

## Population ageing, genders and generations

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It is widely acknowledged that the ageing of societies involves much more than just changing demographic patterns. In particular, population ageing is a challenge for social policy, which has major implications for social security and for sociological analysis, as well as influencing the relative socio-economic position of different age cohorts. These issues have been aired in current debates on intergenerational justice. Social security systems re-distribute economic resources e.g. between men and women, the childless and parents, the employed and those who provide (unpaid) family care.

The generational perspective, focusing on societal generations defined as birth cohorts, has highlighted the paradigm of intergenerational justice and dominated public debates. Consequently, current reforms under the conditions of societal ageing have focused on sustainability and generational equity and justice. Calls for intergenerational justice are often associated with a further privatisation of social security and a strengthening of insurance principles within social security systems reducing the previously equalizing functions of welfare state systems. This may have major effects on inequality patterns both within generations, as well as between generations. Yet intragenerational inequalities – especially between women and men – and how these are connected to intergenerational relations in the family and society, are widely ignored in public discourse and need to be researched more thoroughly (Arber & Attias-Donfut 2000).

The following three articles contribute to this debate, providing new insights into changing gender roles within the context of intergene-

rational relations, as well as how these link to the welfare state or social policy context, particularly in Britain and Germany.

Firstly, Harald Künemund in the paper *'Changing Welfare States and the "Sandwich Generation" - Increasing Burden for Next Generation's Men and Women?'* examines intergenerational caring roles of midlife people using a three (or more) generational perspective. In particular, women in these midlife age groups are a main source of help and support within families and wider social networks. Such women, with both older parents and children (i.e. with at least two other living family generations), are often labelled as 'the sandwich generation'. It is mainly women of these age groups who are commonly described as experiencing competing demands from work and caring obligations for both older and younger family members. This paper demonstrates that being sandwiched between younger and older family member is a common life experience for men and women in modern societies. However, despite this structural position, there is an overestimation in popular discourse of the prevalence of undertaking concurrent activities of paid work, child and elder care, that is rejected by empirical analysis. Neither can the assumption that such complex caring situations have detrimental effects on quality of life be supported by the authors' analyses. A core focus of this paper is to examine the implications of these findings in the light of ongoing changes in demographic patterns and welfare policies.

Secondly, Debora Price in her paper on *'Gender and Generational Continuity: Breadwinners, Caregivers and Pension Provision in the UK'* analyses gender roles within partnerships and welfare state policies. Analyses based on recent UK data indicate the stability of gender role patterns that – in the context of current welfare state regulations – disadvantage pension provision for mothers in comparison with women who were childless. Continuation of this lack of redistribution between women in paid work and those who are not, e.g. those engaged in caring roles – or even the strengthening of the bonds between paid work and social security benefits – may not only increase within-group inequality over time, but may also produce robust incentives for childlessness, resulting in significant impacts on demographic trends.

Thirdly, Traute Meyer and Birgit Pfau-Effinger study changes in gender arrangements in the ongoing process of modernisation and in the

development and re-structuring of pension schemes using a comparative perspective. Their paper '*Gender Arrangements and Pension Systems in Britain and Germany: Tracing change over five decades*' contrasts the British and German situation from an historical point of view. They argue that pension schemes are dynamic systems of stratification. They hypothesise that it is inadequate to understand the development of pension systems in the UK and in Germany as reflecting strong breadwinner models, since this connection was not supported by their analyses. Instead the authors question the role of old age security systems in establishing and maintaining the male breadwinner model in Western European welfare states. They argue that social policy analysis should embrace a much more complex view of the interaction between gender roles and welfare state systems, including the influence of other social institutions and cultural features of the society.

In summary, the papers provide evidence that traditional models of the interconnection between generational relations, gender roles and welfare policies may be misleading. Patterns of gender roles in paid work and the family have remained relatively stable over time despite demographic changes and substantial modification of pension systems. Comparative research also shows increases in social inequality associated with the privatisation of old age security, but this increased inequality is not solely related to gender and social class (Motel-Klingebliel 2006). As demonstrated by these papers, it is important to examine how reforms of social security systems and social structure interact, while also taking into account cultural patterns and new forms of inequality and diversity in later life.

## References

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