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Societal dynamics and older adults' social functioning

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The central research question of the present study is to understand how societal dynamics over the last decades have impacted on the social functioning of older adults. As a result of changes in the social context, particularly the weakening of social institutions and the increasing emphasis on self-realization and productive activities in old age, the expectation was that contrary to the still often posed idea that older adults are isolated they are more likely to be involved in wide range of social relationships and activities than before. The current study examines changes in social functioning in several domains, among others the personal network composition of older adults, stepparent-stepchild relationships and volunteering. Furthermore, it examines the interaction between the state and the family by looking at how informal and formal care vary across different societal contexts in Europe (e.g. culture, welfare state arrangements). In the study, it is found that older adults nowadays have a larger proportion of non-kin in their network than before and are more likely to volunteer. Also, stepparents are much more likely to name their stepchildren as an important and regular contact now than two decades ago. Although some older adults are less able to participate, in general the current societal structure seems to offer increased possibilities for many older adults to be socially active until high ages.



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