

hospital did not seem to be related to the probability of maintaining the elderly person at home. Unsurprisingly, perceived benefit was related to continued attendance of the patient. Those carers who derived most benefit appeared to be those who were clearest about their desired benefits at the outset of receiving the service and where patients were most likely to adjust.

The authors conclude that making the best use of day hospital services for families involves a need for clarity about carers expectations and judgements regarding the suitability of day care. This therefore requires closer co-operation between families and professional caregivers in making decisions about services.

#### COMMENT

Many of these issues are of equal relevance to day centres run by Social Services Departments some of whose features may not be dissimilar to Day Hospitals.<sup>1</sup> Day care facilities are scarce resources and yet little is known of factors which are associated with successful utilisation. It is usually assumed, as in this study, that day care should be beneficial to both carer and cared-for, the former experiencing reduction in strain. The value of this study is that it begins to identify characteristics of both elderly person and carer which may be associated with successful use of the day hospital. It again underlines the observation that a professional approach which combines clarity of explanation, consultation and shared problem-definition with informal carers is more likely to be effective.

#### NOTE

- 1 Brocklehurst, J. C. and Tucker, A. Progress in geriatric day hospitals. King Edward's Hospital Fund, London, 1979.

Personal Social Services Research Unit,  
University of Kent

### **Demography and Migration**

**Tony Warnes**

J. F. Ermisch and Elizabeth Overton, Minimal household units: a new approach to the analysis of household formation. *Population Studies*, 39 (1985), 33-54.

Among the rapidly changing and fundamental facets of elderly people's social situation are their own living arrangements and the composition

and location of their relatives' and friends' households. It is well known that the elderly have recently exhibited a rapidly increasing tendency to live independently and alone, and that this is partly a demographic effect and partly an expression of preference. More problematic are the consequences of increased divorce, lower fertility and the growth of non-family households on the living arrangements and social networks of the future elderly.

For these reasons those interested in both lifespan perspectives on social ageing and the social circumstances of elderly people are keen to be better informed about the contemporary processes and trends in household formation. This article provides an empirical and methodological account of an innovatory approach to household change which aims to provide an improved basis for household forecasts. The method is founded on the definition of Minimal Household Units (MHUs) as the indivisible groups of persons from which actual households are formed independently or by sharing. They are (a) childless, non-married adults, (b) single parent families, (c) childless married couples, and (d) married couples with dependent children. All childless and unmarried persons over the minimum school leaving age are regarded as potential MHUs of themselves, for they are capable of making their own decisions about housing.

Ermisch and Overton employ a sample of 12,000 households from the 1976 General Household Survey to analyse the prevalence of sharing for different MHUs in relation to age, income, marital status, sex, geographical region and a dichotomous measure of health. They are able thereby to separate the demographic context of household size (through fertility, nuptiality and age structure) from the social and economic influences on sharing between MHUs.

Some interesting details are reported of 'loneliness ratios' (or rates of MHU independence). For single persons, they rise steeply with age but never reach values as high as are found for married or previously married persons of the same sex. Among individuals aged 60 years or more, when controlling for income and marital status, the probability of forming an independent household rises from age 60–64 to age 65–74 but falls thereafter. Among pensioners, men are less likely than women to form a separate household, single persons less likely than the previously married, and those with long-standing illness less likely than the more fortunate. An outstanding result for the social gerontologist is the clear demonstration that higher income encourages residential independence among pensioner MHUs. For example, among previously married retired women aged 65–74 years the probability of living alone increases from 0.64 for those with £700 income to 0.88 for those with £2300.

The authors also develop an econometric model of the combination of MHUs in shared households. This is based on an assumed universal preference (of MHUs) for privacy, and the benefits from sharers of reduced unit housing costs and of time savings through shared household production or, more familiarly, housework. Their discussion of the model deserves critical debate and weaves some stimulating deductions about the interactions between the opportunity costs of working, levels of income, being employed or retired, and the benefits of sharing.

Although the present analysis is limited to cross-sectional investigations, if robust it may well be an important development in the understanding and forecasting of household formation, especially if more attention can be given to the supply and price of housing. A little more care in the exposition could have been given to the variable size of MHUs for references to non-sharing or alone sometimes refer to a group of people in an MHU. It must also be the case that some of the analysis is based on extremely small subsamples. These quibbles aside, the article is of great interest and may be the precursor of a considerable improvement in our understanding of this critical subject.

Valerie Preston, A path model of residential stress and inertia among older people. *Urban Geography*, 5 (1984), 146–164.

Migration decision making and the influences upon mobility have exercised numerous sociologists, economists and geographers since the 1960s. One direction of recent North American research has been to develop behavioural models of the decision to move and several papers have applied these ideas specifically to the residential moves of elderly people. Preston's contribution is to focus upon two factors which previous writing has emphasised as major influences on the decision to move. They are 'residential stress' and 'inertia'. The paper establishes simple indexes of these complex factors and analyses a small selection of demographic and socioeconomic influences with reference to three groups of the elderly.

A review of previous research papers is presented with a brief synthesis of the interrelationships between duration of residence, age, social and demographic characteristics, attachment to and satisfaction with the dwelling and the propensity to move. This generates ten hypotheses and is characterised by the restatement of influences in terms of their effect upon either the unwillingness to move (inertia) or the relationship between residential desires and the perception of the present situation (residential stress).

The empirical analysis is based on a 3% (undated) random sample

of the population aged 60 to 98 years in Kansas City. Each person was interviewed about personal, household and housing characteristics and their residential history. Seven variables were selected for analysis: age, years of residence, household income, an index of independence maintenance or of functional ability, perceived housing quality, perceived neighbourhood quality and the frequency of contact with relatives and neighbours. This last variable is treated as an index of inertia, although the argument for this step is unimpressive. The two perception variables are adopted as surrogates for residential stress. The numerical analysis is by partial correlation as refined in path analysis, which essentially rejects the likelihood of causal links between variables if their partial correlations when controlling for other influences are insignificantly different from zero. Disaggregated models for white homeowners, black homeowners and for renters were tested.

A detailed report of the results demonstrates interesting differences between the three elderly subpopulations. Income and functional ability were found to be 'the major determinants' of residential stress and of inertia, although the level of achieved explanations is very low, only one (of nine) coefficients of determination being above 0.18. Age was a secondary and indirect influence but in different ways for the three groups. Black homeowners' judgements of housing quality, unlike white homeowners', were not influenced significantly by income or functional ability.

In contradiction to the starting hypothesis and to the consensus view in the residential stress literature, years of residence were unrelated to the frequency of local social contacts. Overall the results provide only partial support for the principal hypotheses although this may be a consequence of the crude surrogate variables.

The paper is representative of many similar. Although the line of research and the papers' results would be of interest to gerontologists, it has been written with a more specialised research group in mind. For there to be helpful interchange between different groups of social scientists, more attention than is given in this paper must be given to the clarity of technical expositions, to the reasoned construction of behavioural models and to the interpretation of empirical analyses.

King's College, London