The baby-boomer generation and family support – a European perspective[1]

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Abstract

The baby boomer generation, defined in this paper as individuals born between 1945 and 1954, have a high probability of still having a parent or parent-in-law alive. We examine their family intergenerational structure, living arrangements and help given to elderly ascendants in 10 European countries. Swedish and French baby boomers are most likely to belong to a four generational family structure, whereas Spanish and Italian baby boomers have the highest probability of living in multi-generational households. Rates of help given to parents living outside the household are higher in northern European countries but the regularity of help is more intense in southern European countries. These differences might be explained by different perceptions of the notion of 'help'. Factors associated with giving help to an elderly parent include gender, living arrangements and geographical proximity, health of parent, social participation, family composition and financial situation. We find no evidence of a particular 'baby boomer generation' cohort effect on the probability of giving help to an elderly parent

Introduction

The cohort of individuals born between 1945 and 1954, sometimes referred to as the first baby-boomer generation, are now approaching the age of state retirement. This cohort, aged between 50 and 59 in 2004, is in a unique position when compared to their parents at the same stage in the life course. In addition to their numerical strength, they are more likely to have a parent alive than previous generations at the same age. The baby boomers have also set unprecedented patterns of consumption cultures, adopted lifestyles characterised by individual preferences, and challenged (as well as in some cases rejected) traditional gender roles. Much more than their parent's generation, they have initiated new trends in divorce and separation, remarriage, and solo living. Indeed it is the combination of these characteristics that are one of the defining features of the baby boomer generation. Among the many social and economic implications of this unique cohort, the future of intergenerational family support systems looms large. With potentially more family responsibilities and

[1] This paper uses data from the early release 1 of SHARE 2004. This release is preliminary and may contain errors that will be corrected in later releases. The SHARE data collection has been primarily funded by the European Commission through the 5th framework programme (project QLK6-CT-2001-00360 in the thematic programme Quality of Life). Additional funding came from the US National Institute on Aging (U01 AG09740-13S2, P01 AG005842, P01 AG08291, P30 AG12815, Y1-AG-4553-01 and OGHA 04-064). Data collection in Austria (through the Austrian Science Foundation, FWF), Belgium (through the Belgian Science Policy Administration) and Switzerland (through BBW/OFES/UFES) was nationally funded. The SHARE data set is introduced in Börsch-Supan et al. (2005); methodological details are contained in Börsch-Supan and Jürges (2005).

obligations towards elderly parents and descending generations (adult children and grandchildren), how will individuals of the baby boomer generation reconcile family life with personal aspirations concerning work and other forms of social participation?

Who are the baby-boomers?

The notion of the 'baby boomer generation' is derived from the supposition that members of a birth cohort share a distinctive formative experience that can be studied empirically. As a demographic phenomena, the baby boomers represent the dramatic rise in fertility rates experienced at the end of Second World War, which occurred in all European countries albeit with variations in numbers and time. Although the arrival of the post-war baby boom is relatively straightforward to identify, with most European countries showing a peak in fertility rates around 1947 and 1948, it is less clear when it ended. Some commentators claim that there were in fact two baby boom periods, one at the end of the 1940s and the other, slightly smaller in scale, at the beginning of the 1960s. In this paper, we focus on the birth cohort of 1945-1954.[2]

The distinctive formative experience of a birth cohort can be referred to as a 'cohort effect', defined as '*the impact of historical events and processes on individual lives, particularly during the formative years*' (Alwin et al., 2004 p.4). The cohort effect that is typical of the baby boomers has been well documented (Harkin and Huber 2004). This generation grew up in a post-war era of expanding economies. It was influenced by growing liberalism in the 1960s, and it set new trends in consumer patterns. Individualism and freedom from traditional family and gender roles have also been a key-defining trait of the baby boomer generation.

When studying cohort effects, it quickly becomes apparent that there is a distinction between 'birth cohort' and 'generation'. The fact of belonging to a particular birth cohort, in this case 1945-1954, does not necessarily mean all members share the same formative experience. This is particularly true in the European case, where different social institutions, political structures and cultural traditions have influenced the birth cohort of 1945-1954. For example, individuals growing up in post-war Nordic countries under social democratic governments and developed welfare systems experienced a very different upbringing than their Spanish counterparts under the Franco regime. A distinctive 'baby-boomer generation' that is common to all European countries may difficult to identify.

The European birth cohort of 1945-1954 is therefore likely to be heterogeneous, reflecting not only cohort effects but also differences in behaviours and attitudes that apply to the population in general in areas such as living arrangements, labour force participation, family structures and gender roles. Any attempt to systematically identify the attributes of a European baby boomer generation is beyond the scope of this paper. We therefore use the term 'baby boomer generation' to represent first and foremost the birth cohort of 1945-1954 who are approaching retirement age rather than a homogenous group who have shared the same experience. At the same time,

[2] This age group is chosen in part because these first baby boomers have a high probability of having an elderly parent alive and in part because the data source used to examine family support does not include cohorts born later than 1954.

we are aware that the baby boomer generation is associated with a unique cohort effect. We focus on the family relationships of European baby boomers and in particular the help they give to their elderly parents. Two questions are addressed that have important consequences for ageing populations. First, do baby boomers in some European countries support their elderly parents more than in others?[3] Second, what characteristics of the baby boomers are associated with giving help to elderly parents?

Family support in Europe

The ageing of the European population presents one of the biggest challenges to national governments as well as for Europe as a whole. As the key supporters of older people, women are facing new pressures resulting from the rapid social transformations currently taking place. These pressures often arise in the context of uncoordinated or even contradictory policies. At the Lisbon and Stockholm summits of 2000 and 2001, the European Union through its 'open method of coordination' set a target of 50% for the labour market participation of individuals between 55 and 64 by 2010 and an overall level of 60% for women between 18 and 64. At the same, the current baby boomer generation has a high probability of having a living elderly parent, since their parents are one of the first cohorts to benefit substantially from the gains in life expectancy that have been a feature of the twentieth century. In Southern European countries, where female labour force participation has increased in leaps and bounds over recent years, young grandmothers are often solicited by the parents of their grandchildren to help with child care. Social policy both at national and European levels has yet to devise an adequate response to these competing demands. The professionalisation of elder and child care looks set to be an increasing trend, but how this care should be organised is much less clear. Whatever the outcome, there seems to be a broad consensus that some form of European social model should evolve to meet the challenges of an ageing population (Esping-Andersen 2003; Taylor-Gooby 2004).

Different European socio-demographic trends, political infrastructures and historical and cultural processes complicate this general question of how the shape of family support systems is evolving. European differences have been systematically researched at different levels, and several well-known models or classifications have emerged to describe overall patterns of welfare regimes, political infrastructures or cultural styles (Hajnal 1965; Esping-Andersen 1990; Rehr 1998). The sharpest contrasts are to be found between northern and southern European countries, particularly concerning living arrangements – one of the most fundamental forms of support. Intergenerational cohabitation and proximity tend to be much more common in southern European countries. Institutional differences also shape patterns of support. For example, developed welfare systems in northern Europe provide a range of professional services to older people, with a greater choice of independent living schemes or retirement homes. Compared to southern European countries, baby boomers in northern Europe have grown up and passed most of their adult life under conditions of expanding welfare states and job security. Women have increasingly entered the labour market, often pursing careers. In southern Europe, where fertility

[3] Our previous research in this area has suggested that despite anxieties concerning the decline of family support, the children of elderly parents continue to play a key role (Renaut and Ogg 2003).

rates have fallen dramatically in a short space of time and where welfare systems are less developed, family support systems are generally considered to be more intact and pro-active, although there are signs that the southern European family may be under stress (Wall et al. 2001). As a consequence, baby boomers in these countries are much more likely to have retained traditional family roles than their northern and continental counterparts.

Data Source

The data source used to examine the family support systems of the baby boomer generation is the Survey of Health and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), 2004, containing detailed information on persons aged 50 and above in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, Spain, Italy and Greece.[4] This survey is designed specifically to examine the health, economic and family dimensions of ageing and it provides the first opportunity to comprehensively examine the intergenerational structures of the European baby boomer generations as they approach retirement. Although the scope of SHARE includes all persons aged 50 and above in a household, for the purpose of this analysis we have selected only one respondent per household. One special feature of SHARE is that for certain questions, only one member of a couple responds and this applies to questions asked about children. We select this person for the analysis and omit his/her spouse or partner (although we keep information that spouses have given concerning their parents, children, etc.). The final sample for the analysis is therefore one member per household born between 1945 and 1954 (n=6,198). At the time of the survey (2004) all these respondents were aged between 50 and 59, although it should be noted that among couples, 23.4% had a partner who was under 50. The data are weighted to calibrate for country specific age and sex characteristics.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section deals with the family intergenerational structure and living arrangements of the baby boomer generation for each of the SHARE countries. In this section we examine the existence of parents and parents-in-law, children and grandchildren, and siblings, and identify where the baby boomer generation is situated within the family generational structure. Living arrangements are also examined in detail. We then present in the second section general findings on help and support given to others by baby boomers and contrast this activity with a very different pursuit - going to a sport, social or other type of club. The motives for doing these activities are examined and we provide tentative explanations for the observed country differences. We then proceed in the third section to examine whether the same pattern of inter-country differences is observed for a specific form of help – that given to elderly parents. The paper concludes with a multivariate analysis of help given to elderly parents.

[4] Börsch-Supans et al. 2005

Section 1. The family intergenerational structure of the baby boomer generation

Elderly parents and parents-in-law

Having an elderly parent or parents alive is one of the main characteristics of the baby boomer generation. More than half (57%) of the baby-boomer Europeans have both parents still alive, and 50% have a mother alive. The mean ages of these living parents are around 80 for mothers and 81 for fathers. Taking the base of respondents who have at least one parent alive (*n*=3,429), there is very little inter-country variation in the mean number of living parents, around 1.27 (except Switzerland where it is 1.36). However, the likelihood of having at least one parent **or** parent-in-law alive is related to both average life expectancy within countries, marriage patterns and the age differentials among spouses. Taking the base of respondents who have at least one parent **or** parent-in-law alive (*n*=4,113), 68% of the baby-boomers have a living ascendant.[5] Among couples, the greater the age differences of the spouses, the more likely ascendants will be alive. This is the case for example in Greece where many of the spouses of the baby-boomers have partners under the age of 50 (33%) and a very high proportion of these partners have a living parent. Different life expectancy rates between the countries also determine the probability of having a parent alive, as can be seen in the case of France (77% have a living ascendant).

Children and grandchildren

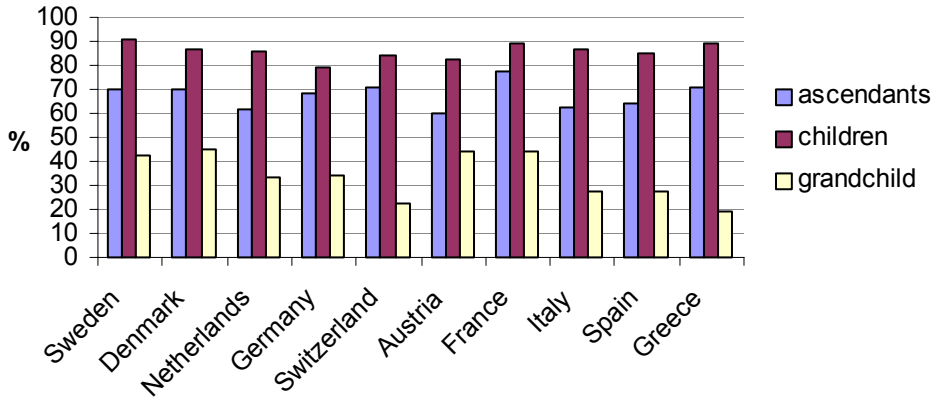
The vast majority of baby-boomers (85%) are parents and their children are mostly adults – for 78% of parents their youngest child is aged 18 or above. Conversely, only 5% of parents have all their children aged under 18. Inter-country differences are less apparent for the presence of a living child than for the presence of an ascendant. The mean number of children for the baby-boomer cohort as a whole is 1.9. For baby-boomer parents, the mean number of children is 2.3, with Swedish parents having the highest mean (2.6) and Greek parents the lowest (2.1). The lower mean in Greece results both from the general trend of lower fertility common to southern European countries and the greater age differentials of spouses – some of the Greek partners of the baby-boomer generation men may not have completed their fertility cycle. Large inter-country differences exist in the presence of step-children, defined in SHARE as being '*a child of the respondent from a previous relationship*' or '*a child of the respondent's current partner from a previous relationship*'. Among baby boomer parents, 8% live in a couple where there are step-children (i.e. a step-child of the respondent or a step-child of the respondent's partner), but rates vary from 24% and 21% respectively in Sweden and Denmark to less than 3% in Italy, Spain and Greece. These differences, of course, reflect marriage patterns and the existence of more separation, divorce and remarriage in northern Europe compared to southern Europe.

[5] We use the term 'ascendant' to denote at least one living parent or parent-in-law.

Although most European baby-boomer are parents, only one-third are grandparents. But inter-country differences in the family structure of the baby boomer generation are greater for the existence of grandchildren than for either parents or children - 45% of Danish baby boomers are grandparents compared to only 19% of Greek baby boomers. As expected, the northern European baby boomers (together with France) are much more likely to be grandparents than their southern European counterparts, reflecting fertility patterns among the baby-boomer generation and their children.[6] Similarly, large inter-country differences are observed in the mean number of grandchildren. Among the population of baby-boomer grandparents, the mean number of grandchildren is 2.54 for all countries, with Greek grandparents the lowest (2.09).

Figure 1 shows the existence of parents, children and grandchildren of the baby boomer generation, a pattern that reflects demographic trends from the beginning of the twentieth century (the life expectancy of the baby-boomer's parents) to current trends (fertility rates among for the baby-boomer's children).

Figure 1. The existence of parents, children and grandchildren for the birth cohort 1945-1954



Siblings

Family support of elderly parents is highly influenced by the presence of siblings in the baby boomer generation. A key characteristic of the baby boomer generation is that they tend to have more brothers and sisters than their parents had at age 50-59 or that that their children will have when they reach this age. The SHARE data show that 86% of the baby boomers have siblings and that the mean number is 2,52 (ranging from 1.92 in Germany to 3.64 in the Netherlands). Put another way, current generations of older people have potentially more children available than previous generations and this is a trend that is likely to continue in the near future (Murphy and Grundy 2003). For present day baby boomers, the potential to share different support tasks concerning parents (as well as other family members) between siblings is likely

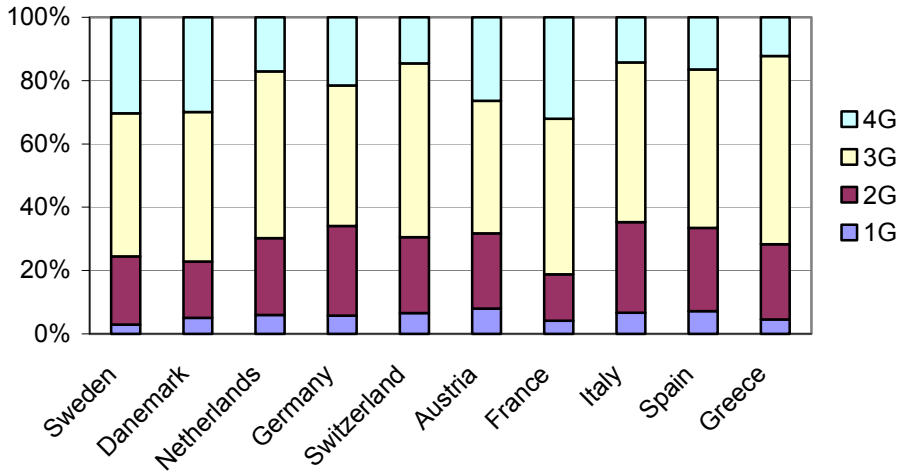
[6] For example, the age at which the baby-boomer mothers had their first child does not vary a great deal between countries (mean age 24). But in second marriage or 'reconstituted' families, the age of the first child is much younger (mean age 20) than in the long-standing marriages or partnerships. These differences, among others (such as delayed childbirth) influence the age at which baby boomer parents become grandparents.

to be crucial in influencing life styles and the balance between family life and individual pursuits.

Family intergenerational structure

The combination of parents, children and grandchildren provide one of the defining characteristics of the baby boomer generation - their position in the family generational structure. By family generational structure, we refer to the presence (direct line) of a living parent(s), and of a living child(ren) and grand-child(ren).[7] The baby-boomer generation is first and foremost an *intermediate* generation within the family generational structure. Of course, there are many possible permutations of ascending and descending generational structures, but whatever these combinations practically all the European baby-boomers belong to a four or less family generational structure. Figure 2 shows these structures. The countries that have the largest proportions of a four-generational family structure (a living parent, child and grandchild) are Sweden, Denmark, and France. In addition, baby boomers in Sweden and France have a higher than average number of children and grandchildren than baby boomers in the other countries, particularly those in southern European countries. In simple numerical terms, baby-boomers in Sweden and France therefore have potentially more family responsibilities and obligations compared to those in the southern European countries and the Netherlands and Germany.

Figure 2. Number of family generations to which the birth cohort 1945-1954 belongs



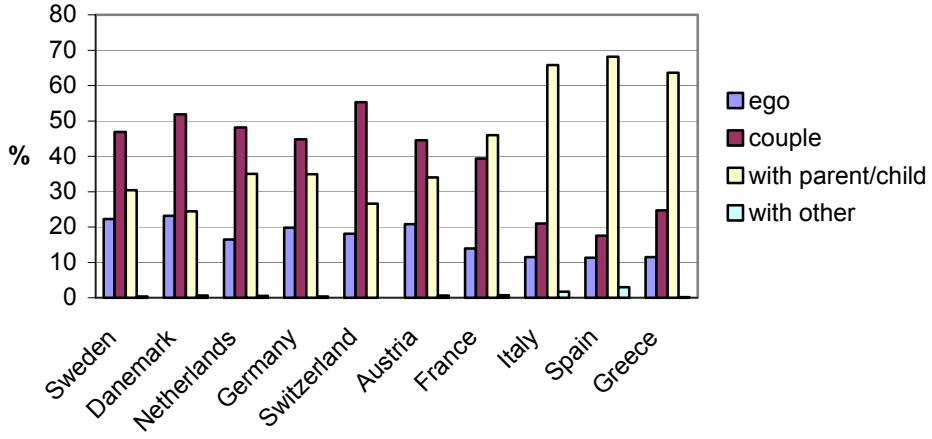
Living arrangements

Although the position of the baby boomer cohort within the family generational structure has a strong influence on how patterns of support may be distributed within the family, living arrangements provide a basic measure of how this support is operationalised. It is well know that there are large variations in the pattern of European living arrangements that reflect historical, cultural and socio-political

[7] It would be very unusual for this cohort to have a grandparent alive and this information is not recorded in SHARE.

influences (Keilman 1987; Pampel 1992; Wolf 1995; Rehr 1998). Figure 3 shows these variations as they relate to the baby boomer cohort. We have chosen a four category variable of living arrangements – 'living alone', 'couple only', living with a parent(s) or child(ren)[8] and a residual category of all types of living arrangements that do not correspond to the first three. The main trend in living arrangements observed is the inter-country differences between households where a couple only are present and households where an immediate ascending or descending generation (parent or child) are present. In all countries except Spain, Italy and Greece, two-thirds of the baby-boomer generation are in a household with a spouse only or living alone. In Spain, Italy and Greece, this situation is reversed, with two-thirds of the baby-boomer generation living with at least one child and/or parent.

Figure 3. Household composition of the birth cohort 1945-1954



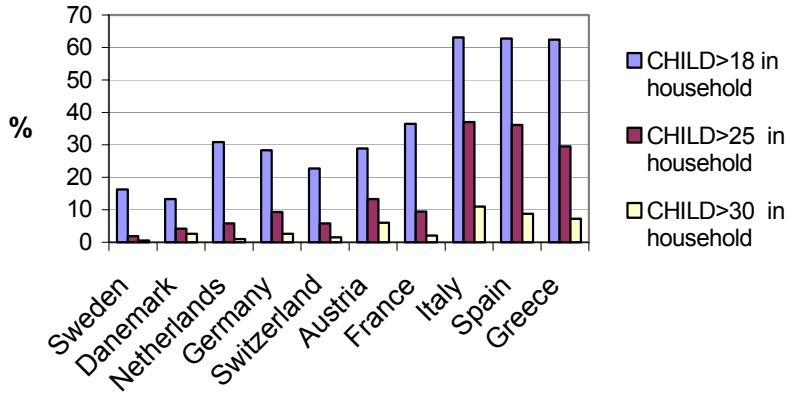
Most of the intergenerational cohabitation observed concerns children of the baby boomers, reflecting deep-rooted patterns of departure of children from the family home and more recent social influences such as the effect of unemployment, housing markets and later age of marriage (Sgritta 2001). Inter-country variation is very large, ranging from only 13% of Danish baby-boomers who live with a child (or children) aged 18 or above to 63% in Spain and Italy. These stark inter-country differences persist for older children –in Sweden and Denmark less then one in twenty baby-boomers has a child (or children) aged 25 or above in the household, compared to approximately one-third of Spanish, Italian and Greek baby-boomers.

When rates of cohabitation with a child aged 25 or above are combined with living in the same building, the southern European differences are accentuated. But one interesting finding is that whereas for the northern and southern European countries, this level of geographical closeness is rare, in Germany and Austria the rates of baby boomers who live with or in the same building as a child aged 25 or above rise to 17% and 21% respectively. The reasons for this finding are unclear – does this close

[8] Only 6% of baby-boomers live with ascendants, with rates extremely low in the northern and continental countries. The Spanish baby-boomers have the highest rates of cohabitation with a parent (13%). See section on relations with older parents for more details of living arrangements.

geographical proximity result from the choice of the actors or is it a sign of institutional features such a housing availability or allocation?

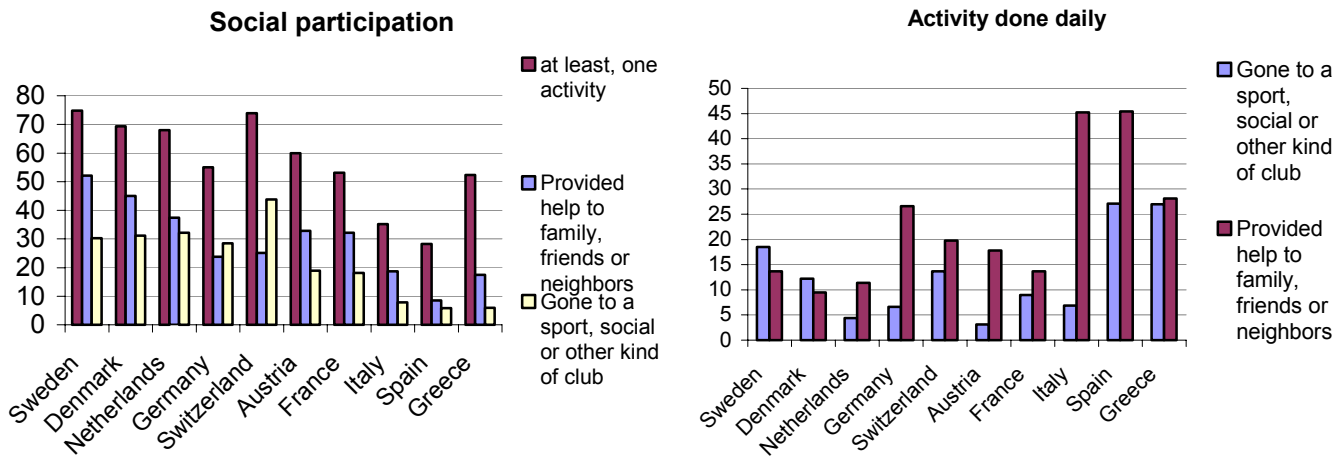
Figure 4. % of birth cohort 1945-1954 parents living with at least one child aged 18 and above, 25 and above and 30 and above



Section 2. Patterns of help and support

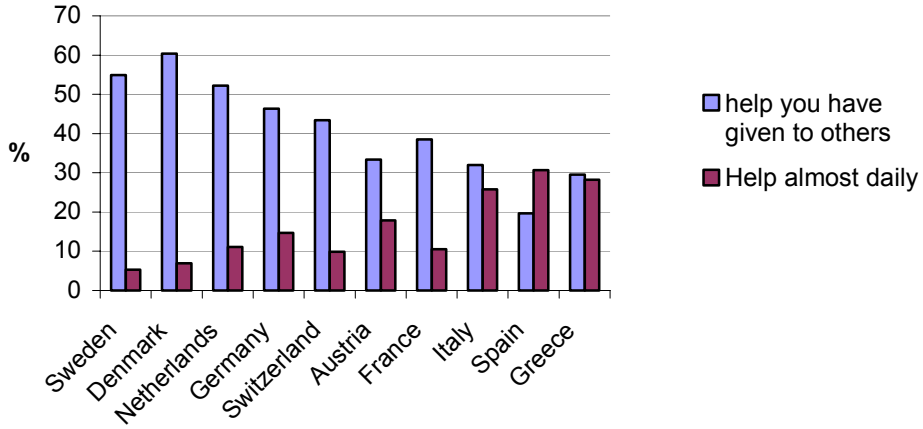
SHARE contains a number of questions on social activities that respondents have done in the past four weeks. These questions are contained in a module within the questionnaire that deals with social participation. Respondents are told by the interviewer that the survey is interested about the motivation for and satisfaction with their activities, and then asked '*whether they have done any of the following activities in the last month*' – *voluntary or charity work, cared for a sick or disabled person, provided help to family, friends and neighbours, attended an educational training course, gone to a sport, social or other kind of club, taken part in a religious organisation or taken part in a political or community related organisation*. The general pattern is shown in Figure 5, where participation rates are given for at least one of the above activities and for two selected activities – providing help to family friends and neighbours and going to a sport, social or other kind of club. Participation in at least one of the several activities listed above is significantly lower for Italian and Spanish baby boomers than for the other countries. For each of the two separate activities, there is a general trend of higher rates in the northern European countries, and lower rates in the Mediterranean countries, with continental Europe in between. However, this north-south gradient is reversed for the regularity of helping other people (and to a lesser extent for going to clubs), with the southern European baby boomers more actively involved. Among southern European baby boomers who help others, more than one in three do so on a mostly daily basis.

Figure 5. Help given and social participation



It might immediately be concluded from these descriptive results that more northern European baby boomers are involved in social activities than southern Europeans, but that southern Europeans baby boomers devote more time and energy to them. But the inter-country pattern of lower rates for providing help in southern European countries is counter intuitive and contradicts arguments that have been put forward for the existence of 'strong' or 'weak' family ties or the individualism of the baby boomer generations. One explanation for the strong inter-country variation on giving help could be that there are different perceptions of the notion of 'help' or 'caring' and this would seem to be confirmed when data on helping others are examined from a different module within SHARE. The module on social support begins by the interviewer informing the respondent that the survey is *'interested in how people support one another'* and that *'the next set of questions are about help that you may have given to people you know…'*. Respondents are then asked whether they have personally given any help to family members outside the household or to friends and neighbours in the past 12 months. The results are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Help given to others



The inter-country pattern for helping others observed in Figure 6 is the same as that in Figure 5. In other words, two different questions on providing help that are located at different points within the SHARE questionnaire provide the same results – a steep gradient between countries running from north to south for rates of giving help and the reverse pattern for the regularity. Do these different rates reflect 'true' differences or are they due to country specific reporting styles? It seems probable that respondents are interpreting the concepts of 'help' and 'support' in different ways. This could be because a certain social distance is required between donors and recipients before help and social support can be identified. In close family situations, particularly where cohabitation is concerned, daily activities that involve 'low-key' forms of support may not be construed as having a 'helping' or 'supportive' value. This could be the case for the southern European baby boomers, where rates of intergenerational cohabitation and close geographical proximity between family members are high. There may also be an element of inter-country cohort effect behind these findings. 'Help' for the northern European baby boomers may include emotional and affective dimensions that are absent for the southern European baby boomers.

The different rates of giving help that are observed within countries, with their large variation, should not be therefore be taken as absolute values, since it is likely that the concepts of help and support are not being interpreted in the same way within different countries. Further evidence for this proposition is provided by the motives that the baby boomers give for the two contrasting social activities of going to a sport, social or other kind of club and providing help to the family or caring for a sick or disabled adult (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Motives for helping others and going to sports, social or other kind of clubs

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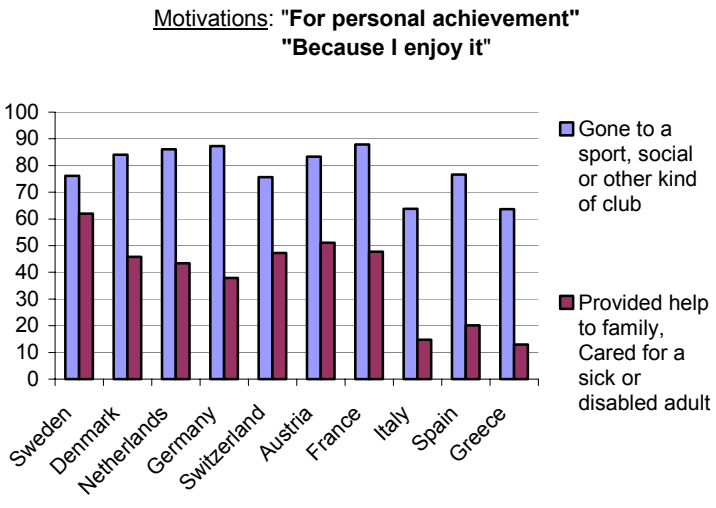

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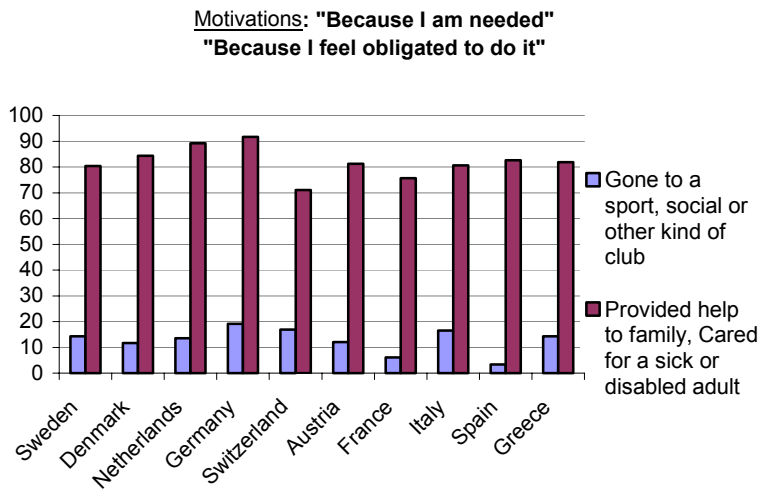


On the one hand motives to do with feelings of obligation (Figure 7A) accord with the two different types of activities – with little inter-country variation, most baby boomers help others because they feel obligated and needed, and very few associate these motives for going to sports, social or other kinds of clubs. On the other hand, whereas individual motives such as enjoyment or personal achievement are the

principal motives for going to sports, social or other clubs for all European baby boomers, a surprisingly high proportion of northern and continental baby boomers cite these motive as a reason for helping others (Figure 7b). Some of this stark difference could be explained by the intensity with which southern Europeans are involved in helping – helping others on a daily basis may well provide less enjoyment than on a occasional basis. But it may simply be that notions of help differ substantially between the different regions of Europe.

Bearing in mind the possibility that the SHARE measures of help and support reflect different perceptions of these concepts, we now turn to examine in more detail help given to elderly parents.

Section 3. Help to elderly parents or parents-in-law

Help can be given to elderly parents in a number of ways, some of which are direct and others indirect. One of the most fundamental forms of help is cohabitation. As Lyberaki and Tynios (2005) note '*household composition and cohabitation with children is probably the oldest social protection mechanism for old age*' (p. 308). Although rates of cohabitation between baby boomers and their elderly parents are straightforward to calculate in SHARE, there is no information on the dynamics of relationships between family members within households. This means that it is not possible to determine who is living with whom or who is helping whom. Cohabitation between elderly parents and their children is usually due to one of three factors – adult children who have always lived with their parents, adult children who return to live with their elderly parents and elderly parents who move into the household of their adult children (Attias-Donfut and Renaut 1994; Iacovou 2000). The most common of these factors is stable households of adult children who have always lived with their parents. Pour la tranche d'âge étudiée

Taking the base of baby boomers with at least one parent alive (n=3,429), the SHARE data show rates of cohabitation with elderly parents at less than 2% in Sweden and the Netherlands, between 2 and 6% for Denmark, Switzerland, France and Greece, around 8% for Germany and Austria, 13% for Italy and 17% for Spain. Because of these relatively low rates, it is not possible to examine in more detail the characteristics of baby boomer households within each country. There are no significant gender differences.[9] Baby-boomers living with their parents have been at their present address for significantly longer than other baby-boomers (26 years compared to 18). This suggests that the main trend is for these baby-boomers to have *always* lived with their parents. Attention should be drawn to the finding that in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy and Greece, a significant proportion of the baby-boomer generation live in the same building as one of their parents (between 4 and 11 per cent).

[9] Our previous work suggests that gender only has a significant effect when more details are known concerning the head of the household or who is normally responsible for paying household bills and maintaining the property – in other words when it can be ascertained who lives with whom (Attias-Donfut & al. 1995).

Cohabitation between baby-boomers and their elderly parents is an indirect form of help, stronger in the southern European countries and practically non-existent in the northern European countries. Before turning to examine direct forms of help as measured in the social support module of SHARE, differences on two other indirect measures of help are examined – geographical proximity and regularity of contact. The SHARE data show high rates of close geographical proximity in all countries between baby boomers and their parents. The majority of the baby boomer generation live less than 25 kilometres distance from their parent or parents (with the exception of Sweden, Switzerland and France, where just under 50% of baby boomers cohabit or live less than 25 kilometres away). In Spain and Italy, these rates are as high as 80 per cent. Conversely French baby-boomers appear most likely to have a mother living more than 100 kilometres away (37%). Interestingly, a high proportion of French baby boomers live more than 500 kilometres from their parent, with one in ten having a parent in another country, whereas these rates are very low for the Netherlands. These patterns undoubtedly reflect differences in the surface areas of the SHARE countries as well as past immigration and emigration trends.

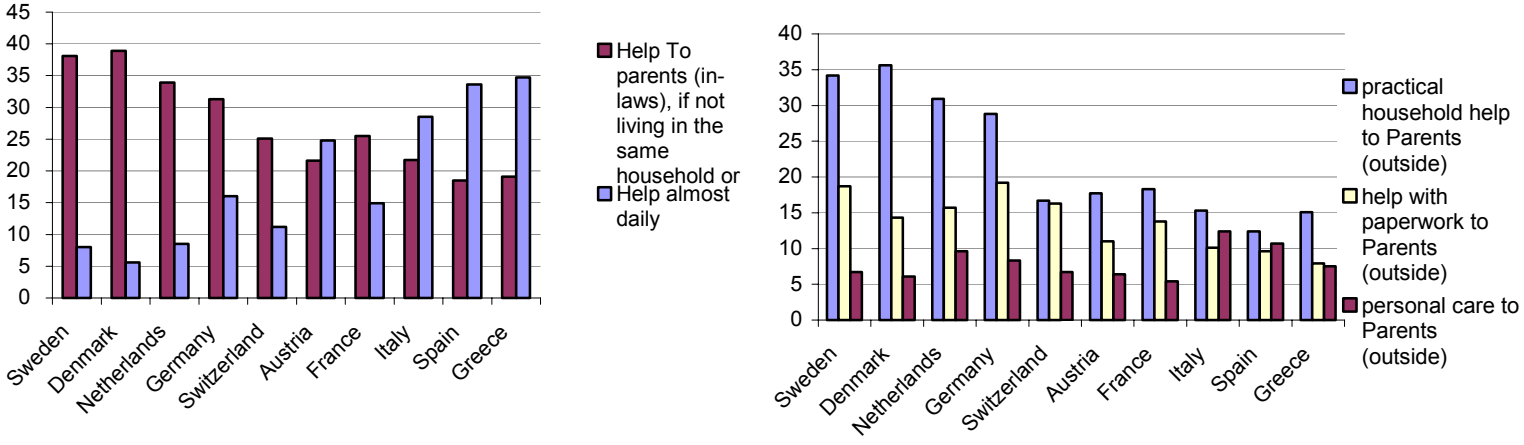
Making contact with an elderly parent can be considered as a primary indicator of family solidarity (Bengtson and Roberts 1991). The SHARE data do not distinguish between contact that is face-to-face and contact made by telephone. This means that although contact and geographical proximity remain correlated, baby-boomers living far away from their parents (assuming universal phone coverage) have an equal chance of making contact as baby-boomers living close to their parents.[10] Contact with elderly parents tends to be higher by baby boomers in Italy, Spain, and Greece, and lower in France. But even in the northern European countries, baby boomers maintain relatively high rates of contact with their elderly parents. Overall, 83% of baby boomers make contact with them at least weekly. It seems clear that the higher rates for contact in Italy and Spain are in part due to the close proximity between baby boomers and their parents in these countries. For Greek baby boomers, where contact remains high but greater distances separate the generations, these rates may also reflect southern European patterns of 'stronger' family ties (Rehr, 1998).

Direct forms of help given to elderly parents are measured in the social support module of SHARE. This module uses a social network approach to capture the metaconcept of support (Vaux 1992).[11] Respondents are asked a series of questions on whether different types of support have been given or received in the past 12 months ***outside*** the household and they then identify the recipients and donors. Thus respondents are not asked *directly* whether they have helped their parents, although of course it is possible to determine whether parents figure among the recipients and donors. Three types of help are identified in SHARE. ***Personal care*** (for example dressing, bathing or showering, eating, getting in and out of bed, using the toilet), ***practical household help*** (for example with home repairs, gardening, transportation, shopping and household chores) and ***help with paperwork*** (for example filling out forms, settling financial or legal matters) given in the last 12 months. For the analysis given below, we consider 'help' to be at least one of these three items.

[10] Rates of contact with parents for baby boomers living more than 500km from their parents remains high.
[11] An alternative approach is a role relation model, where respondents are asked directly whether they have given help to a specific person, such as a parent or child.

Taking the base of baby-boomers with at least one ascendant alive (*n*=4,113), just under one-third of European baby-boomers (29%) helped an ascendant during the past 12 months. The same inter-country pattern that has already been observed for giving help in general is found for giving help to ascendants – a descending north-south gradient for the frequency of having helped ascendants in the past 3 months and an ascending gradient for the intensity of help (Figure 8). When the three different types of help are examined separately, this pattern remains for practical help, with approximately one in three baby boomers in the northern countries having helped their parents with practical tasks compared to only 15% or less in southern European countries. A similar pattern but less pronounced and with lower rates is found for help with paperwork. As far as personal care is concerned, inter-country differences are much less in evidence. Rates are under 15% in all countries, with the highest rates among Italian and Spanish baby boomers, followed by the Dutch.[12]

Figure 8. Help given to parents and parents-in-law (outside household)



The results shown in Figure 8 do not take account of help given to parents living *inside* the household for which there is no information in SHARE - apart from helping other household members with personal care. In the absence of this information, we consider cohabitation or living in the same building with a parent to be a form of help and add these cases to the total of those who give help to ascendants living *outside* the household. The results are shown in Figure 9.

[12] A controlled check on rates of help shows that these increase only marginally for the generation born between 1935 and 1944.

Figure 9. Help given to parents and parents-in-law

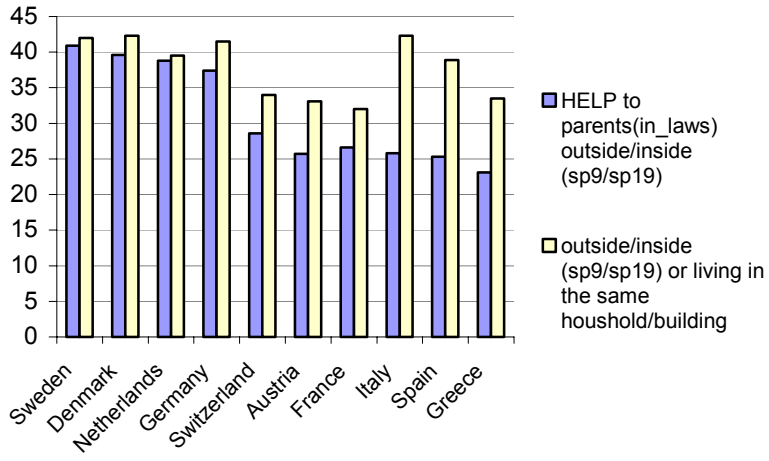


Figure 9 shows that once cohabitation with elderly parents is taken into account, inter-country differences in rates are much less accentuated. The southern Europeans, and Italy in particular reach levels comparable with continental and European baby-boomers. Overall, only 10 percentage points separate the highest and lowest rates. The 10 SHARE countries fall into two groups – Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Spain, where rates of having helped ascendants in the past year are approximately 40%, and Switzerland, Austria and France, where they are slightly lower at around 33 per cent.

We now turn to examine some of the possible determinants of giving help to elderly ascendants using a binary logistic regression model. The response variable combines all the information available in SHARE concerning time transfers of help to parents – practical household help, help with paperwork given to parents living outside the household and personal care given to parents living inside or outside the household. The explanatory variables are as follows: **a social participation indicator** (active during the last month in at least one of the following activities - voluntary or charity work, attended an educational training course, gone to a sport, social or other kind of club, taken part in a religious organisation or taken part in a political or community related organisation). This indicator has three categories - almost daily participation, less frequent participation and no participation; **the type of locality**, an indicator of three categories – living in a building in a big town or city, living in a house in a small town or rural area, and a residual category of all other types of locality; **generational structure**, an indicator of three categories which identifies whether the respondent is childless, a parent but not a grandparent, or a parent and grandparent; **siblings**, an indicator of three categories which identifies whether the respondent has no siblings, belongs to a sibling group that is only brothers *or* only sisters, or belongs to a mixed sibling group; **ascendant's health**, an indicator which identifies the self-reported health that the respondent gives for their parents and parents-in-law. Where the respondent has more than one ascendant, the poorest health status is retained from three categories – good health, fair health and not in good health; **proximity** of ascendant, an indicator which identifies where the nearest parent or parent-in-law

lives in relation to the respondent – in the same house or building, less than 5 km, 5 km or more; **financial situation**, a binary indicator of whether the respondent is experiencing financial difficulties; other binary indicators included in the model are **gender**, **living in a couple**, and in **paid employment**. Finally the 10 countries are entered in the model, with Sweden as the reference category. Descriptive results are shown in Table 1 and the model in Table 2.

The results in Table 2 show the presence of well known factors associated with family help, such as the importance of cohabitation and geographical proximity, women being more involved than men, and the ascendant helped being in poor health. These have the strongest coefficients in the model. But other parameters also are significant – social participation, family composition, financial situation and country. For social participation, baby boomers who have not been involved in any activities during the past month are less likely to have helped their ascendants. At the same time, baby boomers who are grandparents are also less likely to have helped their ascendants.[13] This could be because baby boomers who are grandparents invest more time in activities with the family than in activities outside of the family. The financial situation of the respondents has a slightly weaker effect on the probability of giving help, but interestingly this is positive where baby boomers report *not* having financial difficulties. As far as the effect of country is concerned, the general pattern observed is one that observed in Figure 9, before cohabitation is added to the help indicator. In Denmark, Netherlands, and Germany the probability of giving help to an elderly parent is not different from the reference category, Sweden. But in all the other countries, the probability of helping a parent is less and this result is highly significant.

[13] Our previous research using a different European data source has also found this trend (Ogg and Renaut, 2005, forthcoming)

Table 1 – Basic descriptive data on the baby-boomer cohort (1945-1954)

	N	All	Sweden	Denmark	Netherlands	Germany	Switzerland	Austria	France	Italy	Spain	Greece
	6198	*%*	*846*	*516*	*900*	*762*	*288*	*487*	*514*	*673*	*624*	*616*
Gender												
Women	*2 725*	49.5	51.0	51.2	47.6	50.4	52.5	50.0	53.9	48.1	42.1	47.9
Men	*3 473*	50.5	49.0	48.8	52.4	49.6	47.5	50.0	46.1	51.9	57.9	52.1
Living with partner or not												
Not in couple	*1 419*	23.3	28.1	27.4	20.8	26.4	22.3	28.4	21.0	20.7	24.3	17.3
Couple	*4 779*	76.7	71.9	72.6	79.2	73.6	77.7	71.6	79.0	79.3	75.7	82.7
Current job situation												
Not employed	*2 106*	35.3	17.2	23.7	33.7	27.5	19.2	40.3	33.6	48.6	42.8	42.3
Employed or self employed	*4 092*	64.7	82.8	76.3	66.3	72.5	80.8	59.7	66.4	51.4	57.2	57.7
Siblings												
No siblings	*787*	14.0	11.7	11.2	5.1	20.8	11.2	20.9	11.7	12.8	10.2	11.8
Sibling group or male or female	*1 331*	21.2	24.3	23.4	16.4	24.4	19.3	25.0	16.2	23.3	18.9	24.8
Mixed sibling group	*4 080*	64.7	64.1	65.4	78.5	54.8	69.4	54.1	72.1	63.9	70.8	63.4
Family composition												
Childless	*824*	15.1	9.4	13.1	14.0	20.6	15.6	17.3	11.2	13.7	15.1	10.5
Child(ren) without grandchild	*3 156*	50.9	47.8	41.8	53.0	45.2	62.2	39.0	44.9	58.5	57.8	70.6
Child & grandchild	*2 218*	33.9	42.8	45.1	33.0	34.2	22.2	43.8	43.9	27.7	27.2	18.9
Housing												
Living in a building in a big town	*1 682*	26.1	28.9	17.9	14.1	21.5	13.9	31.3	20.8	24.8	46.1	54.7
Living in a house in a small town or rural area	*2 472*	44.9	32.7	46.2	31.7	50.5	63.6	43.0	52.8	48.7	29.7	13.9
All other localities	*2 044*	28.9	38.4	35.9	54.2	27.9	22.5	25.7	26.5	26.6	24.2	31.4
Financial situation (make ends meet)												
With great or some difficulty	*2 219*	39.1	23.1	21.0	22.8	28.2	15.7	28.5	32.3	65.3	48.4	67.3
Fairly easily	*2 156*	35.5	36.5	32.4	38.7	35.6	33.6	48.0	40.9	29.0	37.6	19.2
Easily	*1 823*	25.4	40.4	46.6	38.4	36.2	50.7	23.5	26.8	5.7	13.9	13.5
Social participation (excludes helping others)												
No activities	*3 649*	65.1	48.2	50.7	48.2	57.9	31.4	54.4	67.5	80.8	79.9	59.1
Activities less than daily	*1 657*	22.9	30.7	27.5	31.2	28.1	40.9	30.3	19.3	13.6	16.1	33.5
Activities almost daily	*892*	11.9	21.1	21.8	20.6	14.0	27.7	15.2	13.2	5.6	4.0	7.5

Source: SHARE 2004

Table 2 – Help to ascendants by the baby-boomer cohort (1945-1954)

	N	All	Sweden	Denmark	Netherlands	Germany	Switzerland	Austria	France	Italy	Spain	Greece
When ascendants alive	*4113*		*585*	*355*	*548*	*516*	*198*	*285*	*386*	*406*	*400*	*434*
HELP to ascendants	1334	30.6	40.9	39.6	38.8	37.4	28.6	25.7	26.6	25.8	25.3	23.1
HELP to ascendants or living in the same household or same building	1590	38.3	42.0	42.3	39.5	41.5	34.0	33.1	32.0	42.3	38.9	33.5
Housing												
In the same household or building	447	13.8	2.0	3.4	1.8	13.0	9.9	14.2	7.5	24.3	23.9	16.5
Less than 5 km	1404	33.2	28.8	30.2	40.2	36.5	24.7	35.6	23.0	33.7	43.9	37.2
More than 5 km	2262	53.0	69.2	66.4	58.0	50.5	65.4	50.2	69.5	41.9	32.2	46.3
Ascendant's health												
In good health	1172	26.0	25.5	35.2	32.0	25.2	36.5	25.7	23.6	19.5	33.2	32.7
Fairly health	1625	40.1	38.9	31.2	41.4	43.8	40.0	49.0	37.8	42.4	32.2	40.9
Not in good health	1316	33.9	35.6	33.6	26.5	30.9	23.5	25.3	38.6	38.2	34.6	26.4

Source: SHARE 2004

Table 3 – Binary logistic regression on helping an ascendant

N= 4113	Parameter	Estimate	Standard Error	Wald Chi-Square	Pr > ChiSq	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Limits	
	Intercept	-1.2737	0.2255	31.9053	<.0001			
Social participation (excludes helping others)	No activities (without help/care)	-0.3262	0.0833	15.3255	<.0001	0.722	0.613	0.850
	Activities less than daily	*ref*						
	Activities almost daily	0.1323	0.1073	1.5202	0.2176	1.142	0.925	1.409
Ascendant's health	In good health	-0.3062	0.0890	11.8307	0.0006	0.736	0.618	0.877
	Fair health	*ref*						
	Not in good health	0.2893	0.0829	12.1837	0.0005	1.335	1.135	1.571
Gender	Women	0.5287	0.0741	50.9217	<.0001	1.697	1.467	1.962
	Men	*ref*						
Living with partner or not	Couple	-0.088	0.0968	0.8278	0.3629	0.916	0.758	1.107
	Not in couple	*ref*						
Current job situation	Employed or self employed	0.1177	0.0836	1.9801	0.1594	1.125	0.955	1.325
	Not employed	*ref*						
Siblings	No siblings	0.1126	0.1131	0.9904	0.3196	1.119	0.897	1.397
	Sibling group or male or female	0.1362	0.0854	2.5447	0.1107	1.146	0.969	1.355
	Mixed sibling group	*ref*						
Family composition	Childless	-0.1139	0.1181	0.931	0.3346	0.892	0.708	1.125
	Child(ren) without grandchild	*ref*						
	Child & grandchild	-0.2902	0.0810	12.8363	0.0003	0.748	0.638	0.877
Housing	Living in a building in a big town	-0.0532	0.0977	0.2962	0.5863	0.948	0.783	1.148
	living in a house in a small town or rural area	0.0719	0.0838	0.7373	0.3905	1.075	0.912	1.266
	All other localities	*ref*						
Where are living ascendants	In the same household or building	1.1373	0.1227	85.9274	<.0001	3.118	2.452	3.966
	Less than 5 km	0.762	0.0779	95.6199	<.0001	2.143	1.839	2.496
	More than 5 km	*ref*						
Financial situation (make ends meet)	With great or some difficulty	-0.2541	0.0914	7.7303	0.0054	0.776	0.648	0.928
	Fairly easily	*ref*						
	Easily	0.1649	0.0862	3.662	0.0557	1.179	0.996	1.396
Country	Sweden	*ref*						
	Denmark	-0.0532	0.1437	0.1368	0.7114	0.948	0.715	1.257
	Netherlands	-0.16	0.1297	1.5212	0.2174	0.852	0.661	1.099
	Germany	-0.3929	0.1334	8.6755	0.0032	0.675	0.520	0.877
	Switzerland	-0.8202	0.1893	18.7718	<.0001	0.440	0.304	0.638
	Austria	-0.8814	0.1697	26.9868	<.0001	0.414	0.297	0.578
	France	-0.5658	0.1501	14.1988	0.0002	0.568	0.423	0.762
	Italy	-0.8563	0.1617	28.0395	<.0001	0.425	0.309	0.583
	Spain	-0.894	0.1607	30.9458	<.0001	0.409	0.298	0.560
	Greece	-0.8702	0.1587	30.0697	<.0001	0.419	0.307	0.572

Helping an ascendant *n=1334* / Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square=389.0235 /DF=26/ Pr > ChiSq =<.0001

Source: SHARE 2004

Summary

In this paper, we have presented some details of the family structure of the baby boomer generation in ten European countries and focussed on the help that they give to their elderly parents. In all the countries studied, the baby boomer generations of the birth cohort 1945-1954 are strong in numerical terms with a high probability of having at least one living parent or parent-in-law. These two characteristics in particular make this generation unique. However, there are important country differences in family intergenerational structures. Swedish, Danish and French baby boomers are more likely to be in a four generational family structure (having at least one living parent, child and grandchild) than baby boomers in other countries. Baby boomers in the southern European countries have high rates of intergenerational cohabitation, whereas northern baby boomers are most likely to be either living in a couple only or alone. Northern baby boomers appear to be more socially active than their southern European counterparts but southern baby boomers seem to be more intensively involved in activities.

As far as helping others is concerned, and in particular the help that baby boomers give to their elderly parents, the SHARE data suggest that northern Europeans are more involved in supporting their elderly parents but at the same time less intensively than in southern European countries. How can this pattern be explained? First there is clearly an effect of the SHARE questionnaire, which does not report on help given *inside* the household (except for personal care where rates are very low). If cohabitation or living in the same building is considered to be a form of help, north-south differences are much reduced. Second, we suggest that these differences could be due to reporting styles concerning the notion of 'help'. More routine patterns of indirect ways of giving help and support probably remain undetected, especially where there are high rates of close geographical proximity as is the case in the southern European countries. These findings need to be tested against data from other European surveys in order to address more directly questions of country or cohort effects. Finally there is little evidence in the SHARE data for any specific 'baby boomer' cohort effect on the probability of giving help. Help to elderly parents tends to be associated more with individual characteristics and the classic patterns associated with gender, family composition and living arrangements.

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