

THE DEMOGRAPHIC BALANCE BETWEEN THE DISABLED OLDER POPULATION AND THEIR INFORMAL CAREGIVERS IN SPAIN. PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE SCENARIOS

Celia Fernández-Carro¹
celia.fernandez@der.uned.es

Rosa Gómez Redondo¹
rgomez@poli.uned.es

Noelia Cámara¹
noelia.camara@der.uned.es

Abstract

The changes related to health needs in old age have converted *care* in one of the key mechanism to maintain well-being in later life. In Spain, the support provided to older disabled population is broadly assumed by relatives, being female partners and adult children the archetypical figure of the caregiver. However, considering the socio-demographic transformations regarding to population structure, family relations, household composition and gender roles, it could be expected an imbalance between the volume of potential informal caregivers and the volume of older population with care needs in the coming decades. With the aim to provide empirical evidences that illustrate the past, present and future scenarios, this paper examines the evolution of the structural relationship between the disabled older population receiving care and their informal caregivers in Spain, identifying the most representative profiles of both groups in demographic terms; i.e. age, gender and generation.

The data to define the basic features of the informal caregivers and the disabled older population will be drawn from the *Encuesta de Discapacidad, Autonomía personal y situaciones de Dependencia 2008 (Survey of Disability, Personal Autonomy and Dependency situation)*. The demographic balance between the informal caregivers and the disabled older people is estimated by means of the *Older Old Informal Support Ratio (OOISR)*, selecting from the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics of Spain (INE) those population particularly at risk to be carer/dependent elderly according to the archetypes previously established.

The results of this research contribute to shed light on the demographic reality behind social practices and dynamics related to informal care in old age. The development of effective policy responses in this respect depends on measures that consider the structural relationship between disabled elderly and their informal caregivers in their design and implementation.

¹ Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), c/Obispo Trejo nº2 , 28040 Madrid (Spain)

Introduction

The new individual and contextual conditions that older population presents in Western countries have redefined both the elderly health needs and the opportunities to maintain their well-being in old age. Longevity increase and the transformations of the elderly epidemiologic profiles have derived in a substantial improvement of the time that individuals live without impairments - 6 years for females and 4.8 years for males in the OECD countries since 1960 -, but also in an extension of the period of later life in which individuals have to deal with less severe limitations (Christensen et al., 2009). This change in the elderly morbidity and mortality patterns has converted *care* in a key mechanism, to maintain the well-being in later life, compensating the loss of functionality. In Europe, especially in Southern countries, the support received by disabled elderly is mainly provided by informal caregivers, despite there is a rising proportion of the older population using private or public services, alone or combined with informal care. Members of the social network, mainly female adult children and partners, but also friends or neighbors, remain being the main support provider across the continent (Abuladze & Sakkeus, 2013; Bolin, Lindgran, & Lundborg, 2007; Bonsang, 2009; Litwin & Attias-Donfut, 2009). In Spain, the prevalence of informal caregivers is even more marked due to the residual partaking of the State and the private sector in social care provision; here, time-consuming support is principally assumed by kin, contrasting with the patterns showed in other parts of Europe, where it is mainly provided by care professionals (Brandt et al., 2009; Kalmijn & Saraceno 2008).

In light of the prevailing role that informal support still has in Spain, and given the transformations that are affecting as the number of disabled older population, as the availability of potential informal caregivers; *population structure* - demographic ageing, longevity increase or fertility decline (Agree & Glaser, 2009) -, *family relations* - filial obligations and parental expectations related to care combined with the rising importance of individual aspirations and choices (Meil, 2011), *household composition* - increase of single households (Isengard & Szydlik, 2012)-, and *gender roles* - extensive female participation in the labour market (Jaumotte, 2003) -, it is essential to put in balance the weight that the different groups of population participating in informal care exchange represent in demographic terms. Despite it is well-known that population trends point to an increase of the proportion of older population with care needs and to a decrease of the number of potential informal caregivers, few works have measured their structural relationship from a demographic point of view. However, a deeper knowledge of the structural dimension of care is a key issue to be consider by policy makers if the measures

implemented, besides to contribute to economic sustainability, aims to effectively response to disabled elderly demands related to care, but also to relieve the informal caregiver's burden.

Notwithstanding the complexity of individual and societal factors intervening in the materialization of care dynamics, our ultimate goal is to reflect on the sustainability of the traditional pattern of informal care in Spain, providing empirical data that explore the demographic equilibrium between potential informal caregivers and potential older dependent population at macro level, considering the past, present and future scenarios.

Objectives and research questions

The main objective of this paper is to examine the evolution of the demographic balance between the groups population involved in informal support to older disabled population; i.e. disabled elderly and their informal caregivers. The questions that this analysis aims to respond are

1. *What are the basic demographic features (sex, age and generation) of the disabled older population and their informal caregivers in Spain?*
2. *According with these profiles, what is the demographic balance between the potential disabled elderly and the potential informal caregivers?*
3. *How have evolved this relationship across the time? What trends could be expected in the near future?*

According to the first question, the objective of this study is to outline the basic demographic characteristics; sex, age and generation, of the groups of population involved in caring; the older disabled population and their informal caregivers, generating a sort of archetypical profiles existing in the Spanish context. The second objective, which answers the second and the third research questions, is to quantify the volume of population at risk to be carer/ to be dependent older person, estimating the demographic relationship between groups of population according to the different archetypical profiles established in the first stage of the analysis. Furthermore, the evolution of this balance across the time will be described.

Data and Methods

The data to identify the basic features of the disabled elderly and their informal caregivers will be drawn from the *Encuesta de Discapacidad, Autonomía personal y situaciones de Dependencia 2008 (EDAD 2008) (Survey of Disability, Personal Autonomy and Dependency*

Situation). This survey registered data about the Spanish disabled population; sex, age, income, health status, behaviours, etc, including information about the characteristics of their caregivers; age, gender, formal/informal, inside/outside of the households, etc. For this analysis, it has been selected a sub-sample composed by individuals aged 65 and over, receiving informal care and living in community dwellings. Table 1 describes the size of the sample utilized for the analysis.

Table 1. Sample summary utilised in the analysis, EDAD 2008

	Males	%	Female	%	Total	%
TOTAL SAMPLE	1,511,253	100	2,276,196	100	3,787,449	100
65 and over	756,756	50.1	1,470,334	64.6	2,227,090	58.8
No receive care	291,918	19.3	380,112	16.7	672,030	17.7
Receive care	341,364	22.6	814,586	35.8	1,155,950	30.5
Formal	17,872	1.2	82,275	3.6	100,147	2.6
Informal	323,491	21.4	731,711	32,1	1,055,202	27.9

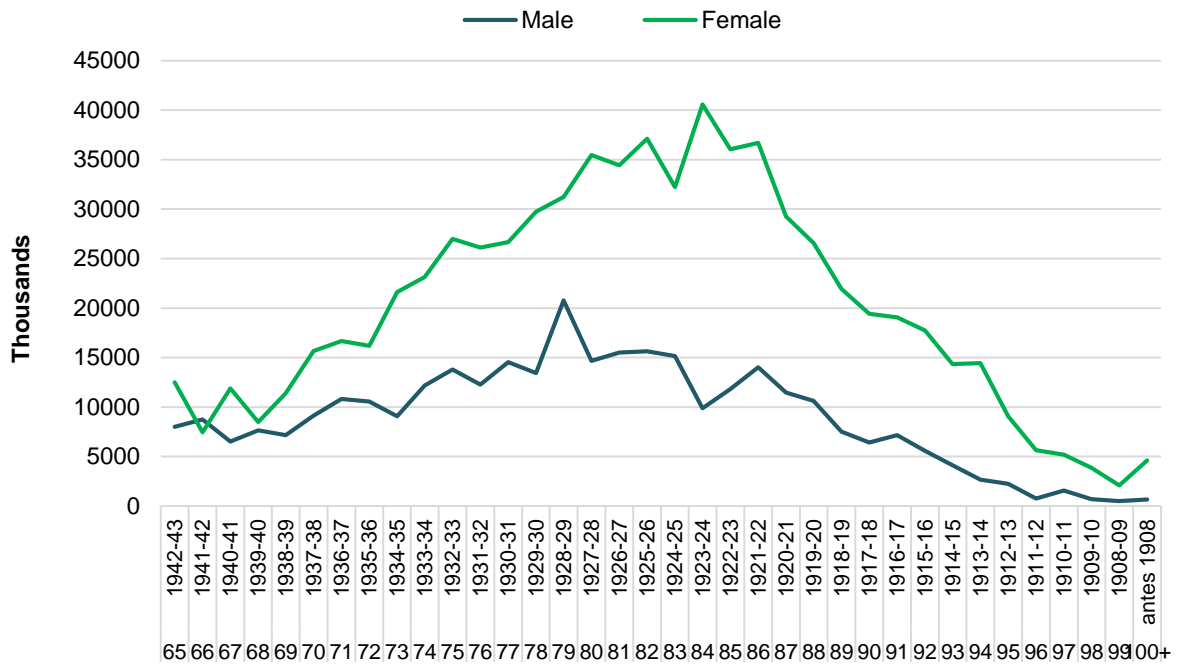
The demographic balance between groups of population is carried out using an indicator labeled as *Older Old Informal Support Ratio* (OOISR), which relates the volume of the disabled elderly and the volume of informal caregivers. The estimation is carried out selecting the population data based on the most representative profiles of disabled elderly and informal caregivers extracted from the survey, assuming that they are “populations at risk” to be carer/to be dependent. The suitability of the OOISR indicator has been tested before in the measurement of different demographic processes associated to ageing structure in Southern countries (Gómez-Redondo et al., 2006).

Preliminary results

Figure 1 illustrates the volume of population aged 65 and over receiving informal care by age, gender and generation. As shown, most of them are concentrated in oldest-old ages, exceeding the age 80 (57%). This pattern is especially observable in the case of female population. The averaged age for males receiving informal care is 79 years old and 82 years old for females.

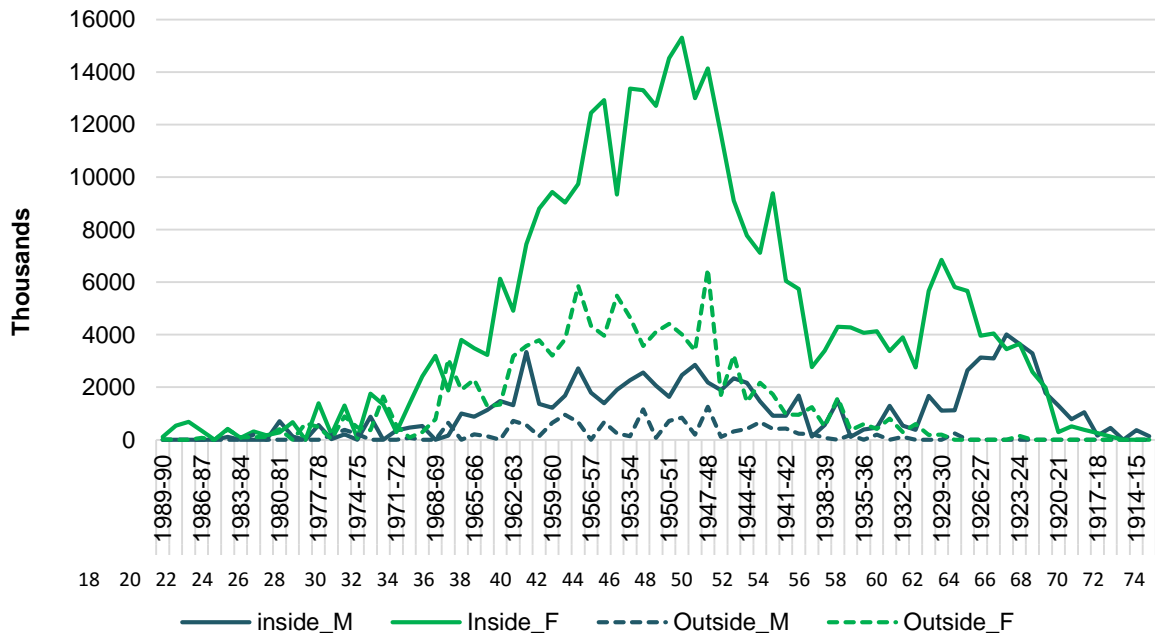
Figure 2 presents the most representative ages of the population that is giving care to population aged 80 and over in Spain. As observed, most of them are aged between 45 and 65 years old and are living outside of the household of the disabled older person. This profile suggests that most of them are adult children.

Figure 1. Population aged 65 and with disabilities receiving care by age. Spain 2008



Source: Survey of Disability, Personal Autonomy and Dependency Situation, Spain 2008

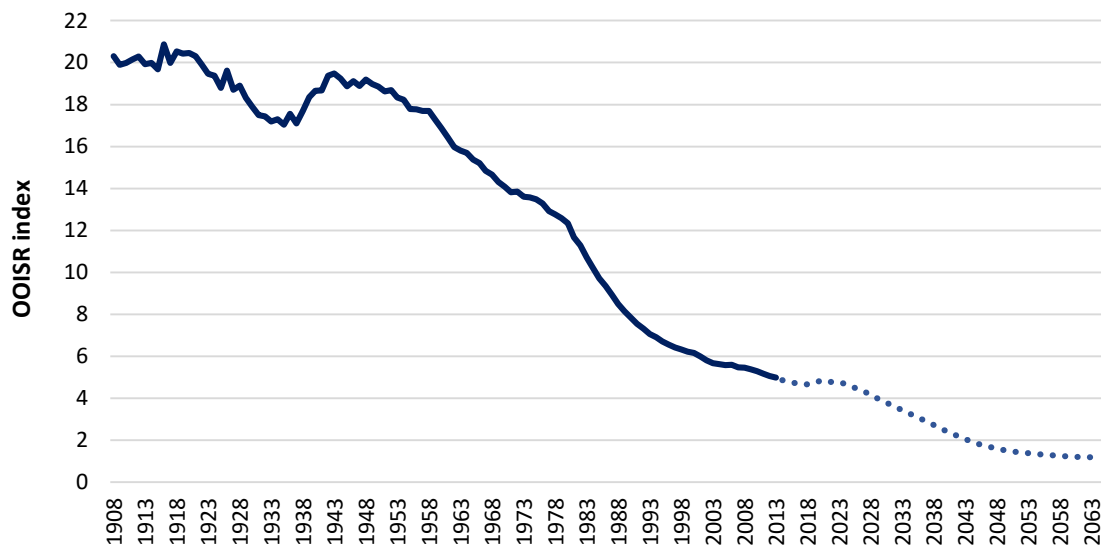
Figure 2. Informal caregivers of the disabled elderly by age and location, Spain 2008



Source: Survey of Disability, Personal Autonomy and Dependency Situation, Spain 2008

Figure 3 presents the results of the demographic balance between those populations involved in the intergenerational exchange of care in Spain. The archetypical demographic profile of both groups is defined by to be aged 80 and over, in the case of disabled elderly, and to be aged between 45 and 65 years old, in the case of caregivers. The results of the OOISR index for the period 1908 to 2063 showed that the number of potential informal caregivers in Spain has been reduced across the time, especially from 70's, in parallel to fertility decline. Meanwhile in 1950 there were 18 potential caregivers for each dependent elderly in Spain, in 2010 there were only five. Calculations carried out with the projection date reveals that the ratio will drop to 1.6 potential informal carer for each disabled older person in 2060. These results present a future scenario in which the predominance of informal care as main resource to compensate the health decline in old age could be questioned, at least in the way it is formulated nowadays, observing the drastic reduction of the availability of potential informal caregivers.

Figure 3. Evolution of the demographic balance between the disabled oldest-old population (80+) and their potential caregivers in Spain, *Older old informal Support Ratio (OOISR)*.



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