Elderly Fathers in Russia after Divorce: Gender Differences in the Intergenerational Transfers

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Abstract

Regarding the aging population, the question of care and financial support of the elderly becomes increasingly relevant. At the same time, the rise of divorce and separation becomes a very strong trend in modern society. Due to the absence of joint custody in Russia, the connection between fathers and children weakens after divorce and in this context the research question is: Do children help their elderly fathers after divorce, and what is the gender specificity in upward transfers after divorce? The object of this study is to examine the transfers that elderly Russian men and women receive from their children. This research is based on data from the "Comprehensive Monitoring of Living Conditions of the Population" conducted in Russia in 2014. The target sample consisted of 113 000 persons over 15 years old—37 787 of which were over retirement age. The survey covered all regions of the Russian Federation. The method used in this analysis is mainly descriptive statistics and correlation tables. According to the results there is a considerable gap between elderly men and women in getting help from their children due to weakened connections between children and their fathers after divorce. This problem can be solved by developing institutions of social protection, but unfortunately such institutions in Russia have not yet been sufficiently developed.

Keywords: intergenerational care; elderly fathers, gender inequality; transfers; divorce: Russia

Introduction

In the context of the aging of the population in Russia, the question of care and financial support of the elderly becomes relevant. The modern Russian system of social protection for the old puts a high value on private savings accumulated during their



working life and financial support from family members. Only 21 per cent of respondents saw the state pension as their only source of income in the elderly age (Samokhvalova 2014). This system worked efficiently in traditional societies where intra-family transfers played an important role in the welfare of the elderly population, but in modern society it has become controversial due to the combined effects of several demographic and social factors. One of these factors is the rise of divorce in families with children, which raises a moral question—should children support their biological or social parents?

Equal parental responsibility in Russian Family Law is possible only in some cases; in general it is not common, and mothers are almost always granted custody of children. Fathers have to go to court for custody and access to see their children, but Russian courts rarely allow joint custody. There are no statistics in Russia that provide the percentage of cases where fathers got custody of their children. Rather than getting custody, fathers who do not live with their children have to pay alimony until the children become adults. Alimony is 25 per cent of income for the first child, 33 per cent for two and 50 per cent for three or more children. Moreover, 18.3 per cent of children who should get alimony according to the court, get it with an average delay of 17.9 months (Russian Federal State Statistic Service 2016, http://www.gks.ru/accessed 6 April 2017).

Thus, children get financial support from their fathers but do not have personal contact with them, which leads to a loss of connection. The hypothesis of this study is that elderly divorced women get more support from their children than elderly divorced men. The aim of this study is to analyse the transfers that elderly divorced men and women get from their children and examine the reasons for some children not paying these transfers. Also, the author investigates how the reception of different types of transfers varies depending on level of income and the health condition of recipients.

The health status of the elderly in Russia differs significantly between men and women. For example, the difference in life expectancy is 10 years; among people above 60, the difference is 5.5 years (16.1 and 21.6 years for men and women respectively [Russian Federal State Statistic Service 2016]). This makes non-financial support from children, in particular care during illness and help with housekeeping, extremely important for elderly men.

The object of this study is to examine the transfers that elderly Russian men and women get from their children. This research is based on data from the "Comprehensive Monitoring of Living Conditions of the Population" conducted in Russia in 2014. The target sample consisted of 113 000 persons over 15 years old, 37 787 of whom were over retirement age. The survey covered all regions of the Russian Federation. The method used in this analysis is mainly descriptive statistics and correlation tables.

Literature Overview

The theme of intergenerational transfers, discussed by demographers as well as by sociologists and economists, first came to the fore in 1958 when the American economist Paul Samuelson introduced the concept of "intergenerational transfers" as part of the life-cycle model (Samuelson 1958, 467–482). Today there are many concepts which describe motivation in intergenerational transfers and these can be divided into two major blocks: the altruistic (Barsukova 2004; Thon and Wallace 2004) and the exchange concept (Samuelson 1958). The first approach is based on the statement that support of parents is a value in itself and individuals maximise their level of utility by helping their relatives. Exchange concept is based on obligation, whether at the social or individual level, for the person to provide his or her parents the same transfers that he or she has received from them during his or her childhood and adolescence, and at the same time to expect the same behaviour from his or her children. According to recent research in Russia (Ivanova 2002; Ovcharova and Prokof'eva 2000), the first category traditionally dominates.

The main factors which make a significant impact on upward transfers are age, gender, distance between the residences of recipient and donor, level of income, level of education, type of settlement, and family structure (Kotlikoff 1988; Rosenzweig and Wolpin 1993). Numerous studies support the argument that the number, frequency and amount of transfers depend on family structure, due to the fact that transfers flow decreases within the transition from a multigenerational family to the model of a couple with one child (Couch, Daly and Wolf 1999; Hao 1996; Lin I-Fen 2008). Single, divorced and widowed donors of transfers—especially women—traditionally provide more support to their parents than married men and women (Bracke, Christiaens and Wauterickx 2008; Laditka and Laditka 2001; Liebler and Sandefur 2002; Sarkisian and Gerstel 2004).

The gender of donors providing help also plays an important role in the flow of transfers. Various studies (Aronson 1992; Brody, Litvin, Albert and Hoffman 1994) indicate that daughters provide help (especially intangible help) more often than sons. In general, according to the National Caregiver Survey, 71.5 per cent of caregivers are daughters and wives (Stone, Cafferata and Sangl 1987). At the same time, elderly women tend to provide emotional support to their children, while men prefer giving financial help (Chesley and Poppie 2009).

Much less research can be found on the topic of gender differences and inequalities among recipients of upward transfers. Women have wider social networks than men and receive intangible help from different sources, while for men the main resources are their wives (Antonucci and Akiyama 1987). Certain psychological studies claim that men seek help less often from children due to traditional social norms (Curran, McLanahan and Knab 2003; Tudiver and Yves 1999).

Divorce often disconnects men from their adult children (Kalmijn 2007; Pezzin and Schone 1999; Shapiro 2003), but it does not weaken connections between mothers and children (Pezzin and Schone 1999; Townsend 2002).

Russian research (Sinjavskaja and Gladnikova 2007) emphasises that in Russia, one of the main reasons for fathers and adult children losing their connections after divorce is that according to Russian law, children almost always live with their mothers after divorce. This makes a considerable impact on the regularity and amount of support. According to Korchagina (2010) in 1993–1998, only 30 per cent of Russian fathers had a connection with their children after divorce. The consequence is not only a decline in the flow of transfers, but also mental health of children, communication skills, and perception of the masculine role among boys (Kon 2009).

In the context of divorce, the theme of the relationship between fathers and children is widely presented in Western studies, while in Russia more attention is paid to the problems of single mothers. Furthermore, upward intergenerational transfers are not considered from the point of view of marital status and therefore support of the elderly by their children can be overestimated.

This paper will contribute to this increasingly important field of research of interactions between gender and upward transfers. It will, in addition, conduct an analysis of the divorced elderly.

Background

Almost one-third of the population in Russia is above the retirement age (the retirement age is 55 for women and 60 for men). According to the official statistics, the rate of people in retirement age at the beginning of 2016 was 24.6 per cent, or 35.9 million people. The majority of these are women, a proportion which is more than 70 per cent of all retired persons. Due to a transformation of the family structure and development of medical care for the last 90 years, there has been an obvious increase in the rate of elderly people in the age structure of the Russian population (Figure 1).

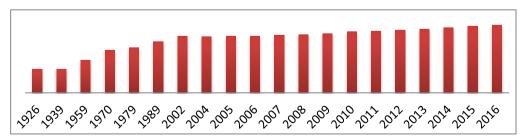


Figure 1: Rate of population above working age, Russia, 1926–2016

Source: Russian Federal State Statistic Service 2016

Projections predict a further increase of the demographic burden on the working population: even low projections indicate a permanent increase in the elderly population in Russia for at least the next 15 years (Figure 2).

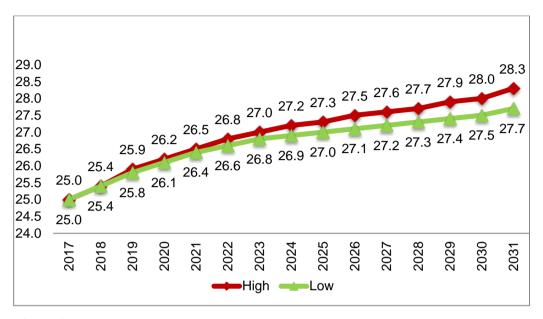


Figure 2: Rate of population above working age, projections, Russia, 2017–2031 **Source:** Russian Federal State Statistic Service 2016

Another trend that plays an important role in the transformation of the demographical situation in modern Russian society is a crucial spread of divorces in the second half of the XXth century (Figure 3). Destruction of the traditional institution of the family led to the fact that in 2016 8.9 per cent of all people over retirement age in Russia were divorced, excluding people who had remarried and created new families. This demonstrates that in 2016, among 36 million retired persons, 3 million were divorced. This number will significantly increase in the near future, because the cohort of people who divorced in the 1990s will reach their retirement age.

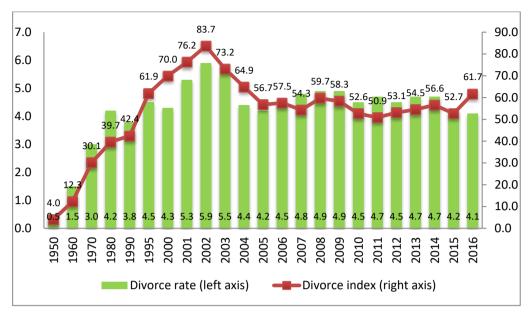
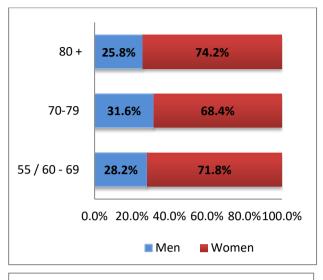


Figure 3: Divorce rate and divorce index, Russia, 1950–2016 **Source:** Russian Federal State Statistic Service 2016

The gender structure of the elderly varies depending on their marital status; for example, among people 70–79 years old, the rate of men is 31.6 per cent, while the same rate among divorced elderly is only 19.4 per cent (Figure 4).



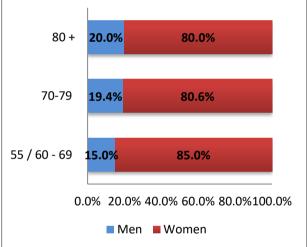


Figure 4: Age and gender among all people above working age (diagram on the top) and among divorced (diagram on the bottom)

Mortality risks are higher among elderly divorced men in comparison with women due to poorer health conditions (Arber 2004; Gähler 2006; Metsä-Simola and Martikainen 2013). This raises the question of unhealthy behaviour/lifestyle of divorced men as well as possible insufficient care given by the relatives of elderly divorced men.

In this research three types of transfers are discussed: financial support, help in housekeeping, and care during illness. The importance of the first type of transfers can be explained by very low state pensions which cannot provide a sufficient standard of living for the elderly. Lack of help from children in housekeeping is a serious problem also because social services in Russia are still on the primary level of development and

they are not popular. Traditionally, the main source of support is relatives. For example, according to the official statistics in 2016, 97.0 per cent of all elderly were not registered for any social service and therefore did not get any kind of public help (Russian Federal State Statistic Service 2016). All types of social services provided for the elderly in Russia and the number of people who receive these services are presented in Table 1. Compared to the 35.9 million people over retirement age, the annual number of receivers of services is not significant. Even the number of people who receive help at home is only 3.2 per cent of the total number.

Table 1: Social services for the elderly, 2016

| | Number of offices | Number of places | Annual number of serviced people |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------------------------|
| Stationary social service | 1 293 | 254 091 | 250 743 |
| Temporary placement centres | 350 | 8 101 | 23 345 |
| Day care centres | 773 | 18 218 | 219 957 |
| Social care at home | - | - | 1 138 994 |
| Urgent social care | 1 863 | - | 9 438 000 |
| Socio-rehabilitation services | 840 | 11 843 | 689 202 |
| Socio-health centres | 51 | 4 977 | 65 027 |

Source: Russian Federal State Statistic Service 2016

The same situation occurs with care during illness: though hospitals and clinics work efficiently in Russia, there is a significant lack of care at home. These types of social services are not developed enough as we saw above. According to official statistics, 62.8 per cent of the elderly get help at home during their illness only from their relatives (Russian Federal State Statistic Service 2016).

These statistics indicate that divorced elderly who have lost contact with their children have to cope with financial problems, illnesses at home, and housework alone without significant help from the government. This raises the question: In which volume do divorced elderly get support from their children? As mentioned above, according to Russian law, after divorce children can stay with their biological father only if he files

 ^{25.3} per cent from nurses; 12.3 per cent from familiar doctor; 11.2 per cent from unknown doctor;
7.5 per cent from a social worker; 5.3 per cent from a specially hired person; 3.1 per cent did not get help.

and wins custody in court (but this is unlikely), so in almost all cases the children stay with their mother. It leads to the weakening of relations between children and their father and therefore can make a significant impact on upward transfers' flow when children become breadwinners.

From this point of view, examination of the real volume of support that divorced elderly men get from their children obtain their importance, because it indicates to which extent the government can rely on family transfers in support of retirees. At the same time, it also reveals—due to the future spread of divorced elderly people—the importance of public services for men.

Methodology

The research is based on data from the "Comprehensive Monitoring of Living Conditions of the Population" conducted in Russia in 2014. The general sample consisted of 113 000 persons aged 15–75 years old and more than 37 787 of these respondents were over retirement age. This is higher than the national average by a difference of 10 percentage points. The survey covered all regions of the Russian Federation with the exception of hospitals and nursing homes.

The main question of the survey for analysis was: "Do you get financial support/help in housekeeping/care during illness from your children who live apart from you?" The close-ended question gave a choice of the following answers: "I get support"; "I do not get support"; and "I do not need support." The survey does not include questions about frequency of intergenerational support, therefore only the presence of support is analysed.

The method which is used in the analysis is mainly descriptive statistics and correlation tables. As already stated, in the analysis we observed men aged 60 years old and above and women aged 55 years old and above, which is the official retirement age in the Russian Federation. Taking into account the fact that children usually live apart from one of their parents after divorce, in order to make a comparison of groups with different marital statuses purer, we analysed only the relationship between parents and children who live apart from each other. As a result, the final sample consists of 29 467 respondents of the retirement age, who have children living apart from them.²

The sample has an individual basis, and it is representative on the country level. It was conducted with a multiphase sampling model with a two-stage selection. Probability selection was applied at each stage of sampling. Allocation of the total sample size was based on a model of disproportionate urban and rural allocation. The urban population in the sample is 74.6 per cent (74% in Russia according to official statistics). The results are weighted with the coefficients calculated as inversely proportional to the

² Based on answers to the question: "Do you have children (regardless of their age) living separately?"

probabilities of selection. The survey was conducted on the basis of a personal interview of respondents at their place of residence in the selected household for observation. Interviewers underwent training to conduct the interviews. Respondents participated in the survey on a voluntary basis.

Data Analysis and Results

According to the results of the study, the proportion of divorced people who have children living apart from them, is only slightly less among divorced elderly (69.0%) in comparison to widowed (73.4%) and married (84.6%) people. In addition, more than half of the children of the divorced elderly live in the same settlement as their parents³ and theoretically have an opportunity to support them not only financially, but also in housekeeping and care during illness.

Nevertheless, only 36 per cent of divorced elderly women get financial help from their children, and among men this number is significantly less—only 17.7 per cent of the sample (Table 2). Gender is not a significant indicator of getting financial help in the group of married elderly, but makes a significant impact on support from children among people who are widowed or divorced.

Table 2: Distribution of answers about getting financial support from children among the people above retirement age, per cent

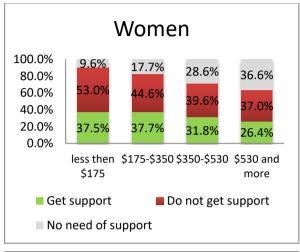
| | Married | | Widowed | | Divorced | |
|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|---------|
| | males | females | males | females | males | females |
| Get support | 26.1 | 24.8 | 35.3* | 40.9* | 17.7* | 36.0* |
| Do not get support | 46.7 | 46.9 | 42.7* | 42.7* | 58.8* | 45.4* |
| No need of support | 27.2 | 28.3 | 22.0* | 16.4* | 23.5* | 18.7* |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Chi-Square | 4.73 | | 30.71 | | 49.44 | |
| * - p < 0.01 | | | | | | |

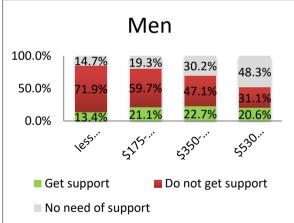
Furthermore, among divorced elderly men, the rate of people who get financial support decreases with a decline of level of income (Figure 5). Among divorced elderly men whose monthly income is more than US\$530, the proportion of persons who do not get help is 31.1 per cent. In the lowest income male group, this proportion is 71.9 per cent. On the contrary, women with the lowest level of income get support more often than women with higher incomes. The tight connection between mothers and their children makes economic and social factors less important. However, for elderly fathers, losing contact with their previous family puts them in social and economic isolation.

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³ Based on answers: "In the same settlement with me, but separately" to the question: "Where do your children live now?"

Nevertheless, we should take into account that this relation can be reversed because some respondents could include the money that they receive from their children in the household income. This could partly explain the high rate of people who get transfers in the group with relatively high income, but still does not explain the gender difference.





p< 0.01 for both sexes

Figure 5: Financial support of the divorced elderly from children and level of income per person in the household

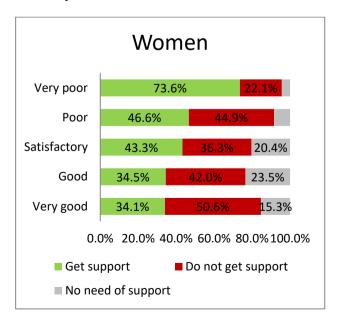
The same gender gap is also observed for intangible help such as support in housekeeping and care during illness. If for married elderly people, the difference in the proportion of men and women who get help in housekeeping from their children is less than one percentage point, for divorced elderly people this gap is 14.5 percentage points (Table 3). The impact of gender is not significant for the married elderly, but extremely important for those who are divorced.

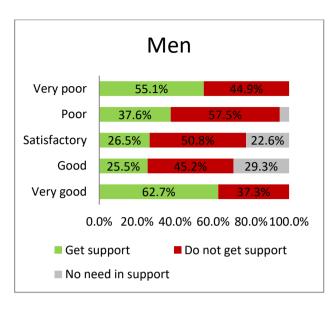
Table 3: Distribution of answers about getting help in housekeeping from children among the people above retirement age, per cent

| | Married | | Widowed | | Divorced | |
|-------------------------------|---------|-------|---------|--------|----------|-------|
| | men | women | men | women | men | women |
| Get support | 51.6 | 51.9 | 53.0** | 57.9** | 28.0* | 44.3* |
| Do not get support | 30.3 | 29.8 | 32.6** | 30.2** | 51.5* | 37.8* |
| No need of support | 18.1 | 18.3 | 14.5** | 11.9** | 20.5* | 18.0* |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Chi-Square | 0.45 | | 13.2 | | 37.06 | |
| * — $p < 0.01$ **— $p < 0.05$ | | | | | | |

The gender distribution of housekeeping roles in Russia is rigid, for example, men would have to step out of normative expectations to keep the house tidy (Makarentseva, Biryukova and Tretyakova 2017). This leads to the situation where men must overcome the traditional "male" role, in contrast to when they were married, and do housework tasks themselves in old age.

One of the main factors that influence the ability of the elderly to do housework is their health condition. Elderly divorced women with poor health get help from their children in housekeeping in 73.6 per cent of cases, but only 55.1 per cent of divorced men receive it in this situation (Figure 6). It again indicates the isolation of the main vulnerable group of elderly males.





p< 0.01 for both sexes

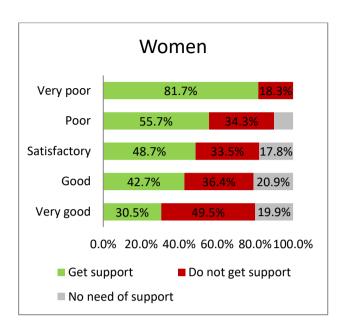
Figure 6: Support in housekeeping that divorced elderly get from children and health condition

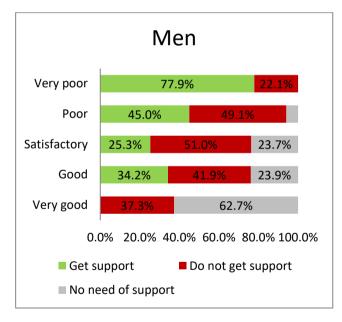
It is important to consider the care elderly people receive during illness. As has been mentioned above, the majority of elderly people receive help from their relatives, but those who are divorced can be deprived of this source of support. The gender difference in this case is even larger than previously mentioned (Table 4): 48.8 per cent of women and 28.8 per cent of men receive care during illness (difference is 20 percentage points).

Table 4: Distribution of answers about getting care during illness from children among the people above retirement age, per cent

| | Married | | Widowed | | Divorced | |
|--------------------|---------|-------|---------|-------|----------|-------|
| | men | women | men | women | men | women |
| Get support | 49.5 | 49.1 | 57.3* | 62.6* | 28.8* | 48.8* |
| Do not get support | 31.3 | 30.8 | 28.6* | 26.3* | 50.3* | 34.2* |
| No need of support | 19.3 | 20.1 | 14.0* | 11.1* | 21.0* | 17.0* |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Chi-Square | 1.87 | | 16.37 | | 54.15 | |
| * — p < 0.01 | | | | | | |

The diagram below (Figure 7) demonstrates that men with very poor health condition get care during illness more often than healthier males, but still 22.1 per cent of them do not get care during illness from their children.





p< 0.01 for both sexes

Figure 7: Care during illness that divorced elderly get from children and health condition

In order to analyse the correlation between upward transfers and "divorced" status, the author created two new dichotomous variables: "getting help" (1 - person gets help

from children; 0 – person does not get help from children or does not need it) and "divorced" (1 – person is divorced; 2 – all other marital statuses).

In general, "divorced status" correlates with a decline in the probability of getting all types of support from children except financial help for women, though the correlation is very low (Table 5). For men, "being divorced" reduces the probability of getting support in housekeeping and care during illnesses much more significantly than for women.

Table 5: Correlation between getting types of support and "divorced status"

| | | Financial support | Support in housekeeping | Care during illness |
|-------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Women | Correlation (Phi) | 0.02 | -0.06 | -0.04 |
| | Approx. Sig. | 0.01 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Men | Correlation (Phi) | -0.04 | -0.09 | -0.09 |
| | Approx. Sig. | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |

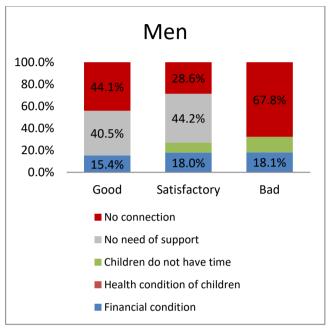
Divorced elderly respondents indicated that the main reasons for the absence of help were almost equally distributed by financial condition of children (27.5%), absence of demand for help (36.7%), and absence of connection with children (23.9%) (Table 6). Examination of the answers from men and women separately gave a completely different distribution: women mainly indicate only two reasons—financial condition of children and absence of demand for support, while almost half of divorced men (49%) pointed out that the reason is absence of connection with children.

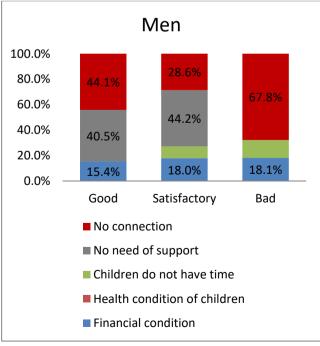
Table 6: Reasons for absence of support from children among divorced elderly, per cent

| | Financial | Health condition of | Children do not have | No need of | No | Total | |
|----------|-----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------|------------|-------|--|
| | condition | children | time | support | connection | Totat | |
| Men | 11.4 | 0.7 | 6.7 | 32.2 | 49.0 | 100.0 | |
| Women | 35.9 | 2.8 | 11.5 | 39.0 | 10.8 | 100.0 | |
| Both | 27.5 | 2.1 | 9.9 | 36.7 | 23.9 | | |
| Chi-Squa | Chi-Square= 86.98, p < 0.01 | | | | | | |

Moreover, the percentage of elderly male respondents for whom a loss of connection with their children is the reason of absence of support, grows with the decrease of level of income and health of the receiver, while among women this trend is not observed.

Over 68 per cent of elderly divorced men with a poor health condition indicated an absence of connection with children as the reason for no support, while for women with a poor health condition the main reasons are financial condition of children (44.5%) and absence of demand for help (25.8%) (Figure 8).





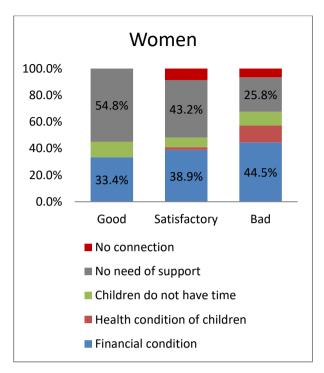


Figure 8: Reasons for absence of care during illness from children and health condition, per cent

Conclusion and Discussion

The Russian traditional distribution of family roles imposes a tighter connection between a mother and her children compared to the connection between children and their father. This becomes even more apparent in the relationship between parents and children after divorce: Russian law enforces traditional norms by placing children with their mother.

This traditional system contradicts the process of the transformation of the family—for example, the spread of divorces and the orientation of young people to their career and own family instead of supporting their parents. These factors both lead to the lack of support for elderly divorced men in particular. These men cannot be compensated by government services because they still work according to the "traditional system" in which support of the elderly is provided by children.

Moreover, the traditional distribution of roles in the family dictates that men assume themselves as the breadwinner, even in the case of health or financial problems, and this prevents them from asking their family members for help. In this context, the results of this study confirm the conclusions of Tudiver and Yves (1999), as well as Curran, McLanahan and Knab (2003).

Also, the lack of help that divorced men receive from their children reflects the disconnection between fathers and their adult children as described by Pezzin and Schone (1999), Shapiro (2003), and Kalmijn (2007). This study reveals a strong gender factor which plays a more significant role in transfers flow for divorced elderly people than those who are married. This outcome confirms the hypothesis of Pezzin and Schone (1999) and Townsend (2002), who claim that divorce does not influence the connection between mothers and children.

The analysis gives even more concerning results than the research of Korchagina (2010), who found that only 30 per cent of Russian fathers have a connection with their children after divorce; here it was found that 28 per cent of elderly fathers receive care during illness and help with housekeeping, and only 17 per cent of them get financial support. The largest gap in transfers in the form of financial support received by male and female respondents occurred in the poorest group. The largest gap in transfers between males and females with the worst health condition was regarding housekeeping help and care during illness.

The main reason for an absence in support of divorced elderly males is the lack of communication between children and their fathers. In contrast to that, women who do not get help define the main reasons for this as the poor financial situation of their children or having no support needs.

The insufficient level of transfers that divorced elderly men get from their children requires development of social services provided by the government or stimulation of business and NGOs in this sphere.

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