

Abstract for the 21st Nordic Demographic Symposium 2019

“Disability Dynamics and Social Networks of Older Adults in Europe“

Authors: Luule Sakkeus¹, Katrin Schwanitz^{1,2}, Lilli Abuladze¹

Background

Only a minority of European countries have aged successfully in terms of healthy life years during the last decades. Studying social networks in health outcomes helps to understand how surrounding social environment, particularly interactions with other people, influence disability trajectories over time.

Research Question

Which policy measures mediate the country differences in the social network effects of the disablement process?

Data and Methods

Using data from the SHARE survey Waves 4 to 6 of people aged 50+ from 14 European countries, we employ regression models and multistate models for interval-censored panel data in order to describe, understand and predict the disablement process – conditional on respondents’ social network characteristics – in different policy contexts. Analytical sample included 19 868 main respondents from the survey.

Results

Descriptive results show that the largest proportion of older people experiencing a worsening situation in their disability over four years happened in Portugal, Slovenia and Estonia. First results from regression analysis indicate that social networks play a role in maintaining the disability status, but also in reducing as well as diminishing activity limitations. For example, Estonia and Germany have the highest risk of people staying in always severely limited situation, after controlling for demographic, health and social network variables. Estonia shows the highest risk of people moving to more severe level of limitations over four years. Next, we will estimate multistate models of disability trajectories by social network characteristics in different policy contexts.

Conclusion

There are some indications that countries with less generous policy provisions correlate with larger social networks among disabled older adults.

¹ Estonian Institute for Population Studies, School of Governance, Law and Society, Tallinn University.

² Centre of Excellence in Interdisciplinary Lifecourse Studies & Estonian Institute for Population Studies, Tallinn University

Corresponding author: katrin.schwanitz@tlu.ee