

Older People in Northern Ireland: Final Report

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This Final Report summarises a series of reports published in 2004/5 on the needs and circumstances of older people in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The research has been funded by Atlantic Philanthropies. The five topic-based reports are:

- Report 1: Setting the scene (November 2004)
- Report 2: Financial circumstances (December 2004)
- Report 3: Health and wellbeing (March 2005)
- Report 4: The Angry Generation (May 2005)
- Report 5: Older People in the Republic of Ireland (June 2005)

Copies of these reports are available online at
<http://www.governance.qub.ac.uk/olderpeople.html>

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Section 1: Introduction

This is the final report of the research project undertaken over the past year to chart the needs and circumstances of older people - that is people aged fifty years and over - in Northern Ireland. We are grateful to the Atlantic Philanthropies for funding the work. It has, we hope, made a very significant contribution to our knowledge of this important group in our society.

The project emerged from three core concerns which were conveyed to the research team by members of the voluntary sector and others. First, there was anxiety amongst those working with, and for, older people in Northern Ireland that they were hampered by lack of information. However, it was the view of the research team that a lot of data on older people was actually being collected through a wide range of large-scale surveys in Northern Ireland, but that the information was scattered across a number of data sets. One of the main aims of this project was, therefore, to bring the data together, subject them to fresh analysis and present the findings in a coherent narrative. This task has now been completed. In the past year, five reports have been produced. These reports contain the statistical material to support our observations in the summaries that follow and are available at <http://www.governance.qub.ac.uk/olderpeople.html>.

Secondly, there was concern that in the debate on social need a hierarchy was developing, with the result that the poverty of some was seen as more urgent than that of others. In particular, it was felt that older people were being overlooked to a large extent and that their needs, alongside those of other groups, should be given their place in debates on poverty and social need. We therefore needed to analyse the existing research data to highlight the circumstances of older people in order to ensure that their needs are taken fully into account in the debate on poverty. We addressed this issue directly in our second report on the financial circumstances of older people and, in various discussions we have had, the data produced are viewed as a major step forward. Within the work relating to poverty amongst older people we have assessed the current gaps in knowledge that exist and have looked at the need for, and feasibility of, a large-scale survey of older people to address these issues. We present our conclusions below.

Thirdly, as we commenced the work, we believed there was a need to assess and challenge the unhelpful, and indeed alarmist tone, which permeates much of the debate around the fact that we are an ageing society. A good deal of what is accepted without question in the media and political circles can be described as “unthinking ageism”. We sought to challenge this in our first report.

It should be noted that at many points the data analysis was more complex and difficult than had been anticipated.

Section 2: Summary of reports

Report One: Setting the Scene

In our first report we sought to address the way in which the debate on older people is conducted in the United Kingdom generally. In essence, older people are seen as a problem – a burden on the rest of society. The prospect of an increase in the number of older people over the coming decades is viewed with alarm. It is asserted that this will lead to the collapse of health and pensions systems and a growing crisis as taxpayers find the cost of an increase in the number of older people - who are viewed purely and simply as dependents - insupportable.

As we indicate at greater length in the report, these perspectives are unsatisfactory for a variety of reasons. In the first place, they disregard the past and current contributions of older people to our society. For example, it has been calculated that the unpaid work of persons aged fifty years and over in the United Kingdom is, in cash terms, worth 24 billion pounds a year. Secondly, with regard to health, it cannot be assumed that the need for health care will increase directly in line with the growth in the number of older people. Older people today are much healthier than the same age group was thirty years ago. Technology and new ways of meeting need are enabling many more people to live independently in the community for longer. With regard to pensions, trends are testing but much depends on the soundness of the policies in place. It is true that the United Kingdom is in the middle of a pensions crisis but the root of that crisis, it can be argued, lies in the failure of the policies adopted in the 1980s which we were told would address the issues raised by the fact that we are living longer. There is, in truth, more than a hint of ‘victim blaming’ in the current pensions debate.

On the basis of this discussion, in our first report we proceeded to draw together data on a range of aspects of the lives of older people in Northern Ireland today. It was noted that Northern Ireland has a lower proportion of people of pensionable age than any other United Kingdom region apart from London. It was also noted that - in contrast to the suggestion of imminent calamity which permeates much current debate - change occurs over relatively long periods giving ample time for planning and adjustment. For example, during the post-war period the gain in life expectancy for women aged 65 years was one year per decade. Looking to the future, the sharpest increase in numbers will occur amongst the over eighty fives - a group that makes heavy demands on health and social care services. We are, however, talking about 64,000 people out of a population of 1.7 million in the year 2041 (Table 1).

Table 1: Projected population (000s)

	2001	2021	2041
65-74 years	124	173	206
75-84 years	78	104	159
85+ years	23	37	64
Total older population	225	314	429
Total population	1,689	1,769	1,723
Older persons as a % of total population	13.3	17.75	24.8

Source: NISRA, Annual Abstract of Statistics, 2003

One of the key themes to emerge in the first report was that there is a more positive story to tell about older people than might be expected. The majority of men and women of pensionable age report that their health is good or fairly good. Contrary to the popular stereotype, the majority do not live alone (Table 2). In the light of the debate on nursing home charges in recent years, it is also salutary to note that the vast majority of pensioners are living in the community, with only 11,286 being in a nursing home, residential accommodation or other such accommodation in 2001. Finally, on this positive theme, our data indicate how involved older people are in our society. For example, people of pensionable age are more likely to vote than those in younger age groups and are as likely to be involved in organisations such as community associations and church groups as younger people.

Table 2: Household composition by age and gender

	%				Total
	Married/cohabiting couple family	Lives alone	Other*	Communal establishment	
Males					
65-74 years	71.5	18.2	8.6	1.6	100
75-84 years	57.4	25.9	11.7	5.0	100
85+ years	34.9	33.3	15.7	16.0	100
Females					
60-74 years	56.1	28.2	14.4	1.3	100
75-84 years	23.0	48.9	20.5	7.5	100
85+ years	5.5	45.0	22.3	27.2	100
All pensioners	49.7	30.8	14.5	4.9	100

* Other: one parent family, not in family but others in household

Source: NISRA, Census of Population, 2001 (commissioned table)

There are, however, matters of concern that we noted in our first report. The data reviewed indicated that all age groups, including older people themselves, consider that the fear of crime is the most important problem facing older people today (Table 3).

Table 3: What do you think are the main problems facing older people in NI today?

	% identifying each problem					
	18-24	25-44	45-49	50-59	60-64	65+
Making ends meet	46	70	57	71	64	56
Fear of crime	82	90	91	91	84	86
Loneliness	52	68	70	74	69	64
Transport	28	31	24	33	25	24
Lack of respect	34	44	34	40	31	32
Keeping warm in winter	43	51	48	58	51	38
Getting employment	25	31	20	30	22	17
Access to healthcare	48	51	49	51	48	42

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2003

The data also indicated that the incomes of pensioner households are dramatically lower than the incomes of other household types and this finding was explored further in our second report on the financial circumstances of older people in Northern Ireland.

Report Two: The financial circumstances of older people

In our second report we reviewed the data available on the financial circumstances of persons of pensionable age in Northern Ireland. This proved to be a rather more difficult task than we had anticipated. A number of data sets provide information on gross or household income. In consequence, it is often difficult to get a clear picture of the actual weekly amounts pensioners have to meet their needs, especially when they live in households with other people. Beyond this there is the difficulty of methodologies which discriminate against older people and understate the extent to which they are hard pressed financially.

The core problem is as follows. In the adjustments made to the raw data to determine whether or not people fall above or below the various poverty lines created for this work, the costs of, and benefits payable for, dependent children are both taken into account. By contrast, with regard to persons with disability, who are likely to be older people, the benefits payable to assist with the extra costs of disability are taken into account but not the costs themselves. Put simply, the result is that the data from many sources suggest that older people have more to meet routine expenses than is actually the case.

On the basis of this, much of the data presented in the second report was surrounded by caveats and concerns. It was noted that pensioner households have much lower incomes than other household types in Northern Ireland (Table 4) and that Northern Ireland's pensioners have lower incomes than pensioners in the United Kingdom as a whole (Table 5).

Table 4: Gross weekly income of pensioner units United Kingdom and Northern Ireland

	UK	NI
	£	£
All pensioner units	276	242
Pensioner couples	387	347
Single pensioners	203	175

Source: National Statistics - The Pensioners' Income Series 2002/3

Table 5: Gross weekly household income by household composition and age of household reference person

	Mean
	£
Household composition	
Pensioner households with one or two adults.	148
Non-pensioner adult households	422
Households with children	577
Age of household reference person	
Under 30	406
30-49	574
50-64	455
65 and over	254

Source: Expenditure and Food Survey 2002/03

With regard to sources of income two central facts emerged. Firstly, women are much less likely than men to have occupational pensions and this is a key element in explaining the emergence at every turn of single females as being those most at risk of poverty. Secondly, it was noted that nearly two fifths of pensioner households were in receipt of benefits to assist with the extra costs of disability (Table 6). This means that, far from being a minor matter, the weakness in methodology which we note above is likely to result in a serious distortion in much of the data that is widely relied on.

Table 6: Sources of income of pensioners in Northern Ireland - pensions and benefits

	%		
	Couples	Sole males	Sole females
State retirement pension	98	95	88
Occupational pension	58	41	21
Occupational pension of spouse	-	-	15
Attendance Allowance	15	28	28
DLA care component	13	4	9
DLA mobility	11	1	7
DLA component not known	7	2	4
Annuity	12	1	4
Income support	6	23	36

Note: Excludes benefits received by under 5% of respondents

Source: Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey (2002)

Next we looked at the assets of pensioners in Northern Ireland. It is, of course, often argued that older people generally are income poor but they are asset rich. Our data indicate that, whilst a minority of pensioners in this part of the United Kingdom occupy property worth in excess of £150,000, the value of the homes of the majority of pensioners is much more modest (Table 7). If we assume that the typical cost of nursing home care is £500 a week, then the majority of our pensioners have assets that will barely fund four years of care (assuming the majority had homes worth £100,000). With regard to savings, though clearly there is likely to be underreporting on such a subject, it appeared that many pensioners had little to fall back on.

Table 7: Value of property occupied by pensioners

Value	%
Under £100,000	67
£100,000-£125,000	10
£125,000- £150,000	8
£150,000 plus	15
All	100

Source: Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey (2002) (N=350)

In the next section of the second report we looked at existing data on the prevalence of poverty amongst pensioners in Northern Ireland. One point of interest to emerge was that the group most at risk of poverty in Northern Ireland are lone parents followed, at some margin, the data suggest, by single pensioners who are predominantly female (Table 8).

Table 8: Quintile distribution of net income after housing costs for individuals by family type

	Net equivalised disposable household income		
	% of individuals		
	Bottom and second quintile	Third quintile	Fourth and top quintile
Single with children	69	21	11
Pensioner Couples	44	25	30
Single pensioners	41	27	22
Couple with children	39	24	37
Couples no children	27	16	57
Single no children	37	23	40

Note: Equivalised income - includes DLA/AA

Source: DSD - Households Below Average Income, Northern Ireland, 2002/03.

However, most of the data available are affected by the methodological problems noted above and, in consequence, we had serious doubts about them. We therefore constructed our own alternative poverty lines using data from the Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey.

This was a major effort. In brief, two new poverty lines were developed. The first was based primarily on the amounts used in the calculation of entitlement to the Guarantee Credit. This is an element within means-tested Pension Credit and represents what government considers is the minimum pensioners require to live on (Table 9). The second poverty line was based on the work of the Budget Standards Unit and consisted of the amount calculated as required by pensioners to secure a modest but adequate standard of living (Table 10). In applying these poverty lines to actual incomes no account was taken of benefits payable to assist with the extra costs of disability. This solved the problems noted above and is in line with practice in the assessment of entitlement to means-tested benefits generally.

Table 9: Pensioner households with net weekly incomes after housing costs below the state poverty line plus 20%

Type	%		Total
	Below poverty line	Above poverty line	
Couples	41.2	58.8	100
Single pensioners	56.7	43.2	100
Total	50.5	49.5	100

Threshold – married couples £179.76, single pensioners £117.78

*Note - excludes pensioners living with others

Source: Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey (2002) (N=408)

Table 10: Pensioner households with net weekly incomes after housing costs below that needed for modest but adequate standard of living (ASL)

Type	%		Total
	Below ASL	Above ASL	
Couples	50.3	49.7	100
Single pensioners	76.5	23.5	100
Total	65.9	34.1	100

Threshold – Married couples £218.12, single pensioners £152.54

*Note - excludes pensioners living with others

Source: Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey (2002) (N=408)

There is a need for caution here because of the size of the samples involved. Nevertheless, our analysis uncovered issues of concern, which clearly merit further investigation. Our data indicate that half of all pensioners fell below the first poverty line and two thirds below the second. To put it bluntly, our analysis suggests that there is rather more poverty amongst pensioners than is evident from work using the conventional methodology. This is an urgent matter for the research community to address.

Report Three: Health and Social Wellbeing

In the third report we focused on three main issues. Firstly, what do the data tell us about the health and wellbeing of pensioners in Northern Ireland? Secondly, to what extent are those of pensionable age providers - as well as receivers - of care? Thirdly, how can we account for the fact that so many pensioners in Northern Ireland are in receipt of Attendance Allowance (AA) or Disability Living Allowance (DLA)?

With regard to the health and well being of pensioners, the data clearly indicate that there is a significant volume of disability amongst Northern Ireland's pensioners, but the picture is more positive than might be expected. For example, with a predictable variation by age, half of all pensioners have a longstanding illness/disability which limits their activities (Table 11). Nevertheless, the majority of pensioners report that their health is good or fairly good and the majority of those reporting a limiting illness or disability are able to manage tasks like doing the housework and climbing stairs. In consequence of this relatively positive picture, the data on use of health and social care services is in line with our observations in the introduction. Nearly half of those aged 65-74 years had not visited their GP's at all in the preceding year or had only had one or two appointments. Heavier use of services was reported by people over 75 years who accounted for the majority of users of, for example, the district nursing service. These are important points and contradict the notion of services being swamped by an increase in the number of pensioners as such.

Table 11: Reported health status by age

	%		
	65-74	75 and over	Total
Good	30.6	23.0	27.2
Fairly good	38.1	42.5	40.0
Not good	31.3	34.4	32.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Has longstanding illness/disability	62.4	67.3	64.6
Has illness/disability which limits activities	46.4	54.6	50.1

Source: Continuous Household Survey, 2002/03

The data in the third report with regard to mental health and social inclusion are also of interest. The mental health of persons aged 65-74 years appears to be better than that of those under 65 but it should be noted that the group with the poorest mental health consists of those aged 75 and over. Nevertheless, the majority of those aged over 75, as well as the younger age group express very positive attitudes about their lives and, for example, often looked forward to every day. Most encouragingly, whilst popular discourse on ageing is peppered with assumptions about loneliness and

family neglect, the majority of pensioners in Northern Ireland feel their families and friends give them support and encouragement (Table 12).

Table 12: Indicators of social inclusion by age

	%		
	65-74	75 and over	Total
Feel left out of things ¹	5.9	10.0	7.7
Family and friends make me feel an important part of their lives ²	84.4	85.6	84.9
Family and friends make me feel loved ²	86.5	85.8	86.2
Family and friends support and encourage me ²	87.6	87.4	87.5

Sources:

¹Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey, Wave 1, 2001 - percentage of respondents saying ‘often’

²Health and Social Wellbeing Survey, 2001 – percentages of respondents saying statement is ‘certainly true’. Note - other possible answers were “partly true” or “not true”. For all three statements under 3% selected the “not true” answer.

Turning to the data on caring, it is evident that older people in Northern Ireland are making an active contribution to lessening the need for reliance on state provision. Twelve per cent have caring responsibilities - that is they are assisting persons with disability in the same or a separate household (Table 13). They are caring for their spouses, other relatives or friends and neighbours. Our data indicate that for nearly one-third the help given takes up twenty or more hours a week. In sum, a major source of care for many older people in Northern Ireland is other older people.

Table 13: Caring responsibilities of respondents

	%	
	Cares for person in same household	Cares for someone in another household
20-34 years	5.4	14.3
35-49 years	7.7	12.1
50-64 years	14.2	16.2
65 years and over	12.7	4.3
Total	7.3	11.3

Source: Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey, Wave 2, 2002

Finally, in this report we looked at the heavy reliance of older people here on AA and DLA. It can be noted that, in general, people in Northern Ireland are more likely to receive these benefits than in any other United Kingdom region. Is this a consequence of fraud and deception as the media are wont to suggest or are there other explanations? Our analysis of the existing data suggests that these benefits are not distributed haphazardly or capriciously. The likelihood of receipt rises directly in line with the number of health problems reported (Table 14) and the volume of help in managing required (Table 15). It would seem that what we have here is a success story. Certainly, with regard to older people, it

would appear that Northern Ireland might have outperformed other United Kingdom regions in getting these benefits to those who need them.

Table 14: Number of health problems reported by receipt of AA/DLA

	%				Total
	None	1	2	3 or more	
Not on AA/DLA	93.8	80.8	62.7	37.9	67.5
On AA/DLA	6.2	19.2	37.3	62.0	32.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note - persons in residential/nursing home accommodation are not included

Source: Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey, Wave 2, 2002

Table 15: Receipt of AA/DLA by reported disability and need for help

	Not on AA/DLA	On AA/DLA	Total
No disability reported/has disability - no help required	95.0	5.0	100.0
Disability - some help required	65.1	34.9	100.0
Disability - a lot of help required	49.7	50.3	100.0

Note - scoring done on the basis of need for help with 14 functions

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times survey, 1999

Report Four: The Angry Generation

In the preceding report we focused on people of pensionable age. In our fourth report we looked at the circumstances of older people aged between 50 and 64 years whom we labelled 'the angry generation'. Recent research had indicated that this age group stood out from other age groups in their attitudes to a range of issues (Evason and Dowds, 2004). They were more negative and annoyed about the position of older people in our society than younger and, indeed, older age groups. In sum, we wanted to try to find out why they were so angry. Our main conclusion was that this is a generation under considerable pressure and strain.

An indication that all is not well with this age group comes from Table 16 which deals with general satisfaction with life. Amongst women, those least satisfied with their lives are those in the 50-54 years age group. With regard to males, one fifth of those in the 55 to 59 years age group are unhappy with their lives.

Table 16: Persons not satisfied with life overall

	%		
	Males	Females	All
16-49 years	11.1	9.9	10.5
50-54 years	8.5	13.6	11.0
55-59 years	20.9	10.7	14.6
60-64 years	6.9	2.4	4.5
65 years and over	3.7	6.9	5.3
All	10.1	9.3	9.6

Source: Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey, Wave 2, 2002

Our analysis indicated that one source of strain is poor health. Thus, for example, males aged between 60 and 64 years are more likely to report that their health is not good than men over retirement age (Table 17). Over two-fifths of men and women aged 50-59 years report a longstanding illness or disability (Table 18). Persons aged between 50 and 64 years also have the poorest mental health of any age group.

Table 17: Persons reporting health “not good” over preceding year

	%		
	Males	Females	All
16-44 years	7.6	10.9	9.5
45-49 years	12.7	15.5	14.2
50-59 years	21.7	22.1	22.0
60-64 years	38.2	27.0	32.6
65 years and over	31.6	33.5	32.7
All	17.2	18.5	18.0

Source: Continuous Household Survey, 2002/03

Table 18: Indicators of ill health amongst persons aged 50-64 years

	%	
	Males	Females
% aged 50-59 years with long standing illness/disability	42.9	45.4
% 60-64 years with long standing illness/disability	57.5	55.6
% aged 50-64 years with health problems which limit type or amount of work	30.6	32.5

Sources: Continuous Household Survey, 2002/03 and Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey, Wave 2, 2002

Poor health will, of course, impact on employment and income. Nearly one third of males aged 55-59 years are not in employment and the main reason for economic inactivity amongst men aged 50-59 is incapacity for work (Tables 19 and 20). In consequence, there is a heavy reliance amongst males in the 50-64 year age group on the benefits system and it should be noted that, whilst others have seen improvements, the benefits likely to be claimed by this age group have been reduced and become harder to obtain over the past decade.

Table 19: Employment status - males

	%			
	50-54 years	55-59 years	60-64 years	All
In employment	80.8	68.0	48.8	69.2
Long term Sick/disabled	12.0	20.6	17.5	16.2
Retired	1.6	4.1	22.5	7.9
Full time home care	0.8	1.0	1.3	1.0
Other	5.6	6.2	9.9	6.7
Total (N=302)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Other: full time education/ unemployed/on training scheme.

Source: Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey, Wave 2, 2002

Table 20: Reasons given for economic inactivity - males

	%		
	50-59 years	60-64 years	All
Permanently unable to work	65.2	49.4	58.8
Early retirement	23.6	36.5	29.9
Looking after home/family	4.5	5.9	5.2
Other	6.7	8.3	7.5
Total (N=174)	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Continuous Household Survey, 2002/03

A further source of strain indicated by the data is caring responsibilities. Persons aged between 50 and 64 years are more likely than those in any other age group to be carers and, in all, one quarter of this generation are assisting others. Nearly half are caring for their parents or in laws whilst one quarter is caring for a spouse or partner (Table 21). Moreover, more than a quarter of these carers are providing assistance for twenty hours a week or more (Table 22). Further analysis showed an association between poorer mental health and caring responsibilities.

Table 21: Relationship to person cared for

	%		
	Same household	Another household	All
Parents/in laws	20.8	69.9	48.9
Spouse	57.1	-	24.4
Child	14.3	-	6.1
Other relatives	6.5	17.5	12.8
Friend/neighbour	-	5.8	3.3
Other	1.3	6.9	4.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
	(N=77)	(N=103)	(N=180)

Source: Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey, Wave 2, 2002

Table 22: Hours per week spent caring

	%		
	Males	Females	All
Under 10 hours	47.8	44.0	45.7
10-19 hours	16.9	16.9	16.7
20-34 hours	12.7	8.8	10.5
35 hours or more	16.8	16.5	16.7
Varies	5.6	14.3	10.5
Total (N=162)	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey, Wave 2, 2002

A point of considerable interest to emerge from the available data was the depth and range of support people in this age group provide as grandparents. The demands placed on this age group are clearly expanding with the growth in the number of lone parents in work and of families where both parents are in paid employment. In all, 43% of females and 31% of males in this age group are grandparents. Amongst men and women the majority of grandparents reported that they often had to put themselves out to help look after their grandchildren. Nearly one fifth of grandmothers report cutting down on their hours of work or giving up work altogether to help out. The main form of support provided is help with babysitting and childcare (Table 23). As this table also shows, there is a fairly strong feeling that the help grandparents give is undervalued and unappreciated along with a clear acknowledgement of the need for grandparental help.

Table 23: Indicators of role and attitudes of grandparents

	% agreeing		
	Males	Females	All
I have often put myself out to help look after my grandchildren	61.5	80.0	73.3
To help look after my grandchildren I have had to cut down on or give up work	10.8	19.1	16.1
People today don't place enough value on the part grandparents play in family life	71.0	66.2	68.3
With so many working mothers, families need grandparents to help more and more	89.8	97.0	93.9

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2004

Clearly this is a generation under pressure. They are under pressure to help their parents and in-laws. They are under pressure to help their children and grandchildren. They are also under pressure from government to return to employment if they are outside the labour force and to work on beyond retirement age - as part of the strategy to address the pensions crisis - if they are in paid work.

It is a peculiarity of current social policy that, whilst this age group has a key role in many specific policies, there is little attempt to assess the extent to which these different roles and expectations may conflict.

The support given by this generation to their parents and in-laws is clearly vital to efforts to enable older persons to remain in the community for as long as possible. The support provided as grandparents is clearly vital to the strategy of encouraging lone parents to move into paid employment. At the same time the assumption is that they themselves should be in employment up to, and beyond, retirement age. There is a need for more joined up thinking here. There is a danger that conflicting and contradictory demands will become a further source of strain for the angry generation.

Report Five: Older People in the Republic of Ireland

To round off our series of reports we looked at the circumstances of older people in the Republic of Ireland. This report was based on published information (either from reports or online tables) to enable some comparisons to be made of the position of older people north and south. Consequently, this was a more limited piece of work than the other four reports.

With regard to demography, it was noted that persons of pensionable age represent a lower proportion of the population in the Republic than in Northern Ireland. Similar gains have been made with regard to life expectancy and, as in the North of Ireland, it is projected that persons of pensionable age will account for approaching a quarter of the population by the year 2036. One issue that may be significant is that people over 40 years in the Republic, from whom this increase in numbers will come, are much more likely than their counterparts in the North to live in rural areas with all of the implications for the delivery of services this has.

However, there is a need for caution on this issue. Data on self reported health for persons aged 65-74 indicates that people in the Republic are much more likely to report their health is good than people in Northern Ireland. Even though the margins are much narrower, people in this age group in the Republic are also more likely to report their health as good than those in England, Scotland and Wales. Indeed, taking all persons over 65 in the Republic together, 70% report their health as being excellent, very good or good (Table 24).

Table 24: Self reported ‘good’ health

Country	%					
	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74
Northern Ireland	72	64.1	63.9	50.4	39.4	32.1
England	84.2	84	81.6	74.1	67.4	60.2
Scotland	88.3	84.6	82.9	75.9	62.8	59.1
Wales	93.3	90.9	86.3	78.1	66.6	60.1
Republic of Ireland	94.3	94.4	91	86	76.1	62.3

RoI source: SLAN (Survey of Lifestyle, Attitudes and Nutrition) 1998

From: Miller et al, 2003

Whilst a number of other topics were covered in this report, the most interesting data came from the material on attitudes to older people. Adults in Northern Ireland of all ages are much more likely than those in the Republic to consider that older people are treated worse by society because of their age. People in the Republic are twice as likely to say that older people are treated better. Beyond this, people aged 60 years and over in the Republic are significantly more likely to say they are treated with more respect because of their age than those in the same age group in Northern Ireland (Table 25). In both the North and the South, there is a general view that more could be done to assist older people with people in the Republic being slightly more positive (Table 26).

Table 25: Do you think that older people are, on the whole, treated better or worse than people in the general population in this country because of their age?

Northern Ireland								
	18-24	25-44	45-49	50-59	60-64	65-74	75+	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Better	18	11	8	6	11	9	21	11
Worse	35	51	48	57	52	45	36	48
The same	40	34	42	36	36	43	41	38
Don't know	7	3	2	1	2	3	2	3
Republic of Ireland								
Better	13	14	17	22	26	30	44	19
Worse	33	42	32	37	35	29	17	36
The same	50	39	45	40	37	39	36	41
Don't know	4	5	6	1	2	3	3	4

Source: Evason and Dowds, 2004

Table 26: Do you think that the authorities in Northern Ireland/ the Republic of Ireland do all they should for older people, do too much, or do not do enough?

Northern Ireland								
	18-24	25-44	45-49	50-59	60-64	65-74	75+	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Do all they should	15	17	21	20	23	25	41	20
Do too much	2	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Do not do enough	63	74	72	77	74	71	53	71
Don't know	20	9	8	3	3	4	5	8
Republic of Ireland								
Do all they should	20	19	23	29	30	46	51	26
Do too much	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1
Do not do enough	70	77	72	68	65	52	48	69
Don't know	10	4	5	3	4	2	2	5

Source: Evason and Dowds, 2004

In summary, the data for this report indicated similarities at many points between the North and South of Ireland but there do seem to be major differences with regard to health and attitudes towards older people.

Conclusion

In conclusion, looking across all of the material produced, this has been an exciting and interesting project to undertake. We are grateful to the Atlantic Philanthropies for giving us the opportunity to carry out this work.

We have covered a lot of ground but three key points have emerged from all of this.

- Firstly, many of the assumptions and stereotypes which surround the debate on ageing are questionable and need to be challenged.
- Secondly, whilst the position of older people is, in many ways, rather more positive than might be expected, a lot of older people face many difficulties such as poverty and disability.
- Thirdly, the extent of poverty amongst older people is understated in many sources of data because the methodologies used are flawed. This is a matter which should be addressed as a matter of urgency by the research and voluntary communities.

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Section 3: Technical notes

The ‘Older People in Northern Ireland’ project involved exploring published data and analysing secondary data sets to compile a profile of pensioners in Northern Ireland and assess the need for – and feasibility of – further work on pensioner poverty. To date, no one has sought to bring existing data together to see what they tell us about the lives and circumstances of older people in Northern Ireland. Pulling together material from ongoing data collection exercises – such as the Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey and the Continuous Household Survey – will provide us with baseline information which could be updated at regular intervals with limited cost and effort in the future. The data we have assembled relates to topics such as health, housing, social wellbeing, income, living standards, economic activity, social isolation and social exclusion.

The profiling exercise has now been completed and five reports have been produced and are available on the Internet (<http://www.governance.qub.ac.uk/olderpeople.html>).

The datasets analysed were:

- Continuous Household Survey 2002/2003
- Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 1999, 2003 and 2004
- Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Survey 2001
- Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey NIHPS Waves 1 and 2
- Family Resources Survey
- Northern Ireland Census of Population 2001
- Labour Force Survey

The choice of dataset to be used for a particular piece of analysis depended on

- (a) the availability of the information within the dataset and, if the data were available on more than one dataset;
- (b) the size of the sample and
- (c) the most recent dataset.

For example, the Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Survey was last undertaken in 2001, and would seem to be the best source of information relating to health and wellbeing. However, the number of pensioners included in the survey was much lower than within the Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey. In addition, the latter survey was able to provide more recent data. Where information was not available within any of the datasets, other sources were sought. Some tables were available in reports or online while others had to be specially commissioned.

Other sources of information were obtained from:

- Northern Ireland House Condition Survey 2001 (Housing Executive)
- Northern Ireland Census of Population 2001 (Commissioned tables)
- Continuous Household Survey, 2003-04 (Commissioned table)
- Mid-Year Population Estimates, 2003 (NI Statistics and Research Agency)
- Population Trends 116, summer 2004 (Office for National Statistics)
- Annual Abstract of Statistics, 2003
- Regional Trends, 2004 (Office for National Statistics)
- Northern Ireland Expenditure and Food Survey, 2001/02
- Travel Survey, 2000-2002 (Department for Regional Development, DSD)
- The Pensioners' Income Series 2002/3
- New TSN Research: Poverty in Northern Ireland 2002
- Households Below Average Income, Northern Ireland, 2002/03 (DSD)
- Receipt of AA/DLA, DSD, February 2004 (commissioned table)

Republic of Ireland

Report 5 (Older people in the Republic of Ireland) used published information (either from reports or online tables). The project team did not undertake any specific secondary analysis. Information was obtained from:

- Central Statistics Office, Population Estimates 2003
- Current demographic trends (M1F2); Central Statistics Office 2004
- Census of Population 2002
- Survey of Lifestyle, Attitudes and Nutrition 1998
- Quarterly National Household Survey 2001