

Older People in Northern Ireland: Report 4: The Angry Generation

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This is the fourth of a series of reports and fact sheets to be published in 2004/5 on the needs and circumstances of older people in Northern Ireland. The research has been funded by Atlantic Philanthropies. Previous reports are:

- Report 1: Setting the scene (November 2004)
- Report 2: Financial circumstances (December 2004)
- Report 3: Health and wellbeing (March 2005)

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Introduction

This is the fourth publication in our series on the needs and circumstances of older people in Northern Ireland. In this report we focus on persons in the 50-64 years age group. There are various reasons for paying special attention to this particular generation of adults. As we demonstrate below, recent research has indicated that persons in this age group stand out in their attitudes on various issues - to such a degree that the authors of the research labelled them “the angry generation” (Evason and Dowds, 2004). Other work has described this group as “the pivot generation” (Mooney and Statham, 2002).

What lies behind these terms is a sense that this is a generation under pressure. It is this generation that has seen the transformation of the worlds of work and welfare - and the growth of insecurity - that has occurred over the last 25 years. People in this age group may feel under strain: caring for their parents; helping their children and grandchildren, and perhaps worrying about the implications for themselves of the general crisis surrounding pensions in the United Kingdom. Whilst we cannot address all of the issues we would like to from the data available, in the following paragraphs we look at the kinds and extent of difficulties persons in this age group may face.

Attitudes amongst the angry generation

Table 1 indicates that persons between the ages of 50 and 64 years have the least positive attitudes of any age group with regard to the treatment of older people in our society. They are clearly more likely than others to take the view that older people are treated worse and with less respect because of their age and feel strongly that the authorities do not do enough for older people.

Table 1: Percentages agreeing with statements relating to older people

	% agreeing					
	18-44 years	45-49 years	50-59 years	60-64 years	65 years and over	All
Statement 1	46.5	48.0	57.4	51.6	41.7	48.2
Statement 2	32.6	34.6	44.1	41.8	37.1	36.4
Statement 3	70.5	71.5	77.1	73.8	65.1	71.1

Statement 1: Older people are treated worse because of their age.

Statement 2: As you get older you are treated with less respect.

Statement 3: The authorities in Northern Ireland do not do enough for older people.

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2003

Satisfaction with life

An indication that all is not well with this age group comes from Table 2 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 2: 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

Ill health amongst those aged 50-64

One possible source of strain which may affect many in the 50-64 years age group - and impact on income - is poor health. Table 3 indicates that males aged 60-64 years report poorer health than males over retirement age. Table 4 shows a significant proportion of this age group as a whole reporting a longstanding illness or disability, with nearly one third of these reporting that their illness/disability impacts on their capacity for work.

Table 3. 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 4: 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

Table 5 presents evidence on mental health, as measured by the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12), by age group: the higher the score the poorer the mental health of the individual. It can be noted that the highest scores are recorded for persons in the 50-64 years age group, with women in this group having the poorest mental health of all.

Table 5: Mean GHQ12 scores

	%		
	Males	Females	All
16-19 years	9.18	9.92	9.54
20-34 years	9.54	11.21	10.44
35-49 years	11.26	11.85	11.57
50-64 years	11.30	12.42	11.89
65 years and over	9.78	11.89	10.88
All	10.40	11.67	11.07

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

Economic activity rates

A central plank in current pensions policy is to encourage people to work up to - and beyond - the state retirement age which is currently 60 years for women and 65 years for men. Table 6 shows that, in practise, amongst males, economic activity rates decline sharply in the ten years preceding retirement age. There is a sharp rise in those who are unable to work due to ill health amongst the 55-59 years age group and thereafter movement away from this with respondents being more likely to describe themselves as retired.

Table 6: 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 7 indicates a more varied position amongst women, but here again, the majority are not in employment in the years preceding retirement age.

Table 7: Employment status - females

	%			
	50-54 years	55-59 years	60-64 years	All
In employment	57.4	47.0	31.5	46.1
Long term sick/disabled	19.4	14.0	4.3	13.1
Retired	2.8	6.6	41.3	14.9
Full time home care	18.5	27.2	20.7	22.6
Other	1.8	5.2	2.2	3.2
Total (N=336)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Other: in education/unemployed/on training scheme

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

Table 8 looks more closely at the reasons for economic inactivity amongst males.

Table 8: 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

It should be noted that, whilst there have been clear improvements in benefits for some groups (notably pensioners and families), not all have made gains. One group that has been subjected to cuts rather than improvements are older persons unable to work due to sickness or disability. The top rate

of Incapacity Benefit for the individual claimant is currently only £76.45 a week and, in general, benefits for this group are much less generous than is often thought. Table 9 indicates significant reliance on Incapacity Benefit amongst men, with occupational pensions being the next most significant source of earnings-replacement benefit in payment. Amongst women the pattern is more varied. The level of receipt of Disability Living Allowance - which we discussed in our third report - is also substantial. Whilst we have not been able to estimate the volume of poverty amongst this group, it seems likely that a significant minority are hard-pressed financially.

Table 9: Benefits and other pensions received

	%	
	Males	Females
Child Benefit	-	17.8
Incapacity Benefit	30.1	17.1
Pensions from employment	17.7	10.2
Income Support	16.9	18.3
Job Seeker's Allowance	3.6	-
State Retirement Pension	-	31.2
Disability Living Allowance	20.1	24.3
Carer's Allowance	-	6.0
Widow's Pension	-	8.4

Source: Continuous Household Survey, 2002/03

Caring responsibilities

As we indicate above, a significant proportion of those aged 50-64 years is in poor health.

Additionally, many in this age group are assisting others who require help as a result of illness or disability. Table 10 indicates that persons in this age group are those most likely to have caring responsibilities. In all, 25.7% of this generation care for someone in the same household or someone in another household.

Table 10: 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

Table 11 shows the substantial volume of care persons in the 50-64 years age group are providing for parents or in-laws.

Table 11: 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 12 indicates that for over two fifths of carers (42.9%), caring takes up over ten hours a week.

Indeed for a minority (16.7%) it is the equivalent of a full time job.

Table 12 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

Finally, it can be noted that further analysis indicated that carers in the 50-64 years age group had poorer mental health than non-carers, with mean GHQ12 scores of 11.89 and 10.88 respectively.

Grandparenting responsibilities

Recent research indicates that 43.2% of females and 31.4% of males in the 50-64 years age group are grandparents (Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2004). Table 13 shows that the majority of grandparents report that they often put themselves out to help look after their grandchildren. Nearly one fifth of grandmothers reported giving up paid work or reducing their hours so that they could help look after their grandchildren. The table also indicates a fairly strong feeling that the help grandparents give is undervalued and that, as the number of mothers in employment continues to rise, grandparents will have to give more and more help.

Table 13: 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

Grandparents aged between 50 and 64 years were asked how often, if at all, in the past year they had looked after their grandchildren aged 12 years and under during the day and in the evening. Tables 14 and 15 detail the substantial amount of help given, by grandmothers in particular, with child care during the day and in the evening.

Table 14: Extent of help by grandparents with babysitting/child care during the day

	%		
	Males	Females	All
Once a week/more often	21.8	39.6	33.3
Several times a month	9.1	13.9	12.2
Gives less frequent help	32.7	29.7	30.8
Gives no help	36.4	16.8	23.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2004

Table 15. Extent of help by grandparents with babysitting/child care in the evening

	%		
	Males	Females	All
Once a week/more often	16.1	27.5	23.4
Several times a month	7.1	19.6	15.2
Gives less frequent help	33.9	36.3	35.4
Gives no help	42.9	16.7	25.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2004

Finally, it can be noted that 21.8% of grandparents are also carers. Of these, 77.5% agreed with the statement “I have often put myself out to help look after my grandchildren” and were clearly heavily involved with meeting the needs of their grandchildren as well as caring for someone with ill health/disability.

Attitudes, caring and employment status

In this final section of our report we look at the interaction of some of the variables considered above. Table 16 indicates that carers are more likely to consider that older people are treated worse because of their age.

Table 16: Attitudes concerning the treatment of older people

	%		
% considering that:	Is not a carer	Is a carer	All
Older people are treated better	11.9	8.0	11.1
Older people are treated worse	46.1	56.2	48.1
Older people are treated the same	38.6	33.8	37.7
Don't know	3.4	1.9	3.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2003

Table 17 indicates that carers are also more likely to consider that the authorities do not do enough for older people.

Table 17 Attitudes on whether authorities do enough for older people by caring responsibilities

% considering that:	%		
	Is not a carer	Is a carer	All
Authorities do all they can for older people	20.8	18.6	20.4
Authorities do too much for older people	.8	-	.6
Authorities do not do enough for older people	69.8	76.5	71.1
Don't know	8.6	5.0	7.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2003

Table 18 indicates that - far from enjoying life free from the cares of work - there is a substantial volume of dissatisfaction with life in general amongst those who are not in employment as a result of ill health and disability.

Table 18: Dissatisfaction with life in general by employment status and gender

	% dissatisfied with life	
	Males	Females
In employment	6.6	3.6
Long term sick/disabled	30.6	36.8
Other	-	10.5
Total	11.5	10.5

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

Conclusion

In this report we have focussed on older people in the 50-64 years age group. While more research is needed, it is clear that this cohort of adults appears to be under strain from a number of directions. As we note above, current policy places considerable emphasis on encouraging and enabling a higher proportion of this age group to remain in employment up to and beyond retirement age. Our data suggest two causes for concern with regard to this strategy. First, it is clear that this age group provides a substantial amount of help on an unpaid basis to their parents, their children and grandchildren. Increasing economic activity rates amongst this group is desirable for many reasons, but the possibility of gaps in care-giving opening up as a result needs to be considered. Second, with regard to those not in employment due to sickness and disability, policies promoting a return to work need to be supportive and sensitive, and not an added source of strain for this age group.

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