

Living Arrangements, Marital Status and Intergenerational Support in Puerto Rico

Nekehia Quashie

Department of Sociology, University of Utah



BACKGROUND

- Puerto Rico is at an advanced stage of population aging. In 2010, older adults 60 years and over accounted for 18% of the population (UN 2013).
- Globally, older women outnumber men. As such women are more likely to experience widowhood; a life stage that is typically characterized by social, economic, and health vulnerabilities. These are differentially experienced by men and women (Carr and Bodnar-Deren 2009).
- Vulnerabilities during widowhood may prompt a change in living arrangements to secure instrumental, social and health support. Intergenerational coresidence has been shown to be protective for older adults' well-being during widowhood (Hermalin et al 2002, Zhang, Li and Silverstein 2005).
- Similar to other developing countries, Puerto Rican social norms of familism and altruism assure that older adults are cared for by family members during vulnerable periods, which includes coresidential living (Garcia-Preto 1996; Gonzales 2007).
- At the same time, roughly half of older men and women 60 years and older lived alone in 2005 (UN 2005).
- Puerto Rican family structures are also characterized by matrifocality (Safa 1995, 2005). This has implications for differences in intergenerational support relations between widowed men and women. Further, widowed men and women may receive different forms of support from children based on their gender role specializations across the life course (Ha et al 2006).
- **Hypothesis 1:** Older adults widowed and living alone or with others will be more likely to receive support from children than married couples.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Widows and widowers living alone or with others will differ in their likelihood of receiving functional health support from children due to matrifocal household relations and gender role specialization across the life course.

DATA & METHODS

- Puerto Rican Elderly Health Conditions Survey (PREHCO). The sample was randomly selected from the 2000 Population and Household Census of the Census Bureau.
- 4291 older adults, 60 years and over, were interviewed at baseline (2003) and by follow-up in 2007, 3, 891 targets were re-interviewed.
- The analytical sample is based on 1990 elderly persons with at least 1 living child, who provided information across both waves of data collection.
- **Random effects logistic regression** is used to examine the likelihoods that elderly receive functional, health and emotional support from children, and the gender differences therein, between the two waves according to their living arrangements and marital status.
- **Functional support:** receipt of assistance with transportation, household chores or errands from at least 1 child. **Health Support:** receipt of assistance, from at least 1 child, when sick. **Emotional Support:** receipt of visits, companionship from at least 1 child.
- **Living Arrangements:** Couple living alone (ref), widowed alone, couple with others (including children) and widowed with others (including children).
- **Covariates:** gender and age of parent, number and location of living children, education, employment, monthly income, self-rated health, disability, cognitive impairment, region and year.

Description of Sample: Select Characteristics

Characteristics of Parents	Wave 1 (2003)	Wave 2 (2007)
% Married living alone	32.9	31.8
% Widowed living alone	21.7	24.7
% Married Couple with others	26.9	22.4
% Widowed with others	18.5	21.2
% Women	56.3	56.3
% Poor Health	12.4	11.7
% ADL	14.0	18.9
% IADL	28.1	31.9
% Receiving Functional Support	33.5	33.1
% Receiving Health Support	34.0	26.9
% Receiving Emotional Support	15.4	6.8

SELECT REFERENCES

- Garcia-Preto, Nydia. 1996. "Puerto Rican Families." Pp. 183-199 in *Ethnicity and Family Therapy*, edited by J. G. Monica McGoldrick, John K. Pearce. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Gonzales, Alicia M. 2007. "Determinants of Parent-Child Coresidence Among Older Mexican Americans: The Salience of Cultural Values." *Sociological Perspectives* 50:561-577.
- Safa, H. I. (1995). *The myth of the male breadwinner*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Safa, H. (2005). The matrifocal family and patriarchal ideology in Cuba and the Caribbean. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 10(2), 314-338.
- Zhang, W., Li, S., & Silverstein, M. (2005). The effects of inter-generational support on the mortality of older people in rural China. *Asian Population Studies*, 1(3), 325-338.

Random Effects Logistic Odds Ratios: Main Effects Support Received

Variables	Functional	Health	Emotional
Living Arrangements (Couple Alone)			
Widowed Alone	2.46***	4.97***	0.92***
Couple with others	2.41***	2.66***	0.92***
Widowed with others	5.64***	8.38***	1.81***
Gender (Women)			
Men	0.32***	0.29***	0.57***

Random Effects Logistic Odds Ratios: Main and Interaction Effects

Variables	Functional	Health	Emotional
Living Arrangements (Couple Alone)			
Widowed Alone	3.54**	5.05***	1.03
Couple with others	4.32***	5.71***	1.41***
Widows with others	7.45***	8.43***	1.93***
Gender (Women)			
Men	0.60***	0.42***	0.71***
Significant interactions			
Widowed alone x men	0.43***	1.30***	0.84***
Couple with others x men	0.33***	0.23***	0.45***
Widowed with others x men	0.68***	2.01***	1.23***

Discussion & Conclusion

- Similar to research in other collectivist cultures, widowhood is positively associated with the receipt of support from children.
- The salience of gender and matrifocality in family relations are also maintained in that fathers are consistently less likely than mothers to receive support from their children, regardless of living arrangement and marital status.
- The importance of life course gender role specialization for support relations is also apparent during widowhood. While widowers were less likely to receive functional support regardless of whether they live alone or with others, they were more likely to receive health-related support when sick.