FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD DEMOGRAPHY

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Contents

Summary

Households are groups of people that co-reside and share some resources. Families are households of related individuals. Household and family demography is the study of these primary social groups or social units, and in particular of group membership and the relationships between members of the group. The concepts of household and family depend on cultural, social and economic factors that vary in time and between countries. The conceptual and measurement issues that result are addressed in the chapter. The documentation of changes in households and families and the modelling of these changes represent major challenges in demography. To capture the complexity of households, tabulations of the full array of household relationships replace tabulations of household positions relative to the household head. Household models follow a similar path. Headship rate models that describe household structures from the perspective of the head of household are increasingly being replaced by dynamic models that focus on relationship among members of a household. As a consequence, models of household dynamics change in the direction of models that describe the demographic dynamics of kinship. The chapter reviews the different approaches to the demographic study of households and families, discusses strengths and weaknesses of models, and proposes agent-based models for the description and projection of households and families in varying contexts.

1. Introduction

Family demography is the study of families and household demography is the study of households. A household usually consists of a number of persons who share a housing unit or part of a housing unit and share food and possibly other essentials for living. A housing unit is a house, an apartment, a mobile home, a group of rooms, or a single room that is occupied as a separate living quarter. Co-residence is a necessary condition but it is not sufficient. Individuals who share a housing unit but do not share food and other essentials for living represent different households, e.g. unrelated students sharing a flat. Co-residence and sharing of at least some resources are two criteria that define a household. A family is a particular type of household. Household members that are related by marriage and parents and children that are related by blood or adoption form a family. Marriage often but not always includes formal or legally sanctioned marriage and common-law marriage (consensual union). A household may consist of a single family, several families (e.g. extended family), or a family (families) and unrelated persons (e.g. lodger). A family is often defined without the strict co-residence criterion. In that case it is a group of people (social unit) related by marriage or by blood or adoption, irrespective of place of residence. The group is usually referred to as kin. The definition of household and family varies in time and between countries. New forms of households and families emerge as individuals organize their lives differently and tradition and social constraints are fading. The challenge is to accommodate new living arrangements and social relationships in family and household demography.

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the field. Family and household demography differs from traditional demography in its emphasis on *groups* rather than individuals. In a group, individuals are important but the relations between individuals are equally important. Much of family and household demography is about group membership and the emotional, biological or economic ties that bind. Individuals move in and out of groups, or change their position in a group. As a result the size and structure of the group change. Family and household demography is concerned with the *structure* of households and families and the *processes* that produce the events that alter the structure. Structure refers to (a) the distribution of households and families by type and (b) the distribution of individuals by position in the household or family (relation to other members of the group).

The structure of the chapter is as follows. Section 2 presents a selected history of family and household demography. It does not pretend to be complete because that is not possible given the long history of the field and the many disciplines that study families and households. Section 3 addresses conceptual and measurement issues that arise in the recording of household and family types and structures. Section 4 summarizes major global and regional characteristics of households and families and trends. Section 5 discusses family and household modelling. It covers static models that distribute a population over family and household types (headship rate models) and dynamic models that describe changes in families and households in terms of life course transitions experienced by members. Two classes of dynamic models are distinguished: models of cohorts and models of individuals. The first class focuses on populations (macro-demography) and is often referred to as macrosimulation models, the second focuses on individuals in a population (micro-demography) and is known as

microsimulation models. The section also addresses a major methodological issue in the modelling of households. It is the consistency requirement that, if an individual experiences an event that involves another person (e.g. marriage), the other person experiences the same event at the same time. The event becomes a shared experience. This problem is never encountered in conventional demography, which deals with individuals separately, but is central to family and household demography. One particularly interesting solution is to model the decision rules that govern social interaction and the shared experiences that result. Section 6 concludes the chapter and discusses promising directions of study.

2. A Brief History

The study of the family started in historical demography in the 1950s. Historical demographers in France and later in England used parish registers (village censuses) and linked individual marriage, baptismal and burial entries to reconstruct families (Henry, 1953; Laslett and Wall, 1973; Wrigley et al., 1997). The technique is known as family reconstitution. In the 1980s, family and household demography emerged as a subfield of demography. The International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) was instrumental. In 1982 the IUSSP Council established a Scientific Committee on *Family Demography and the Life Cycle* with the mandate to promote research in the emerging subdiscipline and to give a visibility within the scientific community. It was the first Scientific Committee on the subject in the history of the IUSSP, established a year after Becker (1981) published his landmark book "A treatise on the family" in which he applies economic theory to explain family life. The IUSSP committee prepared a volume representing the state-of-the-art of family demography (Bongaarts et al., 1987). The book covers the major areas on which research had been focused: the family life cycle, marital and family status life table, kin models and household projection models. The book also covered issues of measurement and estimation. The IUSSP initiative triggered others to follow. In 1984 the Netherlands Interuniversity Demographic Institute (NIDI) under the auspices of the European Association for Population Studies (EAPS) organized a workshop on household demography with an emphasis on modelling. The workshop resulted in a volume that covered different perspectives on and approaches to household modelling and different policy areas that need information on households (Keilman et al., 1988). The book was followed by another a few years later (van Imhoff et al., 1995). In the 1980s a number of excellent papers were published reviewing accomplishments and challenges that remained to be addressed (e.g. Burch, 1979; Brass, 1983; Bongaarts, 1983; Teachman et al., 1987). The very active research in family and household demography in the 1980s also resulted in methods and software for the production of family status life tables and household projections.

As society is evolving, family and household demography is evolving too. In the early days, demography was not directly concerned with the functioning of families and households but with their structure and the processes that take place or unfold over time and produce events that alter their structure. With the gradual disappearance of borders that separate disciplines in the social and behavioral sciences, the study of the functioning of these groups is no longer viewed as a subject of social psychology and sociology, but increasingly also as a subject of demography. It includes topics such the

mutual influence of family and household members, role configurations, the division of labour and the distribution of power, communication between members, domestic violence, and self-efficacy and empowerment of members. Today household and family demography studies the size, structure and functioning of households and families. It addresses also the processes that produce the events that alter the structure. Relations between members receive particular attention, not only the nature of the relationship but also the content.

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