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photo: Private collection

## Emigration of the Dutch and their search of the 'Good Life'

HARRY VAN DALEN, KÈNE HENKENS AND HAN NICOLAAS

**For the first time since the 1950s the Netherlands is experiencing an emigration wave. A large-scale survey on the determinants of emigration has shown that most Dutch emigrants are in search of the good life: space, nature, peace and quiet and friendly people. Two years after having stated their intention to emigrate, 24 percent had actually left the Netherlands.**

In 2007 emigration from the Netherlands exceeded immigration for the fifth year in a row, reaching a level of 123,000, or 7.5 emigrants per 1,000 inhabitants. The Dutch media have reported repeatedly about this unique phenomenon because it caught demographic forecasters by surprise. The last emigration wave occurred fifty years ago and the Netherlands is now the only western country in Europe with net emigration. The fact that people are leaving the Netherlands on such a large scale has worried the media and politicians. What puzzled them is that the Dutch case contradicts common knowledge and economic logic. Most migration flows are triggered by the prospect of improving one's economic status, but the Netherlands is one of the most prosperous countries in the world, so why leave a country that has been the destination of immigrants for decades?

To see who had left, we used national data provided by Statistics Netherlands (CBS). In order to find out *why* people had left and who had emigration plans we carried out a survey among a representative sample of the Dutch in 2005. And to gain more insight into the characteristics of the Dutch emigrant we carried out a survey among a group of potential emigrants who had visited an emigrants' fair. This type of oversampling provided a picture of the determinants of emigration intentions. Two years later, we tracked the whereabouts of the entire sample of 2005 with the help of Statistics Netherlands.

**Where do Dutch emigrants go? Top ten countries of destination of Dutch-born emigrants (excluding children) and some characteristics**

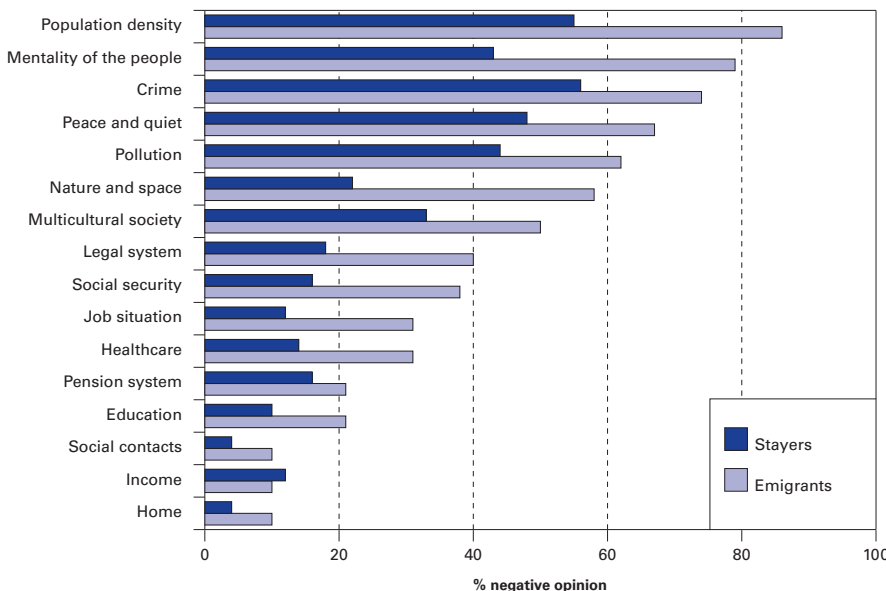
| Destination                      | Frequency distribution | Age at time of departure | % self employed | % singles |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| 1 Belgium                        | 21.1                   | 40.3                     | 9.0             | 24.8      |
| 2 Germany                        | 17.1                   | 40.6                     | 7.2             | 24.3      |
| 3 France                         | 6.5                    | 45.5                     | 10.3            | 20.9      |
| 4 USA                            | 6.4                    | 35.6                     | 3.3             | 29.5      |
| 5 UK                             | 6.1                    | 32.8                     | 2.2             | 42.6      |
| 6 Spain                          | 5.9                    | 43.7                     | 9.6             | 25.9      |
| 7 Netherlands Antilles and Aruba | 5.5                    | 35.5                     | 4.3             | 26.2      |
| 8 Australia                      | 3.3                    | 33.9                     | 4.8             | 34.3      |
| 9 Canada                         | 2.7                    | 38.2                     | 17.8            | 20.0      |
| 10 Switzerland                   | 2.0                    | 36.2                     | 3.1             | 33.2      |

Source: CBS.

**Who has left?**

An analysis of the national emigration figures of Dutch-born in the period 1999-2006 reveals that men are twice as likely to emigrate as women and that the step to emigrate is mostly taken by the young (younger than 30). In terms of income, the Dutch with an income in the top decile are most likely to emigrate. Most Dutch emigrants remain in Europe: 69 percent choose a European destination. It hardly comes as a surprise that most emigrants move to one of the neighbouring countries, Germany or Belgium. In these cases, however, people tend to live just across the border and continue working in the Netherlands. The main reason for opting for this form of migration may be the high housing and land prices in the Netherlands and the fact that Belgium and Germany have spacious houses that are virtually unaffordable for middle-income classes in the Netherlands. Excluding Belgium and Germany, Europe is still the destination of choice for 31 percent of Dutch emigrants. Traditional emigration countries such as the US and Canada attract 15 percent of emigrants. The table presents the top ten countries of destination for native Dutch emigrants.

Assessing the quality of the public and private domains in the Netherlands – emigrants versus stayers (percentage (highly) negative opinions)



**Why leave?**

The NIDI emigration survey carried out in 2005 showed that three percent of the Dutch population had more or less firm emigration plans. By following their subsequent actions we were able to see whether they achieved their intentions. The predictive value of intentions proved to be quite good: 24 percent of the people had left after two years. Considering the fact that emigration is a complex process involving bureaucratic red tape and problems such as selling one's home or business, one could even state that this percentage is quite high.

The most pertinent question with regard to the Dutch wave of emigration is, of course, why people are leaving. Examining what determines emigration intentions and subsequent action provides a clear picture. The determinants can be classified into two groups: (a) individual characteristics one would expect to be relevant if emigration were purely a matter of private gain (e.g. age, human capital, health, networks, personality traits); and (b) the provision and perceived quality of the public domain in the Netherlands. In case of public goods, such as roads, education or the environment, the welfare of each individual depends on the actions and solidarity of others and perhaps even more so in a crowded country like the Netherlands. Based on a statistical analysis, the following elements were selected to represent the public domain: (1) the Dutch welfare state and institutions that provide public goods and services (law and order, social security, education, healthcare); (2) the quality of the public space (noise pollution, space, nature, overcrowding); and (3) an evaluation of the social problems government has to deal with, such as crime, pollution and ethnic tension.

The results of our study reveal that both the private and the public domain are important for an understanding of emigration from a high-income country like the Netherlands. Without knowing how people feel about the quality of the public domain, large-scale emigration would remain a mystery. The more negative people are about the public domain, the more likely it is that they will emigrate (see Figure). Of course, Dutch people who stay in the Netherlands are also negative about aspects of the public domain, but emigrants are far more negative than those who stay behind. The biggest difference between emigrants and those who stay behind is their assessment of the quality of the public space.

One may, of course, wonder whether emigrants are much better off in their country of destination in terms of their reasons for emigrating. At the time of the survey, they were only asked about their expectations and in this respect all emigrants believed the quality of the public space would be far better in their 'promised land' and that social problems would be less serious. Note that only 17 percent believed they would earn a higher income abroad and as many as 29 percent expected their income to drop following emigration. In other words, the Dutch are even prepared to pay to leave their country.

This study suggests that the quality of the public domain is an important aspect of quality of life and those who have moved are implicitly casting a vote of no confidence in their country. By choosing the exit option and foregoing the option of voicing one's opinion, governments feel the pressure to maintain a high quality public domain. Competition is therefore no longer restricted to local governments but is increasingly becoming an affair between national governments. And this very observation may perhaps be the true sign that we are currently living in an age of globalisation.

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# Changes in desired family size during the life course

AAT LIEFBROER

**The Dutch Minister for Youth and Families, André Rouvoet (Christian Union), is in favour of government policy designed to raise the number of children. He believes this would alleviate the disadvantages of an ageing population in the future. Many people in the Netherlands say, however, that the number of children people want is a private matter. At the same time, research has shown that on the whole couples want more children than they ultimately realise. The findings of a study recently conducted at NIDI to look for an explanation for this phenomenon could be useful in determining whether government policy could help people fulfil their wishes.**

photo: Wim de Jonge

Many people have fewer children than they would ideally like to have, but they tend to adjust the number of children they say they would like during the course of their lives. Trends in the desired and actual number of children over time can be charted with the aid of the findings of a longitudinal survey held among young adults (see Box page 5). In 1987, people aged 18, 22 and 26 at the time were asked how many children they wanted to have. They were subsequently interviewed every four to five years to find out how many children they actually had and how many more they wanted.

Whereas women and men born in 1961 said at the age of 26 that they wanted an average of 2.4 and 2.3 children respectively, they were found to have an average of 1.9 and 1.8 children by the time they were 44 (see Figure 1). The difference between the number desired and the actual number of children was therefore about half a child on average. The percentage of women and men who had fewer children than initially desired was 44 and 37 percent respectively; the percentage who had the exact number of children they wanted was 42 and 48 percent respectively, and 13 percent of the women and 15 percent of the men ended up having more children than they said they wanted at the age of 26.

Figure 1 also shows that men and women adjust their ideal family size downwards over time. As a result, the desired number of children gradually drops to two, and ultimately equals the actual number of children. The study

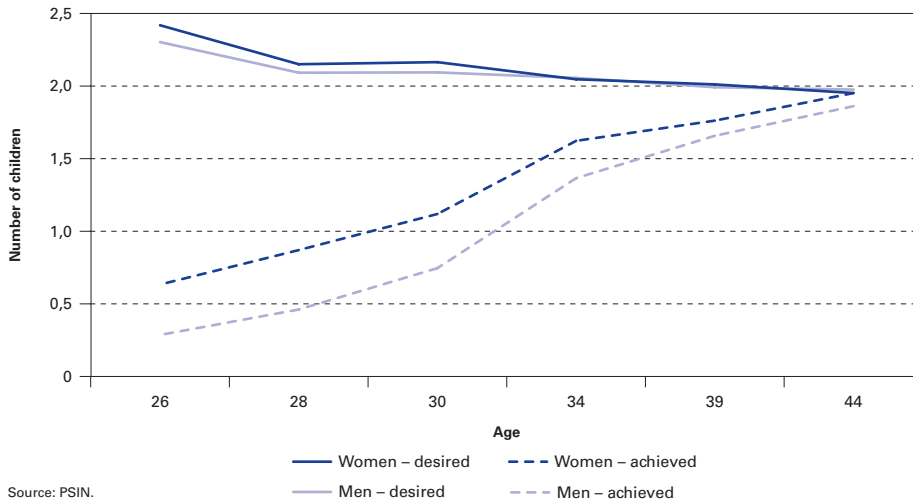


examined which men and women adjust their expectations downwards and which do not. Two factors were found to play a role: Developments in family life itself and developments in education and work.

#### Family life

The number of children young adults ideally want depends on developments within their

**Figure 1.** Desired and achieved number of children among men and women born in 1961



Source: PSIN.

own family lives. At age 20 the difference in terms of the ideal family size between single men and women and men and women who have a partner is very small. On average, both single and married men and women want about 2.4 children. By the time they are 35, the desired number of children has dropped among both groups, but the decline is much sharper among single people than among married couples: whereas married couples want an average of 1.8 children, single people want an average of 1.4 children. This seems to suggest that people who are single at age 35 realise that a big family is not –or no longer– a realistic option for them.

On average people living together outside of marriage wanted 0.2 fewer children than they had initially said they wanted than married couples. This difference remains more or less constant over the life course, suggesting that young cohabiting couples have other priorities in life than married couples.

People’s experiences in having –or not having– children influence the number of children they ideally want. People who remain childless for many years tend to adjust their ideal family size downwards during the course of their lives, either because they find out they are subfertile

or infertile, or because they prefer a life without children. People with only one child also sometimes adjust their wishes downwards. This could possibly be explained by the fact that they had unpleasant experiences during pregnancy and childbirth, that raising a child turned out to be less of a joy than expected, or that combining a child and a job was more difficult than expected.

**Level of education and labour force participation**

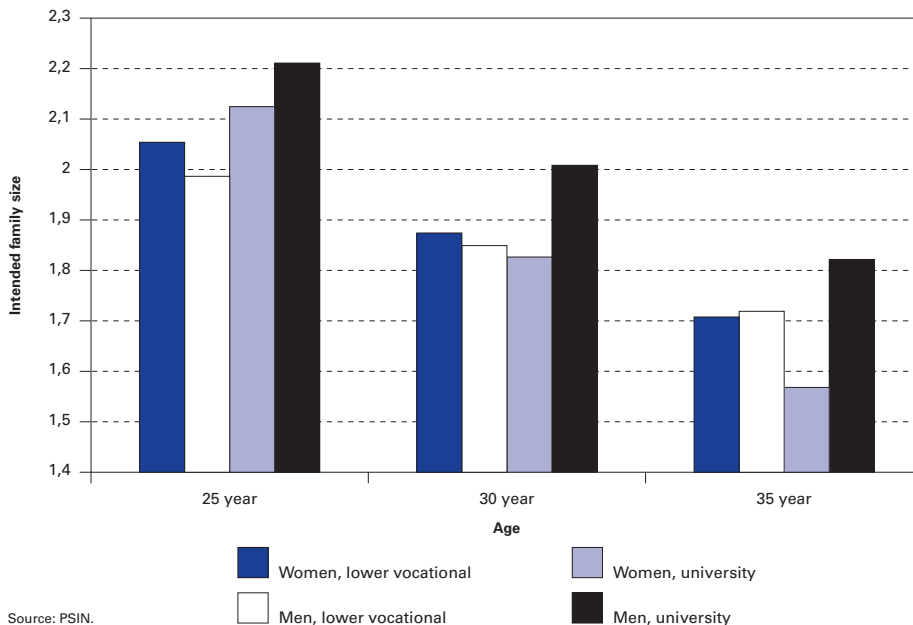
At the age of 25, men and women with a university degree wanted more children than those with lower vocational education (Figure 2). Men who had graduated from university wanted 2.2 children on average, women with university education wanted 2.1 children and men and women with lower vocational education wanted about 2.0 children. Here too, the differences become bigger as people grow older. At age 35 men and women in all educational groups were found to have adjusted their ideal family size downwards. This decline was particularly strong among women with university education, whose ideal family size dropped from 2.1 children when they were 25 to less than 1.6 by the time they were 35. This suggests that it is particularly difficult for highly educated women to combine motherhood and a career.

A similar pattern was found among people with and without a paid job. Whereas differences in desired family size are small at age 30, men and women with a paid job are found to adjust their wishes downward more strongly as they grow older than people without a job. This could again be explained by the fact that combining family duties and work turns out to be more difficult than expected.

**A possible role for government**

The finding that many women and men adjust their ideal family size downwards and often have fewer children than they initially said they wanted to have may have several reasons: they have not found a suitable partner, they have found a partner who already has children, they want to do too much in life, leaving little room for children, or they are infertile or subfertile. Research has shown that combining parenthood and a career makes it more difficult to achieve one’s ideal family size, in particular among highly educated women. Their initial wishes appear to be virtually impossible to combine with the requirements of a successful professional career. Other data from this longitudinal study showed that women who expect that having a child will have a negative impact on their careers tend to delay having children longer than women who do not believe that this is the case. In this light high-quality, affordable and widely available childcare could help people whose careers stand in the way of them having children achieve their ideal family size. A recent Norwegian study reports that women living in towns with good childcare facilities had children at a younger age than women in towns

**Figure 2.** Desired number of children, by level of education, sex and age



Source: PSIN.

PSIN stands for 'Panel Study of Social Integration of Young Adults in the Netherlands'. The study was initiated at Amsterdam's Vrije Universiteit in 1987, and was later continued jointly by researchers from Utrecht University, Tilburg University and NIDI. During the study a group of more than 1,750 young adults, aged 18, 22 or 26 in 1987, were interviewed up to six times during the course of 18 years, enquiring after developments in their lives. More than 750 people still participated in the study in 2005. As the participants were asked in detail about their plans for the future in the very first interview, the PSIN offers a unique possibility of examining the extent to which their plans have come true. The figures presented about differences in the desired number of children by family situation, level of education and employment status are based on the outcomes of multivariate Poisson regression models for all birth cohorts included in the survey. These results can be obtained from the author on request.

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with a less dense network of childcare providers (*Demography*).

Rather than focusing on measures to raise the number of children, the government would do better to help couples achieve their ideal family size by offering better childcare. A policy of this kind could, additionally, counteract the negative effects of an ageing population. If adequate childcare is available, women are more likely to participate in the labour force and remain in employment longer, and to have more children on average. This would help reduce the costs of population ageing. And that, in turn, would lead to a happy end: A happy society, happy couples and a happy government minister.

## Pathways into childlessness

RENSKE KEIZER

### The impact of education, work history and partnership history on remaining childless

**Childlessness has received a great deal of media attention in recent years. Most attention has been paid to the relationship between education, work and having children. Other dimensions have been largely neglected. This study focuses on relationship histories alongside issues such as education and employment. The research results suggest that policy changes are required.**

photo: Wim de Jonge

#### Life course approach

Although the literature seems to assume that the decision to have children or to remain childless is a conscious one (except in cases of infertility), recent studies suggest that the decision to remain childless is more implicit than previously thought; it is much more often the result of behaviour and circumstances relating to education, work and union formation. In order to examine whether this is indeed the case, people's life courses are studied with the aid of data gathered as part of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, a large-scale representative panel survey into family ties.

#### Differences between men and women

This study addresses the life courses of both men and women as the life paths that lead to childlessness are believed to differ for men and women. This may be attributed not only to the fact that the biological fertility of women follows a different course from that of men but also to the fact that women encounter greater obstacles in their efforts to combine caring duties with a job.

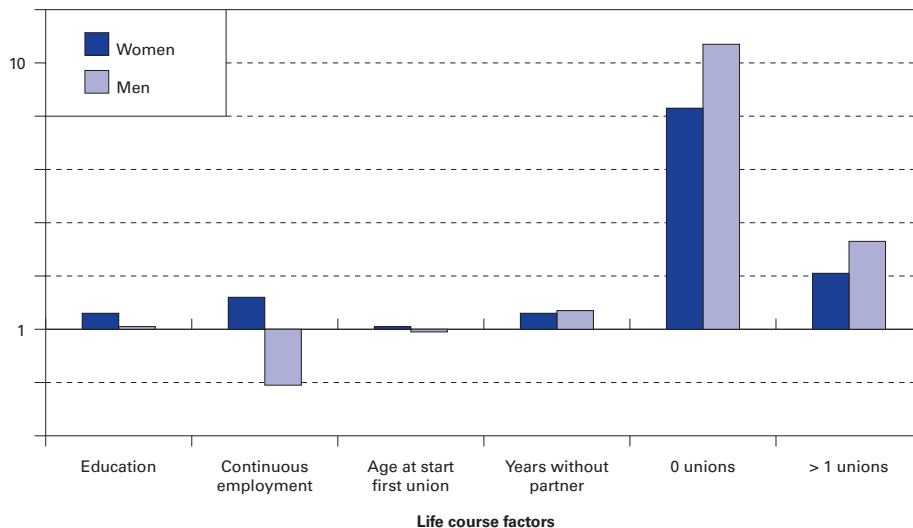
As expected, the research results show up differences between men and women in the life paths that lead to a childless existence. Highly educated women are more likely to remain childless than women with a lower level of education. Each additional year of education increases the probability that women will remain childless by 14 percent. Education was found to have no significant effect among men. Whereas women who do not interrupt their



careers have a 31 percent *higher* likelihood of remaining childless, this likelihood is 38 percent *lower* among men. So while a stable, uninterrupted career appears to be a requisite among men, the research results suggest the opposite for women.

In comparison with people's educational history and employment history, their relationship history was found to have the greatest influen-

The likelihood to remain childless: The influence of various life course factors (logarithmic scale)



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ce on the probability of remaining childless. Women who have never had a partner are almost seven times as likely to remain childless as women who have or have had a partner. Men without a partner were even 12 times as likely to remain childless, suggesting that men’s chances are lower of having a child from a short relationship than women’s. Men who have been in several relationships are more than twice as likely to remain childless than men who have had one relationship only. This probability is much lower among women. This suggests that the likelihood of remaining childless among men is determined by who crosses their path in love life. Women are more inclined to take advantage of a new relationship to embark on parenthood.

That said, men and women do not differ in every respect. Both men and women are more likely to remain childless if they have been single for several years. Each year without a partner increases their likelihood of remaining childless by about 16 percent. Among both men and women the age at the time of the first union was not found to influence the probability of remaining childless.

**Policy**

Government policy in the Netherlands in the past ten years has sought to make it easier for women to combine a job with family duties. This policy does not seem to have been very effective, however. For whereas most children in the Netherlands are born to working mothers, the percentage of childless couples has not declined. Women who feel that a career cannot be combined with children, for example, often delay entering into a serious relationship as this could result in them having children. Men tend to focus initially on building a stable career and on finding a partner, and only then want children to make the picture complete. Education, work and relationships cannot be seen in isolation and their effects should therefore be studied jointly rather than separately in order to gain more insight into the prevalence of childlessness these days. The research results suggest that it is time for policy changes with respect to childlessness.

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# Dutch Muslims to remain a minority

JOOP DE BEER

**The number of Muslims in the Netherlands is growing faster than the rest of the population. Extrapolating this trend, some believe that Muslims will constitute a majority of the Dutch population in the future. How realistic is this expectation? Based on projections of the future number of migrants, it is easy to calculate that Muslims will remain a minority in the future.**

photo: Wim de Jonge



**Not all migrants are Muslims**

According to an estimate by Statistics Netherlands (NCBS) there were 857,000 Muslims living in the Netherlands, or five percent of the population, in 2006 (see Table 1). Most of them are non-Western migrants. Not all migrants are Muslims, however. Just under half of all non-Western migrants are Muslims. The percentage varies considerably depending on the migrants’ country of origin. The three biggest groups of non-Western migrants in the Netherlands are people of Turkish, Surinamese or Moroccan descent. They are also the three biggest groups of Muslims, but whereas about 90 percent of Turks and Moroccans are Muslim, this is only the case among no more than about 10 percent of the Surinamese in the Netherlands. Whereas a clear majority of several groups of migrants

who came to the Netherlands as asylum seekers are Muslims, the percentages tend to be lower than the percentage of Muslims in their country of origin. Among many other groups of non-Western migrants the percentage of Muslims is very low.

The question whether the percentage of Muslims is set to increase in the future, and if so to what degree, will largely depend on the future number of non-Western migrants, and, given the strong variation in the percentage of Muslims, on the composition of the migrant population. Another important factor is the extent to which these people will abandon their faith. It remains to be seen whether second- and subsequent generation migrants will have an equally strong sense of being Muslim as the first generation. Conversely, part of the Muslim community might become more strongly

attached to their religion in the future, and non-Muslims might convert to Islam. However, as statements of this kind are highly speculative, this article will only address the possible consequences of changes in the numbers of migrants for the future number of Muslims.

### Slowdown in growth of numbers of migrants

The extent to which the number of migrants is set to grow will depend on the size of immigration and emigration flows –some immigrants leave the Netherlands after a while– as well as on the average family size and mortality among migrants. As the migrant population tends to be relatively young, mortality plays less of a role in terms of their quantitative development than among the population of Dutch descent. The number of non-Western migrants climbed from 1.2 million in 1996 to 1.7 million in 2006, an increase of half a million people in ten year's time. This growth rate has slowed down considerably in recent years due to a strong increase in emigration and declining immigration. Net migration was even negative for some years: The number of migrants leaving the Netherlands exceeded the number of new immigrants.

### Future immigration of a different kind

Statistics Netherlands does not expect that net emigration is here to stay as immigration is likely to increase again in the future. The main reason for this is the expected tight labour market in the Netherlands due to the ageing population. Many of the migrants settling in the Netherlands in the past decades came from Turkey and Morocco to rejoin their families or to marry. Another large group of migrants arrived as asylum seekers from the Middle East. Both these groups of immigrants consisted mostly of Muslims. Statistics Netherlands expects immigration from Turkey and Morocco to decline in the future as more and more young Moroccans and Turks are now marrying someone living in the Netherlands as well. This means that fewer migrants will look for a partner abroad. The number of asylum seekers has dropped sharply in recent years and is not expected to pick up again due to strict policies. Future immigration may differ from the past. The number of immigrants from eastern Europe has shown strong growth in recent years. And to the extent that immigrants will come from non-Western countries, there will be a shift towards migrants from populous Asian countries such as India and China. Only a small percentage of future immigrants are expected to come from Muslim countries and there are certainly no grounds to assume that the percentage of Muslims among future immigrants will be higher than it is now.

### Migrants are having fewer children

The growing number of migrants results not only from immigration but also from natural increase. The group of second-generation migrants in the Netherlands is growing because the first generation are having children. Non-

**Table 1. Number of migrants and Muslims in the Netherlands, 2006**

|                           | Number of people | Percentage Muslims | Number of Muslims |
|---------------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
|                           | x 1,000          | %                  | x 1,000           |
| Non-Western migrants      | 1,720            | 47                 | 815               |
| of which:                 |                  |                    |                   |
| Turks                     | 365              | 87                 | 318               |
| Moroccans                 | 323              | 92                 | 297               |
| Surinamese                | 332              | 10                 | 33                |
| Afghans                   | 37               | 84                 | 31                |
| Iraqis                    | 44               | 63                 | 28                |
| Somalis                   | 20               | 95                 | 19                |
| Pakistanis                | 18               | 100                | 18                |
| Iranians                  | 29               | 43                 | 12                |
| Other countries of origin | 552              | 11                 | 58                |
| Western migrants          | 1,428            | 3                  | 38                |
| Total population          | 16,334           | 5                  | 857               |

Source: CBS, Statline; Van Herten (2007).

Western migrants have larger families, on average, than people of Dutch descent, but their families have become smaller in the past ten years. Statistics Netherlands expects that the number of migrant children will continue to decline gradually in the next decades, to an average of two children per woman, in part as a result of the fact that birth rates are also declining in their countries of origin.

### Muslims to remain a minority

Statistics Netherlands expects that the number of non-Western migrants will increase from 1.7 million to 2.7 million in 2050, based on the

**Table 2. Number of Muslims in 2050**

|   | Percentage Muslims | Number of migrants | Number of Muslims | Percentage Muslims in total population |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--|
|   | %                  | x 1,000            | x 1,000           | %                                      |
| <i>Scenario 1: constant percentage Muslims</i>      |                    |                    |                   |  |
| Non-Western migrants                                | 47                 | 2,691              | 1,276             | 7.6                                    |
| Western migrants                                    | 3                  | 2,105              | 63                | 0.4                                    |
| Total Muslims                                       |                    |                    | 1,339             | 8.0                                    |
| <i>Scenario 2: strong growth number of migrants</i> |                    |                    |                   |  |
| Non-Western migrants                                | 47                 | 4,324              | 2,050             | 11.1                                   |
| Western migrants                                    | 3                  | 2,405              | 72                | 0.4                                    |
| Total Muslims                                       |                    |                    | 2,122             | 11.5                                   |
| <i>Scenario 3: strong growth percentage Muslims</i> |                    |                    |                   |  |
| Migrants from Africa, Asia and Turkey               | 100                | 4,339              | 4,339             | 23.5                                   |
| Surinamese  | 10                 | 656                | 66                | 0.4                                    |
| Western migrants                                    | 3                  | 2,885              | 87                | 0.5                                    |
| Total Muslims                                       |                    |                    | 4,491             | 24.4                                   |

assumption of net immigration and a gradually declining family size among migrants. The total population of the Netherlands is set to increase from 16.3 million to 16.8 million in the same period. This means an increase in the percentage of non-Western migrants from 11 to 16 percent. Given, however, that not all non-Western migrants are Muslims, we expect only a slight increase in the percentage of Muslims in the Netherlands.

Assuming that the percentage of Muslims among Western and non-Western migrants will remain unchanged during the coming decades, the percentage of Muslims in the total population would increase from five percent in 2006 to eight percent in 2050 (scenario 1 in Table 2). This percentage may be even lower given the expectation that, as indicated above, the percentage of Muslims among future immigrants will be lower than it was in the past. The percentage may also decline as Muslims abandon their faith.

Conversely, the percentage of Muslims could increase if immigration and the future number

of children among Muslims exceeds expectations. Statistics Netherlands has calculated the extent to which the number of migrants would increase assuming much higher migration and birth rates. Under this scenario, the percentage of Muslims would increase to over 11 percent (scenario 2 in Table 2), which would be double the current percentage but still a small minority of the total population.

If we were also to assume that all migrants from Africa and Asia will be Muslims, the proportion of Muslims in the Netherlands would amount to 24 percent in 2050 (scenario 3 in Table 2). And whereas this is substantially more than it is now, Muslims would still constitute a minority in the Netherlands under this extreme scenario.

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# Family solidarity in Europe alive and well

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SUSAN TER BEKKE ANDTINEKE FOKKEMA

**Families in Europe span more generations than they did a few decades ago. And each successive generation consists of fewer people. Yet family solidarity has remained strong, with parents supporting their children and vice versa. We do see considerable differences across Europe, however. In southern Europe, for example, it is far more common for the elderly to live in with their children and to have frequent contact with each other than in northern Europe. Similarly, southern Europeans feel a stronger sense of obligation towards their children and grandchildren than people in northern European countries.**

photo: Wim de Jonge



Families in Europe have undergone marked changes in recent decades. As life expectancy is rising, families today span a larger number of generations, but due to the declining family size each successive generation consists of fewer people. At the same time, family and marriage ties have become weaker. Marriage has lost ground to other living arrangements, divorce is on the rise and, due to growing mobility, family members are living further apart from each other. We also see that caring duties have come under increasing pressure as a result of the emancipation of women, in particular their increased enrolment in education and labour force participation. In cultural terms there has been a shift within families from parental authority (respect your father and your mother) to the individual autonomy of each member of family.

## **Lost or changing solidarity?**

According to some, these changes are a threat to family solidarity. They say that the degree to which parents and children are prepared to support and care for each other is decreasing. In this respect, the welfare state has not been of

any help. The need for children to care for their parents has declined as formal care for the elderly has been extended. Benefits such as state and other pensions and social security have made parents and children less dependent on each other in economic terms.

Others believe that family solidarity has not so much weakened, but has changed in character. Smaller families and the disappearance of distance-creating parental authority have paved the way for more intensive and more personal contact between parents and their children. They say that formal care facilities for older adults and caring for one's family are complementary: as part of the caring responsibilities are taken off their shoulders, informal carers are relieved somewhat of this heavy burden and are able to keep up these duties for a longer period of time. Parents, in their turn, are able to offer their children and grandchildren financial support in difficult times thanks to improved pension arrangements.

In 2004 a large-scale survey was held among people aged 50 and over in eleven European countries (the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe, SHARE for short, see



box). Issues addressed were health, ageing and retirement. The results of this survey were used to gain a deeper insight into the state of family solidarity in Europe in our day and age. The most important results of this survey are presented here.

### Strong sense of duty to care

European older adults clearly feel a strong sense of duty when it comes to caring for their children and grandchildren. As shown in the Table, a large majority of people aged 50 and over felt that grandparents need to be there for their grandchildren if they have problems. A large majority also felt that it is the parents' duty to do their best for their children, even at the expense of their own wellbeing. No less than three quarters of southern Europeans aged 50-plus were of the opinion that grandparents should help their children care for the grandchildren. In the other countries, between 29 and 75 percent of the older adults agreed. These lower percentages are hardly surprising given that the statement appeals to a concrete duty of care, but not to the need for support. In Denmark about the same percentage older adults (34 percent) and in the Netherlands an even higher percentage older adults (42 percent) were of an opposite opinion. They did not feel that it is the duty of grandparents to help their children in this way. Older adults clearly showed less solidarity with their children and grandchildren when it comes to financial support. Whereas in the Mediterranean countries, 61 percent of those aged 50 and over felt that grandparents should contribute to the economic security of their grandchildren and their families, this was a mere 33 percent in the northern European countries. In Austria and Switzerland the number of people who agreed and disagreed was more or less equal. In Denmark and the Netherlands no fewer than 51 and 43 percent of the older adults respectively were of the opinion that grandparents have no obligation to contribute to the economic security of grandchildren and their families; 17 and 25 percent felt that they do.

### Help in kind: Old elderly 'net receivers'

Parents help their children and children help their elderly parents by providing administrative assistance, household help and personal care. They may provide this support either regularly (at least once a week) or occasionally. The exchange of help in kind was found to be more common in northern and central Europe than in southern Europe (see Figure 1). This is surprising as the geographical distance between older adults and their children is shortest in Italy, Spain and Greece and the frequency of contact is highest in these countries, and because the welfare state is less developed in the countries of southern Europe. Having said that, support given in central Europe and, even more so, in northern Europe is usually given on an occasional basis whereas support in southern Europe is given regularly (figures not presented).

Opinions about the duty of parents/grandparents to care for their children/grandchildren (weighted percentages)(\*)

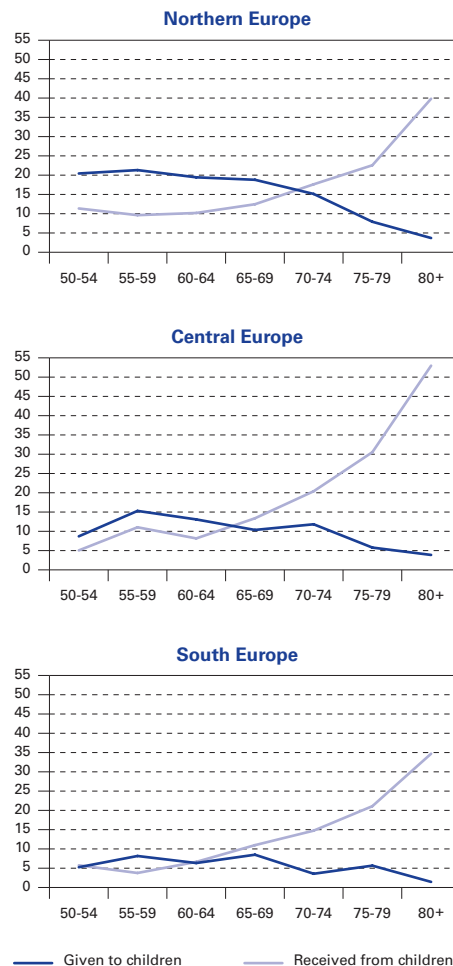
|                        | It is the parents'/grandparents' duty to.... |                     | be there for grandchildren in case of difficulty |                     | do their best for their children even at the expense of their own wellbeing |                     | help the grandchildren's parents in looking after young grandchildren |                     | contribute towards the economic security of the grandchildren and their families |                     |
|------------------------|--|---------------------|--|---------------------|---|---------------------|---|---------------------|--|---------------------|
|                        | (strongly) agree                             | (strongly) disagree | (strongly) agree                                 | (strongly) disagree | (strongly) agree  | (strongly) disagree | (strongly) agree  | (strongly) disagree | (strongly) agree   | (strongly) disagree |
| <i>Northern Europe</i> |  |                     |  |                     |   |                     |   |                     |  |                     |
| Sweden                 | 78.4   | 7.7                 | 88.4   | 4.2                 | 51.9  | 26.1                | 41.9  | 28.6                |  |                     |
| Denmark                | 76.0   | 10.2                | 70.2   | 13.6                | 37.5  | 34.3                | 17.0  | 50.8                |  |                     |
| Netherlands            | 74.0   | 10.7                | 64.9   | 14.9                | 28.5  | 42.0                | 25.1  | 43.2                |  |                     |
| Belgium                | 81.2   | 7.9                 | 66.3   | 19.0                | 60.3  | 19.2                | 45.5  | 28.9                |  |                     |
| <i>Central Europe</i>  |  |                     |  |                     |   |                     |   |                     |  |                     |
| Germany                | 83.5   | 3.2                 | 58.3   | 21.2                | 74.8  | 7.4                 | 39.8  | 27.9                |  |                     |
| France                 | 89.3   | 2.9                 | 72.0   | 10.7                | 69.4  | 9.7                 | 49.4  | 17.5                |  |                     |
| Austria                | 73.1   | 10.7                | 76.2   | 12.8                | 56.2  | 21.1                | 35.4  | 35.8                |  |                     |
| Switzerland            | 70.9   | 12.2                | 69.4   | 17.2                | 49.5  | 25.1                | 32.9  | 38.8                |  |                     |
| <i>South Europe</i>    |  |                     |  |                     |   |                     |   |                     |  |                     |
| Italy                  | 89.6   | 3.3                 | 88.6   | 3.4                 | 77.8  | 7.1                 | 63.7  | 13.4                |  |                     |
| Spain                  | 87.1   | 2.6                 | 89.8   | 2.8                 | 69.1  | 10.9                | 58.0  | 14.4                |  |                     |
| Greece                 | 90.0   | 2.7                 | 91.6   | 3.3                 | 80.1  | 4.0                 | 59.3  | 17.6                |  |                     |

(\*) The row percentages for each opinion do not add up to 100 because the category 'neither agree nor disagree' has not been presented.

Source: SHARE, 2004 – release 2.

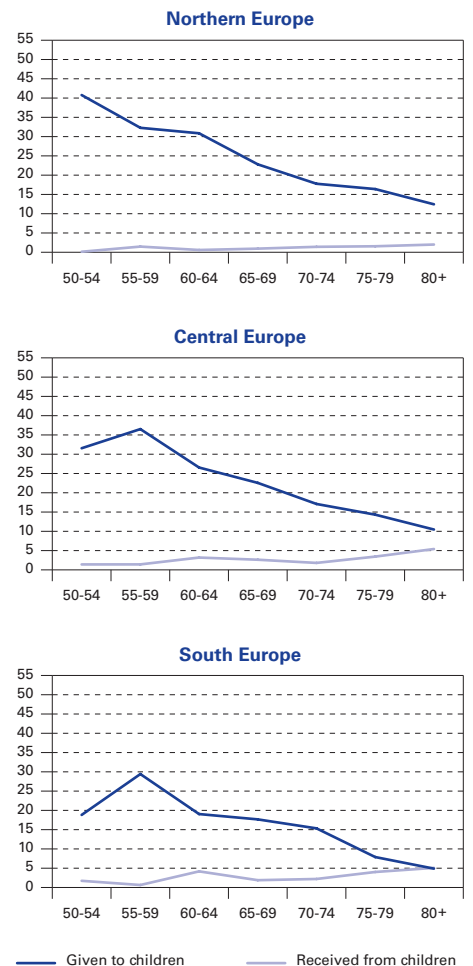
Figure 1 also shows that European older adults did not become 'net receivers' of help in kind until an advanced age. As they grow older, European elderly were found to gradually give

Figure 1. Exchange of help in kind in past 12 months between the 50-plus and their non-co-resident children, by age of the 50-plus (weighted percentages)



Source: SHARE, 2004 – release 2.

Figure 2. Exchange of material support in past 12 months between the 50-plus and their non-co-resident children, by age of the 50-plus (weighted percentages)



Source: SHARE, 2004 – release 2.

The data used were taken from the *Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) – Release 2*, which was largely funded by the European Commission under the Fifth Framework Programme. Additional funding came from the US National Institute on Ageing. Data collection for wave 1 was nationally funded in Austria, Belgium, France and Switzerland. Further support by the European Commission under the Sixth Framework Programme is gratefully acknowledged. For methodological details, see Börsch-Supan and Jürges (2005).

In 2004, more than 19,000 people aged 50-plus were interviewed in eleven European countries. About 65 percent of the interviewees completed a written questionnaire (addressing various issues including their opinions about the duty of care) after the face-to-face interview. People who remained childless or whose children had died (1,281 men and 1,372 women) were not included in this study.

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less and receive exponentially more help in kind. The curves for giving and receiving support cross each other when the older adults reach the age of 60 (southern Europe), 65 (central Europe) and 70 (northern Europe).

**Material support: Young elderly 'net givers'**

European older adults gave more financial support than they received from their children. In the twelve months preceding the survey, 20

percent of older adults aged 50-plus had given 250 euros or more to their children. No more than three percent said their children had supported them. The percentage aged 50-plus offering financial support to their children was highest in the wealthiest countries of northern Europe (25 percent) and lowest in the least wealthy countries of southern Europe (15 percent).

Financial support given to children by Europeans aged 50 and over decreased as they grew older (see Figure 2). The children, in their turn, gave more and more financial support to their parents, however meagre, after their parents had reached the age of 75. The curves for giving and receiving support in southern Europe cross each other after the older adults have reached the age of 80. In northern and central Europe the curves do not cross each other: in these countries, parents remain 'net givers' in terms of financial support.

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# Fat chance!

MIEKE REUSER

## A closer look at the effect of overweight on mortality

**The number of people with overweight or obesity is increasing the world over. The Netherlands is no exception: In the past 20 years the percentage of obese people has practically doubled to about 12 percent. Our present-day food-orientated consumer society with an abundance of calorie-rich food and a structural lack of physical exercise is often given the blame. Obesity raises health risks, and until the 1990s overweight and obesity were thought to be related to an increased mortality risk. Studies at the time indicated that adiposity was very damaging for one's health and that it claimed as many years of life as smoking. More recent research results from the late 1990s show, however, that overweight at an advanced age does not increase the risk of mortality. In fact, men older than 55 who are overweight live 1.5 years longer than normal-weight men.**

In 2005 about half the Dutch population between 18 and 70 years were overweight and expectations are that this percentage will increase strongly in the future. The Body Mass Index (BMI) is widely used to indicate whether or not people are overweight (see Box). According to this categorisation a BMI of between 18.5 and 25 would be the best and healthiest weight, and is referred to as 'normal weight'.

**Overweight and mortality**

In order to determine the effect of overweight on mortality we used the findings of a large-scale longitudinal survey conducted in the United States since 1992. This *Health and Retirement Survey* is held among middle- and old-aged Americans once every two years. The results presented below refer exclusively to the white population aged 55 and over.

The table shows the relative mortality risks broken down by BMI, with a BMI of between 23 and 25 serving as the reference category. The results show that within the normal-weight group, lighter people (BMI 18.5-22.9) differed from the rest (BMI 23-25), that overweight does not increase mortality, that even mild obesity does not shorten our lives and that the risk of mortality among both men and women is only significantly raised in the event of severe obesity. The figures also show that among men a low 'normal weight' is not good for their health. A low 'normal weight' results in a higher mortality rate than overweight does.

These mortality rates can be expressed in terms

Relative risks of total mortality by BMI among men and women, adjusted for age, smoking habits and level of education. The reference category is normal weight, BMI 23-25.

| BMI                            | Men     |         | Women   |         |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                                | 55-80   | 80+     | 55-80   | 80+     |
| Low normal weight<br>18.5-22.9 | 1.42*   | 1.10    | 1.01    | 1.01    |
| Normal weight<br>23-24.9       | 1 (Ref) | 1 (Ref) | 1 (Ref) | 1 (Ref) |
| Overweight<br>25-29.9          | 0.96    | 0.86    | 1.03    | 0.80*   |
| Mild obesity<br>30-34.9        | 1.08    | 0.85    | 1.07    | 0.95    |
| Severe obesity<br>35+          | 1.47*   | 1.31    | 1.95*   | 1.80    |

\* Significant at  $p < 0.05$

The Body Mass Index (BMI) divides body weight in kilos by the height in metres squared (kg/m<sup>2</sup>). The World Health Organisation (WHO) distinguishes five categories:

|                | Body Mass Index (kg/m <sup>2</sup> ) |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Underweight    | <18,5                                |
| Normal weight  | 18,5 – 24,9                          |
| Overweight     | 25 – 29,9                            |
| Mild obesity   | 30 – 34,9                            |
| Severe obesity | 35 +                                 |

BMI is not an ideal measure of obesity for the following two reasons:

- BMI measures total body weight including bones and muscle mass, whereas only a high fat percentage is damaging to health. For example, heavily built Dutchmen with a given BMI tend to have less fat around the waist than small-built Asians with the same BMI. Skin-fold measurements and waist circumference are better measures of adiposity but are used less in practice.
- This study used self-reported weight. It is a known fact that fat people, in particular women, are inclined to report a lower weight than their actual weight.

of life expectancy, a measure often used by demographers. The figure shows the expected remaining years of life from age 55, broken down by the most common risk factors: BMI, smoking and level of education.

The results show that overweight and mild obesity do not, or only barely affect life expectancy. Severe obesity shortens life by about three years among men and five years among women. Overweight men live an average of 1.5 years longer than normal-weight men, and men who smoke live an average of 9.5 years shorter than men who have never smoked. This difference is eight years for women. The difference between highly educated and lower educated men and women is 6.3 years and 5.4 years respectively. The influence of smoking and a low level of education on life expectancy is therefore much greater than the influence of overweight or obesity.

**How does overweight protect against mortality?**

Health is a complex system and the relationship between overweight and mortality is not easy to identify. The existing literature shows, among other things, that in the past excess mortality resulting from overweight was clearly related to cardiovascular diseases. Obesity is known to significantly increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases, but mortality from these diseases has halved in the Netherlands since 1972. This may be explained by improved diets, less smoking, better treatment of formerly fatal heart attacks and the improved treatment of risk factors with blood pressure and cholesterol medications. Now that death from cardiovascular diseases has been substantially reduced, overweight has even been found to protect against mortality. Studies have shown that in the event of illness overweight patients have a better chance of survival than those with normal weight or underweight. For cardiovascular diseases, mortality was found to be lower in cases of overweight and moderate obesity. Overweight also protects against hip fractures, which is plausible for the simple reason that fat serves as padding in the event of a fall. It is difficult to identify cause and effect in the relationship between overweight and mortality. The causality may be reversed: People are fatter because they are healthier. In any case, there is proof that overweight, expressed as a BMI of between 25 and 29.9, is associated with reduced mortality.

**Quality of life**

This does not mean however that overweight is healthier. What we have found is that overweight reduces the risk of mortality and that fatter people are better protected in the event of illness. And there's the crux: Overweight and obesity still increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases and diabetes and these diseases make many older people dependent on care. Recent research in the United States has shown that obesity among the 60-plus is strongly related to disabilities and impairments. In other words, people with overweight or

obesity do not die earlier, but they live longer in poor health. Quality of life and the measurement of years lived in good health have gained in importance in recent years. Not only do most people want to live longer, but they have an even stronger desire to live an independent, healthy life. It is important –in particular for the healthcare sector and for health insurers– to be able to estimate how many years on average people will be in need of care. Ongoing research at NIDI studies the effect of BMI on unhealthy years of life.

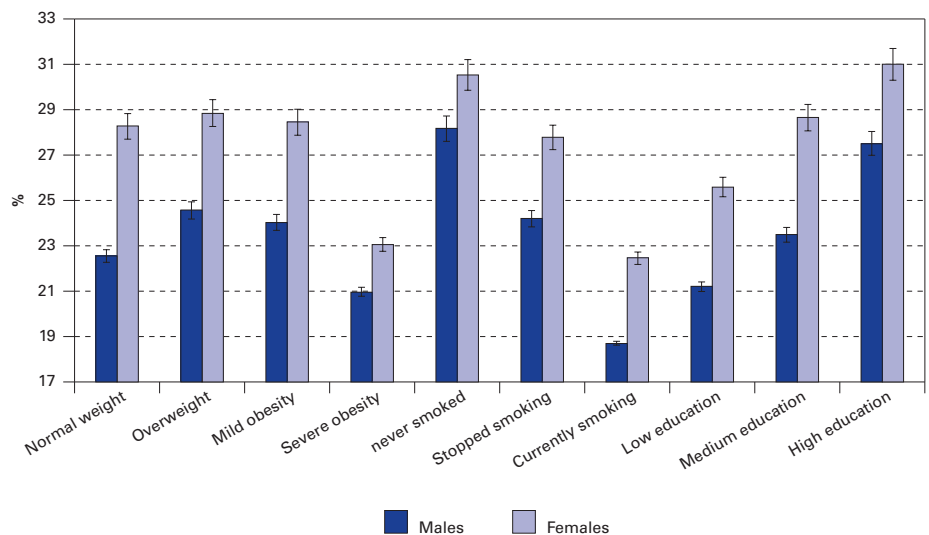
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Life expectancy at age 55 for males and females, separated by risk factors BMI, smoking and education. The error bars depict 95 percent confidence intervals



# Living happier ever after?

JUDITH SOONS

**In the world of social demography and beyond it will not come as a surprise that people who are married are better off in terms of happiness and health than single people. As the lifestyles of cohabiting couples are both similar and dissimilar to those of married couples, one may wonder whether their lives are more similar to those of married couples or to those of single people in terms of happiness and wellbeing.**

The growing number of couples living together outside of marriage has made it increasingly difficult to compare married and unmarried people as the lifestyle of cohabiting couples is very similar to that of married couples. In both cases partners run a joint household, children are born to couples inside and outside of marriage and the legal differences between marriage and cohabitation have become smaller.

That said, differences do exist between unmarried and married couples. For one, cohabiting couples are more likely to be dual earners, to have conflicts and to split up.

## Marriage and happiness

Various studies have compared married couples with cohabiting couples. These studies have shown that people in consensual unions tend to be happier than single people, but less happy than married couples. The same conclusion was also drawn in a study on the social integration of young adults in the Netherlands (PSIN). Whereas the average score on happiness among married couples was 7.9, cohabiting couples scored an average of 7.6. Both groups were found to be a great deal happier than singles (6.6) and somewhat happier than couples who did not share the same household (7.2). These scores show that happiness among people who are married is determined not only by the fact that they have a partner and share a household, but that marriage as such contributes uniquely to their wellbeing.

We do not yet know exactly how marriage contributes to happiness. A possible explanation for the difference between cohabiting and married couples could be that the former have more conflicts. We also see that cohabiting partners tend to differ more strongly in their opinions about the future and the durability of their relationships than married couples: whereas one of the partners might see cohabitation as a lifelong union, the other might see it as a trial relationship that can be fairly easily ended. This greater uncertainty regarding the future of the relationship could explain the fact that cohabiting couples have a weaker sense of happiness than married couples.

## Is sense of happiness lasting?

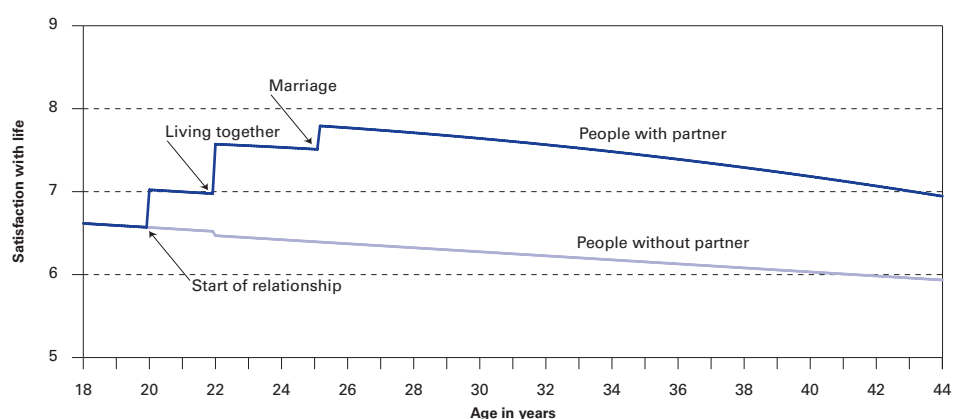
We have found that relationships make people feel happier. A logical question is then how long these feelings of happiness last, a question that has barely been examined to

date. There are reasons to assume that the sense of happiness subsides after a while, which would mean that in the long run relationships do not make people happier. Having said that, there are also reasons to assume that relationships do give people a lasting sense of happiness. Relationships offer certain advantages –also in the long run– that single people have to do without, such as more social support, participation in interesting activities, self-confidence, a sense of identity, and financial benefits. The value of these advantages is not likely to decrease over time. This idea was confirmed by the findings of the PSIN, namely that the wellbeing of couples drops somewhat over the years, but this decline was so slow, however, that even after having lived together for twenty years their sense of wellbeing had not yet dropped to the pre-relationship level. At the same time, we see that young adults who do not live with a partner become also slightly unhappier. A possible explanation for this could be that the probability of finding a partner declines strongly as one grows older, and that there appears to be an implicit age limit for marriage and also for cohabitation. This could give singles the feeling that they are falling by the wayside and this uncertainty in turn could lower their sense of wellbeing.

To conclude, we can say that, whereas living together with a partner contributes to happiness, marriage offers additional advantages that cohabitation does not offer. Both cohabiting couples and married couples, however, experience a lasting increase in happiness... people who live with a partner live happier ever after.

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Satisfaction with life in young adulthood (fictitious)



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