



Living Arrangements and Partnerships

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Introduction

Most people would prefer to live in a family well into old age and have a good relationship with neighbours and friends. Social contacts are important for quality of life and they help people cope with the changes that come with age and critical events in life. An individual's degree of social integration does not depend solely on whether and how many relationships they have with other people. What is decisive is whether they are also getting support in everyday life and whether they have someone to rely on when life gets difficult. This becomes increasingly important with old age.

There is a lot of discussion on how the old people of the future will remain socially integrated in

the light of shrinking and more fragile traditional family structures and increases in divorce. Living arrangements have changed a lot in recent years, especially for those in mid-adulthood.

Partnerships are more often dissolved and entered into among the so-called 'baby-boomer' generation, meaning the cohorts born from the mid-1950s until the 1960s. A growing number of people live together without being married, remain childless or live alone.

The question as to whether the old people of the future will be able to find reliable support outside the traditional family remains so far unanswered.

The German Ageing Survey (DEAS) collects representative data on the living arrangements and relationships within and outside the family of those aged between 40 and 85, how these relationships are organised and to what extent they supply reliable support.

Some examples of key questions are:

- Are living arrangements becoming increasingly diverse?

- How satisfied are people in different partnership and family constellations?
- Does people's social integration differ according to their family or partnership constellation?
- Who do people in the second half of life turn to when they need support in difficult situations?

Living arrangements

The way people aged 40-85 structure their partnerships and family life is becoming increasingly diverse. A growing number of people in this age group live without a partner or in a partnership with someone they are not married to. It was only in the 70-85 year old age group that the proportion of married women increased between 1996 and 2008.

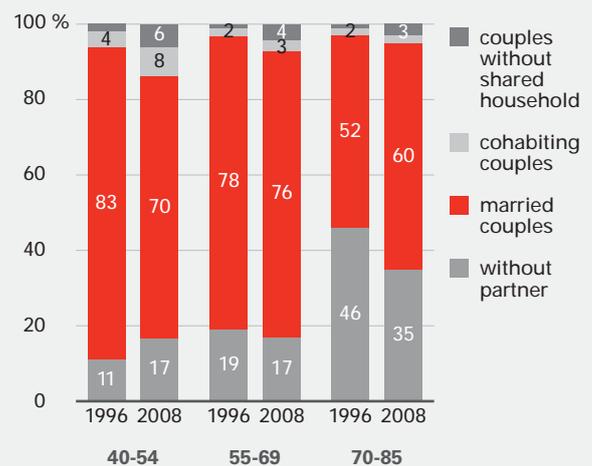
a) During the second half of life living arrangements become more diverse and more fragile

There is a declining number of married people in the 40-54 age group: between 1996 and 2008 the percentage dropped from 83 to 70 percent. It is now only in the oldest age group of 70-85 year olds that we find more married people than before: here the percentage rose from 52 to 60 percent (see Figure 1).

In the 70-85 age group more women now have partners. Longer life expectancy means that people are increasingly becoming widowed after the age of 85. The demographic distortions caused by the many soldiers killed in the Second World War and the shortage of males that followed are now also overcome.

Figure 1 Forms of partnership according to age groups.

The graph shows the four different forms of partnership for people in the age groups 40-54, 55-69 and 70-85.



Source: German Ageing Survey, German Centre of Gerontology.

b) Unmarried couples more likely to expect separation than married couples

The DEAS data enables us to compare the satisfaction of married and unmarried couples with the quality of their relationship and how high they rate the likelihood of separating from their partner. Results show that there is very little difference between the quality of the relationship of married and unmarried couples. Unmarried couples are much more likely to expect to separate from their partners, however.

c) More postmarital partnerships and remarriages

Societal changes have made the relationships between couples less stable. One in three marriages in Germany today ends in divorce and long-standing marriages are no exception. Cohabiting couples are even more likely to separate. Many people subsequently find a new partner.

As a result of this trend people are more likely to live with a partner who has already been married. Of the birth cohorts 1924-1928 at age 50 only around six percent were remarried or lived in a postmarital partnership, for the 1954-1958 cohorts the proportion had risen to around 18 percent (see Figure 2).

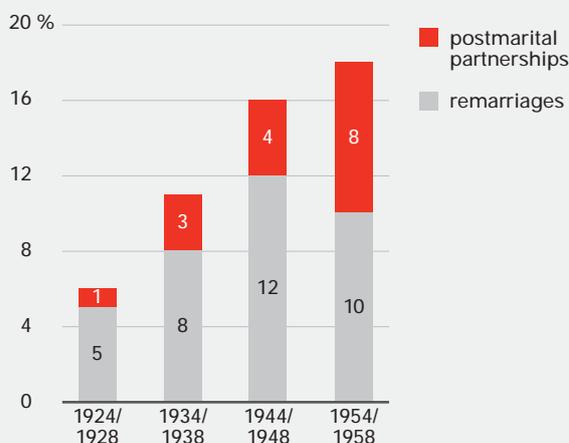
d) No increase in “patchwork” families

Although partnerships break down more often, newly formed families with children from earlier relationships (“patchwork families”) have not become much more common since 1996. Of those in the 40-85 year old age group in 2008, around nine percent had at least one non-biological child.

This quota also applies to the 40-54 year olds. These findings could indicate that the phenomenon of the “patchwork family” has been exaggerated by the media. This family form is not new and it has not become more common over the past twelve years.

Figure 2 Remarriages and postmarital partnerships.

The graph shows the percentage of people in the cohorts 1924/28, 1934/38, 1944/48, 1954/58 living at age 50 in a remarriage or postmarital partnership.



Source: German Ageing Survey, German Centre of Gerontology.

Growing number of people without partner and without children – support sources outside the family

In 2008 a total of one in five people in the second half of life lived without a partner. When split into age groups, the biggest change between 1996 and 2008 is among the 40-54 year olds. Here the share of those without a partner rose by six percent to 17 percent, the proportion of cohabiting couples rose from six to 14 percent.

Taken as a whole, the proportion of childless people in the 40-85 year old age group has not risen significantly. But there is a clear increase among the 40-54 year olds who are just entering the second half of life. Here the number of people who most likely will never have children rose from 13 to 19 percent.

a) Far more people without children among the 40-54 year olds

The fact that people increasingly have no children has a variety of consequences for the development of society. The public debate on the subject is correspondingly lively. From the old age perspective, the growing tendency to childlessness is worrying. For the elderly of today their children are their main source of support and it is not clear who will look after the growing number of childless older people.

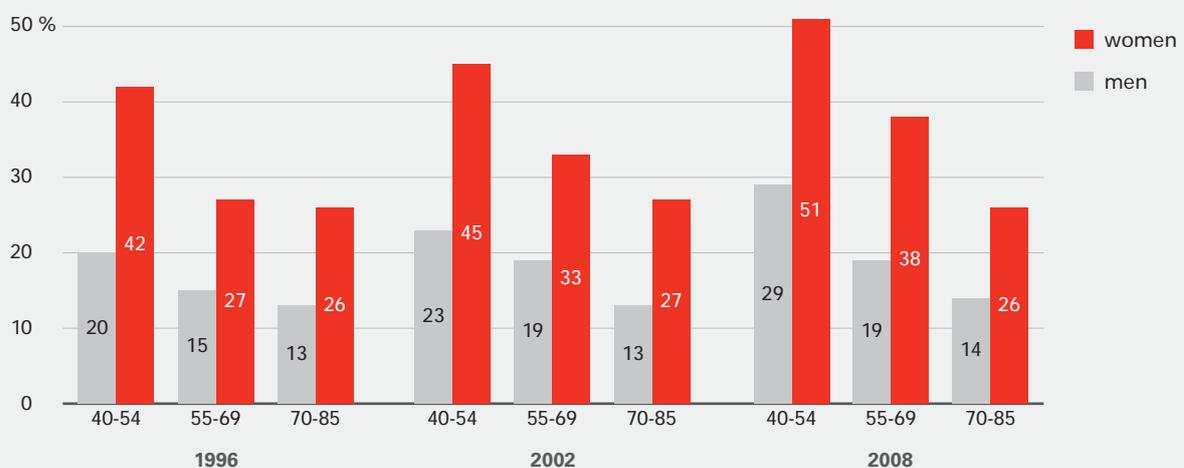
b) Older people find emotional support outside the family and partnerships

The debate on providing for future generations of older people usually focuses on support in terms of long-term care and household help. Not so much attention is given to how older people without a family will find help in future during difficult phases of their life.

Yet this is an important issue – assistance with care and household chores can more easily be

Figure 3 | Emotional support potential outside the family in old age.

The graph shows the percentage of men and women in the age groups 40-54, 55-69 and 70-85 who have someone to turn to for consolation outside the family.



Source: German Ageing Survey, German Centre for Gerontology.

supplied by outside services than emotional support in a crisis. DEAS provides comprehensive data on the sources of support for people in the second half of life. As anticipated, most of those aged between 40-85 get emotional support from their partners and family. But one in three of the 40-85 year olds can also rely on friends, neighbours and colleagues in times of crisis. Since 1996, the number of people who were also able to find help in crisis situations outside the family has been growing (see Figure 3).

This development is especially important for people living without partners or children who thus rely more on the advice and consolation of friends, neighbours and colleagues.

DEAS data show that in this group every second person is able to form close supportive bonds with friends, acquaintances and others. People with children who live in a partnership, on the other hand, have far fewer contacts outside the family: in this group only one in four confides

in friends, acquaintances, neighbours and colleagues (see Figure 4).

c) Emotional support of partner difficult to replace

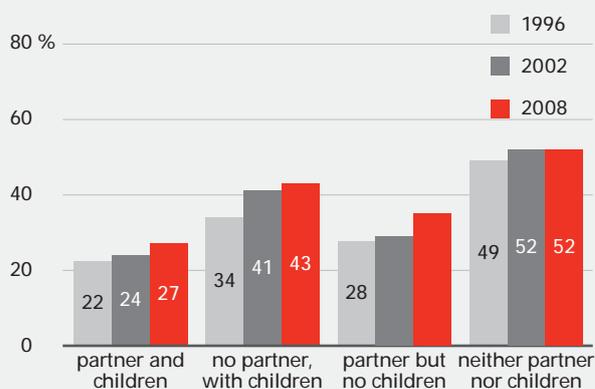
In addition to the detailed questions on the sources of help and emotional support in times of need for people in the second half of life, DEAS also examines which people may not receive the support they need from others in times of crisis.

Results show that around one in seven of those aged between 40 and 85 do not receive enough support. People without a partner miss emotional support the most – regardless of whether or not they have children.

Interestingly enough, women and men in similar situations have a different need for support: women with a partner and children often report insufficient support in comparison to men in the same situation (13 percent of women and nine percent of men in 2008).

Figure 4 Emotional support potential outside the family according to living arrangements.

The graph shows how many people in various kinds of family situations were able to seek help outside the family when in trouble.



Source: German Ageing Survey, German Centre of Gerontology.

Summary: The future of old age – more colourful but also more fragile

In future older people will be less often integrated into society via the traditional family relationships of a married couple with adult children. Alternative living arrangements that are less oriented towards the traditional family are currently becoming more prevalent. This development is taking place gradually and only in selected population groups, however.

It is not yet clear what this means for the integration and everyday coping of future older people. What is decisive here is what alternative arrangements people without partners and children will have in place in their old age and how strong and stable their personal relationships will then be.

The results show that people in the second half of life are quite able to find support and stability outside the traditional family by friends, acquaintances and neighbours. This applies particularly to those whose family links are not strong. But whether others can be relied on for similar help and support as that offered by family members in old age remains to be seen.

Presumably older people in future will be more likely to use the formal help facilities of service providers in the areas of the household, care and advice to the extent that their financial situation makes this possible. ■

The German Ageing Survey (DEAS)

The German Ageing Survey is a comprehensive study of the second half of life, meaning mid- and late adulthood. The study aims to provide scientifically sound information helpful for political decision makers and relevant sections of the general public as well as providing data to be used in scientific research. The study was conducted to date in 1996, 2002 and 2008. The DEAS is funded by the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). The authors are responsible for the contents of this publication.

This document is based on the following book:

Motel-Klingebiel, A., Wurm, S., & Tesch-Römer, C. (Eds.). (2010). Altern im Wandel. Befunde des Deutschen Alterssurveys (DEAS). Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

This document is free of charge and not for sale.

The following documents summarizing main results are available online at

<http://www.dza.de/EN/DEAS-Press-Information>

- The German Ageing Survey (DEAS):
A Long-Term Study on the
Second Half of Life in Germany
- Material Security
- Health and Well-being
- Participation in Society:
Employment, Voluntary Work and Education
- Living Arrangements and Partnership
- Intergenerational Family Relations in
Transition

A brochure containing the press information listed above is published as part of their public relations work by the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (www.bmfsfj.de).

You may obtain further information on this topic from the German Centre of Gerontology (DZA) and online from www.german-ageing-survey.de ■

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