

Family relationships have changed a lot over the past few decades. The Generations and Gender Programme (GGP) is intended to answer the questions that come with these changes.

Tom Emery and Anne Gauthier

Today's families differ considerably from those of the 1950s, where the male breadwinner and his housewife were the norm. Families have become less stable, more complex and highly diversified. The rapid ageing of European populations has also contributed to this fast change, while new types of families have emerged alongside new relationships between generations and genders. Understanding these changes will help us meet many of the challenges that societies face today, such as: How do we support and care for the elderly? How is disadvantage inherited? Why are women having fewer children?

The GGP was launched in 2001 and now covers 19 advanced industrialized countries. It improves our understanding of how various factors affect family life by collecting high quality individual-level survey data on topics such as partnership formation & dissolution, fertility and intergenerational solidarity. Respondents are interviewed every 3 years and changes in their family life are recorded. Importantly, the GGP covers the entire lifespan of adulthood between the ages of 18 and 79 and is the only dataset dedicated to the longitudinal and cross-national study of family life and generational relationships from early adulthood to old age. Over time, the GGP follows respondents through relationships, marriages, parenthood, divorces, deaths of loved ones and many of the trials and tribulations that people meet with, tracking the impact and consequences of these life events at the individual and the societal level. These survey data are complemented with regional and national indicators through a contextual database which helps us understand the part that policy and other contextual factors play in family life.

The Netherlands is a front-runner in this research area. Not only has it been involved in the GGP since its inception, it has also hosted the project since 2009. Last year has been a particularly busy year for the GGP in the Netherlands as it saw the collection of Wave 4 of the Dutch GGP involving a new collaboration with CBS (Statistics Netherlands). Using the Wave 4 dataset, researchers can now look back over a turbulent decade and see its impact upon Dutch family life as well as look forward to monitoring the impact and implications of this change in future waves of the GGP.

### Building a nest during a financial crisis

Recent evidence from the GGP shows that starting a family is strongly intertwined with housing quality and home-ownership. Typically, couples will only start a family if they can live together and they will only start to live together if there is good and affordable housing available. But after many decades of increasing average housing quality and levels of home-ownership in



Grandparents helping out can be important for women who want to return to work after having a child photo Marcel Jancovic

#### GGP Topics

- Fertility
- Partnership
- Transition to adulthood
- Work-family balance
- Gender relations
- Intergenerational exchanges
- Informal and formal care
- Wellbeing and health
- Grandparenthood
- Economic activity
- Retirement

GGP follows respondents through trials and tribulations

# Understanding society through our relationships

Europe things have turned around recently with the housing-market crisis in connection with the global financial crisis. It can now be very difficult for young couples to get a mortgage and start climbing the housing ladder. Given this, future research aims to understand housing-market fluctuations, including the recent crisis, as well as the spatial differentiations in housing opportunities and their interplay with household formation and child-bearing. For example, do couples delay having children because they can't afford to buy a home? Such questions are currently under investigation using GGP data.

### Who has kids outside of marriage?

Recent analysis of GGP data supports the long held belief that having a first child outside marriage is more prevalent among those with lower levels of education. But it also reveals that in some countries, such as France, this is no longer true and it is in fact

those with higher education who are more likely to have a child outside of marriage. Whether or not this pattern will spread to other countries, and whether or not it is influenced by the legal and institutional environment of families are key questions that researchers are looking to answer with the GGP. In answering questions like this we can start to understand what marriage and parenthood mean in the 21st century. Why do we get married? Why do we have kids? And what have the two got to do with each other?

### Care and support across generations

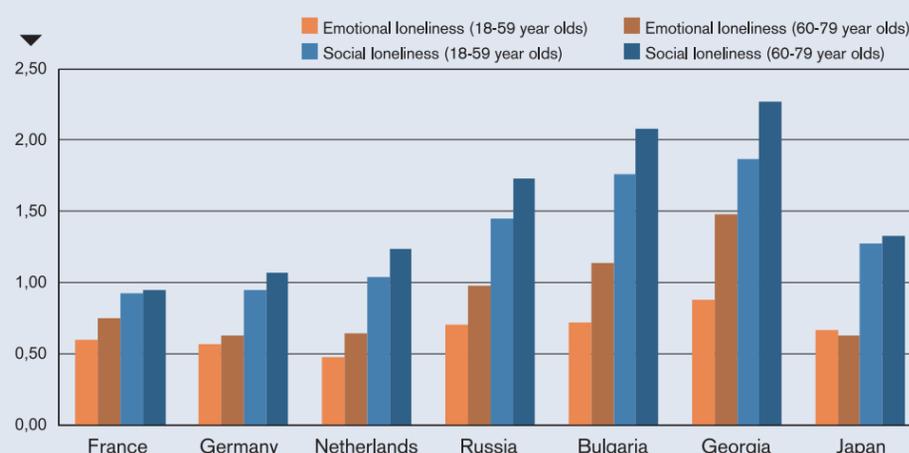
The GGP has led to several key findings about the way generations support each other throughout life. For example, the GGP was used to show how loneliness is more prevalent in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe. This is attributable to the greater health and wealth of older generations in Western Europe and the extent to which this

helps them combat loneliness. But the GGP has also revealed that older generations are not merely vulnerable but also play an important support role for younger generations. GGP data were used to show that in some countries, such as Hungary, grandparents helping out with childcare are important for young women who want to return to work after having a child. Yet in other countries, like the Netherlands, the availability of grandparents for childcare does not affect a mother's decision to work. Future research is set to examine whether this is because of culture, policy or some other factors. These are just two of the ways in which the GGP has demonstrated the complexity and diversity of relationships between generations as well as the need to consider this diversity in different countries.

[ggp-i.org](http://ggp-i.org)



De Jong Gierveld short scales for emotional and social loneliness (0-3)



*Loneliness on the De Jong Gierveld Short Scale across 7 Countries. (De Jong Gierveld, J., & Van Tilburg, T. (2010). The De Jong Gierveld Short Scales for emotional and social loneliness: tested on data from 7 countries in the UN generations and gender surveys. European Journal of Ageing, 7(2), 121-130.)*