

The widowed population in Spain during the 20th Century: Relative and absolute changes and its demographic causes.

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Extended abstract

Background: While the study of family trajectories after divorce and of single parenthood has recently received a broader interest in Spanish sociology (Ruiz, 1999; Houle et al. 2001; Treviño 2006; Solsona and Simó 2007), there have been few studies on the determinants and characteristics of different types of family trajectories after marriage dissolution following bereavement since the classic work of Alberdi and Escario (1986), who, in any case, only studied widows. Even internationally, the study of remarriage after bereavement is not extensively covered (known studies include that of Bongaarts (1989), Smith et al (1991), Wu (1995), Lopata (1996), Davidson (2002), Stevens (2002), De Jong Gierveld (2004), Carr (2004) and Moorman et al. (2006), although as more flexible living arrangements such as living apart together have taken place in Western Europe and the US following bereavement, it has provided the subject with new impetus (e.g. Davidson 2002; Stevens 2002; de Jong Gierveld 2004). To study family trajectories after spouse-loss should therefore be fruitful in terms of contributing to the current knowledge on an increasingly diverse and complex family dynamics.

Objectives: Before providing answers to these empirical research questions, however, it was considered both practical and informative to first study the evolution of the widowed population during the course of the previous century. More specifically, the aim of the conference poster is not only to show how the widowed population changed in absolute and relative numbers over the course of the 20th Century (and its age- and sex-composition), but also to analyse the demographic factors that caused these changes. The latter comprises of the changes in the number of remarriages among widows and mortality counts of both the married and widowed population, as well as in- and out-migration of widows. More indirect effects on the widowed population stock that may also be studied include changes in the number of first marriages (which in recent decades has shown a sharp decline among younger ages), divorces (which only became legally possible since 1981) and remarriage of the

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divorced as it pertains to the changes in the population that is at risk of becoming widowed. Changing remarriage and mortality trends among the widowed population, on the other hand, directly affects the number of widows. The same applies to changing mortality rates among the married (because the surviving spouse becomes part of the widowed population).

Data: Two important data sources will be used: The Spanish Census and Spanish Vital Statistics data (Movimiento Natural de la Población or MNP for short). Census data between 1900 and 2001 will be employed to obtain the population stocks by age, sex and marital status in order to show the age-and sex-specific change of the widowed population, as well as to be used as the population *at risk*. The MNP, for which data is obtained from 1922 to 2006 with more detailed information from 1975 onwards, is required for the (re)marriage and mortality analyses.

Proposed analyses: If possible, the following age- and sex-specific analyses will be considered:

1. The changing composition of the widowed population and its relative importance in the total population.
2. A description of the changing flows of the widowed population, i.e.:
 - the number of marriage dissolutions as a result of the death of one of the spouses;
 - the number of widows who die;
 - the number of widows who remarry; and
 - the number of widows who emigrate and immigrate.
3. The increase in the age at first marriage.
4. The impact of divorce on the married population.
5. Life expectancy of both the married and widowed populations.

General conclusions (tentative):

Due to the strong increase in life expectancy during the past century, the mean age of both becoming widowed and of the widowed population has increased. Therefore, widowhood is today mainly, though not exclusively, an old-age phenomenon. Moreover, as women live longer and tend to marry with older men, it makes widowhood especially a female event.

In relation to remarriage among widows, factors which influence its predisposition include age, sex and economic status. Age has a negative relation with health status and old age also makes a person less eligible in the marriage market, while besides there being more widows than widowers as a result of excess male mortality, due to different reasons widows also show less interest in a new partner and possible remarriage. Finally, although there are sufficient widowers that may be interested in forming a new relationship, many don't end up doing so because they are not economically attractive enough for their potential spouses.

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