

Article

Household Living Arrangements and Old Age Pauperism in Late-Victorian England

Tom Heritage, Andrew Hinde *  and David Clifford

Department of Social Statistics and Demography, University of Southampton, Southampton SO17 1BJ, UK; heritagetoms@aol.com (T.H.); david.clifford@soton.ac.uk (D.C.)

* Correspondence: Andrew.Hinde@soton.ac.uk

Received: 23 January 2020; Accepted: 21 April 2020; Published: 5 May 2020



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

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

1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Poor Law in England and Wales has a long history, going back at least to the sixteenth century. Until 1834, and arguably until 1865, it was administered on a parish basis: the poor of each parish were supported by a rate raised on the better-off inhabitants of the same parish. This collective care of the poor, and specifically the older age poor, went along with a rather pure version of the nuclear family system. This system involved neolocal marriage and entailed the risk that offspring would not be available to care for their parents during the latter's old age, leading to the economic situation of older people being precarious: the "nuclear hardship" hypothesis (Laslett 1988). It contrasts with systems

elsewhere in Europe where extended or joint families were more common and close connections were more often maintained with kin, who were more likely to be available to provide economic and social support to their relations in the latter's old age. It has been found that, in parts of southern England in the nineteenth century, only 40% of old people co-resided with their offspring (Thomson 1986) and that "families were not positioning themselves so as to support the elderly" (Thomson 1991, p. 210). In England and Wales, then, a major role of the Poor Law was to enable collective provision for older people to fill the gap left by the absence of, or the limited nature of, family provision (a notable exception to the individualistic culture often supposed to characterise England in the past) (Macfarlane 1978; Thomson 1986; Thane 2000). The way the Poor Law was operated in practice in nineteenth-century England and Wales varied regionally. Several commentators have pointed out that in the north of England, provision was less generous than it was in the south of the country; and the system also operated differently in Wales (King 2000; Boyer 2016; Jones 2017). Variations could occur within these broad regions, however, and there were regional variations in the closeness of the ties between older people and their families or the extent to which other family members were able to support their older relatives. In parts of the Midlands and the north of England, well over half of older people were co-residents with offspring (for examples, see Anderson 1971; Dupree 1995). In general, the proportion of older people receiving poor relief was greatest in those areas where the aged poor were, relatively speaking, most numerous (Thomson 1991).

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

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

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

Our two hypotheses may be stated as follows. First, individuals who, in their working ages, maintained contact with their families, both immediate and extended, were less likely to have to rely on the New Poor Law to support them in their old age than were individuals who did not maintain such contact. The deeper the familial contact, and the wider the kin group it involved, the lower the chance

of pauperisation. Second, those who were isolated from their families when they were of working age, or whose familial position meant that they were unable to accumulate wealth, were especially likely to need assistance from the community when they were older.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Data

The data used in this paper came from five counties of England and Wales. These were chosen to be representative of different regimes for implementing the New Poor Law. Two of the counties (Hertfordshire and Hampshire) are in southern England; two (Cheshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire) are in the north, and one (Glamorgan) lies in Wales. Within each of these counties, a sample of registration districts was chosen, forming a total of 63 registration districts in the five counties taken together. These registration districts are not a random sample of all the registration districts in the country; however, they are broadly representative of the different economic regions and of different New Poor Law regimes. Because these registration districts are almost coterminous with Poor Law Unions, data drawn from New Poor Law records generally cover the same geographical areas as those drawn from census data.

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

3.2. Pauperism

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

Our aggregate-level measure of the extent of pauperisation is an estimate of the proportions of those aged over 60 years who were in receipt of payments under the New Poor Law in 1891. We estimated this by dividing the average number receiving relief on 1 January 1891 and described as “non-able bodied” by the population in the corresponding Poor Law Union recorded in the census of 1891 (which took place in early April). This measure is subject to error. The main error is that a proportion of those defined as “non-able bodied” in the returns of those receiving relief were aged

under 60 years. This proportion was, however, quite small. In general, local and national poor law administrators assumed that those aged under 60 years were “able bodied” unless it were proved otherwise, whereas those aged 60 years and over were assumed to be “aged and infirm” and hence “non-able bodied”.

3.3. Household Living Arrangements

The analysis in this paper is based on a comparison of the household living arrangements of people aged approximately 30–59 years and the extent of pauperisation among people aged 60 years and over. Our measure of household living arrangements makes use of a coding scheme of household types used by the I-CeM project and based on a classification system created by Eugene Hammel and Peter Laslett (Higgs et al. 2013; Laslett 1972). The I-CeM data include a derived variable that denotes the arrangement under which each person was living at the time of the relevant census. The type of household is categorised using a version of the Laslett–Hammel system of household classification; in this paper, we used a simplified version of that system (Table 1). Our classification divided households into four broad types:

1. Simple-family households, with or without children;
2. Extended households, which contained kin beyond the offspring of the head and spouse;
3. Multiple-family households, with more than one family unit;
4. Other households, including solitaries and households without a core family unit.

We also distinguished people described as “servants” and “lodgers”.

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

Table 1. Categorisation of the 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

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

3.4. The Life Course Perspective

With both the aggregate and individual-level data, we took a life course perspective. We compared the situation of those aged 60 years and over in the early 1880s (for the individual-level analysis) and 1891 (for the aggregate analysis) with the situation of the same cohort in 1851 and 1861. In the aggregate analysis, we compared the situations of the entire populations of the 63 registration districts. In the individual-level analysis, we identified two groups of people: those who received payments under the New Poor Law in the early 1880s when they were aged 60 years and over and the subset of those who received payments in the early 1880s who were admitted to the workhouse. We examined the living arrangements in 1851 and 1861 of these two groups and compared them with the living arrangements of all those living in the same registration district in 1851 and 1861 who were in the same age range as the two groups would have been in those census years. For example, in 1861, those in the groups were aged 37–73 years in the Ripon registration district, 36–71 years in the Alton registration district, and 36–67 years in the Winchester registration district.

4. Results

4.1. Aggregate Analysis

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

Table 2. Results of binary regression of percentages of those aged 60 years and over receiving payments under the New Poor Law in 1891 on the percentages of those aged 30–59 years in 1861 living 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 *

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

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

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

The results (Table 3) confirm that the aggregate association between living arrangements in 1861 and pauperism in 1891 holds up after including the controls. For females, a one-point increase in the percentage of adults aged 30–59 years living in simple households in 1861 is associated with a 0.66-point increase in the percentage of old women claiming assistance from the New Poor Law in 1891; for males, the corresponding effect is a 0.30-point increase in pauperism in 1891. For males only, a greater prevalence of residence in an extended or multiple household in 1861 is associated with a reduced reliance on the New Poor Law in 1891. The results in Table 3 also confirm that older people relied less on the New Poor Law in the north of England (Cheshire and Yorkshire) than in the south of England (Hampshire being the reference region), the difference being especially marked for females.

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

Covariate	Females	Males
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 ²	0.53	0.63

*: Asterisks denote effects statistically significant at the 95% level. “Hampshire” and “Rural” are reference categories.

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

4.2. Individual-Level Analysis

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

In the three Poor Law Unions for which we have data, a total of 177 men and 289 women appear either in the records of payments of outdoor relief or in the workhouse admissions books. Of these, 46 men and 18 women were recorded as being admitted to the workhouse, with 131 men and 271 women receiving only payments in the community. The detailed numbers were as follows: for payments in the community in Alton Union, 82 men and 153 women, and in Ripon Union, 49 men and 118 women; for admission to the workhouse in Ripon Union, 22 men and 10 women, and in Winchester Union, 24 men and 8 women. We do not have data for Alton Union on workhouse admissions or for Winchester Union on payments in the community. These numbers do not include all those who were

receiving support from the New Poor Law in the 1880s. We used census records for the 1881 census to add those who were living in the workhouse in 1881 and certain other individuals. This brought the total of those who received support from the New Poor Law in the early 1880s in the three unions to 318 men and 408 women, of whom 154 men and 70 women spent at least some time in the workhouse. These raw numbers already confirm what has been suggested by previous researchers: that men were less likely than women to be dependent on the New Poor Law but that, if they became dependent, they were more likely to be admitted to the workhouse (Goose 2005).

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

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

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

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	7852	56	106	7533

The sources for this table are New Poor Law records and workhouse admission and discharge books, Alton, Ripon, and Winchester Poor Law Unions, 1880–1885 (see Appendix A) and 1861 census data from the Integrated Census Microdata project. The figures for the “whole population” refer only to those in the age groups represented by those “admitted to the workhouse” and receiving “payments in the community”, roughly 36–70 years. The percentages exclude a small proportion of institutional residents in 1861 (2.0% of the female population and 4.3% of the male population).

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	8756	48	111	8664

The sources for this table are New Poor Law records and workhouse admission and discharge books, Alton, Ripon, and Winchester Poor Law Unions, 1880–1885 (see Appendix A) and 1851 census data from the Integrated Census Microdata project. The figures for the “whole population” refer only to those in 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% of the female population and 7.0% of the male population).

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 involved estimating the proportions of those alive in 1861 who would survive to the early 1880s. This we did using life tables for the second half of the nineteenth century (Woods and Andrew Hinde 1987). We made the assumption that mortality was not correlated with living arrangement in 1861. We then calculated the proportion of the survivors who were pauperised in the 1880s or who entered the workhouse. We assumed 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 noted that the data for the 1880s did 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 made use of several assumptions that require further assessment and so the results should be viewed with caution. We believe, though, that despite the assumptions we made, 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).

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.

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

The sources for this table are New Poor Law records and workhouse admission and discharge books, Alton, Ripon, and Winchester Poor Law Unions, 1880–1885 (see Appendix A) and 1861 census data from the Integrated Census Microdata project.

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

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

conventions of marriage and family, this increased the likelihood of receiving transfer payments in their homes over institutional accommodation in the workhouse.

5. Conclusions

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

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

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

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

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, T.H., A.H., and D.C.; methodology, T.H. and A.H.; formal analysis, T.H. and A.H.; investigation, T.H.; data curation, T.H.; writing—original draft preparation, A.H.; writing—review and editing, T.H., A.H., and D.C.; supervision, A.H. and D.C.; funding acquisition, A.H. and D.C. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: Tom Heritage’s contribution to this research was funded by the United Kingdom Economic and Social Research Council through the South Coast Doctoral Training Partnership.

Acknowledgments: We thank the staff of Hampshire Archives and Local Studies in Winchester, United Kingdom, and the North Yorkshire Record Office in Northallerton, United Kingdom, for their assistance. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Social Science History Association annual meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, in November 2018, and we are grateful to the participants at that meeting, especially Sakari Saaritsa and George Alter, for their comments.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

Appendix A

This Appendix lists the sources of nominal data on paupers being relieved in the 1880s. These data were obtained from local archives as follows: for Ripon Poor Law Union: North Yorkshire Record Office, Outdoor Relief Application and Report Books, 7 October 1880 to 22 September 1881, BG/RI 4/1/4 and Workhouse Admissions and Discharge Registers, April 1880–December 1884, BG/RI 5/3/1. For Alton Poor Law Union: Hampshire Archives and Local Studies, Outdoor Relief Application and Report Books, Alton No1 District, June–September 1881, PL3/2/89 and December 1881–March 1882, PL3/2/90, Binsted No2 District, June–September 1880, PL3/2/128 and December 1880–March 1881, PL3/2/129. For Winchester Poor Law Union: Hampshire Archives and Local Studies, Workhouse Admissions and Discharge Registers of New Winchester Union, April 1879–September 1881, PL5/11/32, October 1881–September 1882, PL5/11/33 and September 1882–March 1885, PL5/11/34.

References

- Anderson, Michael. 1971. *Family Structure in Nineteenth-Century Lancashire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Booth, Charles. 1894. *The Aged Poor in England and Wales*. London: Macmillan.
- Boyer, George R. 2016. 'Work for their prime: the workhouse for their age': Old age pauperism in Victorian England. *Social Science History* 40: 3–32. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Chudacoff, Howard P., and Tamara K. Hareven. 1979. From the empty nest to family dissolution: Life course transitions into old age. *Journal of Family History* 4: 69–83. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
- Dupree, Marguerite W. 1995. *Family Structure in the Staffordshire Potteries, 1840–1880*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Goose, Nigel. 2005. Poverty, old age and gender in nineteenth-century England: the case of Hertfordshire. *Continuity and Change* 20: 351–84. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Great Britain Parliamentary Papers. 1892. *Return (B.), Paupers Relieved on 1 January 1891*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Heritage, Tom. 2019a. Old age, regionalism and the 'north-south' divide in late Victorian and Edwardian England. *Romance, Revolution and Reform* 1: 46–71.
- Heritage, Tom. 2019b. *The Elderly Populations of England and Wales, 1851–1911: A Comparative Study of Selected Counties*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK.
- Higgs, Edward, Christine Jones, Kevin Schürer, and Lee Wilkinson. 2013. *Integrated Census Microdata (I-CeM) Guide*, 2nd ed. Colchester: University of Essex.
- Ittmann, Karl. 1995. *Work, Gender and Family in Victorian England*. London: Macmillan.
- Jones, Peter. 2017. The New Poor Laws in Scotland, England and Wales: Comparative perspectives. *Local Population Studies* 99: 31–41. [[CrossRef](#)]
- King, Steven. 2000. *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700–1850*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Laslett, Peter. 1972. Introduction: The history of the family. In *Household and Family in Past Time*. Edited by Peter Laslett and Richard Wall. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–90.
- Laslett, Peter. 1988. Family, kinship and collectivity as systems of support in pre-industrial Europe: A consideration of the 'nuclear-hardship' hypothesis. *Continuity and Change* 3: 153–75. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Macfarlane, Alan. 1978. *The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property and Social Transition*. Oxford: Blackwell.

- Ruggles, Steven. 2003. Multigenerational families in nineteenth-century America. *Continuity and Change* 3: 139–65. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Schürer, Kevin, and Edward Higgs. 2020. *Integrated Census Microdata (I-CeM) Names and Addresses, 1851–1911: Special Licence Access*, 2nd ed. [data collection]. Colchester: UK Data Service, SN:7856. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Snell, Keith. 2006. *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1850*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thane, Pat. 2000. *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Thomson, David. 1986. Welfare and the historians. In *The World We Have Gained: Essays Presented to Peter Laslett*. Edited by Lloyd Bonfield, Richard M. Smith and Keith Wrightson. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 355–78.
- Thomson, David. 1991. The welfare of the elderly in the past: A family or community responsibility? In *Life, Death and the Elderly: Historical Perspectives*. Edited by Margaret Pelling and Richard M. Smith. London: Routledge, pp. 194–221.
- Woods, Robert I., and P. R. Andrew Hinde. 1987. Mortality in Victorian England: models and patterns. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18: 27–54, Reprinted in 2000. *Health and Disease in Human History: A Journal of Interdisciplinary History Reader*. Edited by Robert I. Rotberg. Cambridge: MIT Press. pp. 61–88.



© 2020 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).