

Cohabitation, succession and/or retirement: living strategies of the elderly in the Northern Dutch countryside around the 19th century



Richard Paping
University of Groningen



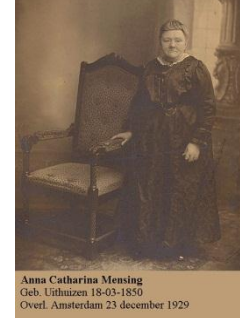
3 'ideal' systems for solving the household formation problems caused by the frequent discrepancy between the death of the parents (too late) and the marriage of the children (too early)

- 1. Three-generation households to pass an economic position/niece to one child of the next generation (cohabitation and family succession)
- 2. Retirement of the older generation to make room for the next generation (nuclear households and family succession)
- 3. The newly-wed establish new household, independent of that of one of their parental couples (nuclear households and no family succession)

Characteristics Groningen clay region

- Market-oriented rural area (export agricultural products): money-economy with large land market ('modern')
- High specialisation: 40% heads outside agriculture, 30% (falling to 10-15% around 1900) farmers, rest were landless agricultural labourers
- Equal inheritance system / impartible holdings
- High social and (short-distance) geographical mobility

Table 1. Age at death of people reaching the age of 30 (percentages) in the Groningen clay region (birth cohorts).



		N	30-40	40-50	51-60	60-70	70-80	80+	Av. Age
1721-1770	Male	481	14%	16%	19%	25%	19%	8%	59.5
	Fem.	475	17%	12%	19%	19%	23%	9%	59.7
1771-1810	Male	588	15%	19%	20%	21%	18%	8%	58.2
	Fem.	654	18%	17%	17%	19%	19%	10%	58.4
1830-1833	Male	273	13%	13%	10%	20%	24%	21%	64.1
	Fem.	314	18%	11%	12%	21%	18%	21%	62.8
1850-1852	Male	265	8%	9%	14%	18%	26%	24%	67.5
	Fem.	270	11%	7%	15%	16%	25%	27%	67.3
1870-1871	Male	216	6%	7%	8%	21%	30%	28%	70.2
	Fem.	259	5%	7%	10%	16%	31%	31%	71.2

NB: only those are included in the table with a known date of death, or (before 1800) with an indication of the death date within four years. Sources: Roman Catholic dataset (1721-1810); Integral History Cohorts (1830-1871).

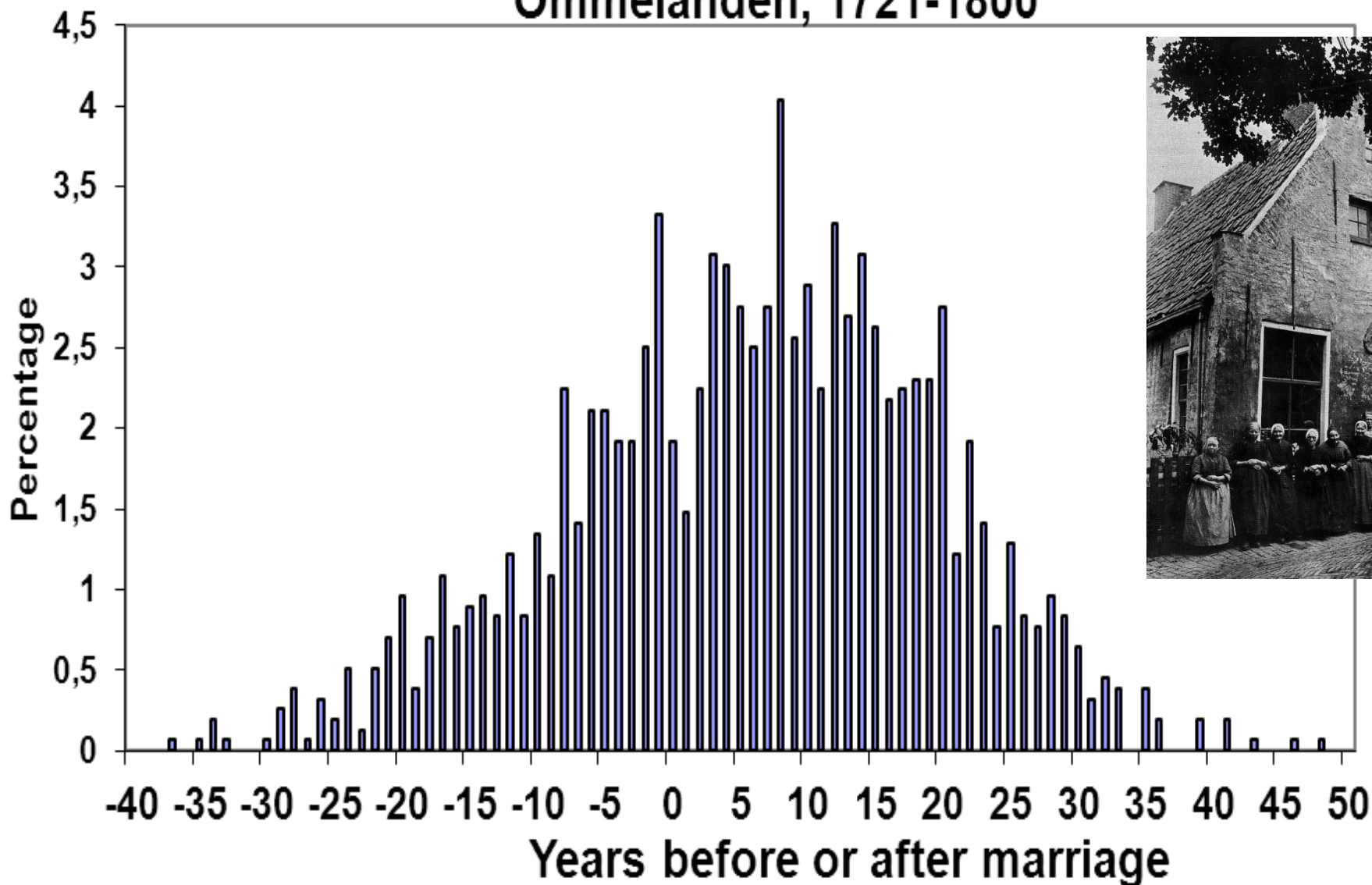
Table 3. Relation between death of parents and marriage date of Roman Catholics born 1721-1810 in the Groningen clay region.

Age	Father died	Mother died	Fully orphan
Longer than 20 years before marriage	15%	12%	3%
10-19 years before marriage	22%	15%	9%
0-9 before marriage	22%	21%	20%
0-9 years after marriage	20%	21%	26%
10-19 years after marriage	14%	18%	26%
More than 20 years after marriage	6%	12%	16%
N	1,914	1,899	1,918
Unknown death dates	331	346	327

Table 5. Survival of parents until moment of marriage of their children in the Groningen clay region (birth cohorts of children).

Birth period	N	Father dead	Mother dead	Fully orphan
1721-1810	1,899/ 1,918	59%	48%	32%
1830-1833	599/618	50%	39%	22%
1850-1852	556/567	49%	40%	23%
1870-1871	457/472	36%	28%	9%

Graph 1: Death of last parent in years before (negative) or after (positive) marriage, Birth Cohort Groningen Ommelanden, 1721-1800



- Most people married when at least one of their parents were still alive, so without a parental inheritance
- The share of individuals marrying without having received their parental inheritance increased considerably in the nineteenth century, and even further in the twentieth century
- There was no relation between the death of father, mother, or of the last parent and the marriage date of the children
- Conclusion: there was a large (and increasing) demographic potential for of creating temporary three-generation households

Table 6. Household structure according to a grouped Laslett-Hammel scheme: Groningen clay area 1829-1850.

	N	%
Single living widowers (1.a1)	51	2
Single living widows (1.a2)	128	4
Other single living persons (1.b-1.c)	138	4
Siblings and other co-resident relatives (2.a-2.b)	79	2
Married couples no children (3.a)	284	9
Married couples with children (3.b)	1,773	54
Widowers with children (3.c)	140	4
Widows with children (3.d)	328	10
Other simple family households (3.e-3.j)	51	2
Extended three-generation households (4.a-4.b, 4.d)	177	5
Laterally extended households (4.c)	112	4
Multiple family households (5.a-5.d)	45	1
Total	3,306	

Table 7-9. Household position, Groningen clay area 1829-1850

WIDOWS	21- 35	36- 40	41- 45	46- 50	51- 55	56- 60	61- 65	66- 70	71+
Solitary or boarder/lodger	14%	5%	10%	5%	21%	27%	40%	29%	43%
Living with unmarried children	71%	74%	83%	83%	67%	51%	30%	37%	20%
In complex households	14%	21%	7%	12%	12%	22%	30%	33%	37%
N	35	42	42	60	82	95	96	78	132

WIDOWERS	21- 35	36- 40	41- 45	46- 50	51- 55	56- 60	61- 65	66- 70	71+
Solitary or boarder/lodger	18%	0%	20%	28%	17%	18%	24%	34%	40%
Living with unmarried children	71%	74%	68%	61%	75%	53%	46%	29%	19%
In complex households	12%	26%	12%	11%	8%	29%	30%	37%	42%
N	17	23	25	18	36	38	37	35	48

MARRIED COUPLES	21- 25	26- 30	31- 35	36- 40	41- 45	46- 50	51- 55	56- 60	61- 65	66- 70	71+
Nuclear family with unmarried children	55%	67%	77%	81%	87%	80%	85%	77%	66%	64%	27%
Nuclear family without children	18%	15%	8%	8%	6%	14%	9%	17%	22%	22%	39%
Extended or multiple household	23%	17%	15%	11%	7%	6%	6%	6%	12%	13%	35%
N	80	321	430	352	321	254	201	163	117	45	49

- 6% three-generation households (differences between social groups rather small). Part of nuclear family region of the Netherlands (coast)
- Widows/ widowers: aged 60-70 living with unmarried children as important as more complex living arrangements with family members, or as living alone (partly in institutions!!). Even after age 70 less than 40% lived in complex family households
- Elderly married couples were even until age 70 reluctant to enter into complex household arrangements. [Only 18 cases of both parents living with a married child]

Linking-pilot 1829 and 1839

- Situation in 1839 of 18 houses with 3-generation households in 1829,
 - 8 houses inhabited by unrelated families in 1839,
 - 1 house had disappeared/was empty
 - 2 houses the older generation still lived **without** live-in married children,
 - 2 houses a **different** married child had succeeded
 - 3 houses 3-generation structure intact (2 times occupations between parent and children differed)
 - 2 houses (a farmer and a labourer) the live-in married child had taken over the household.

Possible functions of a 3-generation household

- 1. Supplying a temporary place to live for a (usually recently) married child
- 2. Caring arrangement in last stage of life of an elderly
 - In the household of the parents
 - In the household of one of the married children
- 3. As a way to pass the household to the next generation

Function 1 and 2 seem more frequent than function 3 in the Groningen clay region

Table 10: Married sons and daughters taking control over the parental household within 10 years after their marriage (married Roman Catholics born in the Groningen clay region, 1721-1800).

	Successor	No succession	N
Farmers and land owners	14%	86%	715
Tailors and weavers	19%	81%	350
Other artisans (industry)	10%	90%	222
Self-employed in services	8%	92%	238
Labourers and cottagers	11%	89%	360
Total	13%	87%	1,889

Table 11. Recipients of transferred farms in the Eastern Marne (Groningen), 1700-1960 (percentages).

	1700-1800	1801-1880	1881-1960
Son (married)	11%	17%	28%
Daughter (married)	6%	9%	8%
Unmarried child or children	2%	2%	5%
Other near relatives	3%	8%	8%
Total relatives	23%	37%	49%
Widow remarrying	13%	6%	1%
Widower remarrying	12%	9%	3%
Total remarriages	25%	16%	4%
Unrelated farmers (sold)	44%	33%	16%
Unrelated farmers (rented out)	1%	6%	21%
Empty/labourers/disapp.	7%	8%	10%
Non-Family	52%	47%	47%
N	566	418	375

Family succession was not extremely important in family formation: not even for farmers (sign of weak family ties???)

Elderly clung to their own households as long as possible, preferably in a nuclear household position: Advantages:
1. power; 2. economic security; 3. 'freedom'

Alternatives were

- In case when the house was also an economic position (farm, workshop): retirement and removal to a different (smaller) house
- In case of poverty: living in a poorhouse or as lodger
- Moving in with family members (care)

Table 12. Working-career of male farmers aged 50 year or older in the eastern-Marne in the 18th to 20th centuries.

Birth-year	N	Dying as a farmer	Retired/ without occupation	Changing occupation
1685-1770	105	74%	17%	9%
1771-1830	116	64%	27%	9%
1831-1870	88	35%	61%	3%
1871-1927	82	18%	80%	1%



Table 13. Average age at handing over the control of the farm of male farmers aged 50 year and older in the eastern Marne in the 18th to 20th centuries.

Birth-year	N	Dying as a farmer	Retired/wit hout occupation	Changing occupation
1685-1770	105	65.9	66.9 [72.4]	58.9
1771-1830	116	65.2	63.4 [77.5]	55.5
1831-1870	88	65.4	64.4 [78.6]	60.5
1871-1927	82	64.2	64.6 [80.5]	52.1

Conclusion: Farmers kept on retiring at about the same average age, however from 1900 onwards: a much larger share retired and they lived longer

Chances on family succession and living strategies of elderly male farmers (50+), eastern Marne

Birth-year	Dying as a farmer: % of family succession	N	Retiring: % of family succession	N
1685-1770	73%	78	63%	24
1771-1830	71%	72	38%	32
1831-1870	65%	31	73%	52
1871-1927	80%	15	66%	68

Retirement was not solely used to ease the transfer of farms to the next generation

3 'ideal' systems for solving the household formation problems caused by the frequent discrepancy between the death of the parents (too late) and the marriage of the children (too early) IN GRONINGEN CLAY REGION

- 1. Three-generation households to pass an economic position/niece to one child of the next generation (cohabitation and family succession)
 - **RARELY HAPPENED**
- 2. Retirement of the older generation to make room for the next generation (nuclear households and family succession)
 - **RETIREMENT INCREASED OVER TIME (FARMERS), BUT NOT ALWAYS COMBINED WITH SUCCESSION**
- 3. The newly-wed establish new household, independent of that of one of their parental couples (nuclear households and no family succession)
 - **MOST FREQUENT, ALTHOUGH SOME MARRIED CHILDREN RETURNED TO THE PARENTAL HOUSEHOLD AFTER DEATH LAST PARENT**