

Furthermore it has also been demonstrated that extended family e.g. siblings, nephews/nieces, cousins, friends and neighbours do not make up the care deficit if one does not have a nuclear family. Essentially, the more support a person needs, the less robust their support network is in being able to meet their needs

“Childless people tend to compensate for the absence of exchanges with their own children by more frequently extending their networks to neighbours and friends, and by getting more involved in community activities. They also tend to develop stronger ties with other family members – parents, siblings and, along the generational line, nephews and nieces.....However when strong support is needed, these compensatory arrangements work only partially. When getting frail and acquiring limitations in their ability to carry out the activities of daily living, childless people receive much less support than parents, are more likely to enter residential care, and do so at lower levels of dependency”¹⁵

Access to formal care

The lack of unpaid care has an inevitable knock on effect to paid for formal care care; evidence shows that older people without children and especially those who are widowed are more likely to need formal care services ¹⁶ People ageing without children are 25% more likely to enter into residential care ¹⁷ which given the limited alternatives to residential care that exist in the UK and the precipitous state of the residential care market is extremely worrying.

However there is evidence to show that although individuals ageing without children do use formal care more than those with children, it is a more complex picture than one would expect

“Two of the very few studies on the utilization of formal care services by the childless clearly indicate that elderly non-parents tend to use formal service provision more frequently and intensively than parents do. But the same studies also show that the utilization of public care services by the elderly is strongly mediated by the presence of children, who act as advocates on behalf of their parents (Choi 1994; Larsson and Silverstein 2004).....As a

¹⁵ *What Childless Older People Give: Is the Generational Link Broken? Albertinin M and Kohli M Ageing and Society 29(08):1261 - 1274 · November 2009*

¹⁶ *Wenger, C. G., Dykstra, P. A., Tuula, M., & Knipscheer, K. (2007). Social embeddedness and latelife parenthood: Community activity, close ties, and support networks. Journal of Family Issues, 28, 1419–1456. doi:10.1177/0192513X07303895*

¹⁷ *Childlessness at the end of life: evidence from rural Wales WENGER G. Clare Ageing and Society, 29(8), November 2009, pp.1243-1259. Cambridge University Press*

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consequence, the utilization of public care services by the childless do not fully compensate for the support deficits they face”¹⁸

Moreover as is outlined above, poor health is the key determinant of whether people need help in their later life. People aging without children are more likely to have risky health behaviours such as higher alcohol consumption and smoking levels. ¹⁹They are also more likely to be underweight which some studies have attributed to lacking support with shopping and meal preparation and have higher mortality rates than parents ²⁰ It may therefore be the case that people ageing without children are more at risk of failing health in later life than those with support from children. If this is the case, then they are more likely to need care and support

Conclusion

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 it must not be assumed wider family networks will “step up” in the absence of children both because there will be fewer people available within families but also because as shown above, wider family networks fall away as care needs get higher

3. Both of the above mean that that there will be a greater reliance on formal care services by people ageing without children 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. This crisis in formal care has serious consequences for people ageing without children who are more likely to need it.

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

¹⁸ *Childlessness and support networks in later life: a new public welfare demand? Evidence from Italy* Marco Albertini Letizia Mencarini 2011

¹⁹ *How Does Childlessness Affect Older Americans’ Health Status and Behavior?* Robert D. Plotnick February 2011 Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs and Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology University of Washington

²⁰ Modig K, Talbäck M, Torssander J, et al Payback time? Influence of having children on mortality in old age *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2017;71:424-430.

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- 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.

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