

Living Arrangements, Household Relationships and Admission to Care Homes

Key Findings:

- this study was based on 51,619 people aged 65 or over at the time of the 2001 Census not living in a care home. A third lived alone (74% of whom were female) and almost half lived in two person households;
- over a six-year period from 2001 to 2007, there were 2,138 care home admissions, a rate of 7.4 admissions per 1,000 person years;
- risk of admission increased with age, being female and poor health status;
- those living alone had the highest likelihood of admission but there was little difference between the never-married (less likely to have children) and those previously married (more likely to have children);
- living with children reduced admissions especially for married couples;
- women were more likely to be admitted than men, though there were no gender differences for people living alone or those co-habiting with siblings.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

A number of studies have reviewed the influence of factors such as living alone, household composition and size on admission to care homes for older people. This research assessed the separate contributions of selected indicators of social support, such as marital status, living arrangements and the presence of children to subsequent care home admission (nursing and residential homes).

METHODOLOGY

A longitudinal cohort analysis was conducted using the Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study (NILS) to examine the characteristics of those aged 65 or over at the time of the 2001 Census not living in a care home. Care home data from the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority was used to identify those who were admitted to a care home over a six year follow-up period.

Study members were analysed in relation to demographic characteristics (age, sex, and marital status) and self-reported morbidity using the limiting long-term illness and general health questions in the 2001 Census. Census data was also used to create novel classifications of households according to whether or not the cohort member was living alone; relationship to co-residents if not alone and marital status (co-habiting was treated as married).

The relationship between demographic, health and household characteristics and risk of admission during follow-up was investigated using Cox Proportional Hazards modelling.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Permanent admission to a care home is an expensive means of providing care for older people and most would prefer to remain in their own homes. In addition, the informal and unpaid support network provided by friends and relatives is probably a more important component of care in the community than statutory community care services.
- This research suggests that living with potential caregivers, rather than caregivers living elsewhere, is a major factor determining admission risk. Further research and policy decisions should therefore concentrate on the health and needs of co-residents. Projected numbers of older people living alone should be an important consideration in forecasting future demand for long term care.

Table: Risk of Admission to Care Home by Living Arrangements (Age and Health Adjusted Cox Proportional Hazards Ratios & 95% Confidence Intervals)

Living Arrangements:	Males	Females
Lives Alone:		
Never married	2.57 (1.99, 3.32)	1.86 (1.52, 2.27)
Widowed	1.44 (1.14, 1.82)	1.47 (1.26, 1.72)
Separated/Divorced	2.39 (1.55, 3.68)	1.18 (0.73, 1.90)
Married	1.94 (0.96, 3.93)	1.74 (1.12, 2.70)
Lives with Partner		
Partner and children	0.61 (0.43, 0.85)	0.82 (0.59, 1.14)
Partner and others	1.38 (0.77, 2.47)	0.47 (0.18, 1.27)
Siblings	2.39 (1.66, 3.45)	1.52 (1.17, 1.98)
Children	1.05 (0.69, 1.58)	0.90 (0.73, 1.11)
Others/complex	1.19 (0.78, 1.84)	1.11 (0.87, 1.42)

1.00 = reference category,
<1.00 = lower risk than living with partner
>1.00 = higher risk than living with partner

NORTHERN IRELAND LONGITUDINAL STUDY (NILS)

The NILS, a sister study to the Northern Ireland Mortality Study (NIMS), is a large-scale record linkage study based on an approximate 28% sample of the Northern Ireland population (c. 500,000 individuals). Sample members are linked to 2001 Census datasets and routinely updated administrative datasets. Both studies allow exploration of health and socio-demographic characteristics to provide an insight into the status of the Northern Ireland population.

The NILS Research Support Unit provides information, advice and support for potential academic and government research users of the NILS and NIMS databases. For further information please go to our website at www.nils-rsu.census.ac.uk.

This research brief is based on McCann M, Donnelly M, & O'Reilly D (2011) *Living arrangements, relationship to people in the household and admission to care homes for older people*. Age & Ageing. For further information please go to: [NILS RSU Publications](#).