

Comparative contexts of health and care: findings from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe

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The articles in this special issue of the European Journal of Ageing are based upon papers that were first presented in a symposium held within the framework of the 63rd Annual Scientific Meeting of the Gerontological Society of America in November, 2010, in New Orleans. The GSA's annual meeting is one of the leading global venues for the presentation of cutting-edge gerontological research. The theme for the 2010 annual meeting—Transitions of Care: Across the Ageing Continuum—provided a singularly appropriate opportunity to organize the first GSA symposium to be based upon research papers drawn from the database of SHARE—The Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe. This was because the SHARE database includes a rich range of topics that uniquely allow for the examination of trends and associations in the realm of care for older people. The current issue of EJA is devoted to the papers that emanated from this symposium.

SHARE is a multi-disciplinary cross-national longitudinal infrastructure for the enumeration and analysis of key aspects of ageing in some 20 countries. Initiated in 2004, the SHARE survey has now completed four waves of data collection, including a retrospective life history, from over 30,000 respondents aged 50 and older. Further information on the SHARE enterprise and its importance for the generation of policy-relevant information is provided in the review article in this collection by Axel Börsch-Supan.

The papers in the SHARE-based GSA symposium utilized the unique capacity of the SHARE data to examine the context of health and care for the older population and their varying configurations and effects in different

countries. The paper by George Ploubidis, Caroline Dale and Emily Grundy identifies country-level differences in somatic health as a function of the level of egalitarianism that exists in the various countries. Florence Jusot, Zeynep Or and Nicolas Sirven examine a country-specific effect on the probability of preventive health care utilization, after controlling for individual-level characteristics. The article by Joanna Geerts and Karel Van den Bosch considers the correlates of transitions across formal and informal care in the respective SHARE countries. Tina Schmid, Martina Brandt and Klaus Haberkern look specifically at the influence of contextual structures on inter-generational support in European countries and the effects of these features on gender inequality. Keren Ladin points, in her article, to the higher utilization of care services among depressed persons, regardless of national setting. Finally, the review article by Axel Börsch-Supan, the founding coordinator of SHARE, considers the papers in this collection in a policy perspective, focusing on the extent to which the identified contextual factors are amenable to change and the mechanisms which may bolster health and the delivery of care in ageing societies.

We are pleased to be able to make these papers available to the general public, after their having passed strict academic review by numerous reviewers who, by convention, must remain unnamed. The reviewers' timely and thoughtful comments were most helpful in bringing the papers to publication, and are warmly appreciated. Thanks are due, also, to the two Editors-in-Chief of the European Journal of Ageing—Dorly Deeg and Hans-Werner Wahl—who kindly gave their agreement to allow publication of the papers in EJA, along with providing critical reviews of their content. The result, we hope, will constitute an important contribution to the literature on the health and care of older people in Europe.

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Finally, it is important to note that the SHARE enterprise was made possible through generous funding from several key sources. SHARE was initially funded by the European Commission through the 5th framework programme (project QLK6-CT-2001-00360 in the thematic programme Quality of Life). Additional support by the European Commission through the 6th framework programme [projects SHARE-I3, RII-CT-2006-062193, as an Integrated Infrastructure Initiative, COMPARE, CIT5-CT-2005-028857, as a project in Priority 7, Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge Based Society, and SHARE-LIFE (CIT4-CT-2006-028812)] and through the 7th framework programme [SHARE-PREP (No. 211909) and SHARE-LEAP (No. 227822)] further strengthened the research potential of the SHARE database. Substantial co-funding came also from the U.S. National Institute on Ageing (U01 AG09740-13S2, P01 AG005842, P01 AG08291, P30 AG12815, R21 AG025169, Y1-AG-4553-01, IAG BSR06-11 and OGHA 04-064), and from the German Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF).

In addition, several of the SHARE countries that are addressed in the articles that appear in this special section of EJA benefited from national co-funding. Sweden was supported by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and

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