

Current topics in kinship demography

Diego Alburez Gutiérrez[†]

[†]Kinship Inequalities Research Group,
Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research

IDEM 128: Matrix Approaches to Modelling Kinship: Theory
and Applications
9 May 2023



MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE
FOR DEMOGRAPHIC
RESEARCH

MAX-PLANCK-INSTITUT
FÜR DEMOGRAFISCHE
FORSCHUNG

Agenda

1. Kinship Demography: Why and what
2. Example: Kin structure and intergenerational transfers
3. Example: The lived experience of kin loss

Kinship Demography: Why and what

Kinship as a demographic human universal

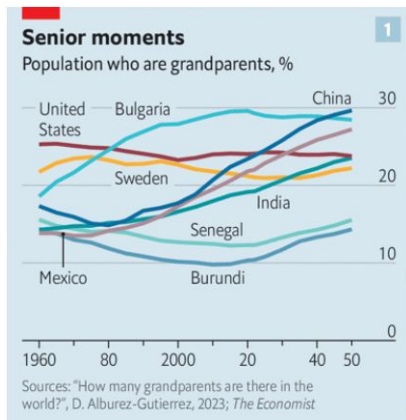
- ① All humans are born
- ② All humans die
- ③ All humans are embedded in kinship structures¹
- ④ No particular family configuration is universal or stable

¹Caswell, H. (2019). The formal demography of kinship: A matrix formulation. *Demographic Research*, 41, 679–712

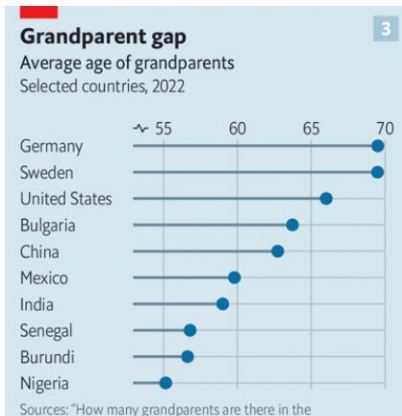
The role of kinship in human societies

- ① Socialisation, protection, and sustenance
- ② Inter-generational solidarity: exchanges and bequests
- ③ Social structure and identity
- ④ Determinant of later-life outcomes

Great societal interest²



The Economist



²'The age of the grandparent has arrived.' (Jan 2023). The Economist.

<https://www.economist.com/international/2023/01/12/the-age-of-the-grandparent-has-arrived>

Working definitions (1)³

Kinship

Social relationships that bind individuals together through culturally shared definitions of relatedness on biological, legal, or normative grounds, ultimately constituting family systems.

Family

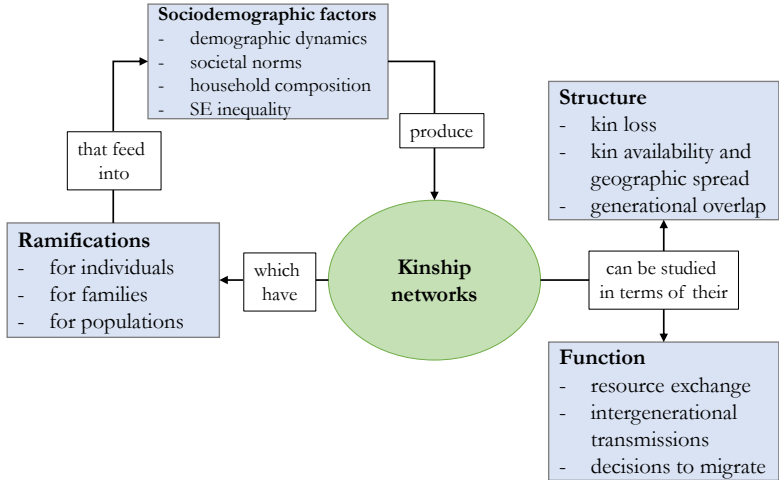
More narrow group of kin given special privilege which, among other things, organize the provision of support, socialization, and social placement of its members.

³Alburez-Gutierrez, D., Barban, N., Caswell, H., Kolk, M., Margolis, R., Smith-Greenaway, E., Song, X., Verdery, A., & Zagheni, E. (2022). Kinship, Demography, and Inequality: Review and Key Areas for Future Development. *SocArXiv*. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/fk7x9>

Working definitions (2)

Kinship demography

The study of family networks, their structures and dynamics from a demographic perspective and using demographic methods.



Active areas of interest

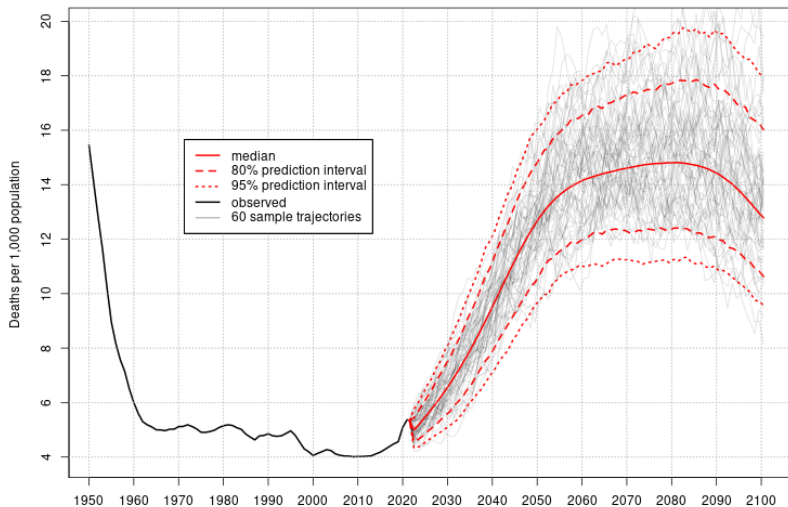
- ① Kin structure and intergenerational transfers
- ② Lived experience of kin loss
- ③ Role of kinship in social stratification
- ④ Formal and methods development
- ⑤ → Kinship and migration, health...

Example: Kin structure and intergenerational transfers

Data

- 1 2022 Revision of the United Nations World Population Prospects (UNWPP)
- 2 Empirical data (1950-2021) and probabilistic projections (2021-2100)
- 3 Countries with pop $>1\text{M}$
- 4 1,000 probabilistic trajectories per country

Singapore: Annual number of deaths per 1,000 population

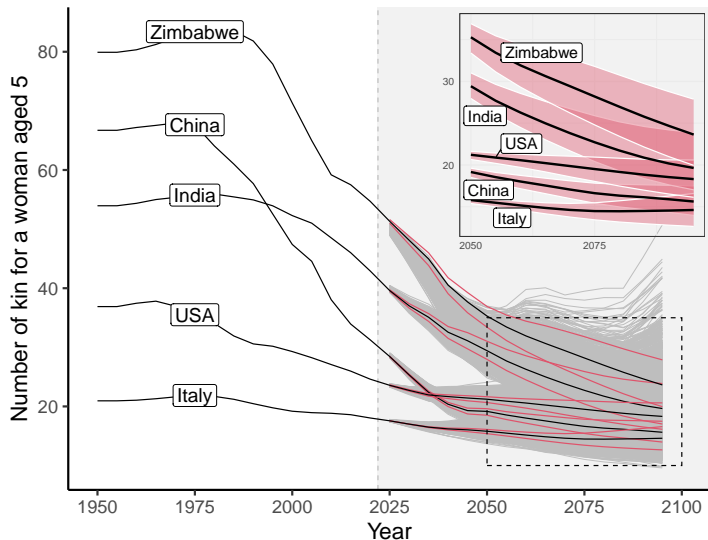


© 2022 United Nations, DESA, Population Division. Licensed under Creative Commons license CC BY 3.0 IGO.
United Nations, DESA, Population Division. World Population Prospects 2022. <http://population.un.org/wpp/>

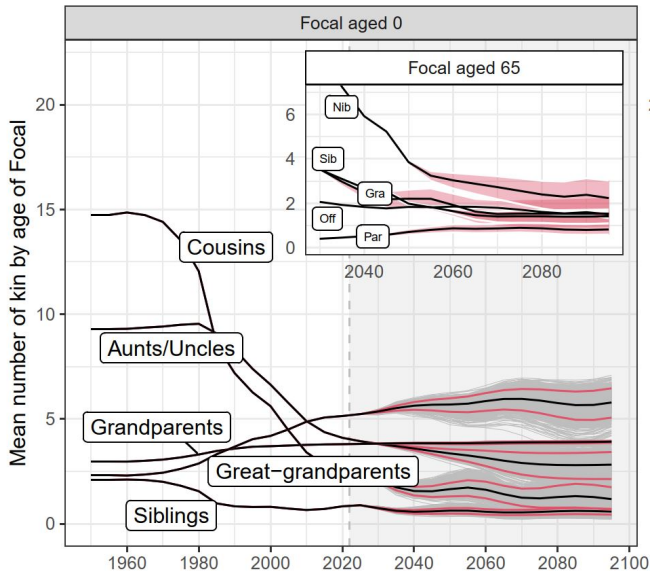
Results (I): Changes in family size

- 1 Expected number of kin (all kin combined) for a number of countries
- 2 Expected number of kin by type of relative in China
 - ▶ at the start of life
 - ▶ around retirement (age 65)

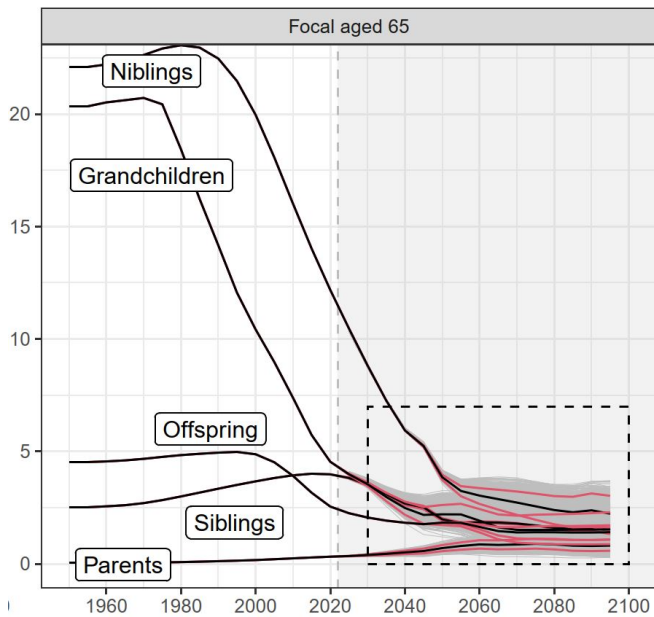
Total number of kin (all kin combined) for a 5yo woman



Number of living kin for a newborn in China



Number of living kin for a 65yo in China



Key points

- ① Shrinking kinship networks:
 - ▶ Fewer relatives at young age
 - ▶ More kin at old age
- ② Losses from horizontal kin (siblings, cousins, nieces)
- ③ Gains from vertical older kin (grandparents, parents, uncles)
- ④ Legacy of high fertility → larger and younger kinship networks

Implications

- ① Changes in kin supply matter to individuals (providers and consumers of informal care)
- ② Slimmer kinship structures put pressure on social support
- ③ Rising kin dependency ratios?

Example: The lived experience of kin loss

Death and loss

“People living through [the Covid-19 pandemic] do not experience the world by weekly rates; they perceive mortality risk through the experiences of their own social network.”⁴

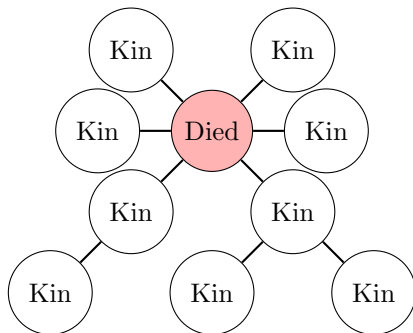
⁴Trinitapoli, J. (2021). Demography Beyond the Foot. In L. MacKellar & R. Friedman (Eds.), *Covid-19 and the Global Demographic Research Agenda* (pp. 68–72). Population Council

Demographic change and the lived experience of kin loss

- ① Excess mortality from Covid-19 (March 2020 to June 2021)
- ② Some deaths would not have happened in the absence of the pandemic
- ③ Some people would not have lost a relative (i.e., 'bereaved')

The 'bereavement multiplier' approach

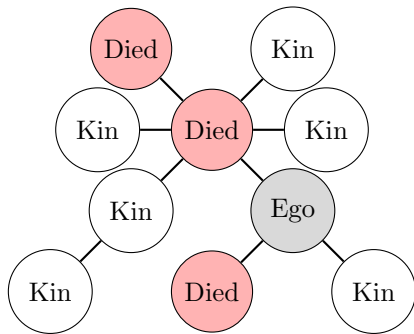
"...every death from COVID-19 will leave approximately nine bereaved."⁵



⁵Verdery, A. M., Smith-Greenaway, E., Margolis, R., & Daw, J. (2020).

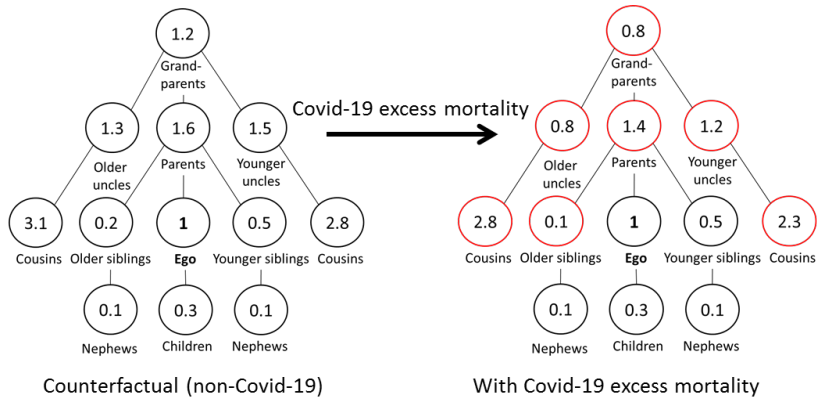
Tracking the reach of COVID-19 kin loss with a bereavement multiplier applied to the United States. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117(30), 17695. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2007476117>

'Excess bereavement': the survivor's perspective⁶

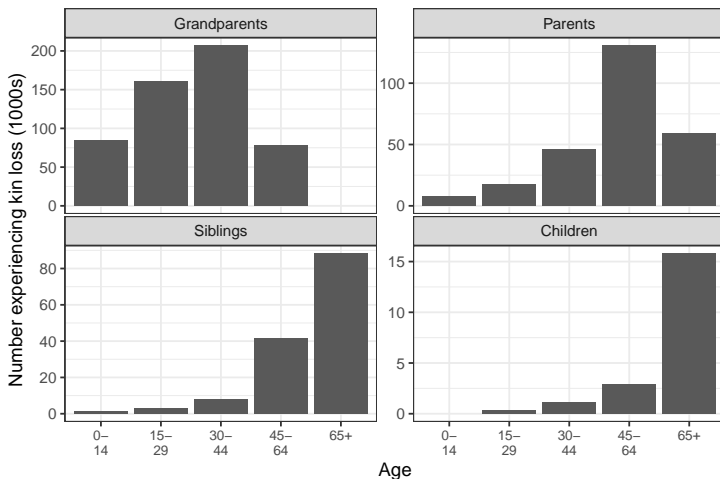


⁶Snyder, M., Alburez-Gutierrez, D., Williams, I., & Zagheni, E. (2022). Estimates from 31 countries show the significant impact of COVID-19 excess mortality on the incidence of family bereavement. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 119(26), e2202686119.
<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2202686119>

Kin loss in the context of Covid-19



How many people in the UK lost a relative to Covid-19?⁷



⁷Snyder, M., Alburez-Gutierrez, D., Williams, I., & Zagheni, E. (2022).

Estimates from 31 countries show the significant impact of COVID-19 excess mortality on the incidence of family bereavement. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 119(26), e2202686119.

<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2202686119>

How many people lost a relative to Covid-19?⁸

Kin lost	Norway	Sweden
Grandparents	.7	44
Parents	.3	20
Siblings	.1	10
Children	.1	.8

Table: Bereaved individuals (1000's)

⁸Snyder, M., Alburez-Gutierrez, D., Williams, I., & Zagheni, E. (2022). Estimates from 31 countries show the significant impact of COVID-19 excess mortality on the incidence of family bereavement. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 119(26), e2202686119.
<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2202686119>

Mortality from a kinship perspective

- 1 Mortality \Rightarrow kin loss \Rightarrow bereavement
- 2 Mortality crises 'accelerate' the experience of bereavement
- 3 Implications for individuals and populations

$$\text{Kin Loss} \approx \text{Mortality} \times \text{Kinship Structure}$$

Concluding thoughts

- ① Demography will continue shaping kinship dynamics
- ② amidst growing family complexity and geographic spread
- ③ demographers are ideally placed to study these changes

Kinship Inequalities Research Group at the MPIDR



Bettina Hünteler

**kinship and social
inequalities**



Andrea Colasurdo

**kinship and
migration**



Amanda Martins
de Almeida

**kinship and
health**