

## **European Population Conference 2020**

### **Dynamics of unmet need for social care in England**

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#### **Abstract**

Unmet need for social care is experienced where individuals report having difficulty with specific activities of daily living (ADLs) or instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs), but do not receive any (formal or informal) support. Recent cuts in social care budgets across the UK raise critical questions about the changing nature and extent of unmet need over time. Using data from waves 6, 7 and 8 of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) and focusing on individuals aged 65 and over, this paper examines the prevalence of unmet need for two specific ADLs for which the receipt of support is critical, i.e. bathing and dressing. Prevalence is examined within and across different waves, providing novel estimates of persistent unmet need. The analysis uses multinomial regressions among the population reporting difficulty with ADLs at baseline to investigate the demographic, health and socio-economic characteristics associated with unmet need for support for the ADL at baseline and at the next wave follow-up. Preliminary results show that cross-sectionally, 45-48% of older individuals with difficulty in bathing experienced unmet need and 52-55% of individuals with difficulty in dressing did so. Longitudinally, of those with an unmet need for dressing at baseline, 36% continued to have an unmet need at the next observation. Similarly, of those with an unmet need for bathing at baseline, just under a third (31%) continued to have an unmet need at the next wave. Repeated unmet need for bathing or dressing in consecutive waves was positively associated with higher educational qualifications, and negatively associated with reporting difficulty with more ADLs at baseline.

## Dynamics of unmet need for social care in England

### 1. Introduction

Unmet need for social care is experienced when individuals report having difficulty with performing specific activities of daily living (ADLs) or instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs) and then also report not receiving any (formal or informal) support with such activities. Recent cuts in social care budgets across the UK raise critical and policy-relevant questions concerning the changing nature and extent of unmet need over time (Mortimer and Green 2015; Dunatchik et al 2016). Previous research has examined the nature of unmet need for social care, with the majority of research being conducted at a single point in time (e.g. Vlachantoni 2019). However, understanding the dynamic change in patterns of unmet need for social care over time can provide valuable insights in the gaps created by changes in the provision of social care. Moreover, following the same individuals across time can identify those older people with a persistent unmet need for care who may be more vulnerable and at risk.

Against this background, this paper addresses the two following research questions:

- 1) What are the patterns of unmet need for social care between 2012-16?
- 2) What are the predictors of repeated unmet need for social care between 2012-16?

### 1. Data and method

The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) waves 6, 7 and 8 is employed. Table 1 shows the sample size for each wave, the proportion reporting difficulty with bathing/ dressing, and among those, the proportion who do not report receiving any support with such ADLs (i.e. proportion with unmet need). Unmet need is relatively stable when viewed cross-sectionally, with between 45-48% of older individuals experiencing unmet need with bathing in each of the three waves, and between 52-55% experiencing unmet need with dressing.

Table 1. Repeated cross-sectional results of difficulty with bathing or dressing, met and unmet care needs.

	W6	W7	W8
Total sample size	5685	5590	5478
No difficulty with bathing	87.1	88.1	89.0
With difficulty with bathing but receiving help	7.1	6.5	5.8
With difficulty with bathing but not receiving help	5.8 (329)	5.4 (304)	5.2 (285)
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Prevalence of unmet need of bathing (unweighted %)	44.8%	45.6%	47.5%
No difficulty with dressing	84.0	84.9	85.0
With difficulty with dressing but receiving help	7.6	7.3	6.7
With difficulty with dressing but not receiving help	8.4 (477)	7.8 (436)	8.3 (453)
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Prevalence of unmet need of dressing (unweighted %)	52.4%	51.7%	55.1%

Source: Authors' analysis of ELSA waves 6,7,8

In order to examine the predictors of repeated unmet need for bathing and dressing, longitudinal analysis is necessary. Limiting the analysis to respondents with complete information in all three

waves (w6, w7 and w8) results in a high number of exclusions, reducing the analytical sample size<sup>1</sup>. In order to minimise missing observations, it was therefore decided to adopt a pooled paired years strategy (pooling paired waves 6-7 and waves 7-8), taking the first year in each pair as the baseline and looking whether individuals' care needs were met or not at the baseline, and then again in the next wave. The analytical sample for the multinomial modelling was restricted to those reporting difficulty with bathing (or dressing) at baseline.

The dependent variable was whether the individual's care needs of bathing or dressing are met over the observation period, with the following possible outcomes: 1. Met need at both waves (reference); 2. Unmet need at one of either wave; 3. Unmet need at both waves.

Table 2 shows the number of cases falling into each category. The majority of those with just one instance of an unmet need were those respondents whose need was unmet at baseline; very few cases reported having a 'new' unmet need at endline (i.e. who moved from having their needs met to unmet). Of those with an unmet need for bathing at baseline (511 in total), just under a third (31%: 160) continued to have an unmet need at the next observation. Similarly, of those with an unmet need for dressing at baseline (751 in total), just over a third (36%: 270) continued to have an unmet need at the next wave.

Table 2. Number of cases.

Bathing difficulty at baseline (N=921)	Met need at baseline	Unmet need at baseline
Met need at endline	Consistently met need (377)	Needs met once (351)
Unmet need at endline	Needs met once (33)	<b>Consistently unmet need (160)</b>
Dressing difficulty at baseline (N=1264)	Met need at baseline	Unmet need at baseline
Met need at endline	Consistently met need (458)	Needs met once (481)
Unmet need at endline	Needs met once (55)	<b>Consistently unmet need (270)</b>

The independent variables included *constant* variables and *dynamic* variables. The constant variables, measured at baseline, were: Age: 65-74, 75-84, 85 and over; Gender: male, female; Marital status: single never married, married/civil partnered, divorced/separated, widowed; ADL score at baseline (i.e. number of ADLs individual has difficulty with); Report of LLTI: No long-term illness, no limiting long-term illness, with limiting long-term illness; Housing tenure: owner-occupier, rent socially, rent privately, rent-free/other; NS-SEC (occupational social class): managerial/professional, intermediate, small employer/ own account worker, lower supervisory, semi-routine/ routine, incomplete/no information (not included in multivariate analysis); Education qualifications: None, low, high.

The dynamic (or time variant) measures included: Living arrangements: living with spouse or others both waves, living alone two waves, change to live alone at the second wave; ADL index score: No change or improved, worsening; Self-reported health: No change or improved, worsening, unknown (not included in multivariate analysis).

## 2. Results

<sup>1</sup> Limiting the analysis to only those with complete information in all three waves (N=3875) shows that among individuals reporting a difficulty with bathing in wave 6, 63% (210/331) had an unmet need. This is much higher than that shown in Table 1 suggesting that non-response across the waves is non-random. Interestingly, of these just under a third continued to have an unmet need in wave 7 (63/210) and 17% (36/210) had a persistent unmet need in all three waves. Similarly, among individuals reporting a difficulty with dressing in wave 6, 64% (314/493) had an unmet need. Of these 38% continued to have an unmet need in wave 7 (122/314) and 18% (56/314) had a persistent unmet need in all three waves.

Table 3 shows the relative risk ratios of unmet needs of bathing or dressing among the respondents at risk. Repeated unmet need for bathing or dressing (i.e. unmet need at both baseline and endline) was positively associated with higher educational qualifications, and negatively associated with the report of difficulty with more ADLs at baseline.

Table 3 Relative Risk Ratios (rrr) derived from multinomial logistic regressions for predicting unmet needs with bathing or dressing difficulty among people aged 65 and over, by individual characteristics (pooled paired waves (w6-w7 and w7-w8); the reference group is respondents with ‘met needs’ in both waves)

	Bathing difficulty at baseline (N=921)				Dressing difficulty at baseline (N=1264)			
	1 record of unmet needs vs Met needs		2 records of unmet needs vs Met needs		1 record of unmet needs vs Met needs		2 records of unmet needs vs Met needs	
<i>Age:</i>								
65-74								
75-84	0.92		1.10		0.78		0.94	
85+	0.47	**	0.26	***	0.51	**	0.35	***
<i>Gender:</i>								
Men								
Women	0.78		0.81		0.87		0.62	**
<i>Marital status:</i>								
Single never married								
Married/civil partnered	0.98		0.98		0.89		0.89	
Divorced/separated	1.47		3.81	*	1.48		2.32	
Widowed	1.01		1.84		1.80		1.25	
<i>Living arrangements change:</i>								
Other living arrangements								
Change to live alone at the second wave	0.92		0.34		3.80	**	3.45	*
Living alone two waves	1.76		1.91	*	2.41	**	5.84	***
<i>ADL index score, baseline</i>	0.67	***	0.70	***	0.62	***	0.65	***
<i>ADL index score change</i>								
No change or improved								
Worsening	0.30	***	0.72		0.30	***	0.90	
<i>Report of LLTI:</i>								
No long-term illness								
Not LLTI	0.96		0.46		1.23		1.18	
LLTI	0.57	*	0.47	*	0.46	**	0.48	*
<i>Housing tenure:</i>								
Owner-occupier								
Rent socially	0.74		0.87		0.91		0.95	
Rent privately	1.08		1.02		0.50		0.52	
Rent-free/other	0.41	**	0.14	***	0.37	*	0.17	**
<i>Educational qualifications:</i>								
None								
Low	1.67	**	1.52		1.14		1.97	***
High	2.07	*	2.26	*	1.57		2.04	*

Source: Author’s analysis of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (Wave 6, Wave 7 and Wave 8).  
Significance levels: \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001.

### 3. Discussion

The results raise important policy implications concerning the individual characteristics associated with the experience of unmet need for social care over time.

### References

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