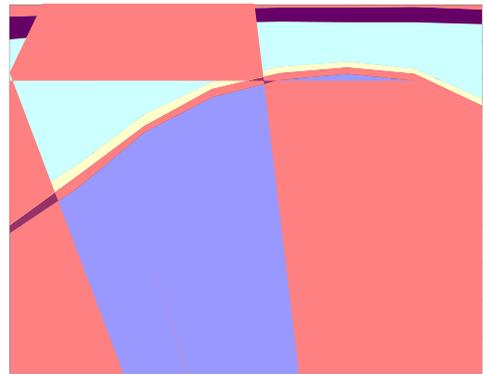
Married women



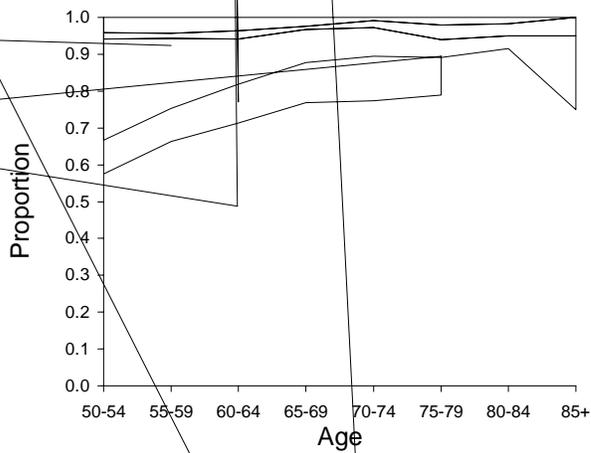
Widowed men



Widowed women



Divorced men



Divorced women

