Submitting to Sub-Theme 4 Adult Health, Mortality, and Aging; Session 4.4 National policies, intergenerational transfers, and the wellbeing of the elderly

Extended abstract

Description of the topic to be studied:

With an increased number of older people expected in sub-Saharan Africa, the patterns of care and support available to them have to be explored in order to ensure that their needs are catered for as they age – and especially in light of the fact that there are few formal provisions for older people in place within this region. Care and support for older people is strongly linked to co-residence with the family so studying living arrangements is extremely important in attempting to understand the patterns of care and support which are available to older people. The paper explores older people in two slums in Nairobi, which are demographic surveillance systems, and utilises panel data collected from 2002 to 2006. It will conduct event history analysis to ascertain the circumstances connected to a change in living arrangements in later life. The aim of the research is not just to understand the dynamics of living arrangements for older people in slum settings but to establish whether these moves can be viewed as positive or negative and if the latter is the case, whether there is need for a strengthening of both formal and informal types of support for older people in this environment.

Theoretical focus:

Population change is being experienced by countries all around the world but the processes concerning this are arguably least well understood in sub-Saharan Africa. In this region, a dearth in data and a lack of reliable vital registration systems means that many of the processes that result in a changing population structure are not well documented. Where demographic developments are addressed, the focus tends to be on issues which are deemed to be most pressing in these societies such as maternal mortality, unmet need for contraception, child malnutrition or the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Although these are all important facets of societal change that need to be resolved, there is another aspect of this demographic process that has yet to be explored fully in this region.

Ageing populations are now seen, sometimes on a quite staggering scale, in many developed countries. Yet little attention has been paid to the processes of ageing experienced by countries in Africa. Although populations may not technically age here as older people will remain a relatively small proportion of them, the absolute numbers of older people is expected to grow dramatically in the coming years. The United Nations projections suggest that 11 percent of the population of Africa will be over the age of 60 years in 2050 – up from five percent in 2009 (UN, 2009:12). This has drastic implications for all societies involved in terms of ensuring that adequate support systems are in place to cater to the needs of this increased number of older people.

Few countries in Africa have existing formal support systems for older people and so the onus for care currently falls on either the older person themselves or on their family. The role of the family is especially important as this ensures provision of care when the older person is no longer able to support themselves. Living with family is an important part of this process as care and support for older people are closely interlinked with coresidence with kin. Although older adults currently make up only six percent of the total population within sub-Saharan Africa, one in four households across

the region contains one (Zimmer and Dayton, 2005:299). This means that many households have experience with the care and support patterns of older people. Traditionally, co-residence has been the accepted norm for older people in Africa but there is evidence which suggests that this may not necessarily be the case with some older people living alone or just with their spouse (Victor, 2008; Bongaarts and Zimmer, 2002). Other findings also suggest that societal changes may be resulting in changes in living arrangements for older people as families adapt to urbanisation, migration and economic challenges (Mba, 2007). This may mean that care and support patterns are also altering, potentially in a negative way for the older person. In this sense, living arrangements can be indicators of welfare for older people and have the potential to highlight existing vulnerability among this group.

What literature there is on living arrangements among older people in sub-Saharan Africa is cross-sectional with very little focus given to the nature of changes in living arrangements over time. This temporal effect is extremely important in understanding an older individual's behaviour and their associated care and support patterns. A change in living arrangements in later life can have a real impact on the wellbeing of an older person and can reflect events in the life course which can also mean a substantial upheaval for the older person. It is therefore interesting to try to ascertain what triggers these moves and whether they can be viewed as positive or negative moves for the older person.

Additionally, very few studies have explored these changes in living arrangements for older people but especially in the urban slum environment. The location of the research, in two urban slums, is particularly interesting as it can be difficult to exist in and could even accelerate the ageing process, whilst not providing any of the formal support mechanisms associated with growing old. This research will add to the literature on older people in sub-Saharan Africa but will also help inform in a new area in terms of having explored changes in living arrangements for older people in an urban slum environment in this region.

Data:

The data to be used were collected in two slums in Nairobi, Kenya. These two slums, Korogocho and Viwandani, are demographic surveillance systems which have been implemented and run by the African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC). This is part of a broader programme of work funded by the Wellcome Trust called the Urbanisation, Poverty and Health Dynamics project which aims to explore the living conditions in these urban slum environments. It has an annual population of 60,000 with more than 28,000 households. Both slums are located near to the city centre and have been established since the 1970s.

The data were collected through the Nairobi Urban Health and Demographic Surveillance System (NUHDSS) which is a longitudinal framework following 60,000 people and aims to investigate the effects of poverty and migration on health outcomes. It has a panel structure where data are collected in rounds, every three to four months. It began in August 2002 with 25 panels having been completed so far. As an additional part to this longitudinal data, information was also collected among older people at a specific time point in 2006 using the 'Survey on Social, Health and Overall Wellbeing of Older People'. This interviewed 2,608 respondents over 50 years of age and collected information on their demographic profile, socio-economic status, health behaviour, migration intentions and their patterns of care and support.

The paper has linked the records of the older people interviewed in 2006 with their panel records over time from 2002 using each person's unique identifier number which has resulted in the creation of a comprehensive database of information. As such, this allows for the study of the interaction of life trajectories within the household or family context. Of the 2,608 respondents interviewed in 2006, 1,750 were present in the slums in 2002.

Research Methods:

Event history analysis techniques will be used to look at changes in living arrangements over time. Firstly, I will broadly look at changes in all types of living arrangements for older people and the emphasis here is on any change in their living arrangements – so movement into any other household in the slums. This is simply to ascertain whether the older person has changed their place of residence – not even necessarily whether they have changed the type of living arrangement but just to get a general idea of movement in the slums over the five year period to see how much change there is.

After exploring the general changes in residence, I will focus more in-depth on the changes in the types of living arrangements. Indeed, the changes in an older person's personal characteristics or in the attributes of 'significant others' may help explain a transition from one state to another as well. A variety of covariates will be used to explore the changes in living arrangements and what could determine the occurrence of an event at older ages – an event here being a change in the type of living arrangement. There will be a particular focus on the transition from either a single person household to a multiple person household or conversely from a multiple person household to a single person household. These household types are especially associated with differing degrees of care and support from the extended family so it will be interesting to explore the circumstances surrounding these particular residential changes for older people.

Expected findings:

Obviously coresidence is just one part of the flow of support between generations but it is an important one. It would be expected that coresidence is most common for older people in this informal urban environment and that there has been a fairly substantial change in living arrangements of older people over time, given the highly migratory nature of the slums. Any changes in living arrangements are expected to be connected to health status with poorer health status over time resulting in the older person perhaps changing their lone residence for coresidence with their extended family, in order to ensure support. Gender may also play a role in increasing levels of co-residence at older ages with women more likely to co-reside with their families after the death of a spouse – associated with this will be changes in marital status too. Age may play a role too in that 'older old' people may find themselves increasingly living alone as their adult children become more independent. Conversely, an 'older old' person may need more functional support so may move from a lone household to co-reside with family in later life.

The overall aim is to add to the literature on living arrangements among older people in sub-Saharan Africa and especially to shed light on the circumstances surrounding this in the urban slum context. This is a very rich data source of consistent panel data which I intend to make use of to explore moves into and out of different household types to try and gain some idea of how these might be associated with care and support for older people. It is important to explore this as there may be

unmet need for older people in the slums in terms of provision of support that needs to be addressed through community support initiatives or formal policy mechanisms.

References

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