

# Sociology Factsheet



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## The Ageing Population of Britain

Britain's population is getting older. Life expectancy is increasing and as people live longer there are more elderly people in society.

This Factsheet will look at:

- The number of elderly people in the population.
- The reasons why there is an ageing population in Britain today.
- The effects of an increasing elderly population on individuals and British society.

The information in this Factsheet will be useful for questions in many different areas of the sociology specifications including:

- Culture and Identity
- Family and households
- Health
- Work, Poverty and Welfare
- Stratification and differentiation

### What is meant by an ageing population?

Population ageing is a phenomenon that occurs when the median age of a country or region rises due to rising life expectancy and/or declining fertility rates.

### What is the age structure of the British population?

Age structure for men and women

Age group	Male (millions)	Female (millions)	All (millions)
0-14	5.681	5.419	11.100
15-64	20.751	20.953	41.704
65+	4.597	5.781	10.378
All ages	31.029	32.153	63.182

#### Activity

Summarise what these figures show about the age of the population of the UK?

**Exam Hint:** Explaining statistics and trends in your exam answers will provide evidence for what you are writing.

### How has the population structure in the UK changed over time?

The number of people aged 65 and over increased from 15 per cent in 1985 to 17 per cent in 2010, an increase of 1.7 million people. By 2035 it is projected that those aged 65 and over will account for 23 per cent of the total population.

### Age distribution of the UK population, 1974 to 2034 (projected)

	Population aged 0-15 (%)	Population aged 16-64 (%)	Population aged 65 and over (%)
1974	25.2	61.0	13.8
1984	21.0	64.1	14.9
1994	20.7	63.4	15.8
2004	19.5	64.5	15.9
2014	18.8	63.5	17.7
2024	19.0	61.1	19.9
2034	18.1	58.5	23.3

#### Activity

Summarise what these figures show about the age of the population of the UK from 1974 to 2034.

### Let's look at some facts about the population:

- Only 1% of those born in 1908 lived to 100 but around a third of children born in the UK in 2012 are expected to live to 100.
- In the UK in 1901 life expectancy at birth was around 45 for men and 49 for women. In 2012 -14 life expectancy at birth for men in the UK reached 79.1 years and for women it reached 82.8 years.
- Between 1901 and 2010, the number of people aged 40 and older trebled from 9.7m to 30.8m.
- In 2012 the number of over 65's and older in the UK surpassed 10 million for the first time. By 2040, this number is expected to grow to 15 million.
- In 2000 there were 11.2 million people under the age of 15 in the UK. By 2040, this will have decreased to 8.7 million.
- There are currently 11 million people in the UK between 45 and 60, the so-called 'baby boomers'. They own 70% of the nation's wealth. In 20 years they could own 85-90% of disposable income in the UK.
- In 1999 the working population amounted to 47.8% of the total UK population. By 2030 it will be 44.5%. This could mean a shortfall of two million workers.

#### Activity

Discuss these facts with other students.

Make two lists:

- what are the advantages of an increasing elderly population?
- what are the disadvantages of an increasing elderly population?

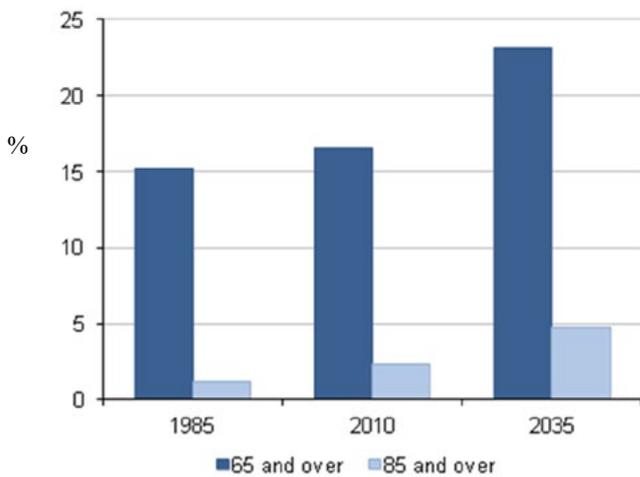
**Exam Hint:** When discussing demography always be aware of the reasons behind the statistics.

### The 'Oldest Old'

As well as a rise in the number of people aged 65 and over there is also an increase in the number of people over 85 years old. These are referred to as the 'oldest old'.



As a result of falling birth rates and rising life expectancy, there will be a projected 151% rise in the global population of this group in the period between 2005 and 2030. This compares to a 21% rise in people aged 0 to 64. Partly due to the 'baby boom' generation (people born 1945-55) now reaching their retirement years, the UK is set to have one of the highest proportions of oldest old people of any country. It is estimated that by 2035, 5% of the UK population (3.5 million people) will be aged 85 and over.



### Percentage of older people in the UK 1985, 2010, 2035

Source: Office for National Statistics, National Records of Scotland, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency ONS.

#### Activity

What does this graph tell us about the changes in the elderly population?

### Why do we have an ageing population in the UK?

The decline in the death rate and increased life expectancy have meant that people are living longer. This has occurred for a number of reasons:

- Improvements in the National Health Service** can provide medical care for people throughout their lives to enable them to live longer.
- Development in technology** has helped increase life expectancy, e.g. heart transplants, pacemakers, etc.
- Medical advancements** have reduced death rates. Research has provided a greater knowledge of causes of ill health and the introduction of vaccines, blood transfusions, antibiotics, etc., have meant that more people survive serious illnesses today.
- Better nutrition** has improved life expectancy rates because people are more able to fight off infection.
- Improved hygiene, sanitation, and medicine** has helped in the reduction of many killer diseases such as cholera and typhoid.
- Health Education.** There is a growing awareness of nutrition and its importance to health. People are much better informed about the implications of poor lifestyles.
- Improved working conditions.** Technology has taken over some of the areas that caused ill health. Higher standards of Health and Safety

at work, shorter working hours, and more leisure time have all made work physically less demanding and have reduced risks to health.

**Exam Hint:** You will need to know some of the causes of increased life expectancy. Make sure you know some of these and you can explain them in detail.

### Research

Griffiths and Brock (2003) carried out research into declining death rates and found that infectious diseases have declined to low levels. The declining death rates, they believed, were also due to hygiene and improved nutrition. The study shows how better nutrition also helped to increase people's resistance to infectious diseases.

### What challenges and opportunities does an increasing ageing population create for society?

An ageing population poses economic, social, and political challenges and increases the dependency of older citizens on those of working age. However, there are also some advantages of an ageing population.

**Exam Hint:** Don't automatically think that an ageing population is a problem for society. You must always look at the broader picture by looking at the advantages and disadvantages.

### The Advantages of an Ageing Population

Rising life expectancy means older people are effectively healthier and fitter than previous generations.

In many families today, both parents are in paid employment and grandparents often play an important role in providing unpaid childcare.



Grandparents play an important role in providing financial, practical, and emotional assistance to family members.

Older people, are in general, more law abiding than younger people, so societies with ageing populations are likely to have lower crime rates. As people live longer they are working longer therefore contributing to society for longer.

As the population ages, more elderly people play a wider role in the community. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport's 'Taking Part' survey in 2013-14 found nearly 4.9 million people aged 65 and over in England (58%) took part in volunteering, for example raising money, providing transport, helping to run charity events, etc.

As people are living longer, their retirement period is longer which leads to the emergence of a new area of consumerism. For example: the over 50s buy 80% of all top of the range cars, 50% of skincare products, and 80% of leisure cruises.



As the population ages there will be an increasing need for more care homes and more trained carers and specialists in elderly care. This creates more jobs in society.

### The Disadvantages and Problems of an Ageing Population

**Burden of dependence.** The growing number of elderly people in the population creates a burden of dependence – an increasing dependency ratio. As the number of elderly people increases, there are less people in the working population to support them. The relationship between the economically productive part of the population and non-workers means that there will be less people of working age and more dependent people.

There will be gaps in the job market as people retire. During the extended period of work, people will have build up skills and expertise which will be difficult to replace.

**Isolation.** Older people are facing growing isolation as partners die. This has led to an increase in single person households. The possibility of not being able to cope on their own can then create stress within the wider family as family members try to cope with an ageing parent. In some cases they might move into the family home which may lead to overcrowding and/or tension between family members.

**More work for women.** The practical issues of caring for elderly relatives generally falls upon the women in the family. Older women in particular are taking on more caring responsibilities, with a quarter of women aged between 50 and 64 regularly caring for an ill, frail or disabled relative. Feminists would argue that this is on top of the dual burden and triple shift which women might already be performing.



### Activity

Make sure you can explain what the dual burden and triple shift are.

**More ill health and disability.** Ageing normally brings with it more ill health and diseases which will require intervention from health care professionals, social services, or family.

**Pressure on healthcare and social services.** As people get older and require more help and support, either within hospitals or within their own home, the financial burdens on the NHS and care providers increase. This is particularly the case for the increasing number of the oldest old who are more likely to have their activities limited by poor health, have difficulty visiting friends and family, less likely to have access to a car, etc. About half of spending on hospital and community health services in Britain is for people over 65.

The rising demand from the oldest old for health and social care provision is creating significant cost pressures for the welfare state. According to Cracknell (2010) the average annual cost of hospital and community health services for someone aged 85 and over is three times greater than for a person aged 65 – 74.

**Care Homes.** There is a need to build more care homes and a need to train more care workers to look after the increasing number of elderly people. Not all families can afford to pay for care and this cost will inevitable fall on the tax payers.

**Housing shortages.** Young people may have difficulty in finding affordable homes of their own as older people occupy their homes for longer. Elderly people may prefer to stay in their family home rather than 'downsize' which reduces the number of family homes available for growing families.

**Pensions.** Pressure on state pension costs has been caused by rising life expectancy. As there is a fall in the ratio of workers to pensioners this pressure will increase. Consequently the minimum state pension entitlement age has risen. It is likely that the UK will see future rises in the state pension age directly linked to increases in life expectancy, to sustain the long term viability of the state pension. When pensions were introduced in the early 1900s there were 22 people of working age in Britain for every retired person. In 2024 there will be less than three.

### Activity

<https://www.gov.uk/yourstatepension?gclid=CIVmb7P388CFRRmGwodwisAMQ>

Look at the above website and research your retirement age. Compare this to the retirement age of your parents and your grandparents.

### What is being done in to tackle the issue?

- The age of retirement has increased and will continue to increase as life expectancy increases.
- Young people are being encouraged to save more through pension schemes.
- More residential homes are being built.

### Activity

Investigate what else is being done to address the issues raised by an ageing population.

**Exam Hint:** How could you use the information in this Factsheet in the different areas of the specification?

Culture and identity	The elderly have a different identity today. They are more active and are able to do more than in previous generations. Families often take on the responsibility of looking after elderly relatives which may influence family structure and roles within families.
Families and households	Demographic changes in the UK. Use statistics to show the changes
Health	As people get older they require more help and support, either within hospitals or within their own home. This increase in demand has financial implications. About half of spending on hospital and community health services in Britain is for people over 65.
Work, poverty, and Welfare	More elderly people are working today and need to work longer in order to receive their pension. An ageing population creates a greater demand on the welfare state.
Stratification and differentiation	Age structure in the UK and different approaches to an ageing population.

Add some points of your own to this table.

### Exam Questions

1. Outline three reasons for the increase in life expectancy.
2. Outline three consequences for society of an ageing population.

**Exam Hint:** Make sure you can distinguish between reasons and consequences. If a question asks you for reasons and consequences make sure you address both parts of the question

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