

1 Article

## 2 **Household living arrangements and old age** 3 **pauperism in late-Victorian England**

4 **Abstract:** The fortunes of older people in late nineteenth century England varied considerably. At  
5 the two extremes were a comfortable retirement and complete reliance on the New Poor Law, but  
6 most older people got by on some combination of part-time work, familial support and transfer  
7 payments from the New Poor Law. This paper considers the extent to which access to resources  
8 during working age affected the risk of becoming pauperised (that is, dependent on transfer  
9 payments from the New Poor Law) in old age. We hypothesise that access to resources was an  
10 important determinant of old age pauperisation, and that such access was associated with  
11 household living arrangements in earlier life. The analysis is conducted at both aggregate and  
12 individual levels, and is based on a sample of small areas in England. We link census data to New  
13 Poor Law records to assess the extent to which individuals relied on payments from the New Poor  
14 Law in their old age. We distinguish between those who, in their old age, received transfer payments  
15 while living in their own homes and those who were institutionalised through admission to the  
16 workhouse. The main finding is that people who, in earlier adult life, lived in households containing  
17 extended family members were less likely to have recourse to the New Poor Law in their old age  
18 than those who, in earlier adult life, lived with only their spouse and offspring. The results also  
19 support previous work that has found that females were more likely than males to be supported by  
20 the New Poor Law, but that males were more likely than females to enter workhouses.

21 **Keywords:** poverty; old age; household structure; welfare payments; living arrangements

22

### 23 **1. Introduction**

24 The study of older people in late-Victorian England has long been documented through their  
25 relationship with the welfare system of the New Poor Law. Contemporaries in the Victorian period that  
26 surveyed the aged poor found that older people were more likely than the adult working-age  
27 population to be admitted to workhouses or to receive transfer payments (known as *outdoor relief*) in  
28 their own homes. This was partly because older people were less able to earn a living for themselves,  
29 being subject to a range of infirmities associated with being old. For this reason, though, older people,  
30 or the 'aged and infirm' as they were called, were deemed 'deserving' of poor relief, in contrast to the  
31 adult working-age population, who were required to search for work rather than rely on welfare. Thus  
32 older people placed greater demands on the welfare system than their younger counterparts, and the  
33 system was more willing to meet those demands.

34 Not all old people, however, were dependent on the New Poor Law. Some were financially  
35 independent through investments or a retirement pension. Others were supported by their families, or  
36 worked part time. Many relied on a combination of transfer payments from the welfare system and  
37 familial support.

38 This paper is about those who were compelled to seek support from the New Poor Law. Who were  
39 they, and how did their characteristics differ from those who did not seek such support? We take a  
40 longitudinal perspective, asking whether events in people's earlier lives made it more or less likely that  
41 they would rely on the New Poor Law in old age. Such a perspective is lacking in the historiography of  
42 older people reliant on poor relief. We have little understanding of who the older people at the extremes  
43 of poverty actually were, their background, or their stories of how they came to be on outdoor relief or  
44 institutionalised in workhouses. To put it simply: in order to understand the history of old age, we have  
45 to look into the histories of older people through their life course (Chudacoff and Hareven 1979).

46 We address this through a study of the association between the household living arrangements of  
47 adults of working age and the extent of their reliance on the New Poor Law in old age (which we define  
48 as being 60 years and over). We are interested in the extent to which access to resources, both material  
49 and family support, during the working-age period of an individual's life affected the risk of  
50 dependency on the New Poor Law in his or her old age.

51 The analysis is conducted at both aggregate and individual levels, and is based on a sample of  
52 small areas in England and Wales. It uses individual-level census data recently made available through  
53 the Integrated Census Microdata (I-CeM) project to trace the histories of individuals across censuses  
54 from 1851 through to 1891. We link the census data to New Poor Law records including workhouse  
55 admission and discharge registers to assess the extent to which individuals relied on payments from  
56 the New Poor Law in their old age. We also distinguish between those who, in their old age, received  
57 transfer payments while living in their own homes and those who were institutionalised through  
58 admission to the workhouse.

## 59 2. The Economic Position of Older People in Late-Victorian England and Wales

60 Older people in England and Wales in the late nineteenth century made a living using various  
61 means (Thomson 1991). At one end of the economic spectrum were those who had an independent  
62 income from a pension (such as retired military personnel) or deriving from the ownership of lands  
63 and houses. Then came a great number of older people who relied to some extent on support from  
64 members of their immediate or extended families. Finally, recourse could be had to the welfare  
65 system then extant in England and Wales, the New Poor Law. This involved transfer payments to  
66 older people made in one of two ways. First, payments in cash or in kind could be made to older  
67 people living in the community, either in their own houses or in the houses of their relatives: these  
68 payments were termed *outdoor relief*. Second, older people could be admitted to the workhouse, an  
69 institution catering for the unemployed and otherwise destitute, where they would be fed and  
70 clothed in return for performing some more or less menial work. Support provided in the workhouse  
71 was known as *indoor relief*. The New Poor Law was administered locally, the unit of administration  
72 being the Poor Law Union. The typical Poor Law Union outside urban areas consisted of around 25  
73 parishes, and was often centred on a market town. Its population was typically 30,000–50,000 people  
74 by the last decades of the nineteenth century. Many older people made use of combinations of these  
75 three sources of income, for example being looked after by their offspring while at the same time  
76 receiving a cash payment from the Poor Law Union. For the purposes of this paper, *pauperism* means  
77 a state of relying on transfer payments through the New Poor Law for at least part of one's living.  
78 We are interested in the factors which affected the chance that a person would become so reliant after  
79 the age of 60 years.

80 The Poor Law in England and Wales has a long history, going back at least to the sixteenth  
81 century. Until 1834, and arguably until 1865, it was administered on a parish basis: the poor of each  
82 parish were supported by a rate raised on the better-off inhabitants of the same parish. This collective  
83 care of the poor, and specifically the older age poor, went along with a rather pure version of the  
84 nuclear family system. This system involved neolocal marriage and entailed the risk that offspring  
85 would not be available to care for their parents during the latter's old age, leading to the economic  
86 situation of older people being precarious: the 'nuclear hardship' hypothesis (Laslett 1988). It  
87 contrasts with systems elsewhere in Europe where extended or joint families were more common and  
88 close connections were more often maintained with kin, who were more likely to be available to  
89 provide economic and social support to their relations in the latter's old age. It has been found that,  
90 in parts of southern England in the nineteenth century, only 40 per cent of old people co-resided with  
91 their offspring (Thomson 1986), and that 'families were not positioning themselves so as to support  
92 the elderly' (Thomson 1991: 210). In England and Wales, then, a major role of the Poor Law was to  
93 enable collective provision for older people to fill the gap left by the absence of, or the limited nature  
94 of, family provision (a notable exception to the individualistic culture often supposed to characterise  
95 England in the past) (Macfarlane 1978; Thomson 1986; Thane 2000). The way the Poor Law was  
96 operated in practice in nineteenth century England and Wales varied regionally. Several

97 commentators have pointed out that in the north of England, provision was less generous than it was  
98 in the south of the country; and the system also operated differently in Wales (King 2000; Boyer 2016;  
99 Jones 2017). Variations could occur within these broad regions however, and there were regional  
100 variations in the closeness of the ties between older people and their families, or the extent to which  
101 other family members were able to support their older relatives. In parts of the Midlands and the  
102 north of England, well over half of older people were co-resident with offspring (for examples, see  
103 Anderson 1971; Dupree 1995). In general, the proportion of older people receiving poor relief was  
104 greatest in those areas where the aged poor were, relatively speaking, most numerous (Thomson  
105 1991).

106 The risk that an older person would become reliant on the New Poor Law therefore depended  
107 on three elements: the opportunities the person had had to accumulate wealth in earlier adulthood;  
108 the chance that he or she had maintained contact with both immediate kin (specifically offspring) and  
109 his or her wider family; and the region where he or she lived. This paper focuses on the first two of  
110 these (for a discussion of the third, see Heritage 2019).

111 The opportunity to accumulate wealth during adult life and the extent to which people  
112 maintained contact with family members are associated with the position they occupied in their  
113 households of residence in earlier adulthood. For example, an adult who, at the age of 40 years, found  
114 himself or herself unmarried, living with and caring for an aged parent, was in a much worse position  
115 from a wealth accumulation point of view than his or her sibling who was married and living as head  
116 (or spouse of head) in a separate household. Position within the household in earlier adulthood is  
117 also associated with the extent to which contact was being maintained with other family members.  
118 People living in 'extended' households alongside members of their wider kin group might be  
119 expected to have a larger pool of family members from which to draw support in old age than people  
120 living in simple households with just their spouse and offspring.

121 In this paper, we examine the association between living arrangements in earlier adulthood and  
122 the risk of becoming pauperised in old age. We do this by comparing people who were aged 60 years  
123 and over in the 1880s and 1890s with the same people (or the same cohort) in 1851 and 1861, when  
124 they were aged approximately 20-49 years and 30-59 years respectively. The analysis is carried out at  
125 both aggregate and individual levels. In the aggregate analysis we compare average pauperism rates  
126 with measures of the structure of the household at the level of the registration district. There were  
127 roughly 600 registration districts in England and Wales in the nineteenth century; and an attractive  
128 feature of public administration in the country is that the registration districts were, in many  
129 instances, almost coterminous with Poor Law Unions. The individual-level analysis takes cohorts of  
130 individual people and uses record linkage to trace them back from their old age in the 1880s to the  
131 censuses of 1851 and 1861, when they were younger adults. It thus compares the household living  
132 arrangements in earlier adulthood with the economic position in old age of a specific cohort of  
133 individuals.

134 Our two hypotheses may be stated as follows. First, individuals who, in their working ages,  
135 maintained contact with their families, both immediate and extended, were less likely to have to rely  
136 on the New Poor Law to support them in their old age than were individuals who did not maintain  
137 such contact. The deeper the familial contact, and the wider the kin group it involved, the lower was  
138 the chance of pauperisation. Second, those who were isolated from their families when they were  
139 of working age, or whose familial position meant they were unable to accumulate wealth, were  
140 especially likely to need assistance from the community when they were older.

### 141 3. Materials and Methods

#### 142 3.1. Data

143 The data used in this paper come from five counties of England and Wales. These were chosen to be  
144 representative of different regimes for implementing the New Poor Law. Two of the counties  
145 (Hertfordshire and Hampshire) are in southern England; two (Cheshire and the West Riding of  
146 Yorkshire) are in the north, and one (Glamorgan) lies in Wales. Within each of these counties, a

147 sample of registration districts was chosen, forming a total of 63 registration districts in the five  
148 counties taken together. These registration districts are not a random sample of all the registration  
149 districts in the country; however, they are broadly representative of the different economic regions,  
150 and of different New Poor Law regimes. Because these registration districts are almost coterminous  
151 with Poor Law Unions, data drawn from poor law records generally cover the same geographical  
152 areas as those drawn from census data.

153 Our data come from several sources. Data on household structure and living arrangements in  
154 1851 and 1861 come from the Integrated Census Microdata (I-CeM) project (Schürer and Higgs 2020).  
155 This provides complete listings of the inhabitants of England and Wales in the censuses of 1851, 1861,  
156 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911, including names, ages and answers to all the questions asked in those  
157 censuses. Data on old age pauperism at the aggregate level come from six-monthly lists of the  
158 numbers being given transfer payments. Officials within each Poor Law Union were asked to provide  
159 the central authorities in London with a summary of the numbers of males and females being  
160 supported in whole or in part on 1 January and 1 July each year. These summary numbers were  
161 published in the British Parliamentary Papers, distinguishing males from females, and paupers who  
162 were 'able bodied' from those who were not 'able bodied'. We use the numbers being relieved on 1  
163 January 1891 (Great Britain Parliamentary Papers 1892). At the individual level, we use lists of the  
164 names of individuals being supported in the early 1880s by three Poor Law Unions, Alton and  
165 Winchester in Hampshire, and Ripon in the West Riding of Yorkshire (see Appendix A). Nominal  
166 lists of paupers of this kind are very hard to find in England and Wales for any Poor Law Union.  
167 Those for Alton, Winchester and Ripon were discovered in local archives, and data collection  
168 involved days of work transcribing manuscript documents. The lists include weekly returns of those  
169 given payments, either in cash or in kind, and also the admission and discharge records of the  
170 workhouses. We can therefore identify who received outdoor relief, and who was admitted to the  
171 workhouse.

### 172 3.2. Pauperism

173 Our individual-level data include details of people who were given support under the New Poor  
174 Law during a period in the first half of the 1880s, stretching from 1880 until 1885 (the exact duration  
175 varies among the three Poor Law Unions for which we have data). In the individual-level analysis, a  
176 person is defined as a pauper if, at any time during that period, he or she received such a payment.  
177 As mentioned earlier, persons receiving assistance from the New Poor Law could either receive this  
178 in the community, or by being admitted to the workhouse. We therefore identify a subset of paupers  
179 who were, at some point during the period for which we have data, admitted to the workhouse.

180 Our aggregate-level measure of the extent of pauperisation is an estimate of the proportions of  
181 those aged over 60 years who were in receipt of payments under the New Poor Law in 1891. We  
182 estimate this by dividing the average number receiving relief on 1 January 1891 and described as  
183 'non-able bodied' by the population in the corresponding Poor Law Union recorded in the census of  
184 1891 (which took place in early April). This measure is subject to error. The main error is that a  
185 proportion of those defined as 'non-able bodied' in the returns of those receiving relief were aged  
186 under 60 years. This proportion is, however, quite small. In general, local and national poor law  
187 administrators assumed that those aged under 60 years were 'able bodied' unless it were proved  
188 otherwise, whereas those aged 60 years and over were assumed to be 'aged and infirm' and hence  
189 'non-able bodied'.

### 190 3.3. Household living arrangements

191 The analysis in this paper is based on a comparison of the household living arrangements of people  
192 aged approximately 30-59 years and the extent of pauperisation among people aged 60 years and  
193 over. Our measure of household living arrangements makes use of a coding scheme of household  
194 types used by the I-CeM project, and based on a classification system created by Eugene Hammel  
195 and Peter Laslett (Higgs et al. 2013; Laslett 1972). The I-CeM data include a derived variable which  
196 denotes the arrangement under which each person was living at the time of the relevant census. The

197 type of household is categorised using a version of the Laslett-Hammel system of household  
 198 classification; in this paper we use a simplified version of that system (Table 1). Our classification  
 199 divides households into four broad types:

- 200 1. simple family households, with or without children;
- 201 2. extended households, which contained kin beyond the offspring of the head and spouse;
- 202 3. multiple family households, with more than one family unit;
- 203 4. other households, including solitaries and households without a core family unit.

204 We also distinguish people described as ‘servants’ and ‘lodgers’.

205 Table 1 also gives the approximate percentage of persons aged 30-59 years in mid-Victorian  
 206 England and Wales (1851 and 1861) living under each arrangement. It is clear that the largest single  
 207 group (almost a majority) were living either as head or spouse in a simple family with their offspring  
 208 only. If we add those living as head or spouse without children and without other related people, we  
 209 have accounted for more than 60 per cent of the population in this age range. Only a very few people  
 210 lived in multiple family households, but extended households were not rare: 15-20 per cent of the  
 211 population lived in such households.

212  
 213 **Table 1.** Categorisation of household living arrangements used in this paper

Designation	Description	Approximate percentage of those aged 30-59 years living under such arrangements in mid-nineteenth century England and Wales
Unrelated	Listed as ‘servant’, ‘lodger’ etc.	10
Solitary	Living alone	5
No core family unit	Living with siblings	4
Simple family no offspring	Living with spouse only	15
Simple family with offspring	Living with spouse and offspring only	46
Household extended upwards from head	Head, spouse, offspring and members of generation of head’s parents	3
Household extended downwards from head	Head, spouse, offspring and members of generation of head’s grandchildren	9
Other extended household	Head, spouse, offspring, and other members of head’s or head’s offspring’s generation	5
Multiple family household	Two or more related married couples	3

214 Approximate percentages were derived from I-CeM census data for 1851 and 1861. They vary slightly  
 215 from place to place and should be interpreted as an indication of the relative weight of each living  
 216 arrangement in the population, and not as exact figures.

### 217 3.4. The life course perspective

218 With both the aggregate and individual-level data we take a life course perspective. We compare  
 219 the situation of those aged 60 years and over in the early 1880s (for the individual-level analysis) and  
 220 1891 (for the aggregate analysis) with the situation of the same cohort in 1851 and 1861. In the  
 221 aggregate analysis we compare the situations of the entire populations of the 63 registration districts.  
 222 In the individual-level analysis we identify two groups of people: those who received payments  
 223 under the New Poor Law in the early 1880s when they were aged 60 years and over; and the subset

224 of those who received payments in the early 1880s who were admitted to the workhouse. We examine  
 225 the living arrangements in 1851 and 1861 of these two groups, and compare them with the living  
 226 arrangements of all those living in the same registration district in 1851 and 1861 who were in the  
 227 same age range as the two groups would have been in those census years. For example, in 1861 those  
 228 in groups were aged 37-73 years in Ripon registration district, 36-71 years in Alton registration  
 229 district, and 36-67 years in Winchester registration district.

## 230 4. Results

### 231 4.1. Aggregate analysis

232 Table 2 presents the results of binary regressions of the percentages of those aged 60 years and over  
 233 receiving poor relief in 1891 in the 63 registration districts/Poor Law Unions in our five study counties  
 234 on the percentages of those aged 30-59 years living in various types of household in 1861 in the same  
 235 registration districts.

236  
 237 **Table 2.** Results of binary regression of percentages of those aged 60 years and over receiving  
 238 payments under the New Poor Law in 1891 on the percentages of those age 30-59 years in 1861 living  
 239 under various arrangements: 63 registration districts/Poor Law Unions of England and Wales

Living arrangements	Females	Males
Unrelated to head	-0.53	0.05
Solitary	-1.20	0.27
No core family unit	-3.41*	-3.27*
All simple households	0.62*	0.41*
Simple household with offspring	0.49*	0.30
Extended household (all types)	-1.72*	-1.35*
Multiple family household	-1.01	-1.60*

240 Asterisks denote effects statistically significant at the 95 per cent level. Two registration districts were  
 241 subdivided in the 1870s: we have combined their data for 1891 to preserve the 1861 geography.

242  
 243 It is clear that registration districts where extended households were more common in 1861 (or,  
 244 at least, where a large proportion of adults aged 30-59 years lived in extended households) had lower  
 245 levels of pauperisation in 1891. For each percentage point increase in the proportion of adults living  
 246 in extended households in 1861, the proportion of those aged 60 years and over who were pauperised  
 247 in 1891 was reduced by 1.72 per cent (for females) and 1.35 per cent (for males). Even larger effects  
 248 were seen for the percentages living in households with no core family unit, though here we are  
 249 dealing with a small proportion of households. Conversely, a higher proportion of working-age  
 250 adults living in simple households in 1861 was associated with a higher proportion of older people  
 251 claiming support from the New Poor Law in 1891.

252 These results hold up to a considerable extent when controlling for regional effects and for the  
 253 urban-rural nature of the registration districts. We have performed a multiple regression analysis in  
 254 which the independent variables are the percentages of adults aged 30-59 years in 1861 living in  
 255 simple and extended or multiple households and the dependent variable is the same as in Table 2.  
 256 We control for the county in which the registration district is situated and whether the registration  
 257 district/Poor Law Union was classified by Charles Booth as 'rural', 'half rural' or 'urban' in 1894  
 258 (Booth 1892).

259 The results (Table 3) confirm that the aggregate association between living arrangements in 1861  
 260 and pauperism in 1891 holds up after including the controls. For females, a one point increase in the  
 261 percentage of adults aged 30-59 years living in simple households in 1861 is associated with a 0.66  
 262 point increase in the percentage of old women claiming assistance from the New Poor Law in 1891;  
 263 for males the corresponding effect is a 0.30 point increase in pauperism in 1891. For males only, a

264 greater prevalence of residence in an extended or multiple household in 1861 is associated with a  
 265 reduced reliance on the New Poor Law in 1891. The results in Table 3 also confirm that older people  
 266 relied less on the New Poor Law in the north of England (Cheshire and Yorkshire) than in the south  
 267 of England (Hampshire being the reference region), the difference being especially marked for  
 268 females.

269 The highest negative coefficient by county is found for both men and women in Yorkshire. This  
 270 may be associated with the smallholding economy in the sample registration districts, where farm  
 271 work was mainly run by the extended family. The two Yorkshire registration districts of Settle and  
 272 Skipton, in particular, contained substantial numbers of male farmers and a low proportion of male  
 273 agricultural labourers according to 1891 census data (Heritage 2019a). These districts, out of the 63  
 274 analysed, exhibited some of the highest proportions aged 30-59 years recorded in extended and  
 275 multiple households in 1861, as well as the lowest proportions of those aged 60 years and over  
 276 receiving payments under the New Poor Law in 1891. Smallholdings were conducive to household  
 277 structures that safeguarded people from old age pauperism. By contrast, the labour-intensive nature  
 278 of arable farming in the south and east of England, comprising low-wage agricultural labourers, may  
 279 account for the positive relationship between household residence and pauperism in Hertfordshire.  
 280

281 **Table 3.** Results of multiple regression of percentages of those aged 60 years and over receiving  
 282 payments under the New Poor Law in 1891 on the percentages of those age 30-59 years in 1861 living  
 283 in simple and extended/multiple households and control variables: 63 registration districts of  
 284 England and Wales

<b>Covariate</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>
Constant	-15.87	13.60
Living in simple households in 1861	0.66*	0.30*
Living in extended and multiple households in 1861	- 0.01	- 0.78*
Yorkshire	-10.04*	- 5.21*
Cheshire	- 7.27*	- 4.61*
Glamorgan	- 2.13	- 3.80*
Hertfordshire	3.29	1.92
Half rural	2.99	1.01
Urban	- 0.55	- 1.79
R <sup>2</sup>	0.53	0.63

285 Asterisks denote effects statistically significant at the 95 per cent level. 'Hampshire' and 'Rural' are  
 286 reference categories.  
 287

#### 288 4.2 Individual-level analysis

289 We now turn to the individual-level analysis. We start with the tracing back in time of those who  
 290 were recorded in the early 1880s as having received assistance from the New Poor Law, and those  
 291 who were recorded as having been admitted to the workhouse.

292 In the three Poor Law Unions for which we have data, a total of 177 men and 289 women appear  
 293 either in the records of payments of outdoor relief or in the workhouse admissions books. Of these,  
 294 46 men and 18 women were recorded as being admitted to the workhouse, with 131 men and 271  
 295 women receiving only payments in the community. The detailed numbers were as follows. For  
 296 payments in the community in Alton Union, 82 men and 153 women; in Ripon Union 49 men and  
 297 118 women. For admission to the workhouse in Ripon Union 22 men and 10 women; in Winchester  
 298 Union 24 men and 8 women. We do not have data for Alton Union on workhouse admissions, or for  
 299 Winchester Union on payments in the community. These numbers do not include all those who were  
 300 receiving support from the New Poor Law in the 1880s. We can use census records for the 1881 census  
 301 to add those who were living in the workhouse in 1881 and certain other individuals. This brings the

302 total of those who received support from the New Poor Law in the early 1880s in the three Unions to  
 303 318 men and 408 women, of whom 154 men and 70 women spent at least some time in the workhouse.  
 304 These raw numbers already confirm what has been suggested by previous researchers: that men were  
 305 less likely than women to be dependent on the New Poor Law but that, if they became dependent,  
 306 they were more likely to be admitted to the workhouse (Goose 2005).

307 We successfully traced 106 men and 219 women who received payments in the community in  
 308 the early 1880s back to the 1861 census. The vast majority of these were living in the same Poor Law  
 309 Union in 1861 as they were in the 1880s. We could in principle trace people across space to take  
 310 account of those who have migrated in the interim period. This is achievable using the searchable  
 311 database constructed from the individual-level data from the 1851 and 1861 censuses by genealogical  
 312 organisations such as ancestry.co.uk. However, we are concerned with people aged (typically) over  
 313 40 years, and this age group is not very migratory so, for this initial analysis, we did not feel the  
 314 tracing of migrants was worth the substantial additional effort involved.

315 Of those who were admitted to workhouses, we successfully traced 56 men and 24 women back  
 316 to 1861. This gives a total percentage successfully traced back to 1861 of 51 per cent of men and 60  
 317 per cent of women. These percentages might appear somewhat low, but it should be borne in mind  
 318 that for many of these people we have very limited information on which to base the linkage. Of  
 319 those who appeared in the records of payments in the community or in the workhouse admissions  
 320 books in the early 1880s for which we have more information, we successfully traced 92 per cent  
 321 (162/177) of men and 84 per cent (219/271) of women back to 1861, and 85 per cent of men and 78 per  
 322 cent of women back to 1851. The most difficult group to trace were males in the workhouses who did  
 323 not appear in the admissions books. For many of these we have only the sketchiest of information  
 324 from the 1880s. In addition, some of them may have been itinerant workers hailing from distant  
 325 places.

326 We shall eventually focus on the living arrangements of those who could be traced in 1861 and  
 327 1851 for two groups of paupers in the 1880s: those receiving payments in the community and those  
 328 admitted to the workhouse (Tables 4 and 5). However, let us first look at the living arrangements of  
 329 all those in the relevant age range in 1861 and 1851 (roughly 36-70 years in 1861 and 26-60 years in  
 330 1851). The distribution of these adults among the household types in the three Poor Law Unions  
 331 broadly reflects that of Table 1. About 60 per cent were living in simple households, 17-20 per cent in  
 332 extended or multiple households (rather more in 1861 than in 1851, when the relevant cohort was  
 333 older). Only small percentages were living alone (especially in 1851) or in households with no core  
 334 family unit. If we now look at those who would go on to receive payments in the community from  
 335 the New Poor Law in the early 1880s, we find that a higher proportion were living in simple  
 336 households with offspring: 60.2 per cent compared with 45.3 per cent for females in 1861, and 62.2  
 337 per cent compared with 48.5 per cent for males in 1861, with the differences being even starker in  
 338 1851. Conversely, relatively fewer were living in extended or multiple households, or living alone, or  
 339 living as a servant or a lodger in the household of an unrelated head. Finally, though numbers are  
 340 small, we can examine the living arrangements of those who would go on to be admitted to the  
 341 workhouse in their old age. Summarising the experience of males and females, we can say that people  
 342 in this group were more likely to be living in a simple household without offspring, or unrelated to  
 343 the household head, and less likely to be living with offspring, than those who would eventually  
 344 receive outdoor relief.

345

346 **Table 4.** Percentages with various living arrangements in 1861

Living arrangement in 1861	Females			Males		
	Admitted to workhouse in 1880-1885	Received outdoor relief in 1880-1885	Whole population in 1861	Admitted to workhouse in 1880-1885	Received outdoor relief in 1880-1885	Whole population in 1861



Unrelated to head	12.5	1.4	11.0	12.5	4.7	9.3
Solitary	4.2	2.3	4.6	5.4	1.9	4.5
No core family unit	4.2	7.3	4.6	1.8	6.6	2.4
Simple no offspring	20.8	12.3	11.2	19.6	13.2	11.9
Simple with offspring	41.7	60.2	45.3	48.2	62.2	48.5
Extended or multiple	16.7	16.3	21.3	12.5	11.3	19.0
N	24	219	7,852	56	106	7,533

347 The sources for this table are poor law records and workhouse admission and discharge books, Alton,  
 348 Ripon and Winchester Poor Law Unions, 1880-1885 (see Appendix A); and 1861 census data from the  
 349 Integrated Census Micro-data project. The figures for the 'whole population' refer only to those in  
 350 the age groups represented by those 'admitted to the workhouse' and receiving 'payments in the  
 351 community', roughly 36-70 years. The percentages exclude a small proportion of institutional  
 352 residents in 1861 (2.0 per cent of the female population and 4.3 per cent of the male population).

353

354 **Table 5.** Percentages with various living arrangements in 1851

Living arrangement in 1851	Females			Males		
	Admitted to workhouse in 1880-1885	Received outdoor relief in 1880-1885	Whole population in 1851	Admitted to workhouse in 1880-1885	Received outdoor relief in 1880-1885	Whole population in 1851
Unrelated to head	8.0	0.9	11.9	12.5	1.8	12.3
Solitary	0.0	0.5	1.2	0.0	0.9	1.2
No core family unit	4.0	1.4	5.6	6.3	1.8	2.6
Simple no offspring	16.0	5.2	8.1	4.2	6.3	8.1
Simple with offspring	60.0	77.3	52.8	56.3	79.3	52.2
Extended or multiple	12.0	14.2	17.9	20.9	9.9	16.7
N	25	211	8,756	48	111	8,664

355 The sources for this table are poor law records and workhouse admission and discharge books, Alton,  
 356 Ripon and Winchester Poor Law Unions, 1880-1885 (see Appendix A); and 1851 census data from the  
 357 Integrated Census Micro-data project. The figures for the 'whole population' refer only to those in  
 358 the age groups represented by those 'admitted to the workhouse' and receiving 'payments in the

community', roughly 26-60 years. The percentages exclude a small proportion of institutional residents in 1851 (2.3 per cent of the female population and 7.0 per cent of the male population).

361

Finally, it is possible to use the data to start with the 1861 populations of the three Poor Law Unions and to estimate the probability of being a pauper in the early 1880s, and of entering the workhouse in the 1880s, for persons with different living arrangements in 1861. This analysis involves estimating the proportions of those alive in 1861 who would survive to the early 1880s. This we do using life tables for the second half of the nineteenth century (Woods and Hinde 1987). We make the assumption that mortality is not correlated with living arrangement in 1861. We then calculate the proportion of the survivors who were pauperised in the 1880s or who entered the workhouse. We assume no migration (or, at least, that migration was not correlated with the risk of pauperisation), which is a non-trivial assumption, although this age group (people all aged over 35 years) was not especially migratory. We also remark that the data for the 1880s do not capture all those who were in receipt of support from the New Poor Law. The results, therefore, should not be interpreted as indicating the level of pauperisation among older people at that time.

This exercise makes use of several assumptions which require further assessment, and so the results should be viewed with caution. We believe, though, that despite the assumptions we make, they tell us something about the differentials in the risk of old age pauperisation among persons with different household living arrangements when they were younger adults. This belief is buttressed by the fact that the results (Table 6) largely confirm the story revealed by the aggregate analysis and the individual-level analysis 'looking back' from the 1880s and, where they can be compared with previous work, are generally consistent with what we know from that work. Overall, females were more likely to be pauperised in old age than were males, but males who did rely on the New Poor Law were more likely than females to enter the workhouse. There is a suggestion that the greater female pauperisation was a feature of those who were married; it was less true of the unmarried (compare the figures for males and females who were living alone or in households with no core family unit).

386

**Table 6.** Proportion of survivors of those alive in 1861 ending up pauperised or admitted to the workhouse when aged over 60 years in the early 1880s

387

388

Living arrangement in 1861	Females		Males	
	Pauperised (receiving support from the New Poor Law)	Admitted to the workhouse	Pauperised (receiving support from the New Poor Law)	Admitted to the workhouse
Unrelated to head	0.031	0.015	0.066	0.038
Solitary	0.073	0.012	0.057	0.034
No core family unit	0.205	0.012	0.170	0.021
Simple no offspring	0.158	0.025	0.107	0.047
Simple with offspring	0.173	0.012	0.098	0.028

Extended and multiple	0.095	0.015	0.042	0.009
Overall	0.135	0.013	0.083	0.029

389 The sources for this table are poor law records and workhouse admission and discharge books, Alton,  
 390 Ripon and Winchester Poor Law Unions, 1880-1885 (see Appendix A); and 1861 census data from the  
 391 Integrated Census Micro-data project.

392  
 393 The probability of pauperisation among persons living in simple households was close to double  
 394 that among persons living in extended or multiple households. Only a small minority of people  
 395 would enter the workhouse, but the risk of entering the workhouse was higher among those living  
 396 without offspring in 1861, suggesting that the presence of offspring was associated with the receipt  
 397 of payments in the community (Dupree 1995). The proportion of persons in earlier adulthood living  
 398 in households with no core family unit was small, but these people were especially likely to be reliant  
 399 on the New Poor Law in their old age (though rather unlikely to enter the workhouse). Finally, those  
 400 who as mature adults were living as servants or lodgers (who comprised most of those described in  
 401 Table 6 as 'unrelated to head') were no more likely to have to rely on poor relief in their old age than  
 402 others but, if they did, had around a 50 per cent chance of having to enter the workhouse. It might be  
 403 observed that this group was especially likely to have migrated between 1861 and the early 1880s.  
 404 Nevertheless, it makes intuitive sense in that those living as servants or lodgers were less likely to  
 405 have maintained connections with family members than the rest of the population.

406 A discussion of some of the case histories of the individuals recorded in Tables 4, 5 and 6 offers  
 407 more context to our findings. In 1851, John Brown, the oldest of 10 siblings, from Markington parish,  
 408 Ripon, was aged 32 years, living with his father, a farmer owning 164 acres and employing 5 men  
 409 and 2 boys. In the 1871 census he was enumerated as an unmarried farm servant in an unrelated  
 410 household. Ten years later, shortly before his admission to Ripon workhouse, he was described as a  
 411 boarder and farm labourer to Hannah King, who owned 5 acres. George Lee, living in Owslebury,  
 412 Winchester in 1861, was aged 45 year and lived with his 80-year-old father. In 1871, he migrated to  
 413 nearby Upham, Winchester, where he was a 56-year-old lodger of the Cooper family. George Lee,  
 414 like John Brown, was also admitted to the workhouse in old age (Heritage 2019b). What their stories  
 415 show is the contrast between the Victorian ideals of 'the family' and the reality of their actual living  
 416 arrangements, where they remained unmarried without starting a family (Ittmann 1995). Evidence  
 417 elsewhere points to how the involvement of adult offspring outside the household reduced the  
 418 likelihood of elderly couples facing the workhouse (Snell 2006). The prospective workhouse  
 419 admissions of John Brown and George Lee followed the curtailment of the normal transition from  
 420 the parental household through subsequent marriage to living in independently-run households.  
 421 When people conformed to Victorian conventions of marriage and family, this increased the  
 422 likelihood of receiving transfer payments in their homes over institutional accommodation in the  
 423 workhouse.

424

## 425 5. Conclusion

426 This paper represents an initial attempt to analyse old age pauperisation using a life course  
 427 perspective. This attempt has been made possible by the availability of machine-readable and  
 428 searchable census data through the I-CeM project. We set out to test two hypotheses: that individuals  
 429 who, in their working ages, maintained contact with their families, both immediate and extended,  
 430 were less likely to have to rely on the New Poor Law to support them in their old age than individuals  
 431 who did not maintain such contact; and that those who were isolated from their families when they  
 432 were of working age, or whose familial position meant they were unable to accumulate wealth, were  
 433 especially likely to be pauperised in old age. We find substantial support for the first of these  
 434 hypothesis in our data, and some support for the second.

435 In general, in late-Victorian England, females were more likely than males to have recourse to  
436 the New Poor Law in their old age – at least among those who married. Those who lived in simple  
437 households in their earlier adult lives were more likely to require support from the New Poor Law  
438 than were those living in extended or multiple households. Thus our data provide support for the  
439 ‘nuclear hardship’ hypothesis. Those who lived alone, or who were living in mid-adulthood as  
440 servants or lodgers in someone else’s household, were especially likely to have to enter the  
441 workhouse if they became poor in their old age, most likely because they lacked familial support.  
442 Those who were living as servants or lodgers were also mainly in occupations which did not facilitate  
443 the accumulation of wealth. Finally, living alone in mid-adulthood does not appear to have been  
444 associated with an increased risk of pauperisation in old age.

445 There was, therefore, a clear association between household living arrangements in earlier  
446 adulthood and the risk of pauperisation in old age. However, identifying the impact of more detailed  
447 characteristics of living arrangements in earlier adulthood is complicated. For example, we might ask  
448 whether being a household head, or the wife of a household head, when aged around 40 years was  
449 associated with the risk of becoming a pauper in old age. Trying to answer this question we quickly  
450 run into difficulties. Persons living in simple households were certain to be household heads or their  
451 spouses, and were more likely to have recourse to the New Poor Law. Those living in extended and  
452 multiple households may or may not have been heads of these households. Those described as living  
453 as ‘servants’ or ‘lodgers’ were, by definition, not heads of their households; those living alone were,  
454 by definition, all heads of their households.

455 Despite this, our paper has provided evidence that, just as multigenerational families in the  
456 United States have been shown to have provided clear benefits for the welfare of both the older and  
457 younger generation (Ruggles 2003), extended family households, though relatively rare in England  
458 and Wales, were protective in terms of reducing the risk of pauperism and of workhouse admission  
459 at older ages. This not only implicitly points to the willingness of family members in these  
460 households to provide economic and social support for their older kin, but also highlights the efficacy  
461 of this support in reducing reliance on the New Poor Law system. Although it may be true that  
462 English families in the Victorian period were not deliberately arranged with support for the elderly  
463 in mind (Thomson 1991), in practice many families did provide such support, and those individuals  
464 who maintained a greater range and intensity of connections with their families across the life course  
465 had a reduced chance of being reliant on community welfare payments from the New Poor Law in  
466 their old age.

467

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## 482 Appendix A

483 This Appendix lists the sources of nominal data on paupers being relieved in the 1880s. These  
484 data were obtained from local archives as follows: for Ripon Poor Law Union: North Yorkshire

485 Record Office, Outdoor Relief Application and Report Books, October 7 1880 to September 22 1881,  
486 BG/RI 4/1/4 and Workhouse Admissions and Discharge Registers, April 1880-December 1884, BG/RI  
487 5/3/1. For Alton Poor Law Union: Hampshire Archives and Local Studies, Outdoor Relief Application  
488 and Report Books, Alton No1 District, June-September 1881, PL3/2/89 and December 1881-March  
489 1882, PL3/2/90, Binsted No2 District, June-September 1880, PL3/2/128 and December 1880-March  
490 1881, PL3/2/129. For Winchester Poor Law Union: Hampshire Archives and Local Studies,  
491 Workhouse Admissions and Discharge Registers of New Winchester Union, April 1879-September  
492 1881, PL5/11/32, October 1881-September 1882, PL5/11/33 and September 1882-March 1885,  
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