



The Open University

AGEING SOCIETIES

RADICALSTATISTICS Annual Conference

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An Ageing Population and Apocalyptic Demography

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Age and demographic statistics: a continuing interest

Bytheway, B. (1981) 'Demographic statistics and old age ideology', *Ageing and Society*, 1.3, 347-64.

Johnson, J. (1994) 'Social Responses to Need', Unit 10, *An Ageing Society* (K256), The Open University.

Bytheway, B. (2005) 'Ageism and age categorisation', *Journal of Social Issues*, 61.2, 359-72.

Johnson, J., Rolph, S. and Smith, R. (forthcoming) *Care Homes in Transition: 'The Last Refuge' Revisited*, Palgrave.



An Ageing Population

We are all growing older. So this White Paper concerns everyone. What is more, a larger number of us can in future expect to live longer. There will be many more very old people.

Growing Older, DHSS, 1981



Preparing for our Ageing Society

Within 20 years half of the adult UK population will be over 50. One in four children born today will live beyond 100. These are dramatic shifts that have far-reaching consequences for us all, and our ageing population will change our society in many ways.

DWP, 2008



21 August 2008

Office for National Statistics *News Release*

For the first time ever, there are more people of state pensionable age than under-16s. This reflects a decline in the number of under-16s, which fell to 18.9 per cent of the population, compared with rising numbers of men aged 65+ and women aged 60+, who accounted for 19.0 per cent of the population at mid-2007.



22 August 2008

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Britain now home to more pensioners than children for the first time

The data reignited the debate over whether the Government is sufficiently prepared to deal with the long-term effects of an ageing population.

Ministers are grappling with the problem of how to fund the growing costs of social and nursing home care for the elderly. The NHS is also restricting access to drugs that could benefit sufferers of Alzheimer's and other conditions amid fears that the costs could cripple the health service.



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22 August 2008

THE DAILY MAIL

**Ancient Britain: For the first time in history,
there are more OAPs than children**

The astonishing milestone follows years of steadily rising life expectancy and a significant fall in the number of children and young teenagers.

Experts described the watershed moment as a 'wake-up call', warning of grave implications for many aspects of national life including the Health Service, social care for the elderly, pensions and housing.



Apocalyptic demography

Catastrophe projections abound.

An increasing ageing population with its multitude of health problems will bankrupt us.

Apocalyptic demography:

- scapegoats older people by blaming them for rising health care costs,
- fuels intergenerational inequity arguments,
- provides the rationale for age-based rationing of health care.

Robertson, A. (1990) 'The politics of Alzheimer's disease: a case study in apocalyptic demography', *International Journal of Health Services*, 20.3, 429-442.



Robertson's conclusion

- The biomedicalization of old age
- The construction of 'the elderly' as a category of need
- The development of the ageing enterprise
- Its gaze on 'the elderly', producing evidence of high rates of pathology
- Arguments about intergenerational inequity



Our conclusions

- Uncritical use of open-ended upper age groups
- Result in stereotyping images, stigma, prejudice and discrimination
- Unconstrained demographic predictions
- Result in a wider moral panic



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[I hope the paper] will help shift future policy initiatives way from elders themselves and toward the context within which people grow old.

Robertson, 1990

It is politics, not demography, which now determines the size of the elderly population and the material conditions of its existence.

Myles, 1984