Evidence - ageing without children; impact on care & health

The following paper is designed to give a brief overview and summary of evidence produced on issues pertaining to ageing without children. It lists relevant research papers, sets ageing without children within the context of UK policy, highlights the key issues that can be drawn from the research to date and suggests how these will impact on health and social care.

Definition of ageing without children

Individuals are ageing without children for a wide range of reasons including
- those who have never been parents either through choice or through circumstance
- those whose children predeceased them
- those estranged from their children
- those whose children live far away
- those whose children are unable to support them for another reason e.g. they have a long term disability or they are in prison

Context

The number of women who have not become mothers has more than doubled in a generation, from 9% to 19%. Although, no corresponding data is kept on men, it has been estimated that around 23 per cent of men over 45 are without children. 90% of LGBT people are estimated to be ageing without children, while, of the 11.9 million people with disabilities in the UK, only 1.7 million are parents, which means that an estimated 85% of people with disabilities have no children. The numbers of people over 65 without adult children are set to double from 1.2 million at the present time to 2 million by 2030 and the number of older people with disabilities who live alone and have no child is also

5 The Generation Strain Clare McNeil and Jack Hunter April 2014, Institute for Public Policy Research
projected to increase rapidly, rising by nearly 80 per cent between 2007 and 2032. In 2017 for the first time, there are more older people who need care than there is family available to provide it.

The papers listed below comprise research carried out by Universities across Europe, North America and China examining aspects of ageing without children.

Key points

- There is very mixed evidence as to what extent people ageing without children have access to unpaid care because they have wider social networks. There is disagreement both about 1. Whether people ageing without children do have wider social networks and 2. To what extent they can be relied on for unpaid care. There is general agreement that even when individuals ageing without children do have a large & strong social network, they can rely on them for low level help but when their care needs become more intense and help is needed more frequently these networks do not substitute for support from adult children and tend to fall away.
- People ageing without children are more likely to use formal care services and to go into residential care at an earlier age and lower level of dependency.
- Access to formal care is often curated by adult children; when weighting is brought into play non parents are not more likely to use formal care than parents, not because they don’t need it but because it is harder for them to navigate the processes required.
- There is mixed evidence on the psychological wellbeing of older people without children with some studies showing little difference between them and parents and others showing high levels of depression and anxiety. It is suspected that the differences are dependent on the route to being without children in old age and whether it was a choice.
- Single people ageing without children especially single men are at a higher level of disadvantage in accessing unpaid care and informal support compared to those with a partner.

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7 The Generation Strain Clare McNeil and Jack Hunter April 2014, Institute for Public Policy Research
• Single childless men tend to have lower levels of income than fathers, poorer social networks and poorer health.
• People ageing without children are more likely to live alone and are 25% more likely to live institutional care.
• Childless older people are between 26%-31% more likely to be caring for their elderly parents.
• Childless older people have worse health, worse health behaviours and higher mortality rates than parents.
• There are more older people needing care than adult children able to supply it.
• The rise of the “beanpole” family – smaller families with multiple generations means that there are fewer siblings and therefore nephews/nieces. It cannot be assumed that nephews/nieces will be able to take on the support of older relatives along with their own parents.

The above needs to be placed within the context of UK health and social care policy. Successive Governments have failed to manage both the issue of both how to fund social care and ensure that what is provided is of a good quality. This coupled with the austerity programme of reduced public spending has resulted in fewer people receiving social care and Government policy insofar as it exists has been to focus on families doing more. Little attention has been paid to those older people who have no children or other family to help and support them in later life.

"We need to start thinking as a society about how we deal with care of our own parents. One of the things that has struck me as I’ve been doing this role is that nobody ever questions the fact that we look after our children, that’s just obvious. Nobody ever says it is a caring responsibility, it’s just what you do. I think some of that logic and some of way we think about that, in terms of the sort of volume of numbers that we are seeing coming down the track, will have to impinge on the way we start thinking about how we look after our parents. In a way, it is a responsibility in terms of our life cycle that is similar."  

9 David Mowat Minister for Care January 2017

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8 Age UK Briefing: Health and Care of Older People in England 2017
“Family planning must be as much about care for older generations as planning for younger ones. A wholesale repairing of the social contract so that children see their parents giving wonderful care to grandparents – and recognise that in time that will be their responsibility too” Jeremy Hunt Secretary of State for Health 2015

There is no current evidence to suggest that criteria to access social care will be loosened or that there will be a significant boost in social care spending during the lifetime of this Parliament. Despite the fallout from the so called dementia tax, Government is likely to focus policy on individuals with assets funding their own care rather than raising taxes nationally.

Impact

Rising numbers of people ageing without children will have an impact on the health and social care system

1. Over the next 20/30 years there will be unprecedented numbers of people without children reaching oldest old age. Policy and planning focused on older people being supported by their children/grandchildren in later life will not meet this need and risks leaving individuals ageing without children dangerously unsupported.

2. Smaller families in general means that wider family networks cannot be depended on to “step” in the absence of children

3. Wider unpaid care networks do not substitute for children as health declines meaning that there will be a greater reliance on formal care services at a time when they have never been under such intense pressure. Public spending reductions and difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff mean that residential care homes are closing, private sector providers are handing back contracts and voluntary organisations are struggling to cope with the additional demand on their services which have in turn also faced cuts.

4. If people ageing without children continue to display poor health behaviours and have poorer health, they are more likely to need care as the need for care is predicated by poor health not by age.

10 https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/personal-responsibility
Further research

More research is needed to understand the following

- How far different routes to ageing without children effect behaviours and resilience especially in the ability to plan and prepare for later life
- To what extend formal care services are being used by people ageing without children, and what their experiences are of accessing and using those services
- Distinguishing between support provided by wider family including which family members, and friends, including what type of support is given and how often
- Whether people ageing without children impact on 1. Avoidable hospital admissions b. delayed transfers of care c. readmissions within the 28 day window
- Whether being without children in later life is a risk factor in loneliness
- The needs of people ageing without children living with dementia
- The experiences of ageing without children from diverse backgrounds excluding LGBT, BAME and disabilities
- The effect of being a carer ageing without children on wellbeing and resilience in later life

Conclusion

People ageing without children who need care and support in later life face significant barriers including

- No one to play the role of advocate to speak for them and curate care
- Lack of informal support networks compared to those with children
- Shrinking state provision
To overcome these hurdles, people ageing without children need targeted interventions that accommodate the lack of family support available to them. Failure to tackle the issues raised will lead to increased use of health and social care services and a considerably poorer later life for individuals without children.
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<td>A growing care gap? The supply of unpaid care for older people by their adult children in England to 2032</td>
<td>A key feature of population ageing in Europe and other more economically developed countries is the projected unprecedented rise in need for long-term care in the next two decades. There is, however, considerable uncertainty over the future supply of unpaid care for older people by their adult children. The future of family care is particularly important in countries planning to reform their long-term care systems, as is the case in England. This article makes new projections of the supply of intense unpaid care for parents aged 65 and over in England to 2032, and compares these projections with existing projections of demand for unpaid care by older people with disabilities from their children. The results show that the supply of unpaid care to older people with disabilities by their adult children in England is unlikely to keep pace with demand in future. By 2032, there is projected to be a shortfall of 160,000 care-givers in England. Demand for unpaid care will begin to exceed supply by 2017 and the unpaid ‘care gap’ will grow rapidly from then onwards. The article concludes by examining how far this unpaid ‘care gap’ is likely to be met by other sources of unpaid care or by developments in new technology and examines the implications of the findings for long-term care policy.</td>
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| Payback time? Influence of having children on mortality in old age    | **Background** It is known that parents have lower mortality than childless individuals. Support from adult children to ageing parents may be of importance for parental health and longevity. The aim of this study was to estimate the association between having a child and the risk of death, and to examine whether the association increased at older ages when health starts to deteriorate and the need of support from a family member increases.  
**Methods** In this nationwide study, all men and women (born between 1911 and 1925 and residing in Sweden), as well as their children, were identified in population registers and followed over time. Age-specific death risks were calculated for each calendar year for individuals having at least one child and for... |
individuals without children. Adjusted risk differences and risk ratios were estimated.

**Results** Men and women having at least one child experienced lower death risks than childless men and women. At 60 years of age, the difference in life expectancy was 2 years for men and 1.5 years for women. The absolute differences in death risks increased with parents' age and were somewhat larger for men than for women. The association persisted when the potential confounding effect of having a partner was taken into account. The gender of the child did not matter for the association between parenthood and mortality.

**Conclusions** Having children is associated with increased longevity, particularly in an absolute sense in old age. That the association increased with parents' age and was somewhat stronger for the non-married may suggest that social support is a possible explanation.

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<th>Support Networks of Childless Older People in Europe: An Analysis with the Data of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE)</th>
<th>Western societies age rapidly. Today people do not only live longer, they also have fewer children. These developments exert considerable pressure on pension and health systems. Children have usually been the mainstay of old age support, especially when there is no partner. We thus face new challenges: On which support networks can childless elders rely? (How) can the lack of children be compensated? Who provides help and care? What role does the state play? We assess the support networks of childless Europeans aged 50 and over in 12 countries based on the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE). When comparing support networks of elders without children to those of elders with children, we focus on the importance of the extended family and of public services. Our analyses show that informal help for childless elders is often taken over by the extended family, friends and neighbors. Intense care tasks, however, are more likely provided by public providers. The family and especially intergenerational relations play an important role for support in old age. In the absence of children vital support for older persons has to be taken over by public providers in many cases. In countries with low social service provision, childless older people are thus likely to experience a lack of help, especially when depending on vital care</th>
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<td>Coping without children: Comparative historical and</td>
<td>Older generations are composed of a number of distinctive sub-populations which need much closer attention if the differential impacts of population ageing are to be accurately assessed. One such</td>
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<td>Cross-cultural perspectives</td>
<td>population is older people without children, a group commonly assumed to consist chiefly of small minorities of infertile couples. This paper draws on historical and contemporary population studies to show that there are many societies that have experienced levels of childlessness of 10 to 20 percent and higher, over long periods. These levels derive only in small part from infecundity; consideration is necessary of a range of demographic factors, including migration, marriage patterns, contraception and pathological sterility. The implications of <em>de facto</em> childlessness suggest that limited or nil access to children is likely to be considerably higher than levels of infertility indicate. Rather than a marginal social phenomenon, significant numbers of elderly without children appear to be a consequence of enduring social arrangements, adaptations characteristic of longterm population stability, and adjustments to major social and economic change. Despite the aggregate advantages which levels of childlessness may give to a society in the long term, it nonetheless tends to compound the social and economic disadvantages of older people, and carries important implications for their social exclusion and powerlessness. The range of adaptive strategies that people may employ in response to childlessness and its consequences is reviewed, together with the empirical and methodological needs for further study.</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.ageing.ox.ac.uk/download/102">http://www.ageing.ox.ac.uk/download/102</a></td>
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| Effect of childlessness on nursing home and home healthcare use | This study examines the likelihood of nursing home and home health care use for childless older Americans. Four research questions are addressed: (1) Are the childless elderly at a greater risk of nursing home and home health care use? (2) Is it childlessness per se or not having children with particular characteristics that affects the likelihood of using these formal long-term care services? (3) Does having additional children beyond the first one have a significant effect on the use of these services? (4) Are the effects of childlessness different on the likelihood of nursing home and home health care use? Longitudinal data from the first (1993) and second (1995) waves of the Asset and Health Dynamics Among the Oldest Old Survey (AHEAD) and multinomial logistic regression models are used for the analyses. Separate models are developed for women and men, each controlling for a variety of demographic, socioeconomic, and health-related characteristics of sample persons. Findings indicate childlessness as an important risk factor, especially for older women's use of nursing home services. Implications of findings |
| Aykan H |
| 2003 |
for planning for long-term care needs of the baby boom generation are discussed.

| Unequal Inequalities: The Stratification of the Use of Formal Care Among Older Europeans Albertini M, Pavolini E 2015 [1](https://academic.oup.com/psychsocgerontology/article/72/3/510/2631882) | **Objectives:** The general aim of the article is to incorporate the stratification perspective into the study of (long-term) care systems. In particular, 3 issues are investigated: the extents to which (a) personal and family resources influence the likelihood of using formal care in later life; (b) the unequal access to formal care is mediated by differences in the availability of informal support; (c) the relationship between individuals’ resources and the use of formal care in old age varies across care regimes and is related to the institutional design of long-term care policies.  
**Method:** Data from Waves 1 and 2 of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe for 4 countries: Denmark, Germany, France, and Italy, and population aged at least 65 ($N = 9,824$) were used. Population-averaged logit models were used.  
**Results:** Logit models revealed that in terms of access to formal care: an individual’s educational level plays a limited role; family networks function similarly across the countries studied; in general, financial wealth does not have a significant effect; there is a positive relation between income and the use of formal care in Germany and Italy, and no significant relation in France and Denmark; home ownership has a negative effect in Germany and Denmark. On accounting for informal care, inequality associated with individuals’ economic resources remains substantially unaltered.  
**Discussion:** The study shows that care systems based on services provision grant higher access to formal care and create lower inequalities. Moreover, countries where cash-for-care programs and family responsibilities are more important register inequalities in the use of formal care. Access to informal care does not mediate the distribution of formal care. |
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<td>Childless older adults Dykstra P 2015 <a href="http://www.familiesincontext.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Dykstra-Childless_older_adults-encyclopedia.pdf">2</a></td>
<td>Current older adults have historically low levels of childlessness. There has been a tendency to view childless older adults as a problem group, but findings show they are not more prone to poor psychological well-being and social isolation than older parents. At the end of life, however, nonparents are more likely to enter institutional care than parents. To understand the consequences of childlessness for later life it is critical to unravel the interplay of parenthood history, marital history, and gender.</td>
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Previous research on a quality of life of childless elderly people has not yielded unanimous results. The role of childlessness seems to differ for various life domains and its potentially negative impact can be buffered by numerous factors. For instance, a support received from a person’s social network, an income or an availability of health services are all important mediators in that respect. The present study expands our knowledge on such buffering factors. We apply explorative, qualitative methodology to investigate whether older childless people adopt any conscious coping strategies in a response to challenges that might be posed by a lack of children. We analyse a set of 42 qualitative interviews with childless men and women aged 65 or older. We reveal main concerns and worries related to childless aging and identify various coping strategies adopted in reaction to these concerns. The respondents were mostly worried that a lack of children is or can be resulting in a lack of support and care, especially in case of limitations in activities of daily living (ADL). We could identify two categories of coping strategies in face of these fears. First, our respondents aim at creating a satisfactory net of social contacts and sources of support. Second, they discussed strategies that might help them to remain independent from their social networks. In the paper, we portray these strategies and discuss their role for older childless people’s well-being.
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<td>Childlessness at the end of life: evidence from rural Wales</td>
<td>After the spouse, children are the most likely source of informal support for an older person when the frailties of advanced old age create the need for help. Childlessness may thus be seen as particularly a problem for older people. In general, to compensate for the lack of children, childless people develop closer relationships with available next-of-kin and non-kin. Despite this, in times of need they are likely to find themselves with inadequate informal support. Using data from the Bangor Longitudinal Study of Ageing, this article explores the consequences of childlessness among persons aged 85 years or more living in rural Wales. The results indicate that by the time they reach old age, childless people have adapted to their situation and developed expectations consistent with being childfree. They have closer relationships with collateral kin, friendships are important and a high value is placed on independence. Nevertheless, unless they die suddenly or after a short acute illness, almost all of them enter residential care or a long-stay hospital at the end of their lives. It is also shown that the situation of childless people varies greatly and depends on several factors, particularly marital status, gender, social and financial capital, and on the person’s earlier investment in the strengthening of next-of-kin and non-kin networks.</td>
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<td>Grundy &amp; Read 2012</td>
<td>Objectives. To investigate whether number of children and, among parents, having a daughter is associated with older people's likelihood of at least weekly face-to-face social contact and later receipt of help if needed. Method. Multivariate analysis of data from Waves 1 and 2 of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA). RESULTS: Older parents in England had higher chances of at least weekly face-to-face social contact than their childless counterparts but larger family size had only a slight additional effect. For parents, having at least one daughter was more important than number of children. Larger family size was positively associated with receipt of help from a child by parents with activities of daily living (ADL) or instrumental activities of daily living (IADL) limitations. Childless women were more likely than mothers to receive help from friends but even so had lower odds of receiving help from any informal source. Contact with a child in 2002 predicted receipt of help 2 years later. Discussion. These results show some advantages for older parents compared with childless individuals in terms of social contact and receipt of help and, among parents, an additional effect of having a daughter. Changes in family size distributions have implications for the support of older people and for planners of formal services.</td>
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<td>Patterns and Determinants of Social Service Utilization: Comparison of the Childless Elderly and Elderly Parents Living With or Apart From Their Children Choi N 1994 <a href="https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article-abstract/34/3/353/583829">https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article-abstract/34/3/353/583829</a></td>
<td>Approximately one out of five elderly persons are childless. In the absence of children who provide important emotional and instrumental support, are childless elderly more likely to use social services than are elderly parents? Analysis of data from the Longitudinal Survey of Aging shows that the childless elderly were more likely to say that they lacked informal instrumental support at times of illness than were the elderly parents. Nevertheless, the childless were no more likely to use social services than were the elderly parents. Strategies to improve the childless elderly's social service use are recommended.</td>
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<td>The actual and expected availability of informal caregivers: Childless people versus parents in the US Albertini M et al 2015 <a href="http://paa2015.princeton.edu/abstracts/150899">http://paa2015.princeton.edu/abstracts/150899</a></td>
<td>Current estimates indicate that 87% of Americans who are in need of long-term care receive it from unpaid caregivers. Given that adult children are one of the most important sources of informal care, it may be expected that childless older people, whose proportion has been growing, are at higher risk than parents of a lack of social support. We aim to explore how childlessness affects the probability that people with disabilities receive informal care, and whether childless elderly people differ from parents in their expectations regarding the future availability of informal caregivers. A novelty of this study is that we distinguish between different types of childlessness and explore their consequences for actual and expected social support. Our results confirm previous findings about the weaker informal networks of childless people. The gap in the likelihood of getting help between parents and childless people appears to be similar for most of the models of actual and expected support.</td>
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<td>How Does Childlessness Affect Older Americans’ Health Status and Behavior? Plotnick R 2011 <a href="https://www.pdx.edu/sites/www.pdx.edu.econ/files/Childlessness_and_health_PSU.pdf">https://www.pdx.edu/sites/www.pdx.edu.econ/files/Childlessness_and_health_PSU.pdf</a></td>
<td>Objectives The study examines the relationships between childlessness and ten indicators of older Americans’ health status and behavior: self-reported health, depression, limitations in performing ADL and instrumental ADL, limitations on fine and gross motor activities, obesity, being underweight, obtaining vigorous exercise, and alcohol use. Methods Using data from the Health and Retirement Survey, the study estimates these relationships and compares findings from OLS, logit and propensity score models. Results Childless older persons exhibit worse health and health behaviors than parents on most indicators. After controlling for confounding characteristics, for men, the evidence is strongest that childlessness is</td>
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positively related to being underweight, having limitations on fine motor activities, and not getting vigorous exercise. For women, the evidence is strongest for positive relationships with being underweight and drinking heavily.

**Discussion** Results on being underweight, exercise and heavy drinking are consistent with the premise that parents take better care of themselves than childless elders and are more likely to avoid risky health behaviors because of social pressures and personal motivations. The result on being underweight is also consistent with the possibility that childless elders eat inadequately because they lack adult children who may help with shopping and cooking, and monitor their nutritional status.

| Informal care for older people provided by their Adult children: projections of supply and demand To 2041 in England Pickard L 2008 http://www.pssru.ac.uk/pdf/dp2515.pdf | The key conclusion of this paper is that, on the assumptions used here, the supply of intense informal care to disabled older people by their adult children in England is unlikely to keep pace with demand in future years. Demand for informal care by disabled older people is projected to exceed supply by 2017, with the ‘care gap’ widening over the ensuing years. By 2041, the gap between the numbers of people projected to provide informal care and the numbers needed to provide care if projected demand is to be met amounts to nearly 250 thousand care-providers. A key reason why the supply of informal care to older people by their adult children is unlikely to keep pace with demand is due to underlying demographic trends. Around 90 per cent of people who provide care to their older parents are themselves under retirement age and it is well known that ‘old age dependency ratios’ are due to rise sharply in the next thirty years (Pensions Commission 2004). If the probability of providing care to older parents remains unchanged, it is very likely that demand for care by older people will exceed the supply of care by the succeeding generation. If intense informal care for older parents were to meet demand in the coming decades, then the probability of providing this form of care would need to rise. Indeed, the probability of providing this form of care would need to be considerably higher by 2041 than it was during any of the years for which data were available between 1985 and 2000. |
Moreover, given that around 90 per cent of those providing intense care to parents are under the age of 65, then if supply were to keep pace with demand, then it would have important implications for the numbers of people of ‘working age’ providing care. The numbers of people under the age of 65 who provide intense care to older parents would need to nearly double between 2005 and 2041, if supply were to keep pace with demand. The finding that there will be a projected ‘care gap’ in the coming decades is consistent with previous research on the supply of informal care to older people (cf Karlsson et al 2006). As noted earlier, Karlsson and colleagues concluded that, with regard to care for older people, there would be a shortage of informal care in future years, assuming that patterns of provision remain unchanged.

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<th>Childlessness and support networks in later life: a new public welfare demand? Evidence from Italy Albertini &amp; Mencarini 2011 <a href="http://www.carloalberto.org/assets/working-papers/no.200.pdf">http://www.carloalberto.org/assets/working-papers/no.200.pdf</a></th>
<th>Childlessness is an increasingly common condition in many European societies. The consequences that this phenomenon might have on European welfare systems are widespread. Using data from the ISTAT survey on Family and Social Subjects, the paper explores the effect of the absence of children on the risk of lack of social support in old age in Italy. It also expands the standard approaches to the topic by examining how the relation between childlessness and lack of support varies throughout the individuals’ life course. The results of the analyses show that childless people tend to receive less support at early stages of their life and as much support as parents when they grow very old and frail. However, it is mainly public services and volunteering organizations that substitute the support usually provided by children. In addition, it is found that the type of support that the childless elderly receive tends to be non-personal and less intensive.</th>
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<td>No children in later life, but more and better friends? Substitution mechanisms in the personal and support networks of parents and the childless in Germany Schnettler &amp; Wöhler 2015</td>
<td>Given increases in childlessness, we ask if and how the permanently childless substitute for adult children in their later-life support networks. Previous research finds that they are disadvantaged on several network and support indicators. Yet, the role of different substitution mechanisms remains unclear. We examine two substitution mechanisms: substitution through adjustments of network size/composition and through higher efficiency of personal ties. Data are from the German Ageing Survey</td>
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<td>Loneliness and Depression in Middle and Old Age: Are the Childless More Vulnerable? Koropeckyj-Cox 2002</td>
<td>This study examines the relative circumstances of community-dwelling childless and parents in middle and old age (50-84 years old), using data from the 1988 National Survey of Families and Households, in order to update and test earlier findings of negative consequences related to childlessness in later life. Results indicate that net of other effects, both loneliness and depression are significantly related to childlessness for women but not men. Childless women are 46% more likely to report high depression compared to mothers. Among both men and women, being formerly married is related to greater loneliness and depression. These results demonstrate the greater salience of childlessness for women compared to men. The findings are discussed in the context of the changing norms regarding marriage, divorce, childlessness, and gender roles experienced by the newly emerging cohorts of the middle-aged and elderly.</td>
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<td>How important is parenthood? Childlessness and support in old age in England Wenger GC et al 2000</td>
<td>Familial relationships are popularly and sociologically viewed as crucial to the social support of elderly people, and of these the relationships between adult children and their parents are generally regarded as the most important (Finch and Mason 1993). But could these expectations be part of a cultural myth? In actuality, does the distinction between parenthood and childlessness make much difference to social support in old age? The present paper addresses this question. Using data from Liverpool, it compares the support networks of older people in three categories: parents (nearly always married); those who married</td>
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<td>Our descriptive and regression results on network size/composition and the number of potential informational and emotional supporters show that both mechanisms play a role: the childless have more friends and extended kin, and they are more likely to consider them as potential supporters, than parents. Across cohorts or age groups, the relative effect size of network size/composition versus tie efficiency changes. Parents with no children nearby constitute a mixed type that shows similarities to the childless on some indicators of social support and to parents with at least one child nearby on other indicators. Our findings provide a foundation for better predicting how current demographic trends affect future scenarios of social support in later life and for identifying the future need for formal care services. Thus, they are relevant for social scientists and policy makers alike</td>
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but remained childless; and those who did not marry and remained childless. Its principal finding is that childlessness has a negative impact on support network strength only for *single* men and for *married* women. This suggests that youthful investment in a lasting marriage incurs high social opportunity costs for women in old age, unless offset by the survival of children. The findings have implications for the evaluation of social policies that are based on the expectation that individual female family members, in the context of a male-breadwinner family, will provide ‘caring’ for dependent persons. Such provision of care may incur diminished receipt of care for some women in old age.
Childlessness, Psychological Well-being, and Life Satisfaction Among the Elderly in China
Zhang, W. & Liu, G 2007

This paper examines the effects of childlessness on the well-being of persons aged 65 and above in China. It is based on an application of ordered-logit regression in the analysis of the data from the 2002 wave of the Chinese Longitudinal Healthy Longevity Survey (CLHLS) conducted in 22 provinces of China ($N = 13,447$). It compares parents with the childless elderly, focusing on three dimensions of psychological well-being, namely feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and uselessness, and on life satisfaction. The findings include the following. First, with control of social demographic variables of age, gender and education, childlessness is significantly associated with life satisfaction, feeling of anxiety and loneliness, but not feeling of uselessness. The childless elderly are less satisfied with their lives and feel more anxious and lonely than do parents, but they do not necessarily feel significantly more useless. Second, when controlled with social-demographic variables and additional socioeconomic variables of residence, living arrangement, availability of pension and medical services, childlessness is no longer significantly related to anxiety and loneliness, and it is related at only a marginally-significant level to life satisfaction. Third, individual education, place of residence, living arrangements, economic security and access to medical services are consistently related to life satisfaction and psychological well-being among the elderly. We conclude that providing social investments in education in early life and economic security and medical insurance in later life for both the childless and parents are crucial for improving individual psychological well-being and life satisfaction for the elderly.

Social Support among Unmarried Childless Elderly Persons
Zheng W & Pollard S 1998

Objectives. This article examines the availability, exchange, and receipt of informal support for unmarried childless elderly persons. These individuals may be at particular risk of lacking social support because they lack the two most important sources: spouses and children.

Methods. Using data drawn from the 1991 Canadian Survey on Aging and Independence ($N = 1,078$), orderedresponse logistic regression models were employed to assess the availability and exchange of social support. Logistic models for binary variables were used in support-receipt models.

Results. The findings suggest that although support was generally available to this elderly population, it was not readily translated into exchanged or received support. Gender differences were found in support exchange, with women generally more advantaged than men. Gender by age interactions were also identified in the exchange and receipt of emotional support. Additionally, greater involvement in support exchange generally corresponded with increased support receipt.
**Discussion.** In light of the correspondence between support exchange and receipt, concerns may be raised about the low levels of support exchange (involving less than one quarter of this population) reported for the unmarried childless elderly persons in this study. Emotional support appears to be the greatest unmet need, with support being provided to only 25% of this group.

| Permanent Childlessness: Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages Among Older Persons  
Connidis I A & McMullin JA  
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<td>This study examines the perceptions of childlessness reported by 287 childless respondents aged 55 and over who were part of a larger study (n - 678) on aging and social support. Sixty-seven per cent (n = 193) report advantages to childlessness and 64 per cent (n = 185) report disadvantages. Qualitative data show that key perceived advantages are fewer worries or problems, financial benefits, greater freedom, and career flexibility. The major disadvantages are lack of companionship/being alone/loneliness, lack of support and care when older, and missing the experience of parenthood. Bivariate and multivariate analyses of the effects that gender, marital status, age, and childless status (childless by choice or by circumstance) have on the perceived advantages and disadvantages of having no children show that there is variability in perceived advantages only. When we compare specific perceived advantages and disadvantages to related experience, only some perceived benefits (financial advantage) are associated with actual experience. Findings are discussed in the context of actually experiencing costs and benefits versus sharing widely-held beliefs about childlessness.</td>
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<td>How Older People Position Their Late-Life Childlessness: A Qualitative Study</td>
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<td>“We Have to Create Family”: Aging Support Issues and Needs Among Older Lesbians</td>
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| The effects of childlessness on the care and psychological well-being of older adults with disabilities | **Objectives:** Adult children are a primary focus of family and caregiver research. In contrast, relatively little is known about childless elders with a disability, including their care needs and the state of their overall well-being compared to elderly parents. We addressed this gap by examining the relationship between childlessness and the care and well-being of adults aged 75 and older with a disability.  

**Methods:** Parents and childless persons aged 75 and older were compared using data from the 1998 to ...
2004 waves of the Health and Retirement Study (HRS). We used logistic regression to examine the relationship between childlessness and care provision (personal care and assistive devise use) and ordinal regression to examine the relationships of parental status, personal care, and use of assistive devices with well-being. The analysis was based on 2048 observations from 1456 community-dwelling respondents who had difficulty walking across a room or getting into or out of bed.

**Results:** Compared to parents, childless elders with a disability generally do not receive less care or have worse psychological well-being. However, being unmarried reduces the likelihood of having personal care and is associated with depressive affect. Use of assistive devices is associated with less depressive affect.

**Conclusion:** Childless older adults are similar to parents on measures of psychological well-being and care provision. This finding has important implications, as it is projected that 30% of baby boomers who will need assistance will lack care from spouses or adult children. Further exploration of compensatory resources is suggested.
The wellbeing of childless men and fathers in mid-life
Dykstra P & Keizer R
2009
https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ageing-and-society/article/the-wellbeing-of-childless-men-and-fathers-in-mid-life/6AE5B3CD8D5D9B6C0D2D6558850A1FAB

Using data from the first wave of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study conducted in 2002–03, this paper examines the economic, psychological and social wellbeing among 1,467 men aged 40–59 years with different parenthood histories and circumstances: the childless, fathers who live with their children, non-co-resident fathers, and ‘empty-nest fathers’. The gerontological interest is whether there are variations in wellbeing by parenting, and whether they persist in old age. The results showed that fathers have higher incomes than childless men, regardless of their partner history. As regards psychological wellbeing, men’s partner history counts, not their parenthood status. Being single contributes to low levels of psychological wellbeing. The findings provide evidence of the socially integrating effects of parenthood and for men’s ‘good-provider’ role. Childless men and non-co-resident fathers report poorer quality family relationships. In addition, childless men were least likely to report helping others in the community. Overall, more support is found for the notion that fatherhood is a transforming event than that the wellbeing benefits derive from fathering activities. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings for inequalities in wellbeing and informal support among the male members of the cohort born during 1943–63 when they reach old age.

Off the Beaten Track
Childlessness and Social Integration in Late Life
Dykstra P
2006
http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0164027506291745

Aiming to uncover the socially integrating functions of parenthood, this study focused on differences in network size between older adults with and without children, using survey data from Amsterdam (n = 661) and Berlin (n = 516). Explicit attention was paid to diversity among the childless and to their biographical pasts. The pattern of results was similar for both countries. Those who never had children had smaller networks in old age than parents, a finding partially attributable to a more limited supply of kin. There was no evidence for a competing hypothesis, namely, that childlessness is a means for greater sociability. Contrary to expectations, those who had outlived their children were not more socially isolated than those who had never had children. Neither was there support for the expectation that parenthood-history differences would be greater among women than men. Last, the findings showed that parenthood contributes to social integration independently of marriage and employment.

The utility of positioning theory to the study of ageing: Examples from research with childless older people
Allen R & Wiles J

Growing older is hard to make sense of. Opposing perspectives are presented on everything from individual to population ageing, and there is widespread ambivalence towards many aspects of ageing. Positioning theory is a research approach that can tolerate such ambiguity and provides a clear, useful framework to make sense of research data, while doing justice to its complexity. It is starting to be used in
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<td>2013</td>
<td>The Positioning Triad and Gerontology</td>
<td><a href="http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0890406513000066">Link</a></td>
<td>The aim of this paper is to give gerontologists the tools and impetus to use it more. The positioning triad is outlined, comprising positions (how we position ourselves and others within a single conversation or across a lifetime), storylines (the individual and social narratives which furnish those positions), and the speech acts (and acts of research) through which storylines and positions are enacted. In addition, considering the rights and duties associated with different positions and storylines can usefully illuminate some of the tensions around competing positions on ageing. Worked examples from a qualitative study on childless older people (38 participants aged 63 to 93) in terms of their positioning of childlessness, views on residential care, and positioning of emotional support show how the complexity of such diverse topics can be usefully studied using a positioning theory framework.</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>Characteristics of Older Childless Persons and Parents: Cross-National Comparisons</td>
<td><a href="http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0192513X07303837">Link</a></td>
<td>The prevalence and implications of childlessness in old age are compared across nine major surveys in seven countries: Australia, Finland, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Specifically, the researchers examine indicators of the well-being and resources of childless men and women, compare them to their within-country peers with children, and explore the similarities and differences among childless older adults in different countries. The results show strikingly similar patterns across countries (with the exception of Japan). Childless elders are more likely than parents to live alone or in an institution. Childless never-married women have consistently higher education levels than other groups of women. Among men, marriage rather than parenthood is consistently linked with higher socio-economic status. The results suggest important structural processes that differentially shape the resources and well-being of men and women, childless and parents, over the life course and in old age.</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>Health of Aging Parents and Childless Individuals</td>
<td><a href="http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0192513X07303896">Link</a></td>
<td>This article reviews and presents research findings on the relationships between parenthood and health over the life span. Existing research shows lacunae. The links between reproductive behavior and longevity generally focus on family size rather than contrasting parents and nonparents. Studies of marital status differentials in survival generally confound the effects of parenthood and marital status. Studies of the effects of multiple roles (combining parenthood, marriage, and employment) have the drawback that parenthood is equated with currently having children in the home. The authors provide new evidence on the health of people who have reached old age, contrasting those with and without children, in an attempt to tease out the effects of parenthood, marital status, and gender. Data from Australia, Finland, and the Netherlands are used. Insofar as parenthood effects are found, they pertain to health behaviors</td>
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<td>Current and future challenges of family care in the UK</td>
<td>Population ageing challenges the ways in which family care is provided to older people. At times of growing need, due to rising numbers of people in their 80s, 90s and 100s requiring long-term care, the supply of family carers decreases, due to a combination of reduced fertility and changing family values concerning female employment and family formation. The economic value of care provided by the 5.8 million informal carers in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2013a) exceeds that provided by the formal care sector by several times (Fernández and Forder, 2010). The average lifetime expenses for social care faced by people aged 65 years and over exceed £30,000 (Comas-Herrera and Wittenberg, 2009; Fernández and Forder, 2010). Long-term care provision expenses have increased since 2000 and are projected to continue rising in the future (Wanless et al., 2006; Fernández and Forder, 2010; Curtis, 2014). Section 2 considers the demographic trends causing the need for long-term care, as well as those reducing the availability of family carers. Section 3 focuses on changing family values and their implications for family formation and intergenerational family relations, before implications for current and future family care provision are discussed in Section 4. The Evidence Review concludes with some policy recommendations on how to support family care more effectively.</td>
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| Future of an ageing population: evidence review | Kirsty Woodard
July 2017 |
| Foresight, Government | Hoff A
2015