

5. Social activity

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The analysis in this chapter shows that:

- Overall, greater percentages of women than men provide care, although this is not the case for providing care for a spouse, where rates are equal.
- Most carers provide between 1 and 19 hours of care a week. A quarter of carers provide round-the-clock care.
- In general, those in poorer health are less likely to belong to organisations such as political parties or trade unions, charities or sports clubs.
- Those in more managerial and professional occupational groups tend to be more likely to be a member of an organisation other than social clubs, where the opposite is true.
- Around 50% of people aged 50 and older say that they go to the cinema, opera or theatre or visit an art gallery or museum. Almost all say that they eat out of the house sometimes.
- Those in older age groups, poorer health or more routine and manual occupational groups are less likely to participate in these activities.
- Those in older age groups are more likely to have voted in the last general election.
- Access to email and the Internet is strongly related to age (younger people have greater access), occupational class (those in the managerial and occupational classes have greater access) and gender (men have greater access than women).

There is a growing awareness that a significant proportion of those who have retired are enjoying an active and relatively healthy lifestyle (Laslett, 1996; Gilleard and Higgs, 2000; Hirsch, 2000; Scase and Scales, 2000). In *A Fresh Map of Life*, Peter Laslett argued that older age should no longer be seen as a residual category of the life course whose inhabitants are preoccupied with decrepitude and death. The fact that people are living longer, healthier lives with more disposable income in their retirement means that older age should be seen as the ‘crown of life’ in which people are free to develop themselves and their interests (Laslett, 1996). Although these arguments are not without their critics (Bury, 1995), they do illustrate that the nature and expectations of retirement have changed over the past few decades. Increasingly, older age is seen and portrayed as a time of leisure and personal enjoyment. The expansion of the Universities of the Third Age (Carnegie Inquiry into the Third Age, 1993) and the increasing participation of older people in a variety of leisure pursuits (Hogg, 1993; Midwinter, 1992; Office for National Statistics, 1999;

Hirsch, 2000) and foreign travel (Burnett, 1991) show that older people are keen to develop new interests. The growing number of websites designed for older people, such as www.boomercafe.com and www.thirdage.com, demonstrates that older people are also engaging with information technology and Internet services. Social and cultural participation is not only inherently worthwhile, but has also been shown to be associated with improved health and quality of life amongst the older population (Evenson et al., 2002; Di Mauro et al., 2001; Silverstein and Parker, 2002). Increasingly, national and local government focus is on promoting an active life in older age (Department of Health, 2001) and improving access to leisure activities, email and Internet for older people (National Audit Office, 2003).

There is growing interest in the amount and degree of productive ageing both from governments and from older people themselves. Productive ageing is generally defined as activities done by older people that contribute, directly or indirectly, to economic productivity (Bass and Caro, 2001). No longer being in paid work does not mean that one does not contribute to the community and society at large. The UK government has clearly identified the voluntary and caring work done by older people as a crucial benefit to the nation (Department of Social Security, 2000). However, if the unpaid work that older people do is taken for granted, it could have a deleterious impact on their physical and mental health due to the increased stress of unrewarded work (Siegrist, Knesebeck and Pollack, forthcoming). There are many types of activities that contribute to productive ageing and that can benefit others, although different social groups are likely to be more involved in certain activities than others (Burr, Caro and Moorhead, 2002). For example, most individuals provide informal care to sick or disabled others at some point in their lives, with the onset of caring episodes peaking in late middle and early older age (Hirst, 2002). The economic and societal value of informal, or unpaid, carers to older people in the UK has been highlighted by a recent government paper and national strategy (*Caring about Carers*, 1999). The extent to which older people are able to provide care to others may depend on their own health; in turn, having onerous or stressful caring responsibilities may also adversely affect the health of carers (Schulz and Beach, 1999).

5.1 Methods

ELSA respondents were asked whether they have looked after anyone in the last week, the relation of the care recipient to the respondent, and the number of hours spent caring during the past week. These hours were categorised into low (up to 19 hours/week), medium (20 to 49 hours/week), high (50 to 167 hours/week) and round-the-clock (168 hours/week). As a measure of cultural participation, respondents were asked how often they went to the cinema, ate out of the house, went to a museum or art gallery and went to the theatre or opera. For each activity respondents said whether they went more than twice a month, once or twice a month, a couple of times a year, once a year, less than once a year, or never. These answers were transformed to show whether respondents ever did these activities or if they never did them. Those who said that they did an activity less than once a year or never were asked an additional question about whether they would like to go more often but felt

that they were obstructed from doing so. In the self-completion section of the interview, respondents were asked whether they were members of any of the following organisations: political party, trade union or environmental groups; tenants' groups or residents' groups; neighbourhood watch; church or other religious groups; charitable associations; education, art or music groups or evening classes; social club; sports clubs, gym or exercise classes; or any other organisations, clubs or societies. In the same section, they were asked whether they were involved in any of the following social and civic activities: whether they voted in the last general election, read a daily newspaper, had a hobby, had been on a holiday in the UK in the last 12 months, had been on a holiday abroad in the last 12 months, had been on a day trip in the last 12 months, used email or the Internet, and had a mobile phone.

5.2 Carers and caring

Overall, men and women are approximately equally likely to report looking after their spouse (6.4% of men, 6.5% of women), with more women than men before the age of 70 caring for their spouse and the pattern reversing after age 70. Across age groups, women are more likely to look after children or grandchildren than men, with the prevalence of child/grandchild care within each sex peaking at ages 60–64 (5.4% for men, 11.0% for women). Women are also more likely to be looking after their parents or parents-in-law, with the 50–54 age group having the highest proportions within each sex of those engaged in this kind of care (6.5% for men, 11.2% for women), and subsequently declining with age. Although more women than men look after other relatives or friends, the overall percentages, across age groups, are smaller than for the other categories of care recipients (2.1% for men, 3.7% for women). The proportion of respondents providing this type of care peaks at ages 65–69 within both sexes. (Figures 5.1 and 5.2, Table 5A.1)

Figure 5.1. Percentage of men providing care to someone in last week, by care recipient

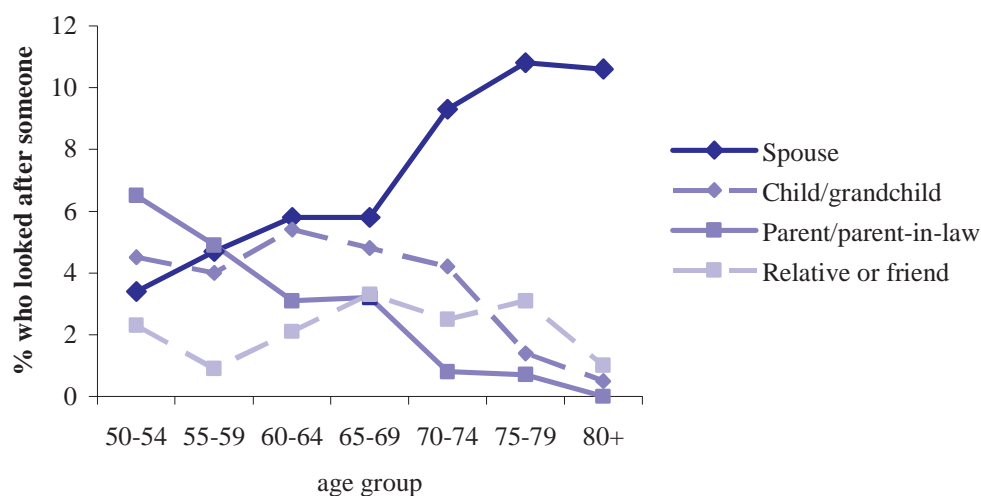
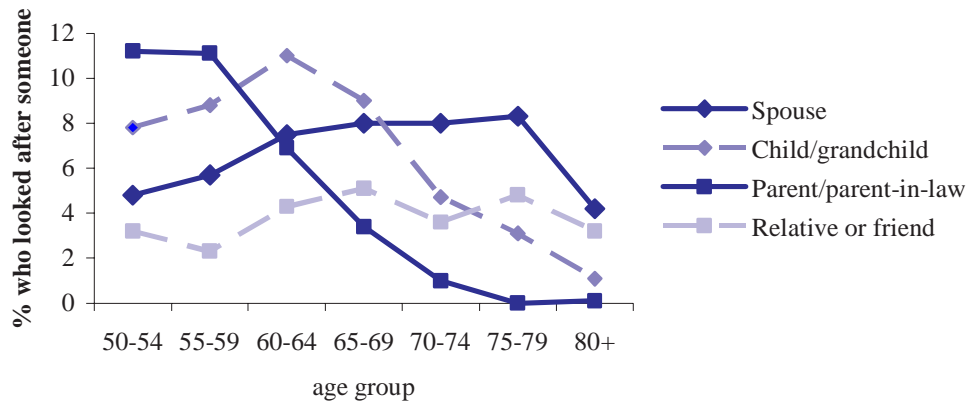


Figure 5.2. Percentage of women providing care to someone in last week, by care recipient



The majority of carers (defined as those who identified themselves as having looked after someone in the last week) provided less than 20 hours of care in the last week (52.5% of men and 50.7% of women, averaged across age groups). However, approximately a quarter of carers of both sexes reported caring for someone 168 hours in the last week – that is, round-the-clock caring. Round-the-clock care increases in prevalence with age for both men and women, and is particularly high among male carers aged 80 and over, of whom 59.1% provide this level of care. This suggests that caring responsibilities become more intense with advancing age. (Table 5A.2)

Unmarried respondents of both sexes are clearly less likely to provide any care to spouses (with a small number of individuals providing care to divorced or separated spouses), and are also less likely to be providing care to children or grandchildren. However, unmarried men aged 50–59 are more likely than their married counterparts to care for a parent or parent-in-law (7.1% compared with 5.3%) and up to age 75 are more likely to look after a friend or relative. Unmarried women of all ages are also somewhat more likely to look after a parent or parent-in-law, or friend or other relative, than their married counterparts. Unmarried people of both sexes are the least likely to provide round-the-clock care to someone, probably due to this group not providing care to spouses. (Tables 5A.3 and 5A.4)

Self-reported health interacts differently with informal caring depending on the recipient of care and the age of the carer. For both sexes and up to age 75, there is a gradient such that those in fair/poor health have higher rates of caregiving for their spouse or partner than those in good or excellent / very good health. This may reflect either the obligatory nature of the spouse-caring role or a negative impact of providing spousal care on the carer’s own health. For example, 9.4% of women and 9.6% of men aged 60–74 who said that they had fair or poor health reported caring for their spouse compared with 6.6% and 4.1% respectively of those in excellent / very good health. This pattern is not found universally across care recipients, however; for example, among both women and men aged 60–74, there is a gradient such that the better one’s self-reported health, the greater the likelihood of providing care for a relative or friend. (Table 5A.5)

In general, greater percentages of carers in excellent / very good health provide low or moderate levels of care than of those in poorer health, while, in turn, those in poorer health have greater rates of round-the-clock care-giving than those in better health. For example, 64.0% of male carers and 56.9% of female carers in excellent / very good health aged between 60 and 74 report giving up to 19 hours of care a week, while these proportions are 39.0% and 32.8% respectively among carers with fair/poor health. Averaged across age groups, 39.1% of male carers and 34.6% of female carers in fair/poor health provide round-the-clock care, compared with 19.3% and 17.5% respectively among those in excellent / very good health. (Table 5A.6)

The tables showing the relationship between economic activity and informal caring highlight the trade-off between paid and unpaid work. Men and women who are not economically active are generally more likely to be providing care than those who are employed. Exceptions to this include women aged between 60 and 74 who report looking after children/grandchildren (8.9% of employed women versus 8.3% of not employed women do so) or parents/parents-in-law (5.1% versus 3.7%). Not surprisingly, employed carers of both sexes under age 75 are less likely to provide round-the-clock care and more likely to provide light care (less than 20 hours of care per week) than their economically inactive counterparts. (Tables 5A.7 and 5A.8)

5.3 Organisational membership

The proportions of older people who are members of an organisation vary by age, sex and type of organisation. For both sexes, those in age groups below the respective state retirement age have the highest percentages of members of a political party, trade union or environmental group. The pattern is somewhat reversed for membership of a tenants' or neighbourhood organisation and for membership of a church or religious organisation, where, with two exceptions, those under the state retirement age have lower percentages of members. For all age groups, greater percentages of men than women report being members of a political party, trade union or environmental group. Women of all age groups are more likely than men to belong to a charitable organisation. For both men and women, the rates of membership of a sports club are over twice as great in the age group 50–54 years (23.6% and 26.3%) as in the age group 80 and older (9.3% and 5.4%). (Table 5A.9)

In almost all cases, those in poorer health are less likely to be members of any organisation. For example, around a quarter to a third of men who say that they are in excellent or very good health in the 50–59 age group are members of a sports club or of a political party or trade union, compared with 9.2% and 17.4% respectively amongst those who say that they have fair or poor health. However, amongst men in the younger age groups, those with poorer health are slightly more likely to be members of a social club. Amongst the 50–59 age group, 22.6% of those in fair or poor health belong to a social club, compared with 20.7% of those in excellent or very good health. In the 60–74 age group, 27.5% of those in poor health belong to a social club compared with 24.9% of those in excellent or very good health. (Table 5A.10)

Although, in general, those in the higher occupational groups are more likely to be members of an organisation, the relationship is not entirely clear. For example, for the 50–59 age group, 30.8% of men and 36.7% of women in the managerial and professional occupational group are members of a sports club, compared with 15.0% and 16.1% respectively of those in routine and manual occupations. There are similar socio-economic gradients in the membership of tenants' groups and neighbourhood watch organisations. For both men and women in all age groups, those in the top socio-economic groups are around twice as likely to be members of such an organisation as those in the lower occupational groups. However, the trend is reversed for membership of a social club. In all age groups and for both sexes, higher proportions of those in the routine and manual occupational group are members of a social club than of those in the higher socio-economic groups. The difference in the rates of membership between the top and bottom occupational classes is greater for men than for women. Just under a third of men in the lowest socio-economic group aged 50–59 and 60–74 are members of a social club, compared with 16.2% and 21.3% respectively of those in the managerial and professional occupational group. Amongst men, there is no clear pattern of socio-economic difference in membership of a political party or trade union. Around a quarter of men in the managerial and professional occupational group and routine and manual occupations aged 50–59 are members of a political party or a trade union, compared with 14.2% of those in intermediate occupations. However, amongst women, there is a clear pattern of difference, with those from the higher occupational groups reporting higher percentages than those in the lower groups. (Table 5A.11)

Number of organisations

The majority of both men and women in the sample are a member of at least one organisation. However, women are more likely than men not to be a member of any organisation. 37.2% of men and 41.5% of women say that they do not belong to any organisation. Yet women are slightly more likely to be members of four or more organisations. 8.3% of men and 9.1% of women are members of four or more organisations. In general, there is an increase with increasing age in the percentages of people who say that they are not a member of any organisation for both men and women. 31.8% of men and 37.9% of women aged between 50 and 54 say that they are not a member of an organisation, compared with 50.0% of men and 50.6% of women aged over 80. There is a corresponding general decline in the rates of people who say that they are members of either one organisation or two or three organisations amongst both men and women with increasing age. However, amongst men, those aged between 70 and 74 have the highest rate for reporting being in four or more organisations (10.2%), and amongst women it is those in the age group 65–69 who have the highest rates (11.3%). (Table 5A.12)

For both men and women, those who say that they are in excellent or very good health have the lowest percentages who are not members of any organisations. For men, 29.4% of those in excellent or very good health say that they are not members of any organisation, compared with 35.2% of those in good health and 51.3% of those in fair or poor health. Amongst women, the corresponding figures are 32.8%, 41.5% and 55.1%. However, there is little

difference in the percentages of people who are in one organisation between those who report different states of health. Amongst women, 24.4% of those in excellent or very good health are in one organisation compared with 23.7% of those in good health and 23.5% of those in fair or poor health. The corresponding figures for men are 27.7%, 26.2% and 25.9%. (Table 5A.13)

Amongst men, those in the managerial and professional occupational groups are much less likely than those in either the intermediate or routine and manual groups to report being a member of any organisation. Around a quarter of men in the managerial and professional occupational group report not being a member of an organisation, compared with 40.6% of men in the intermediate occupational groups and 45.4% in the routine and manual groups. Amongst women, there is also a difference between the intermediate and routine and manual occupational groups. 23.3% of women in managerial and professional groups are not members of any organisation, compared with 35.9% of women in the intermediate groups and 52.3% in the routine and manual groups. However, there is little difference in the rates of being a member of just one organisation between the different occupational groups. Amongst men, 24.1% of those in managerial and professional groups are in one organisation, compared with 28.3% of those in the intermediate occupations and 28.1% of those in routine and manual occupations. The corresponding figures for women are 20.5%, 25.7% and 24.5%. Men in the managerial and professional occupational groups are more likely to be members of four or more organisations (14.1%), whereas men in the intermediate and routine and manual groups report similar rates (6.3% and 4.6% respectively), and 19.3% of women in the managerial and professional groups report being a member of four or more organisations, compared with 9.9% of women in the intermediate groups and 4.1% in the routine and manual groups. (Table 5.14)

5.4 Cultural participation

For both men and women, there is a clear trend for lower proportions of those in the older age groups to report participation in the cultural activities covered in the questionnaire (Figures 5.3 and 5.4). For cinema-going, visiting a museum or art gallery and visiting the theatre or opera, the differences in the rates of participation for the youngest and oldest age groups are rather large. The proportions of both sexes in the youngest age group who visit the theatre or opera are around twice as big as those in the oldest age group. Although there are still differences in the percentages of older people who eat out of the house, they are not as great. 94.8% of men and 94.5% of women aged 50–54 eat out of the house compared with 90.0% and 93.2% of those aged 65–69 and 82.7% and 79.1% of those aged over 80 respectively. (Table 5A.15)

For both men and women and for any of the age groups, lower proportions of those who have fair or poor health, report engaging in any cultural activities than of those who report being in good health. Also, there tends to be a widening of the differences in participation amongst the older age groups. 71.1% of women in the 50–59 age group with excellent or very good health go to the cinema compared with just under half of those with poor health in the same age group. For women aged 75 years and over, around a quarter of those

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in excellent or very good health go to the cinema, whilst only 11.8% of those in fair or poor health do so. 70.2% of men and women in excellent or very good health aged between 50 and 59 visit a museum or art gallery, compared with 41.9% of men and 42.3% of women in the same age group with fair or poor health. (Table 5A.16)

Figure 5.3. Percentage of men engaged in selected forms of cultural participation

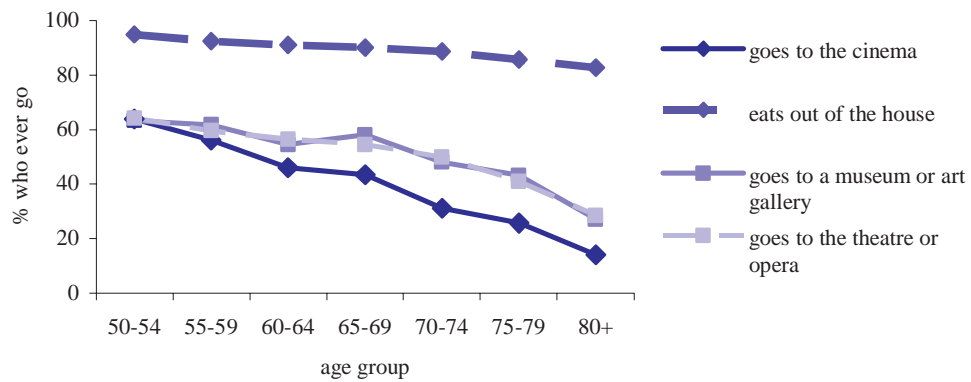
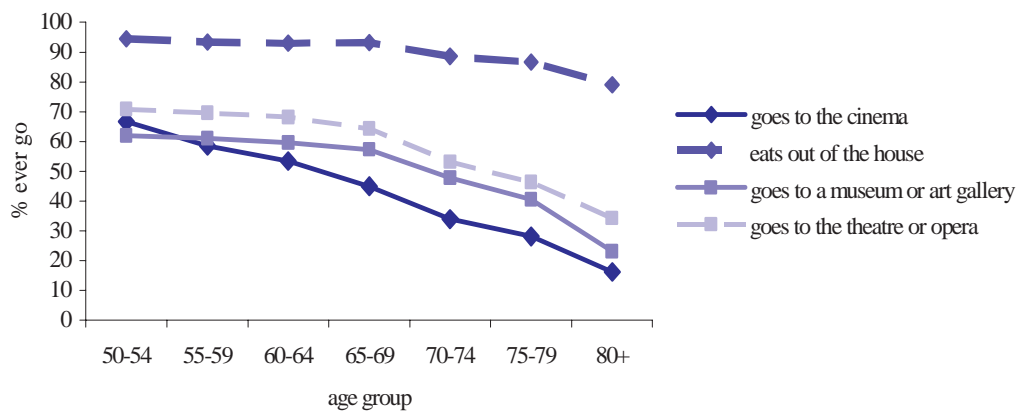


Figure 5.4. Percentage of women engaged in selected forms of cultural participation



There are clear occupational group differences in the rates of participation in cultural activities amongst the older population. In all age groups and for both sexes, there is an occupational class gradient in reporting going to the cinema, eating out of the house, visiting a museum or art gallery and going to the theatre or opera. The rate of going to the theatre or opera is over twice as great amongst men in the managerial and professional class (72.5%) as amongst men from the routine and manual class (38.5%). 74.1% of women in the managerial and professional class go to a museum or art gallery compared with 37.6% of those in the routine and manual class. Around three-quarters of men aged between 50 and 59 who are in the managerial and professional occupations go to the cinema, or visit a museum or art gallery, compared with

44.8% and 46.0% respectively of those in the routine and manual occupational classes. The difference in rates of eating out of the house between the highest and lowest occupational class is narrower than for the other activities. For both sexes, almost all of those in the top occupational class in the youngest age group say that they eat out of the house, compared with 89.1% of men and 90.0% of women in the routine and manual occupational class in the same age group. (Table 5A.17)

Obstructed from social participation

Some people who do not participate in such activities, or do so only rarely, might not want to participate more than they do, while others might wish to and feel that they are obstructed in some way. Those who said that they went to the cinema, ate out of the house, visited a museum or art gallery or went to the theatre or opera less than once a year or never were asked whether they felt that they were unable to do so for any reason. In general, amongst those who say they that did these activities less than once a year or never, greater percentages of women than men feel that they are unable to participate in these activities. For going to the cinema, eating out of the house and visiting a museum or art gallery, generally greater percentages of those in the younger age groups feel that they are obstructed from participating for some reason than of those in the older age groups. 39.5% of women and 36.7% of men aged 50–54 who rarely or never visited a museum or art gallery would have liked to have gone more often but felt that they were unable to do so, compared with 25.6% and 21.4% respectively of those aged over 80. The pattern for the rates of going to the theatre or opera is somewhat different. Amongst men, those in the 50–54 age group have the highest rates for feeling that they are obstructed from going (42.8%). This rate falls in successive age groups to 29.9% of those in the 70–74 age group saying that they are obstructed from going. However, amongst the over-80s, 32.4% say that they are obstructed. Amongst women, the pattern is very similar. (Table 5A.18)

Self-reported general health relates to feeling obstructed from participating in these activities in the following ways. Those who said that they went to the cinema, ate out of the house, visited a museum or art gallery or went to the theatre or opera less than once a year or never were asked whether they felt that they were unable to do so for any reason. Those in fair or poor health report that they would like go to the cinema or eat out of the house more often than they do but feel that they cannot. 40.1% of women and 29.6% of men who have fair or poor health say that they are unable to eat out of the house as often as they would like, compared with 28.6% and 25.8% respectively of those in excellent or very good health. For those who say that they feel unable to go to a museum or art gallery, those with better health, notably amongst men, seem to feel most obstructed. 32.2% of men and 33.7% of women who say that their health is excellent or very good say that they cannot go to a museum or art gallery as often as they would like, compared with 27.7% and 32.8% of those in fair or poor health. (Table 5A.19)

With the exception of eating out of the house, where those in the manual and routine or intermediate occupational groups are more likely to feel that they are unable to do so as often as they would like to, both men and women in the

managerial and professional classes would like to go to museums, art galleries, the theatre or opera more often but feel that they are unable to do so. In relation to going to the cinema, the same is true only for women. 16.3% of women aged over 75 years in the routine or manual occupational group said that they would like to go to the cinema more often but were unable to do so, compared with 27.3% of women in the managerial and professional class in the same age group. Just under a quarter of men in the routine and manual group and around a third of those in the managerial and professional group in the 60–74 age group felt that they were unable to visit an art gallery or museum as often as they would like to. (Table 5A.20)

Social and civic participation

Although the majority of the older population voted in the last general election, the trend is for greater rates of voting in the last general election amongst the older age groups. In general, and especially amongst the oldest age groups, men report slightly greater rates of voting than women. 89.0% of men and 80.8% of women aged over 80 voted in the last general election, compared with 79.1% of men and 77.0% of women aged between 50 and 54 years. For men, rates of daily newspaper readership are highest in the 70–74 and 75–79 age groups, whilst amongst women, those in the 60–64 and 65–69 age groups report the highest rates of daily newspaper readership. (Table 5A.21)

In a somewhat similar fashion, those aged between 60 and 64 years have the highest percentages that say that they have a hobby or pastime, for both men and women. For both sexes, the percentage of each age group that has a hobby declines after this age and reaches its lowest – 62.4% for men and 63.6% for women – amongst those aged over 80. (Table 5A.21)

Although over half of the older population have taken a holiday in the UK in the last 12 months, those aged between 60 and 64 have the highest rates. 61.6% of men and 66.1% of women in this age group took a holiday in the UK over the last 12 months, which are around one-and-a-half times the rates for those aged over 80. For taking a holiday abroad in the last 12 months and for going on a day trip, those in the younger age groups report the highest percentages. There is a clear decline in the rates of people who take a foreign holiday with increasing age. Around 58% of both men and women in the 50–54 age group took a holiday abroad in the last 12 months, compared with around 19% amongst the over-80s. (Table 5A.21)

Overall, men report higher rates of Internet use than women. For both men and women, there are clear age-related differences in the rates of people that use the Internet or email, or have a mobile phone. 59.4% of men in the 50–54 age group say that they use the Internet or email, compared with only 9.0% of those aged over 80. Differences amongst the age groups in women are not as extreme as amongst men, with 47.7% of those aged 50–54 using the Internet, compared with 6.5% of those aged over 80. Similar trends apply to the ownership of mobile phones. (Table 5A.21)

Poor health is related to older people's ability to engage in various forms of social and civic participation. 83.6% of men aged between 50 and 59 years

who say that they are in excellent or very good health voted in the last general election, compared with 74.6% of those who have fair or poor health. However, amongst men in the oldest age group, the gap in voting rates between those in excellent or very good health (91.2%) and those in fair or poor health (87.4%) is considerably smaller. For both men and women, greater proportions of those in excellent or good health report having a hobby than of those with fair or poor health. The greatest health-related differences are for those who say that they took a holiday abroad in the last 12 months, especially amongst the oldest age groups. Women in excellent or good health in the oldest age group are three times more likely to have taken a foreign holiday in the last 12 months than those in fair or poor health, whilst for men those in excellent or very good health are around twice as likely to have been on holiday abroad. (Table 5A.22)

For both men and women and in all age groups, those in the managerial and professional occupational groups reported higher percentages of people who voted in the last general election. For example, 89.4% of men and 88.0% of women in the managerial and professional group had voted in the last general election, compared with 80.7% and 77.6% respectively of those in the routine and manual occupational group. There is a clear occupational class gradient in all age groups and for both sexes in the rates at which members of the older population report having a hobby or pastime, taking a holiday in the UK, taking a holiday abroad, using the Internet or email, or owning a mobile phone. Greater percentages of those in the managerial and professional class report doing any of these activities than those in the intermediate class, who in turn report higher rates of activity than those in the manual and routine classes. For example, nearly 90% of men and women in the managerial and professional class in the 50–59 age group say that they have a hobby or pastime, compared with around three-quarters of those in the routine and manual class. The differences are particularly large for rates of Internet or email usage, especially amongst those aged between 50 and 59 years. 69.7% of women and 80.5% of men in the managerial and professional class in this age group use the Internet or email, compared with 24.0% and 30.0% respectively of those in the routine and manual occupations. (Table 5A.23)

5.5 Conclusion

These data from the first wave of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing reveal that although older people are increasingly involved in various forms of social and cultural participation, there are still inequalities, by age, sex and occupational class, in their ability to do so. The figures for care-giving demonstrate that older people can continue to be a socially productive group even though they are no longer in the labour market. Fortunately, the data show that even amongst the older cohorts, old age is not dominated by caring for the ill and infirm. However, some do have care-giving responsibilities and that burden of care does not fall evenly on the older population. Rather, it is socially patterned by age, sex and recipient of care. That women continue to be the main providers of care, especially for non-spousal relations, raises concerns about their role in later life and the obstructions they might face against engaging in fuller social participation. The increasing hours of care

given by older people, who themselves might have care needs, also raise issues about whether the section of the ageing population that requires social and welfare support the most is receiving it.

Increasingly, older people are becoming heavy consumers of leisure and engaging in various social and cultural forms of participation. The results presented here certainly show that there are reasonable numbers of older people who are engaged in a range of activities. Around half of the sample go to the cinema, or to an art gallery or museum, or to the theatre or opera, and almost all of them eat out of the house sometimes. Older people are also involved in a range of clubs, societies and organisations. Some of these activities, such as charity work and volunteering, have been identified as important areas by the government, which is encouraging older people to be more active. Other activities, such as being a member of a political party or trade union or being part of the neighbourhood watch, could be important for building a sense of community in local areas or the workplace. Such activities have benefits for the whole of society, not just for older people themselves.

However, the ability to participate in these activities and belong to these organisations is not equally distributed throughout the older population. Poor health and low occupational position are major impediments to people's engagement. Although the numbers reporting fair or poor health are low throughout the sample, these are people who then suffer a double injury from not being able to participate as fully as they would like in society. The rates at which people from the manual and routine occupational groups engage in cultural activity are much lower than those for people from the other occupational groups. However, even amongst the managerial and professional and the intermediate occupations, people have a sense of frustration at not being able to participate in the activities that they would like to, to the extent that they would like to. If government is keen to facilitate the increased social participation of older people, then it needs to address the obstacles that people face.

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