

Chapter 9

Family Resources

Improvements in life expectancy have changed the structure of multigenerational families; joint survivorship within and across generations has resulted in extended periods of support exchanges (including caregiving) and affective connections over the life span. At the same time, relationships in aging families have become more fluid and less predictable, as reduced fertility and increased rates of divorce, remarriage and stepfamily formation have altered the microcontext in which intergenerational, spousal, and sibling relationships function.

(Silverstein and Giarrusso 2010: 1039)

9.1 Family Diversity

Deficits in family resources are emerging in aging populations. The intact, caring family of later life, comprising grandparents, sons and daughters and grandchildren, has long been a stereotype. With high proportions marrying, having children, and surviving into their 70s and 80s, the stereotype was commonly part of the life experience of older generations at the start of the twenty-first century. This is now becoming less applicable because of the effects of the rising prevalence of never marrying, childlessness, separation, divorce and serial monogamy. The second demographic transition has brought greater diversity in life course experience. Traditional kinship ties continue for many, but in conjunction with less binding or less permanent ties for others. Developments in the second demographic transition strain the meaning of ‘family’ and the distinction between kith and kin. The connections between the lives of younger and older generations further indicate that family-related stresses for sons and daughters will impact upon more aged parents. At the same time, the high labour force participation of working age women either reduces their availability to support elderly parents or increases the difficulties in doing so (Brody 2006).

In contemporary Western societies older people rely quite considerably on a spouse for care, but much less so on daughters and sons if there is an alternative, such as if they can obtain supported accommodation, or paid help, or subsidised services. As a result of social changes, many older people will have diminished options for family care, or for family care complementing community care. Even in the Third Age the important emotional support and day-to-day practical help that the family stereotype has envisaged could become less prevalent, not only because there are fewer immediate relatives but also because of complexities, distancing and weakened commitment within many family networks. Diversity in family building experience will mean that, in later life, some will still be members of large families of three or four surviving generations, while others will have no children or no grandchildren.

Emerging developments thus signal important contrasts between the experiences of present and future cohorts of the aged, although the extent of the shift towards scarcer or less effective family resources will vary between societies. Given the degree of family change, much remains to be learnt about ensuing implications for the experience of later life, including maintaining independence and social integration. The greater diversity will include a continuation of support within and between generations in many families, as well as departures from this. Also, more interaction with friends may partly substitute for depleted family resources (Phillipson et al. 2001: 67).

9.2 Marriage and Cohabitation

Accompanying below replacement fertility have been substantial changes in marriage. Whereas there was a trend towards earlier marriage in Western countries between the 1900s and the 1970s, this subsequently reversed bringing later marriage and a decline in the proportions married at younger ages (Waite 2003: 622–3). Contributing factors have been the prolongation of education for men and women, greater participation of women in the labour force, and increases in cohabitation. Repercussions on the family life of older people include delays in, or curtailment of, generation building when sons and daughters never marry, or marry late, or never have children. This reduces the prevalence of three and four generation families which marked the culmination of trends in the first transition.

At the same time, further developments associated with the second demographic transition make complexity and instability more pronounced features of the family life of older people. Among their sons and daughters, serial monogamy has become more common and with it greater frequency of cohabitation and entering and ending relationships. Cohabitation can occur before or instead of formal marriage, potentially making the family networks of the aged more complicated and some relationships more tenuous. Data for the early years of the twenty-first century show that 7% of people aged 20 and over in OECD countries were cohabiting, with higher figures for people in their twenties and early thirties (OECD 2007b, Table SF9.1).

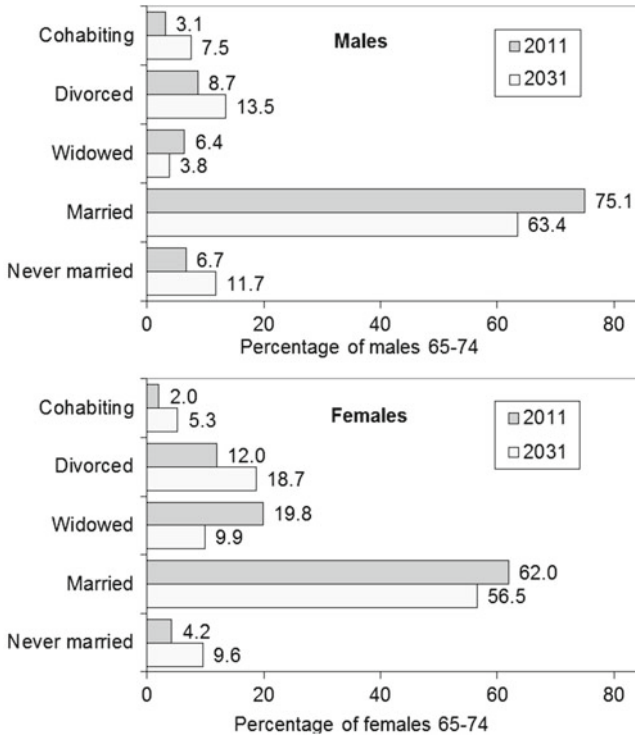


Fig. 9.1 Marital status at ages 65–74, England and Wales 2011 and 2031 (Note: ‘Cohabiting’ includes persons of all marital statuses living with an opposite sex partner to whom they are not formally married. The other categories exclude persons who are cohabiting. The ‘married’ category includes people who are separated but not cohabiting) (Source: Office for National Statistics 2009)

By 2031 in England and Wales, population projections suggest that 7% of people aged 65–74 may be cohabiting, compared with 2% in 2007 (Fig. 9.1). The relatively high frequency of relationship breakdown in consensual unions, as well as in marriages preceded by cohabitation (Wu and Schimmele 2003: 315 and 321), also increases the likelihood that parents will need to provide emotional support, accommodation and financial assistance to their sons and daughters, including those who have become single parents.

International data on the family indicate the distinctiveness of family circumstances associated with some of the world’s lowest birth rates and highest levels of aging. In Japan, as well as in the more traditional Western family systems of Italy, Greece and Spain, the percentages of people aged 20 and over who were cohabiting were less than half the OECD average. The Southern European countries also had 46–52% of sons and daughters aged 20–34 living in the parental home compared with the OECD average of 36% (OECD 2007b, Table SF9.1). Moreover, these countries and Japan had a relatively low percentage of births occurring outside marriage – Japan 2, Greece 5, Italy 15, Spain 23 – compared with a third to a half

in many other countries (OECD 2007a, Table 2.2). A further distinctive feature was that the employment rates for mothers with a child under 16 in the four countries were among the lowest in the OECD, as were figures for Germany and parts of Eastern Europe (OECD 2007b, Chart LMF2.1). Conservative family values and workplace practices, which restrict women's choices in relation to employment, partnering and motherhood, are obstacles to the achievement of desired combinations of work and family roles. This contributes to the environment for very low fertility and rapid aging of the population. Moreover, in Germany and Austria sub-replacement fertility ideals may have emerged as a consequence of a history of low birth rates fostering a culture of low fertility. Germany and Austria have been the first countries to exhibit a preference for below replacement families in Eurobarometer surveys (Goldstein et al. 2003: 490ff). A reduction in levels of public support for children is also thought to have made German society less child-friendly since the 1970s, with new generations adopting anti-child preferences not previously evident (McDonald 2006: 486).

In England and Wales, the prospective trend in marital status at ages 65–74 accords with expectations based on the second demographic transition, especially the rise in alternatives to being married or widowed (Fig. 9.1). Although the great majority of men and women aged 65–74 are projected to be married in 2031, the figures are appreciably lower than in 2011. The fall in the proportions married occurs despite improvements in survival and the resulting reductions in the proportions widowed. Concomitant developments are the rise in the proportions never married, or divorced, or cohabiting (Silverstein and Giarrusso 2010: 1043). Overall, if the projections are valid into the future, there will be a significant change in the pattern of marital status in later life, reflecting not only heightened complexity in family circumstances but also, for some, greater vulnerability associated with the weaker family safety nets of the never married and the divorced. Even within the 'married' group there is likely to be more diversity because it includes the separated and the remarried. A similar pattern of change is projected for Australia (Rowland 2003: 251–253).

9.3 Divorce and Remarriage

Rising divorce rates in the United States and Scandinavia in the 1950s have been cited as the first signs of the second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2008: 82). Women's greater financial independence – through greater participation in the labour force together with the provision of welfare support for single parents – has facilitated abandonment of unsatisfactory marriages. Surveys during the 1960s and 1970s in the United States revealed a dramatic increase in tolerance of divorce (Emens et al. 2008: 129). High divorce rates occurring in some countries since the 1970s have also been associated with legal reforms which introduced 'no fault divorce', such as in Canada, the United States and Sweden. The reforms abolished previous requirements for evidence of adultery or desertion or other failings. Thus in

some countries, changes in the law probably both reflected and reinforced liberal attitudes to divorce, which were part of the social changes associated with the second demographic transition. Divorce became less acrimonious and stigmatizing, and more people became willing to divorce in order to remarry, cohabit or live separately. However governments of other countries have opposed no fault divorce, for instance on the grounds that in certain cases blame should be attributed, or that couples should be more circumspect – seeking to resolve differences instead of resorting to a supposed ‘quickie divorce’. By the twenty-first century, just under half of all marriages in the United States and Sweden were ending in divorce, while in other Nordic countries and the United Kingdom the figures were around 40% (Goldstein 2003: 265–267). Despite this, the same countries have maintained birth rates close to replacement. Low marriage rates and high divorce rates do not appear to be strong predictors of low fertility, because divorces are by no means confined to the childless, remarriages are common, and many relationships are not formalized through marriage.

Because of the increased prevalence of cohabitation, divorces and separations now commonly represent only a part of the overall occurrence of breakdowns in marriages and partnership relationships. This is a situation that will affect the living arrangements and family life of the aged population increasingly in the future. The impending rise in the proportions living without a spouse or partner is very significant for the family life of the aged because support within, rather than between, generations is often the main source of the family assistance that underpins personal independence throughout later life. The rise will curtail a favourable family trend, apparent for the aged in the late twentieth century, when the rising proportions currently married, in conjunction with declining death rates, led to an increase in joint survival of married couples.

Now looms the prospect of aged care concerns not only for widows, but also for greater numbers of older people who are also unpartnered. The proportion of older people reaching later life without a spouse or partner will increase in a number of countries during the first decades of the twenty-first century. This will coincide with higher proportions reaching advanced ages and no longer being able to manage independently. The deficit in family support due to remaining separated or divorced appears to have more adverse consequences for men, who tend to have less social capital in the form of social networks and supportive contact with others (Arber and Ginn 2005: 534–535; Russell 2007: 108; Silverstein and Giarrusso 2010: 1042). Loss of contact with grandchildren, as a result of a son or daughter divorcing, or migrating after divorce, further reduces older people’s involvement in family life. More than wanted involvement can occur, however, if a grandparent is obliged to become the main child-minder for a divorced daughter or son.

At the same time, remarriages are complicating intergenerational relationships and broadening the meaning of kinship. The second demographic transition is thought to bring a decline in remarriages after separation, divorce or widowhood, in favour of cohabitation or non-coresident arrangements (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2008: 82). This may reduce the level of contact and commitment between different generations of the same ‘family’, because there is no formal acknowledgement or

confirmation of kinship ties. Cohabitation also introduces new types of relationships of the elderly with the de facto partners of their sons and daughters and with partners' children from previous unions.

'Living apart together' (LAT) is another instance of the new types of relationship. This occurs where two people live in their own separate residences but consider themselves, and are considered by others, to be a couple (Levin 2004: 226–7), or as having an 'intimate partner relationship' (Spéder 2007: 116). The name originated from a Dutch movie in the 1970s 'Eva and Frank: Living Apart Together', but other terminology is used in different countries (Levin 2004: 227–8). The LAT relationship may be long term or temporary – such as when a couple make an extended or brief transition to living together, marrying or breaking up. Following divorce or widowhood, LAT may offer tax advantages and protect the inheritance of an individual's own children, at the same time preserving individual autonomy, keeping options open and not having to forego the satisfaction for individuals of living in their own established homes (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2008: 86; Levin 2004: 235). It can also make possible a new relationship without disrupting either existing living arrangements – such as for working-age people with children or a disabled parent – or existing social networks of friends and relatives in the home neighbourhood (Levin 2004: 230–3). Although LAT is an alternative to marriage, it occurs as well among married people who have to work in different places or who prefer to live separately despite emotional bonds. Sometimes too it can serve as an alternative to divorce or as a transition to it (*ibid.*: 235–236).

Like cohabitation, LAT is attributed to rising secularism legitimizing non-traditional choices (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2008: 88). A Swedish survey in 2001 found that 14% of respondents aged 18–74, who were neither married nor cohabiting, were in LAT relationships. A corresponding figure for Norway in 2002 was 8% (Levin 2004: 228–9). Including married people would presumably increase these percentages. However, LAT is difficult to identify and distinguish from dating in statistical collections. Although it generally seems to have low prevalence at any point in time, the available data probably understate its occurrence as a life stage for individuals and its importance as a form of partnership.

9.4 Choices of Living Arrangements

Trends in the living arrangements of older people further reflect the contemporary transformation of family life, which makes it inconceivable that future circumstances will match the present. By the start of the twenty-first century the cohorts that attained peak proportions marrying and having children had reached the older ages with substantial family resources. In the future, social changes will reduce older people's family resources, affecting capacities to maintain independent living arrangements. Despite this, several key influences on older people's choices of living arrangements are likely to endure, namely considerations of security, personal autonomy and social integration. These have more in common with the 'materialist'

values (basic needs) of the first demographic transition than with the 'post-materialist' values of the second.

In old age the household assumes greater importance in daily life, especially if health and mobility impairments limit participation in roles outside the home. Security, in terms of access to help in the event of disability, illness or accident is an important consideration for many older people when making choices about housing and living arrangements. Sharing accommodation with a spouse or other relative brings security in that immediate help is almost always available. Security considerations are also largely responsible for the popularity of various forms of assisted housing, as well as applications for special accommodation in anticipation of future needs. Husbands, who commonly have younger and longer-lived wives, have a lower likelihood of changing their living arrangements. The maintenance of the gap between male and female life expectancies, and the high proportions ever married in older cohorts, have enabled more men than women to avoid the crisis points in decisions about living arrangements.

Although security is an important consideration, probably the highest priority for the majority of older people in Western developed countries is independence. An important manifestation of this is the desire of older people to stay in their own home for as long as possible, which has led to international endorsement of aging in place as a policy goal. Social and economic changes through time have increased the ability of the elderly to achieve and preserve independence. Higher incomes, for example, have enabled aged parents and their adult offspring to live apart. Similarly, the provision of subsidized housing for pensioners, and domiciliary support services, such as meals on wheels and housekeeping, enable many elderly people to remain in their own homes with a minimum of intervention by others. More severe health problems reduce independence, especially at advanced ages. Recognition that maintaining independence is a key aspiration for the aged is essential to avoid undue emphasis on dependency in policy making.

Integration into family life is also a major consideration in decisions about living arrangements. A repeated finding is that the majority of the aged in Western countries desire the level of integration into family life described as 'intimacy at a distance'. In other words, older and younger generations mostly wish to live apart while maintaining contact and exchanging support, such as through visits and phone calls (United Nations 2005: 9). Thus the network described as the modified extended family is the preferred setting for intergenerational relations in many Western countries. Intimacy at a distance is most accessible to aged homeowners who are healthy and mobile. The frail aged and the poor often must accept a degree of contact and involvement with relatives that is above or below the norm. Thus the issue of integration into family life becomes especially pertinent at the crisis points in old age – including widowhood or illness – when accustomed amounts of contact become less viable.

Attainment of goals in relation to housing and living arrangements depends on people's personal resources of wealth, health and family. Groups with the greatest resources cluster in the types of living arrangements preferred in Western societies – couple or single-person households, which afford high levels of personal autonomy.

Groups with limited resources cluster in less commonly favoured situations where autonomy is more restricted, especially households of younger relatives and subsistence-oriented aged care accommodation. A repeated finding is that the poor are more likely to live with relatives, not because of preferences, but because of a lack of alternatives. Similarly, health is a major constraint on choices of living arrangements, so much so that outcomes of changes in health – becoming locality bound, house-bound, wheel-chair bound or bed-bound – mark significant turning points in accommodation needs. Finally, family membership affects the range of choices available by determining whether relatives are present to assist if necessary. Physical proximity is the major factor determining the frequency of face to face contact with kin. The elderly in areas with high outmigration of the young are likely to see their relatives less often (Pillemer et al. 2000: 3).

Independent living arrangements – alone, with a spouse, or as a household head – commonly afford desired levels of independence and integration into family life although, for people living alone, security may be compromised in the event of an illness or accident. When security becomes the main consideration, resources permitting the maintenance of independence have usually become limited in some way, such as on account of ill health or economic disadvantage. Changes associated with aging lessen personal autonomy and the ability to maintain intimacy at a distance, while increasing the importance of security in decisions about living arrangements. The concepts of security, autonomy and integration have applications both in explaining living arrangements and in identifying policy goals, because they enter not only into the decisions of older people themselves, but also into the decisions of others acting on their behalf. Security is the prime consideration in aged care policies that emphasize institutionalization and custodianship to the neglect of rehabilitation and integration into family and community life.

9.5 Householders and Coresidents

In developed countries, the great majority of older people maintain households separately from younger family members, either living as a couple, or living alone. This contrasts with past experience in the United States, for example, where more than half the elderly white individuals and couples had shared living arrangements with children during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth (Ruggles 2001). Today, in the United States and the United Kingdom, 60% of men aged 60 and over live in couple only households, compared with 40% of the women (Fig. 9.2). The difference is due partly to many wives being younger and outliving their husbands. The prevalence of couple only households also depends on whether offspring have left home, which contributes to the higher and lower figures for some other countries. In France and Germany, nearly 70% of older men live in couple only households while in Italy, where many offspring delay leaving home, the figure is 50% (United Nations 2005: 60). Couple only households have a high likelihood of enabling older people to achieve autonomy, security and desired levels

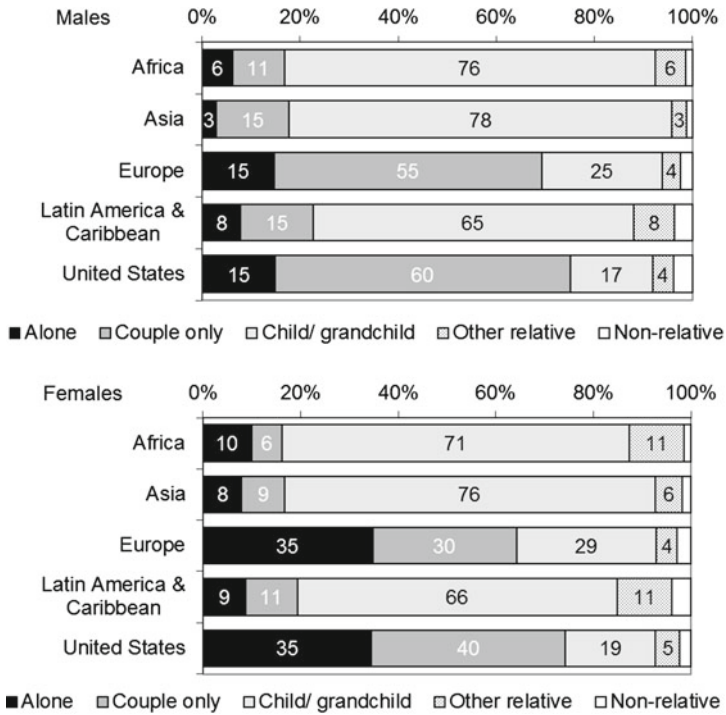


Fig. 9.2 Living arrangements of males and females aged 60 and over in major regions and the United States, late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries (Source: United Nations 2005: 40)

of integration, especially if personal resources of health and income are also favourable. Those who live with a spouse or other relatives are less reliant on outside support, and the feasibility of receiving home-delivered services is widened where there is a coresident ‘gatekeeper’ or carer.

Over lifetimes, older cohorts become more dispersed through different types of living arrangements, as the proportion in married couple households falls and more widows and widowers live alone. The desire to live independently in familiar surroundings, and the financial means to achieve this, are decisive considerations for many. Living alone is often a practical possibility even for the aged who are partially dependent on family support for daily needs, because some offspring may live within easy reach. The kind of assistance needed commonly does not extend to personal care, and membership of a modified extended family is a sign of potential access to the kinds of support most widely required, such as with shopping, housework and transport. Many elderly people who are housebound nonetheless live alone, as outside help enables them to maintain a valued part of their independence. Often complementing family support now are domiciliary services either purchased privately or provided by governments and charitable organizations. Despite its important advantages, living alone can entail a greater risk of economic

disadvantage, social isolation, feelings of loneliness or depression (ibid.: 11) and unmet need in the event of ill health or disability.

There is a global trend towards a greater prevalence of living alone (ibid.: 28–29), but there are still considerable variations in the proportions living alone in developed countries. The figures have long been low in Japan on account of traditions of filial piety and coresidence of aged parents, although currently these traditions are weakening (ibid.: 8–9; Kinsella and He 2009: 72). In Japan the percentage of both sexes aged 60 and over living alone was 13% in 2000 (United Nations 2005: 34). Intermediate figures, with around a quarter of the aged living alone, occur in places where the populations are demographically younger (e.g. USA), or where sons and daughters postpone leaving home, sometimes for economic reasons, as in Italy (ibid.: 34–35). In the United States, it is expected that the proportions living alone may decline for a time as the aging of the baby boom cohorts increases the proportions aged 65–74 years and reverses, temporarily, the ‘aging of the aged’ (ibid.: 24 and 29–30). The highest figures, of 30% or more living alone, occur in north-western Europe including Germany, Austria and the United Kingdom (ibid.: 34–35). Women invariably comprise the majority of the aged living alone: in Germany in 2001, 47% of women aged 65 and over lived alone, compared with 17% of men (Kinsella and He 2009: 73).

In Western societies, older people generally wish to avoid becoming a burden on younger relatives. For many coresidence is a last resort. Nevertheless, in contemporary Europe around 25% of men aged 60 and over, and 29% of women, have such living arrangements (Fig. 9.2) – especially those with more children, less education and fewer financial resources (Tomassini et al. 2004: 26). In developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America coresidence with children or grandchildren is typical for two thirds or more of older men and women.

In developed countries, joint living arrangements today are sometimes of short duration, near the end of a parent’s life and after the grandchildren have left – creating households of two rather than three generations. Moreover, at any time, there are large numbers of older people whom censuses may identify as ‘visitors’ in households, but who undoubtedly include some either providing support to younger relatives or receiving short-term accommodation during an illness or convalescence. Through the twentieth century, preferences to live independently seem to have produced a shift from longer term to shorter-term coresidence with relatives. For American women aged 65, the expected years lived in a household headed by a child was 4.1 years in 1900, 3.3 years in 1940 and 1.2 years in 1990 (Schoeni 1998: 311). The pronounced decline does not necessarily imply a marked overall decline in the proportions ever living in such situations. American studies have found that 23–25% of daughters ever had a parent or parent-in-law move in with them, proportions which were fairly constant through the twentieth century (Weinick 1995). Consequently, in the United States, the trend towards living independently has apparently had only a limited impact on the frequency of living with relatives at some stage.

Long-term coresidence can occur where cultural needs and obligations take precedence. In Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan many of the aged live

with a son or daughter because of the Confucian ethic of filial piety (United Nations 2005: 8–9). Nevertheless, in Japan coresidence of the aged with married children has fallen steeply from 87% in 1960 to an estimated 42% in 2010 (Kinsella and He 2009: 72). A sense of filial obligation is also instrumental in the formation of joint households by immigrant families (Elman and Uhlenberg 1995: 504–5). In Western countries, coresident aged in ethnic minority households sometimes explain their living arrangements in terms of ‘family closeness’. Nevertheless, their joint living arrangements are commonly due particularly to lack of proficiency in the national language, economic constraints or an absence of culturally appropriate aged care (Rowland 1997, 2007). Expectations about the desirability of coresidence and close contact between older and younger generations after immigration are sometimes misplaced. This can lead to family conflict and the need for outside intervention to provide financial and other support to estranged relatives.

Although coresidence can be indicative of aged dependency, it may also denote support from the older to the younger generation, as in instances of ‘the never empty nest’ and children returning home after a relationship breakdown. Here, the aged are likely to be providing economic support to the younger generation and have a position of some authority and control within the household (Elman and Uhlenberg 1995; Macunovich et al. 1995: 18). Late departure from home of sons and daughters, apparent in Europe, North America and Japan, is associated with the high cost of housing, later age at marriage of sons and daughters, prolonged education, and difficulties in securing stable employment (Tomassini et al. 2004: 26; United Nations 2005: 30). In 1994, two thirds of Italian men aged 25–29, for example, had not left home. Critics also see self-interest and lack of initiative as implicated in this phenomenon, referring to the stay-at-home young in Italy as “mothers boys” and in Japan as “parasite singles”.

9.6 Friends

Some research indicates that friends have increasing importance in older people’s ‘personal communities’, despite the persistence of strong feelings of reciprocity and responsibility between the generations. Tomassini et al. (2004: 26–7) considered this development to be less apparent in ‘familistic cultures’ of Southern Europe than in more ‘individualistic cultures’ of northwestern Europe, where they observed “less co-residence, looser family ties, less contact with kin, less desire for such contact, and greater geographical separation of generations.” Furthermore, findings from the Australian Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ALSA), showed that over a decade, older people’s networks with friends and confidants conferred significant benefits for survival, whereas networks with children and relatives did not (Giles et al. 2005). The analysis controlled for the effects of a range of demographic, health and lifestyle variables. The results are consistent with the notion of health benefits arising from social engagement and social capital formation, but they are less consistent with the observation that married people have lower death rates. Also, the

study does not necessarily negate the generalization that family members provide much of the instrumental support to those with failing health.

The reasons why friendships may be so beneficial for health remain speculative. Giles et al. (2005: 578) argued that friendships had a beneficial effect on lifestyles – smoking, drinking, and exercise – as well as encouraging health seeking behaviour and improving self-efficacy, self-esteem, coping and morale. Mendes de Leon (2005: 538) pointed out, however, that a confounding influence in this type of research can arise because declining health affects the ability to maintain a network of social contacts. He noted that friendship networks are markers of abilities to build social capital resources that produce tangible health benefits. Thus friendships may be indicative of positive attributes which friendships reinforce. In contrast, older adults who experience or anticipate dependency tend to turn to members of their nuclear family (*ibid.*: 539). Gender differences are important here because women tend to have more extensive social contacts and they live longer.

9.7 Leaving the Home

Age-related losses such as widowhood, disabilities and frailty can make security the main consideration in choices of living arrangements, sometimes impelling movement from the family home or long-time residence. In such circumstances the more affluent in Western countries are likely to use their financial resources to avoid heavy reliance on relatives and obtain high quality private support, such as in a retirement village. Maintenance of social networks with friends and ‘intimacy at a distance’ with relatives, remain achievable if the new place of residence is near the original home. For low income groups, age-related losses more often bring unwanted levels of reliance on the immediate family. The aged without family resources, such as the never married and the childless, have tended to have a higher risk of nursing home admission and at earlier ages, especially in times and places where community services are underdeveloped (United Nations 2005: 53). Older cohabiters too have been at greater risk of institutionalization than the married because their partners are less likely to be committed to caregiving at home (Silverstein and Giarrusso 2010: 1043).

OECD data for member countries indicate a range in the percentages of persons aged 65 and over in institutional care from 1.5 to 8.0 (Fig. 9.3). Italy and Japan, where expectations of family care for the elderly remain strong, have the lowest figures while other OECD countries commonly have percentages between 4 and 6. The proportions in the oldest ages affect these figures, but there are other influences on levels of institutionalization besides demographic ones. Before the last quarter of the twentieth century nursing homes were the main form of residential care for the frail and disabled aged in developed countries, but since then hostel and retirement village accommodation has become more widely available. The demand for these will rise in conjunction with increases in the aged population and the aging of the aged. One restraining factor will be the expansion of home-delivered services,

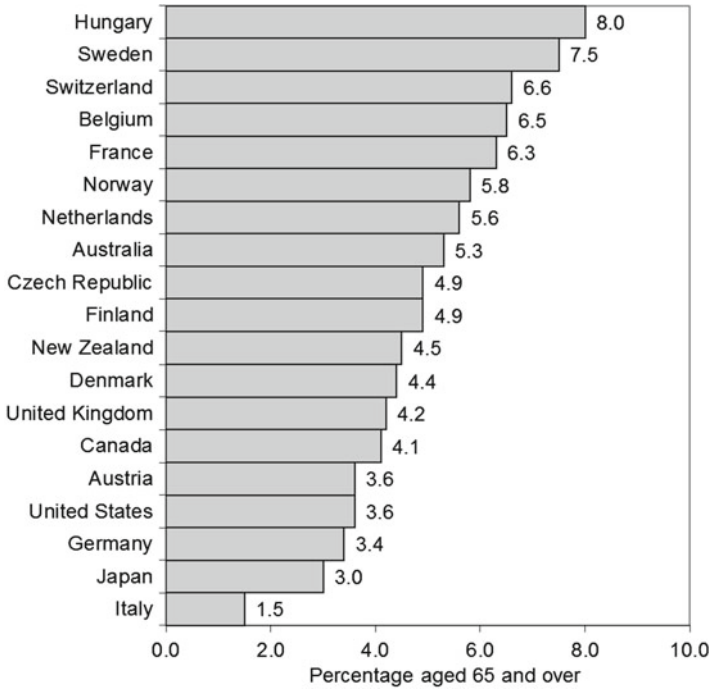


Fig. 9.3 Percentage of persons aged 65 and over in institutional care, OECD countries 2004 (Source: OECD 2006)

including nursing care. The concept of ‘aging in place’ has influenced this development in a number of countries. Care at home accords with the preferences of the aged as well as being less expensive to provide than institutional care. In the past, nursing home admissions often occurred at relatively early stages of disability because there were minimal alternatives. Now there is a tendency towards reserving nursing home accommodation for people needing 24 hour nursing care, many of whom have dementia. Domiciliary support is also diversifying to provide various levels of nursing care at home to meet patients’ wishes, save costs, provide a more flexible system and permit culturally appropriate care for minority groups.

9.8 Conclusion

Family change is at the centre of the forces responsible not only for population aging but also for shifts in the personal resources that are important to the well-being and support of older people. Family membership and affective family relationships are vital resources for individuals, whether young or old. Family support also relieves demand for public support and enables a partnership between the family

and the community in enabling aging in place. The family's multiple roles – in relation to childbearing, child care, child and adult socialization, saving, expenditure, lifestyle choices and exchanges of care between generations – have a major influence not only on the causes and consequences of population aging but also on other social trends and social policy issues. The aged are enmeshed in the forces of change that have transformed their sons' and daughters' experience of marriage and family formation. In the future, cohorts of the aged themselves will increasingly be products of these changes. Yet, despite upheaval in the institution of the family, birth rates in a number of Western countries have remained at levels sufficiently close to replacement to avoid a demographic winter. Other countries, with very low birth rates, will need revitalized family systems to avoid extremes in population aging and reductions in family resources.

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