

LIVING CONDITIONS OF WOMEN 50+ IN GERMANY

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1. Introduction

Anyone looking for information pertaining to the living conditions of women 50 over years of age (women 50+) in Germany will find scattered and, in part, spotty resources that have only been systematized to a small degree. In the area of social science research, where the topic of “older women” has been increasingly addressed as part of discussions on the demographic ageing of society, a relatively high number of publications exist with diverse focal points covering a range of life topics. Searching for data in official statistical sources on the living conditions of women 50+ is quite time-consuming, since they are dispersed across all areas documented by official statistics.

The following “mapping exercise” is an attempt to depict the heterogeneous “scientific landscape” pertaining to the living conditions of women 50+. Existing descriptions of this topic will be examined in terms of which information can be found and which theories can be located pertaining to individual life topics. The result is a “scientific map”, one of many possible maps, detailing the living conditions of women 50+ in Germany, one that can serve as a guide for those interested in the subject and, perhaps, pointing towards (new) paths of knowledge.

In the following, an introduction will be given of the MERI¹ research project in which this mapping exercise has been integrated and of how the MERI research programme has been implemented in Germany. Subsequently, general characteristics of the information available

1 MERI (“**M**apping **E**xisting **R**esearch and **I**dentifying knowledge gaps concerning the situation of older women in Europe”) was carried out in 2003 und 2004 as part of the thematic programme “Quality of life and management of living resources”, within the 5th framework programme of the European Commission for research, technological development and demonstration activities.

on the living conditions of women 50+ will be described. Following that, a depiction will be given of data pertaining to individual life areas, in which informational focal points and weaknesses will be examined and important patterns of argumentation discerned. In conclusion, suggestions for potential areas of future research will be offered.

1.1 The MERI project: resources pertaining to women 50+ in Europe

How do women over 50 live in Europe? How are their living conditions approached in the realm of research and how are they depicted in official statistics? These questions served as the point of departure for the MERI European research project, along with the observation that the state of information on how these women live is deficient in many respects, despite the fact that they represent a significant and growing segment of the population, and despite numerous indications that they are systematically disadvantaged in a variety of ways. Within the framework of this project, current information in 12 participating countries (Belgium, Germany, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Sweden, Spain and United Kingdom) relating to the situation of women 50+ in the areas of health, education, work, material situation, social integration, crime/abuse and political representation was collected and examined by national teams of researchers. In the project's first phase, researchers investigated to what extent academic research exists on the topic. In the second phase, official statistics were examined to see if and how they contained information on women 50+. In the course of both phases, key areas of information and deficiencies in information resources in each nation were ascertained and subsequently compared across countries. This provided an overview of where research and official statistics are wanting and allowed corresponding agendas for research, data collection and data dissemination to be assembled. Implementation of the agendas was subsequently discussed as part of a seminar attended by representatives of European government and non-government organisations. The systematisation of resources pertaining to the living conditions of women 50+ is meant to provide politicians and researchers with an improved empirical basis for carrying out their work and to increase awareness of the difficulties this demographic segment faces – as well as its potential.

1.2 Carrying out the MERI research programme in Germany

In carrying out the MERI research programme, the national research teams approached their tasks in a variety of ways, above all in light of the range of information on the living conditions of women 50+ to be found in each country. In Germany, a selection of social science research carried out between 1993 and 2002 was examined to ascertain the current state of research². The research's central theses were summarized and assigned to the categories corresponding to those areas used in the MERI project. The works' basic theses were collected in a database, along with information on the questions raised, methodology and bibliographic annotations in each text. The results of a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the database were supplemented with estimates on the current state of research based on current literature and interviews with experts.

In the area of official statistics, publications released by Germany's Federal Statistical Office were examined if the data to be found therein had been published within the past nine years. All published tables were collected in which the characteristics "age" and "gender" appeared

2 For the time period 2000 to 2002, all search results in the category of social science in the catalogue of the Deutsche Bibliothek in Frankfurt am Main were examined, as was the "GeroLit" database of the German Centre of Gerontology. Medical studies were not systematically referenced. For the time period 1993 to 1999, the sampling of the MERI precursor project "Equal opportunities for older women" (cf. Stiehr/Huth 2001, pp. 120pp) was used as a point of departure and developed further. In addition, the federal government's third and fourth report on the older generation (cf. BMFSFJ 2001; 2002) were evaluated. A total of 81 texts were analysed.

and were cross-listed. The data pool that resulted comprises 234 tables. These tables were examined to see which age groups were referenced under the “age” characteristic. Notations of particular interest were the range of years in each category and the oldest listed age group. As part of the analysis, the tables were studied to determine for which characteristics information was presented on women 50+ and, in turn, in which areas such information was missing. In looking for and evaluating the data, telephone conversations with personnel of Germany’s Federal Statistical Office responsible for individual informational areas proved quite helpful. A total of 46 employees of the Federal Statistical Office were interviewed.

Based on the results of the analysis of the scientific research and the analysis of official statistics, it was possible to determine which types of information are available on the living conditions of women 50+ and in which areas, as well as in which areas more information is required.

2. Which types of information are available?

2.1 Social science publications

Examination of social science publications on the living conditions of women 50+ showed that in the time period under study a relatively large number of articles appeared on this topic. Yet the examined publications consistently noted that the relationship between the categories of “gender” and “age” is only gradually being addressed as a topic and that the low level of academic research on women 50+ does not reflect their demographic importance, which increases as one moves up the age scale (“feminisation of old age”), or their difficult social situation (cf. e.g. Backes 2002).

The apparent contradiction might well lie, in part, in the focus of the examined publications. A number of the texts have an insufficient empirical base. The studies often have little to do with age-related sociological or gerontological³ and feminist concepts. This view coincides with Backes’ assessment of current research, according to which many questions remain open regarding the relationship between “gender” and “age” and much of what is known can only be seen as initial speculation or results based on highly specific observations (cf. Backes 2002: 117). Many of the publications focus on in part highly-specialized individual aspects of the living conditions of women 50+, while studies geared toward creating systematic results are rare. Another portion of the examined publications, however, especially those dealing with the topics of provision for old age, care work und retirement, do contain detailed and well-founded studies.

The often-expressed criticism of the deficient state of research on the living conditions of women 50+ is, on the other hand, also motivated by research politics. It is both feminist criticism of gerontological research, in which until now the category of “gender” was not systematically considered, and gerontological criticism of feminist research, in which “age” has hardly been addressed. The epistemological and scientific-political aim of most of the examined publications is thus a combining of the, until now, mostly separate categories of “age” and “gender”. The epistemological aspect is, however, seldom explicit, and purely epistemological studies are lacking entirely.

Within the pool of examined publications, however, the following implicit concepts of the categories “gender” and “age” are expressed. “Gender” is exclusively conceived in terms of feminist theory of difference: It is seen as largely a result of socialisation, the existence of a biological sex as a natural basis for gender-identification, and the universal physiological and ontological differences between men and women that follow from it are considered self-

3 The lack of theoretical anchoring of comprehensive empirical data (“rich-data-poor-theory”) is a commonly expressed criticism of the sociology of ageing and social gerontology (cf. Bengtson/Burgess/Parrot 1997).

evident (cf. e.g. Prokop 1976) and are not, as in the discussions of feminist theory in the 1990s, deconstructed (cf. e.g. Butler 1993).

The distinction of “age”, however, yields more conceptual effort. Given its ascriptive nature, virtually no text can escape defining what an “older woman” is. The distinction is often based on practical research-related and rarely on epistemological criteria. Chronological age is usually referenced, and more or less haphazard age limits are set. Implicit references to current theoretical concepts of “age” are less evident and uniform than is the case with the category of “gender”. On the one hand, it is apparent that in many of the examined texts positive images that stand in contrast to common social perceptions of older women are presented and, in conjunction with them, arguments from activity theory not infrequently employed: As a competing strategy to the socially-related loss of function as part of ageing, new possible roles for women, above all for those of middle age, are being created (cf. e.g. Tartler 1961). On the other hand, the impression arises that apparently biological indications gain in importance the older the age group considered. This is perhaps evidence of the currently-discussed increasing “medicalisation” of those of advanced age.

In addition to the key categories of “age” and “gender”, the influence of other structural categories on the living conditions of women 50+ is little examined in the pool of publications. Surprisingly, the meaning of “class” as a category is seldom studied, even though major socio-economic differences are readily apparent, in the areas of provision for old age and care, among others. A relatively new development is a consideration of the living conditions of older immigrant women (cf. e.g. BFSFMJ 2001; Olbermann 2003)⁴. The living conditions of women 50+ with physical challenges and illnesses remain almost completely unexamined (cf. e.g. Wacker 2003). Similarly, information on women 50+ and homosexuality is nonexistent. Socio-spatial differences are recorded in the form of commonly reproduced comparisons between eastern and western Germany – how the living conditions of women 50+ in rural and urban areas differ – but is hardly addressed. Most of the publications examined refer as a matter of course to urban living conditions (cf. also Engel 2001).

2.2 Official statistics

In searching for data in official statistical sources pertaining to the living conditions of women 50+, hundreds of tables could be located having the characteristics “age” and “gender” cross-listed, despite only data from Germany’s Federal Statistical Office having been searched⁵. For a variety of reasons, however, these tables are often of limited use in providing meaningful information about the living conditions of women 50+. A fundamental problem is that personal data relating to households (e.g. micro-census, income and consumption survey (Einkommens- und Verbrauchsstichprobe) are often only available for the mostly male “head of household”. Deriving information about the living conditions of women is, as a result, only possible to a limited extent. In addition, household-related data do not include individuals living in institutions, such as senior citizens’ or nursing homes, or the homeless.

Further limitations are imposed by the choice of age groups listed in the tables. In many cases, the population is broken down into age groups spanning five or ten years. The oldest group is often “65 years or older”. Until the age of 65, differentiation according to age is often detailed, presumably since one of the main objectives of collecting federal statistics is the

4 Promising results are expected from the second panel of The German Ageing Survey (2002), which included male and female immigrants in its survey sample, which were until now not included in the existing representative ageing studies.

5 The Federal Statistical Office is in the process of making fundamental changes to how it publishes data. Among other changes, data are to be disseminated increasingly via Internet. This is meant to allow users easier access to more comprehensive data and facilitate customized table formats (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2002a). Presumably, this should make a considerably larger number of tables available offering even more detailed information on “age” and “gender”.

recording of social and state-related developments. Given that gainful employment is of central importance to the allocation of social benefits a detailed differentiation for age until the regular retirement age 65+ is practical. The inclusion of all people 65-years-of-age or older in one category, however, is not always useful (e.g. when looking at education levels, voter participation, health issues). From a gerontological viewpoint, therefore, only few tables provide sufficiently differentiated information when it comes to very high age groups.

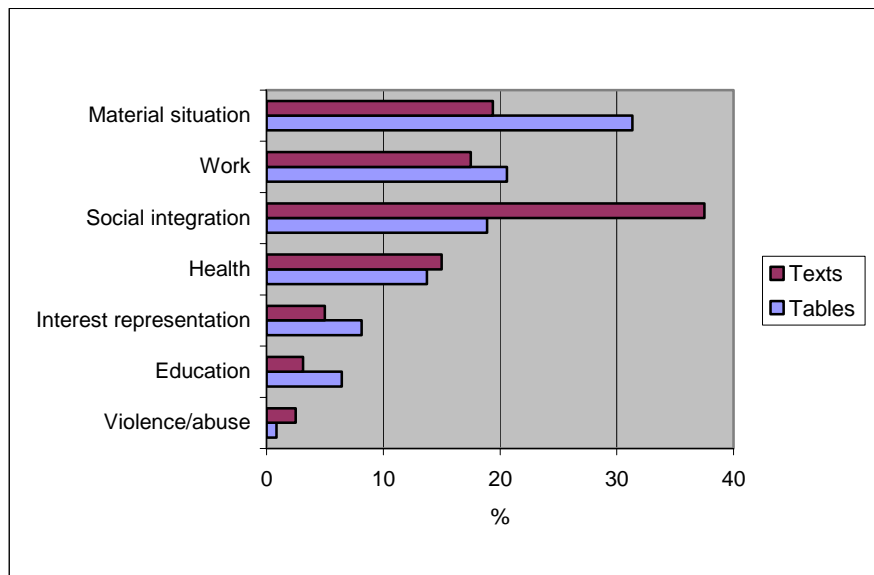
Moreover, the characteristics “age” and “gender” as listed in the examined tables are often not cross-listed with other characteristics and, as a result, the data often remain relatively vague. For example, tables on “foreign residents” are available differentiated by “age” and “gender”, while additional informative characteristics such as “residential status” or “length of residence” are not. This might be ascribed to the practical consideration that the “age” characteristic takes up considerable space in a table. In contrast to “gender”, for which a maximum of three columns or lines (men/women/total) is required depending on classification, the “age” characteristic can require between five to ten columns or lines. The cross-referencing with other characteristics, above all with more comprehensive characteristics, would in many cases exceed the space available for printed media. On the other hand, it might also be a result of how “age” is understood as part of official statistical record keeping. In the course of this project, the impression could be increasingly had that “age” is conceived of as a primarily demographic characteristic and not, as in the case of “gender”, a structural category. While large portions of the publications of the Federal Statistical Office now consistently differentiate by “gender”, age-related distinctions are often solely offered as demographic summary information.

In light of this, the demographic ageing of society as detailed in publications of the Federal Statistical Office is mainly approached from the perspective of general population statistics. Of central interest are descriptions, explanations and forecasts of ageing trends (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2003d). This situation has, however, not led to a recognition of the necessity of employing new collection and publication practices. Unlike as in European-wide discussions (cf. Eurostat 2002), demands for an “enageing” of official statistics remain largely unexpressed. Analogous to “engendering”, the term “enageing” refers to the introduction of a comprehensive differentiation by age in all statistics. This derives from the notion that “age” – as is true of “gender” – is a central structural category for positioning individuals in society and, therefore, should no longer be viewed as just one more demographic variable among many. No such publications have been made available, nor had Federal Statistical Office or Statistical Advisory Council staff heard of the “enageing” of statistics or any related discussion.

3. How are the living conditions of women 50+ being described?

The qualitative evaluation of the information found in the examined texts on the living conditions of women 50+ showed that clear thematic focal points exist, which are also reflected in the quantitative distribution of the examined texts and tables across the life topics included within the scope of the MERI project. The most comprehensive information is available for the areas of “work” and “material situation”, areas that are closely linked both thematically and causally. They are seen as the key areas giving rise to the socially-disadvantaged situation of women 50+. The area of “social integration”, to which the examined texts were very often ascribed above all as a result of its broad definition, contains among others the central cross-sectional topics of “social networks” and “psycho-social aspects”. Although theories for gender-related differences among older persons are often to be found in the area of “health”, relatively little information is available on this point in the examined texts and tables. This is a result, among other factors, of the fact that texts focussing on social science topics were examined and medical texts were not systematically included. “Health”, along with the little-referenced areas of “interest representation”, “education” and “crime and abuse”, thus belongs to the weakest informational focal points.

Figure 1: The distribution of examined texts and tables on areas under study



Texts: n = 160 (multiple inclusions possible), tables: n = 234.

3.1 Areas of informational focal points

3.1.1 Work: discontinuous employment and unpaid care work

One thematic area for which much information can be found in both social science publications and official statistics is “work”. In the examined texts, the living conditions of women 50+ is almost without exception ascribed to the cumulative effects of being subject to life-long gender-related discrimination. This clearly refutes the argument that gender-related differences tend to diminish with advanced age. The discrimination of women through gender-hierarchical work distribution is, according to feminist argumentation, of central importance. In the examined publications, correspondingly, when it came to the topic of “work”, employment of women 50+ was less prominent than were factors contributing to the discontinuity of their work histories. In keeping with the importance of reproductive-related tasks in feminist theory, at-home care work of disabled family members is of key interest (cf. e.g. Maly-Lukas 2003). A “new” form of the double burden of women, the merging of employment and nursing responsibilities, is being addressed (cf. e.g. Reichert 2003). Much information is also available on developments relating to retirement (cf. e.g. Clemens 1997, 2000), and individual articles examine unemployment among women 50+ (cf. e.g. Backes 1999).

While social science publications focus on unpaid care work, official statistics highlight traditional paid work. Although statistics of the Federal Statistical Office are not the most important source of official employment data⁶, micro-census data on employment in the general population yield tables differentiated by “age” and “gender” (cf. e.g. Statistisches Bundesamt 2002c; 2002g). In these tables, the characteristic of “age” is detailed consistently in 5-year groupings all the way up to the employment-relevant group of “65 or older”. Often, statistics on employment participation, areas of employment and work conditions are all present in the tables. In contrast, rarely is information on unemployment or persons leaving the workforce to be found in publications of the Federal Statistical Office. No data are available on informal, unpaid work by women 50+. Data pools that might shed light on the area of unpaid employment, such as the non-employed as recorded in the micro-census or persons providing care work as recorded in care statistics (Pflegerstatistik), are not published according to “age” and

6 In terms of official data, the statistics of the German Federal Labour Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit) represent the most important source of information on the subject of employment.

“gender” or are not recorded according to personal characteristics. Promising data are, however, expected from the as-yet unpublished results of the first time-budgeting survey, in which time spent on unpaid work plays a central role (cf. BFSFJ/Statistisches Bundesamt 2003: 9pp).

Many of the examined texts (cf. e.g. Backes 2003) and tables (cf. e.g. Statistisches Bundesamt 2002c; 2002g) look at differences between women in eastern and western Germany. In them, not only ongoing pronounced socio-economic differences, but also the after-effects of the different traditions of employment for women in the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic are, above all, of interest.

The following theory pertaining to disadvantages of women 50+ in the area of work can be found in almost all of the examined social science publications on the topic of work. It is not only the case that, as shown in official statistics, employment levels of women 50+ are markedly lower in, above all, western Germany than for men of the same age (cf. e.g. Statistisches Bundesamt 2002c: 45). In addition, their work histories are, in contrast to that of men, marked by discontinuity, since the years of gainful employment for women 50+ have been and will be truncated on both ends in favour of family-related tasks. Recently women in western Germany, above all, have often interrupted their professional work as a result of having and raising children (cf. e.g. Krauthausen 2002), a topic that until now has been at the heart of feminist research. What is more, women 50+ often give up or reduce their involvement in gainful employment in their later years in order to care for family members in need. The majority of those caring for family members at home are women 50+ (cf. e.g. BMFSFJ 2002: 195pp).

A central characteristic of the discontinuity in the employment of women is that they leave the workforce earlier than men and, not infrequently, their departure is unplanned and not of their own choice. The most common form of entering retirement for women is early retirement (cf. e.g. Clemens 2000: 145). In addition to taking on care work, disability is also an oft-cited reason. In a majority of cases, women in eastern Germany who work professionally until reaching retirement age receive a pension based on the regulations applying to women who have reached their 60th birthday. In western Germany, women receive pensions almost equally based on regulations applying to women and those reaching the age of 65. Pensions – often claimed by men – based on long-term employment with pension insurance, unemployment, partial retirement or severe disability are rarely claimed by women (cf. BMFSFJ 2001: 180pp).

In addition to leaving the workforce early, unemployment is a further factor contributing to the discontinuity in the gainful employment of women 50+, especially in eastern Germany. For them, two factors come together: the increased rate of unemployment for workers between the ages of 50 and 60 and the high level of unemployment for women in eastern Germany (cf. e.g. BMFSFJ 2001: 169p).

Beyond the focus on the discontinuity in employment of women 50+, relatively little information is available on their employment situation. In the examined texts, the over-representation of women 50+ in low-status and part-time jobs and as the objects of income and workplace discrimination are barely acknowledged as real-world phenomena (cf. e.g. Backes 1999). In contrast, a large number of the examined texts are concerned with the conditions and after-effects of providing unpaid care work. The texts extensively document the enormous physical and mental burdens that are often associated with such work (cf. e.g. Maly-Lukas 2003). The combination of engaging in professional work and providing care work is viewed from a number of perspectives. Some studies emphasize the double stress aspect and problems of compatibility. Others emphasize that employment can serve as a financial and psychological counterweight for providing care work (cf. e.g. Reichert 2003). At the heart of these arguments, however, one finds the fact that the often very stressful and socially-important provision of home care work is rarely accorded social recognition. Referencing feminist ideas of work, the examined texts therefore demand that the social concept of work as limited to gain-

ful employment should be expanded, above all so that work carried out by women 50+ can be included in claims for pension benefits.

The discontinuity in employment of women 50+ and the unpaid care work provided by them thus serve as a focal point in the examined texts, since qualified and continuous employment is widely seen as the best “gero-prophylaxis”, that is, the best prerequisite for “successful ageing”, primarily in material but also in immaterial terms⁷ (cf. e.g. Backes 1999). Women 50+, however, do not have continuous employment experience and are therefore subject in advanced age to higher risk factors than are men. Above all, as will be shown below, they are at a disadvantage vis-à-vis men in terms of their material resources. A number of the examined texts, however, suggest positive future developments, since the employment rate for women 50+ has risen constantly in past years (cf. e.g. BMFSFJ 2001; Statistisches Bundesamt 2002c: 157) and will presumably continue to rise. This trend is taken to mean that women who enter the category 50+ in the future will experience better living conditions than women 50+ today.

3.1.2 Material situation: insufficient “independent provision for old age”

Even more information is available in social science publications and, above all, in official statistics about the material situation of women 50+ than is the case for the topic of “work”. Information provided in the examined texts is related to and directly extends theories pertaining to work. The material situation of women 50+ is perceived as the result of their preceding choices in the labour market and their ensuing inclusion in state-run social welfare programmes, which is of decisive importance for their income in later years. Above all, the income of women 50+ is discussed often and extensively (cf. e.g. Veil 2002). Even as early as the 1970s, provisions for retirement and old age were the object of feminist discourse in Germany, something that is often viewed in connection with the fact that the gender-bias of the German pension system is relatively apparent compared to other countries and, as a result, often the object of feminist criticism (cf. e.g. *ibid*). A central topic in the examined texts relating to the income of women 50+ is poverty (cf. e.g. Faik 2000). In contrast to sources of income, expenditures by women 50+ are hardly discussed in the examined publications. A number of texts are concerned with, among other things, housing conditions for women 50+ (cf. e.g. BMSFSJ 1998, Zeman 2000); in contrast little information is presented on their consumption habits (cf. e.g. Schönknecht 2003).

Of those examined, more tables were to be found in publications of the Federal Statistical Office on the material situation of women 50+ than on any other topic⁸. The majority of data available pertained to how women 50+ are included in state-run social welfare programmes, a decisive factor when it comes to income for older persons. Presumably this is because presentation of statistics pertaining to state-related social developments as a tool for government policy aimed at implementing social welfare principles is one of the main responsibilities of the Federal Statistical Office (cf. Vogel/Grünwald 1996: 85pp). Yet data on women 50+ relating to the assorted types of social services and social insurance programmes are published with highly-varying degrees of differentiation.

In terms of those receiving social assistance, publications of the Federal Statistical Office contain sufficient and comprehensive data broken out by “age” and “gender” (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2000a). Publications of the Federal Statistical Office contain no data on recipients of assistance as part of work promotion programmes, since these can be found in statis-

7 A few texts depict the effects of gainful employment on the living conditions of women 50+ more ambivalently. They maintain that employment can also increase the risk of social isolation, health problems and overexertion (cf. e.g. Clemens 1997: 273).

8 Even though the most important data sources in this field are the studie “Altersvorsorge in Deutschland” (cf. Verband Deutscher Rentenversicherungsträger 1999) and the statistics of the Verband Deutscher Rentenversicherungsträger.

tics published by the German Federal Labour Agency. No data are available on women 50+ receiving housing assistance (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2001b) or diverse types of war-related assistance (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2000b). Only a few datasets on asylum-related assistance are differentiated according to “age” and “gender”, in which the highest age group (65 and over) is insufficient from a gerontological point of view (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2001a).

Data on social insurance protection for women 50+ can only be found in publications of the Federal Statistical Office as they relate to Germany’s state-run pension system. They are available as detailed and extensive micro-census data, differentiated by “age”, on persons contributing to the pension system (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2001c). For other company-related pension contributions, no current data are available. With the exception of a table detailing life insurance policies (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2001c: 52pp), no data on private retirement plans were to be found. Data on coverage by state-run health insurance companies are collected by the Federal Statistical Office as part of the micro-census, although they are not published. Information on insurance policies covering care work is also not available.⁹

In addition to the comprehensive data on the inclusion of women 50+ in social insurance programmes, many tables were available with information on the income of women 50+, most of which are results of the income and consumption sampling survey (Einkommens- und Verbrauchsstichprobe) (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2001f; Münnich 2001) and the micro-census query (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2002c; 2002e). The included data are detailed and highly differentiated according to “age” and pertain to household income, above all with respect to poverty. The data, however, are limited when it comes to illuminating the income situation of women 50+, since they are the result of household queries and person-specific data are only available for the usually male head of household. The data are rarely differentiated by type of income, which means, for example, that data on income from pensions – a key source of income for women 50+ – are hard to come by. Most data pertain to employment income and are derived from wage and salary statistics (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2001d). These data, too, remain quite general, since the characteristics of “age” and “gender” are not cross-listed with other characteristics such as level of education or profession.

No data are available on the consumption habits of women 50+ or their acquisition of goods and services, neither in household expenditure publications (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2001e; 2002d) nor in income or consumption samplings (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2001f), since the characteristics of “gender” and “age” in the corresponding tables are not cross-listed. Individual tables can only be found on female pension recipients living alone (cf. e.g. Münnich 2001). In terms of expenditures for housing or housing-related purchases, micro-census data are available (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2000c) that are in fact differentiated by “age” and “gender”, but whose meaningfulness is limited given that the data are household-related and the highest age group is “65 or older”, which is too low in light of average life expectancy.

In all examined tables dealing with the material situation of women 50+, statistical proof can be found that the income of women 50+ is, on average, markedly lower than that of men in the same age group, regardless of differences in income related to class, geographical region or type of household. It can be seen that property and wealth are even more unequally distributed between men and women than is income. Depending on the source of data and method of calculation, the extent of the disparity of material resources varies. Women are

9 Further statistical data on the social security protection of women 50+ are to be found in the statistics of the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Security (Bundesministerium für Gesundheit und soziale Sicherung), the Verband Deutscher Rentenversicherungsträger, the Arbeitsgemeinschaft betriebliche Altersversorgung, the Verband der privaten Krankenversicherung and in the studie “Altersvorsorge in Deutschland” (cf. Verband Deutscher Rentenversicherungsträger 1999).

particularly disadvantaged in terms of expenditures, e.g. for (assisted) living (cf. e.g. Zeman 2000), private nursing services (cf. e.g. BMFSFJ 2002: 98pp) or consumption.

The material disadvantage evidenced by women 50+ is ascribed to the fact that this age bracket is often associated with diminished income as a result of leaving the workforce, and, in addition, the fact that their disadvantaged position in the workforce has a negative effect on all types of income: If they have one at all, women 50+ have a considerably lower income from gainful employment than do men of the same age bracket (cf. e.g. Faik 2000), since they mostly work in more poorly-paid areas, receive in total lower wages than men and are often only employed part-time. Given their often discontinuous work experience, women 50+ in western Germany have far fewer possibilities for claiming a state pension than do men of the same age group. In comparison, income from age-based pensions is far less unevenly distributed between men and women in eastern Germany as a result of the more continuous employment histories of women there (cf. e.g. BMFSFJ 2001: 194pp). Women 50+ in eastern Germany, however, are listed as the demographic group over 50 years of age with the lowest available income and wealth (cf. e.g. Backes 2003). Presumably this is a result of the low level of pension payments in eastern Germany and their more disadvantaged position in terms of other types of income. In the end, given their lower income and wealth, women 50+ have markedly less private resources for retirement at their disposal than do men in the same age group. As a result, they are often dependent on their spouse's income, on second-party pensions, above all widow's pensions, or on social assistance (cf. Repo 1997).

This is the point at which feminist criticism of the gender aspects of the German social welfare state begins, criticism that can be found in almost all examined texts and which has been expressed in the women's movement and feminist research since the 1980s. Based on the depiction of typical work histories and the resulting material disadvantages in advanced years, the conclusion is reached that women are notably disadvantaged within the German pension system, which is based on regular employment and which does not recognize unpaid work related to childrearing and care for older relatives, work that is as a rule performed by women. That is why marriage often serves as the most important institution for supporting women, even in later years (cf. e.g. Veil 2002). Many of the examined texts thus call for socio-political measures for promoting "independent retirement means" for women (cf. e.g. *ibid*). At the heart of this concept, developed in the 1970s, is a call for advancing employment possibilities for women, facilitating a combining of family and career and the inclusion of childrearing and care work in pension claims. Quite a few of the examined texts analyse what effect current reforms and debates regarding work or pensions will have on "independent retirement means" for women. By and large, the authors come to the conclusion that a number of the new regulations would be welcome (e.g. regulations relating to children), while others would bring new risks for women during their later years (e.g. reductions in pensions for surviving spouses without their own sources of replacement income) and other important measures were not even addressed (cf. e.g. Langelüddeke 2001).

In many of the texts, this "gender"-focussed depiction of highly complex income parameters is recast, in that factors that present additional material risks for women 50+ and factors that might ameliorate material disadvantages are identified. Those who can be considered at increased risk are, above all: single mothers (cf. Faik 2000), women living alone (cf. e.g. Zeman 2000), women needing care – above all those living in senior citizens' or nursing homes (cf. e.g. Zeman 2000) – and women with a large number of children (cf. Roth 2000). In addition, being an immigrant (cf. e.g. Olbermann 2003), disability (cf. e.g. Wacker 2003) and having eastern Germany as a primary residence (cf. Backes 2003) are also risk factors. The effects of social class are, surprisingly, seldom addressed. Whether being widowed is advantageous or disadvantageous for the material situation of women 50+ is viewed varyingly in the examined texts (cf. BMSFJSJ 2002: 95pp). The texts also rarely look at factors that might compensate for the disparity in the material situation between men and women over 50 (e.g. social class, property and wealth, education, employment).

One often-examined question is whether age is still a key cause of poverty, as was true in the 1960s. The examined texts agree that poverty based on income is no longer a problem specific to women 50+ (cf. e.g. Faik 2000). This view is, above all, justified by the fact that employment levels for younger women have risen notably and that the pension system still functions sufficiently for today's seniors. In terms of hidden poverty, the examined texts evince a range of estimates depending on the definitions or methodologies used (cf. e.g. BMFSFJ 2002: 86).

As in the area of work, mostly positive assessments are presented for the future material situation of women 50+. They are based on the fact that pension claims for women (in western Germany) will increase markedly given their increasing rate of professional employment (cf. e.g. Roth 2000), although differences between men and women will continue to exist (cf. e.g. Krauthausen 2002).

3.1.3 Social integration: living in single person households, weak non-familial networks and work-related psycho-social stress

Of all those examined, "social integration" was clearly the topic under which most of the examined texts were categorized. On the one hand, this is a result of how the category is defined, with its wide range of diverse subtopics¹⁰. On the other, the subtopic "psycho-social aspects" and the subtopic grouping "social networks" are important cross-sectional topics often addressed in texts belonging to other areas. Relatively fewer but very detailed results are also to be found on the subtopics "volunteering" and "sexuality".

The most information are available on the cross-sectional topic "social networks". In addition to past employment choices and the associated inclusion in state-run social welfare programmes, previous choices and the associated inclusion in kinship or friendship, neighbourhood and community transfer systems are accorded a central importance for the living conditions of women 50+ (cf. e.g. Backes 2003: 24), since a majority of age-related support is provided as part of these systems. A central point of interest is the question of how potential support through kinship and other social networks will develop given changes in structures relating to families and age groups, values and lifestyles (cf. e.g. BMFSFJ 2001: 212pp).

In publications of Germany's Federal Statistical Office, concerning social networks much information can be found on how the households of women 50+ are structured as well as on their marital status. Most of this information derives from the micro-census (cf. e.g. Statistisches Bundesamt 2002e). The under-representation of female survey subjects in household-related queries is partially compensated for through a special evaluation pertaining to women (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2002e: 34pp). In most of the tables on the nature of households and marital status, the choice of listed age groups ("75 and over", or "65 and over") is insufficient. In addition, the micro-census provides tables containing information on partnerships (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2002e): spouses' ages, length of marriage and information on unmarried couples. Other characteristics that might provide additional insight into partnership arrangements (e.g. employment or income) are not available in combination with the characteristics of "age" and "gender". Here, too, the choice for the highest listed age group is insufficient ("75 and over", or "55 and over"). Data on the social networks of women 50+, their leisure-time and volunteer activities cannot be found, although it is expected they will be included, and hopefully sufficiently differentiated by "gender" and "age", in the results of the time-budgeting survey 2000/2001 (cf. BFSFJ/Statistisches Bundesamt 2003).

10 The category "social integration" as used in the MERI project includes the following subtopics: "household structures and marital status", "partnership relations", "intergenerational relations", "sexuality", "kinship networks", "friendship, neighbourhood and community networks", "mobility and accessibility", "leisure and cultural activities", "volunteering", "ageism and other forms of discrimination" and "socio-psychological aspects".

The examined texts on the social networks of women 50+ show that women 50+ are more strongly integrated into kinship networks than are men of the same age group. They note, however, that this increased integration in kinship networks can, at the same time, mean a stronger dependence on kinship networks (cf. e.g. Backes 1993b). Yet a central point of interest is the fact that the integration of women 50+ in kinship networks is, in part, endangered, something that is revealed by official statistics on “household structure” and “marital status”. The most eye-catching conclusion of such data is that with advancing age, the number of the mostly widowed women living in single-person households rises sharply, while the comparable figures for men decline from their already much lower level (cf. e.g. Statistisches Bundesamt 2002e: 107). Assorted reasons for this are offered: higher life expectancy rates for women, women as junior partners in marriage and the demographic after-effects of World War II. This demographic development is taken to suggest that the integration of women in kinship networks, especially in advanced years, is in danger. As a result, the risk of isolation and the lack of support, above all for widows living alone, is often discussed. At the same time, the texts stress and show – through results available from qualitative studies – that the characteristics of “household structure” and “marital status” are only meaningful to a limited extent in relation to social integration (cf. e.g. Zeman 2000). As for contact with their own children, which is seen as the second most important element in the kinship networks of women 50+ after contact with a partner or spouse, a number of studies agree that despite relatively few cases of women 50+ living with their children, most maintain regular contact and, therefore, benefit from the strong possibility of receiving support (cf. e.g. BMFSFJ 2001: 216).

Friendship, neighbourhood and community social networks are viewed in many of the examined texts as resources for social and individual emancipation processes for women 50+. Their access to and integration in friendship, neighbourhood and community networks, however, is estimated to be notably worse than those of men in the same age group (cf. e.g. Backes 1993b). It is shown how, above all in rural areas, older women have hardly any extra-familial contacts at all (cf. Engel 2001) and immigrant women 50+ are rarely integrated into friendship, neighbourhood and community networks (cf. Olbermann 2003: 92). What is more, provision of care work can make taking up or maintaining social contacts outside of the family even more difficult (cf. e.g. Maly-Lukas 2003: 106pp). Professional and continual employment is seen, in contrast, as a positive influence on friendship, neighbourhood and community networks (cf. e.g. Backes 1999).

The central focus of the results on the second cross-sectional topic “psycho-social aspects” of the living conditions of women 50+ is work-related, psycho-social stress. Extensive descriptions can be found of the often enormous psycho-social burden that women face who provide at-home care work, in addition to the often very demanding and time-intensive care itself. At the same time, the psycho-social situation of women needing care is only discussed indirectly. It is shown how care providers often experience increased pressure from within their family and social environment and, at the same time, sense an obligation to provide care. This not rarely leads to the situation that the care providers dedicate themselves to their task to the point of self-abnegation and only rarely request or accept (professional) assistance. The change in the relationship to the person receiving care, often the mother (cf. e.g. Maly-Lukas 2003) or the spouse or partner (cf. e.g. Fischer/Schug 1995), and any attendant alterations in personality of the person in need of care can be experienced as extremely stressful. Those providing care are confronted with mourning the shared life they once enjoyed and the fact that it has irrevocably ended, and confronted as well with death. Studies depict how the majority of women providing care counterbalance this burden and are able to successfully provide care work (cf. Fischer/Schug 1995). In numerous cases, comparisons are made with men providing care work. It is shown that they report care-related stress far less often than do women. Presumably this is a result of the fact that they receive more recognition for what is, for men, an atypical role, are more willing to accept help and set clearer boundaries than do women when it comes to stress (cf. e.g. Maly-Lukas 2003: 103pp). Yet positive aspects of providing care work are also mentioned, such as the caregivers’ perceiv-

ing it as meaningful work or as a help in resolving interpersonal issues with the person receiving care. The importance of these aspects is also stressed in maintaining a willingness to provide care on the part of women 50+ (cf. Meinders 2001).

Many of the examined texts discuss the work-related psycho-social stress facing women 50+ who leave the workforce or who become unemployed. The assumption is refuted according to which women who enter retirement do so with little conflict, since they are simply returning to their original domestic role, while men tend to face “pensioner’s shock”. The studies show that for women, as for men, different types of reactions vis-à-vis retirement can be found and that they, too, experience changes and stress – sometimes even more so than men – not least because they not infrequently enter retirement unexpectedly or unwillingly (cf. e.g. Clemens 2000). Similarly, it is stressed that the psycho-social results of unemployment for women are the same as for men (cf. e.g. Backes 1999). In addition to work-related psycho-social stress, a number of the examined texts describe and discuss the effects of children leaving home on the psycho-social situation of women 50+, and that the start of the “empty nest” phase for women 50+ more clearly marks the commencement of a new life phase than it does for men of the same age bracket (cf. Backes 2003). The enormous psycho-social burdens that the loss of a partner brings (cf. e.g. Dibelius 1997; BMFSFJ 2002: 126pp) or that the fear of disability (cf. Backes 1993b) and death can cause are, in comparison, seldom addressed.

Single qualitative studies are to be found on the subtopic “sexuality” of women 50+, a topic which the Grey Panthers tried to make less taboo as early as the 1980s. The texts all strive to combat the preconception that post-menopausal women are no longer sexually capable and no longer feel sexual desire (cf. e.g. Amrhein 1997). It is shown that even if the hormonal fluctuations that occur during menopause can cause sexual problems, a woman’s sexuality is less affected by age than is the case with men. The texts attempt to show that women 50+ experience sexuality in very different ways and that biographical and health factors, lifestyle and the presence of a partner, among other things, exert a decisive influence (cf. e.g. Daimler 2002).

The relatively high degree of interest in the topic “volunteering” of women 50+ might be explained by the fact that volunteering is an important element in “active ageing” concepts, in the discussion of the social potential of older persons and in neo-liberal concepts of work. The texts covering volunteer activities describe how older women volunteer their time much less than do men of the same group (cf. e.g. Rohleder 2003). The reduced voluntary participation on the part of women 50+ is viewed in a negative light in a number of texts, since volunteer activities can be seen as a new possibility for women 50+ to take on an extra-familial role, something that can promote social and individual emancipation processes for women 50+ (cf. e.g. Backes 1993a). At the same time, critical assessments of volunteer activity can also be found, noting above all that gender-hierarchical work roles are also present in the realm of volunteer work, bringing associated disadvantages for women 50+. The texts describe how men can often be found in job-like, influential, socially-respected and politically-oriented voluntary positions, while women mostly take on housewife-like, socially-oriented voluntary positions that are often less respected and allow for little self-initiative. In addition, the texts point out the socio-political problem of paid work being supplanted through voluntary activity, above all in the realm of socially-oriented work where women can often be found and in jobs that usually pay little to begin with (cf. Backes 1993a).

3.2 Areas of informational weaknesses

3.2.1 Health: increased morbidity and reduced mortality

The health situation of women 50+ is the focus of research in few of the examined social science publications (cf. e.g. M. Baltes et al. 1996). Presumably this informational weakness can be ascribed to the fact that the area of health is primarily the province of medical re-

search¹¹. Even if health is only rarely the focus of attention in the examined texts, reference is nonetheless often made to it, since in addition to employment disadvantages related to gender, gender-related health differences are offered up as a key argument for prevailing differences between the sexes in advanced years.

Many of the examined texts argue that in the area of health, differences exist between older men and women that are largely independent of social class (cf. e.g. Lampert 2000) and from which other key gender-specific differences can be derived. Accordingly, these differences can, above all, be seen in the fact that the age related physical degeneration takes a different course among men than among women. Women 50+ exhibit – apparently paradoxically – both a higher morbidity rate and a lower mortality rate (or higher life expectancy) than men. On the one hand, women 50+ suffer more often from physical and mental symptoms than men of the same age group, they fall ill with chronic diseases (e.g. Alzheimer's, dementia, osteoporosis, arthritis, heart conditions) more often and their functional health is markedly reduced. On the other hand, women 50+ are less often victims of fatal diseases (e.g. heart attack, chronic obstructive lung conditions) than are men of the same age group, they exhibit lower mortality rates when affected by the same disease and their life expectancy is estimated, depending on method of calculation, to be 3.7 to 6.6 years higher than that of men. The lower life expectancy of women in eastern Germany has, since 1989, risen to match that of women in western Germany (cf. Backes 2003: 29).

The higher morbidity rates and higher life expectancy of women 50+ are offered as reasons for the following: women 50+ seek medical and psycho-social assistance and treatment more often, avail themselves of medication more often, subjectively rate their state of health as worse than men and require care often and for a longer length of time than men of the same age group. Accordingly, a comparatively larger portion of healthcare expenditures are dedicated to older women. Given the ongoing discussion of the necessity of reforms in light of the current ageing of society, this argument is politically sensitive and is not infrequently instrumentalised for political purposes (both generally and in terms of healthcare policy)¹².

In the examined studies, diverse causes are advanced to explain the increased morbidity and lower mortality rates (or higher life expectancy) of women 50+. Mostly, gender-specific lifestyles are referenced, such as behaviour on the part of women that promotes health or diminishes risk. Often, gender-hierarchical division of labour is mentioned, interestingly enough both as rationale for the higher morbidity rates among older women (sickness as the result of less favourable working conditions) (cf. e.g. Clemens 1997) and also for their higher life expectancy (longer life as the result of better working conditions) (cf. e.g. Baltes 1996). The influence of biological factors, in contrast, is assessed in a variety of ways. Empirical evidence for such causalities, however, is hard to come by.

Differing outlooks are offered for how the quality of health will develop during the “add-on” years resulting from a rise in life expectancy. According to optimistic scenarios, the years where health problems occur will be delayed and fewer (compression of morbidity). Pessimistic estimates, in contrast, foresee rising morbidity (cf. BMFSFJ 2001: 69p).

Often-found theories based on morbidity and mortality rates rely either explicitly or implicitly on health statistics. Morbidity and mortality are also the indicators for which most data differentiated by “age” and “gender”, and the most detailed, can be found in publications of the Federal Statistical Office¹³. Yet their meaningfulness for the health situation of women 50+ is very limited. In general, “statistical foundations providing a well-rounded picture of the overall

11 In geriatric research, a discussion of gender-specific differences has recently begun (cf. e.g. Lauritzen 1997).

12 For example, the introduction of standardized, preventative oestrogen replacement therapy during menopause is propagated as a means of reducing healthcare costs (cf. e.g. Lauritzen 1997: 5).

13 The health report for Germany represents a key data source in the area of health (Robert Koch Institut/Statistisches Bundesamt) and also includes unofficial statistics.

health situation [...] for Germany are only partially available” (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2003a: 435). In terms of the condition of health of the general population, the lack of data on who suffers from which disease is a source of complaint. Data on diagnoses of in-hospital patients and causes of death are the only information recorded in official statistics (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 1999; 2001g).

While the morbidity and mortality of women 50+ are often discussed in the examined texts and statistics (cf. Baltes 1996: 576), little information can be found on other health-related topics such as formal or informal medical care and healthy living. What is more, until recently the health aspects of domestic and institutional care have been little discussed, although almost all the examined publications stress that women make up a majority of those requiring care. The subject of care as treated in the examined publications focuses on another area: often it is the unpaid provision of care work, mostly by women 50+, that is of interest, a topic directly connected to feminist criticism of society’s gender-hierarchical division of labour. Accordingly, the health burdens of those providing care are more often discussed than is the health situation of those needing care (cf. Baltes 1996: 575). The newly-introduced statistics on care (Pflege­statistik) also provide limited information on the situation of women in need of care. They are published solely in the form of short reports in which almost all of the telling characteristics (e.g. degree of care, location, income) are not differentiated by “age” and “gender”.

3.2.2 Interest representation: a major lack of participation

The area of “interest representation” for women 50+, be it with respect to their political participation, their representation in interest groups or their presence in formal or informal processes of public discourse, is discussed in few of the examined texts, and where it is addressed, it appears only marginally. In publications of the Federal Statistical Office, in contrast, comprehensive electoral results could be found detailing voter registration and participation rates along with results for elections for the European Parliament as well as for German national and state legislatures. On the one hand, however, the age differentiation in the tables on election results is insufficient, since the highest listed age group is “60 and over” (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2002b: 9). On the other hand, the tables listing Germany’s states and municipalities are not also available with “age” and “gender” differentiation.

The little information to be gleaned from the examined texts reveals an alarming lack of participation. It shows that older women have markedly less access to processes for influencing public discourse than do older men and that, above all in rural areas (cf. Engel 2001), they are much less frequently organized in interest groups (cf. Zeman 2000: 108). The information also shows that older women are less interested in politics than are older men. Their lower level of education and their more limited access to educational possibilities are offered as reasons for this (cf. BMFSFJ 2001: 234p). The texts suggest that these deficits are even more acute in eastern Germany than in the country’s western regions (cf. Backes 2003: 28). Voting statistics, however, allude to cohort-specific differences, since voter participation by women 50+ is primarily and notably lower in the “70 or over” age group than for men of the same age. For those between 50 and 60 years of age, in contrast, a higher percentage of women than men have participated in a number of elections since 2002 (cf. e.g. Statistisches Bundesamt 2002b: 11). These differences between younger and older age cohorts suggest that the political participation of women 50+ will increase in future.

A further problem is noted in that the interests of women 50+ are often not taken into account in existing organisational structures, since the work of women’s organisations tends to focus on the interests of younger women while senior citizens’ organisations are often occupied with the interests of older men. Reports can be found, however, of the beginnings of a political movement for older women in Germany¹⁴ (cf. Stiehr/Huth 2001).

14 For example, the National Network of Older Women was founded in Münster in 1995.

3.2.3 Education: a low level of education and limited access to educational possibilities

Little information can be found in the examined texts and tables on women 50+ and education. That is surprising, primarily since any number of references can be found to the central importance of education for the areas of employment, material situation and political participation. In addition to one table on continuing education¹⁵, basic data on the highest level of education and educational degrees are available in publications of the Federal Statistical Office based on micro-census data (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2003b). Their differentiation by age, however, is insufficient. The highest age group listed in the tables is "65 or over" and answering the questions on education was voluntary for respondents 51 years of age or older (cf. e.g. BMSFSJ 2003b: 32). Interestingly enough, time spent on lifetime learning is being recorded in the time-budgeting survey (cf. BMFSFJ/Statistisches Bundesamt 2003).

The little information to be found suggests that women, above all those of advanced age, have markedly lower levels of education or educational degrees than men (cf. e.g. BMSFSJ 2003a: 373p; Zeman 2000: 108). Even if educational possibilities for older persons have increased overall in recent years, women avail themselves of them much less often than do men (cf. Backes 2003: 27p). Thus, for example, older, primarily less-qualified female employees participate less often in professional continuing education courses than do male employees in the same age group (cf. BMFSFJ 2001: 175), and the data suggest that older female workers are seldom the target group of socio-pedagogical efforts (cf. Backes 1993b). In addition, the "digital divide" is also described and discussed: older women have had much less experience with computers and the Internet than have older men. No information is available on women's participation rates in so called "3rd Age Universities", often touted as "good practice" in the area of education for seniors, either in the examined texts or in the statistics pertaining to higher education.

In the area of education, too, positive forecasts can be found. One maintains that the educational situation for women 50+ will improve considerably in the future, since better-educated women will enter this age group (cf. e.g. Statistisches Bundesamt 2003a).

3.2.4 Crime and abuse: a blind spot

In the examined social science publications on women 50+, information pertaining to the areas of crime and abuse was rare. This is hardly surprising, considering that until recently addressing the topic of crime and abuse against older persons was socially taboo and seldom the object of social science research (cf. Bröscher 2003: 228). Statistical information was also rare, consisting of two tables on the administration of justice for convicts (cf. BMFSFJ 2003f) and prisoners (cf. BMFSFJ 2003e).

The little information available suggest that women 50+ are more often the victims of direct or indirect forms of crime and abuse than are men of the same age group (cf. e.g. BMFSFJ 2002: 133). Crime in domestic contexts is repeatedly discussed, above all in the context of crime and care, an area in which women 50+ are doubly affected, given that they make up the majority of those providing and receiving care. The studies describe how in enormously stressful situations involving care, instances of disrespect and disregard as well as financial, mental and physical abuse can easily arise. The complicated and diffuse nature of crime-related situations is stressed and reference is made to the fact that both providers and receivers of care can be both perpetrators and victims of crime. At the same time, women 50+ as perpetrators is more rarely examined than cases where they are victims. Virtually no information is available on crime in public spaces. Finally, one study deals with the topic of the after-effects of sexual crimes experienced in younger age (cf. Böhmer 2002; Wacker 2003).

15 A central source of data in the area of continuing professional education is the BWS reporting system for continuing education (TNS Infratest Sozialforschung/Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung).

4. Suggestions for future research and data collation

The mapping of information resources on the situation of women 50+ in Germany showed thematic and systematic focal points as well as weaknesses. How can major knowledge gaps be closed and conceptual deficits be compensated? According to the premises of the carried out mapping exercise the following thematic and systematic suggestions can be made for future research and data collation:

As regards the areas of “health”, “interest representation”, “education” and “crime and abuse”, areas on which only little information is available from social science research and official statistics, basic knowledge gaps have to be closed. The spectrum of possible research topics for social science studies is broad, whereas the possibilities of official statistics in these fields are partly very restricted.

In the area of *health* social scientific and, above all, qualitative research on the health situation of women 50+ could augment this mostly medical field of research with important additional aspects and theoretical concepts. Areas where information is lacking include, among others, informal medical services, health aspects of care, assisted death, preventative healthcare, healthy lifestyles and perceived health. With regard to official data sources on the health situation of women 50+ in the micro-census data on the ill, the injured and aspects of preventative measures the characteristics of “age” and “gender” should be comprehensively cross-listed and the highest listed age group (mainly 65+) should be raised. For users the publication of the care statistic in a series of detailed tables and not just in the form of short reports would be desirable. In addition, a thorough differentiation by “age” and “gender” should be included and the mostly separate person-related and institution-related data brought together, as far as possible.

In the area of *interest representation* satisfactory social science findings are not to be found, neither pertaining to formal nor even more to informal political participation of women 50+. Almost unresearched themes are their work in advisory bodies for senior citizens, possibilities for including and empowering female residents in senior citizens’ and nursing homes, and (inter)national interest representation organisations of older women. In the comprehensive official voting data the age categories listed are insufficient from a gerontological point of view. For the category “individuals casting votes”, for example, the highest listed age group (60+) should be expanded. In addition, a thorough categorisation according to “age” and “gender”, including those data differentiated according to state or municipality, would be desirable.

In the area of *education* qualitative studies on learning biographies of women 50+ could complete the little, mainly quantitative data available. Thus apart from the participation in educational measures and educational attainments also learning opportunities, barriers to learning and the educational interests of women 50+ would be surveyed. Very important seems to be a critical analysis of the concept of “lifelong learning” i.e. as regards its reinforcement of existing educational differences and its involvement in the individualisation of labour market risks. In the data on the highest level of education or professional qualification taken from the micro-census again the highest age group (65+) is insufficient from a gerontological point of view and should urgently be raised.

In the area of *crime and abuse* there is an extensive need of information. No data are available on crime and abuse in public spaces or in nursing or senior citizens’ facilities and only individual findings can be found on crime or abuse in families. In order to close this informational gap, studies would be necessary in which women 50+ are examined as both victim and perpetrator. As regards official statistics the continuous cross-listing of the characteristics of “age” and “gender” would be desirable.

In the areas “work”, “material situation” and “social integration” comparatively many information are available. Nevertheless in some cases social science studies could survey already well researched themes from new perspectives and as regards less researched themes in-

formation gaps could be closed. For official statistics many suggestions for an improved publication of data can be given.

In the area of *work* relatively few publications concern themselves with professional work and unpaid work in non-familial networks performed by women 50+. In future research differences in social class, presumably of critical importance for the work situation of women 50+, need to be considered systematically. In addition, the current, fundamental restructuring taking place in the realm of “work”, such as the current reforms of the job market and the globalisation of work should be considered. Objects of research could be i.e. a critical assessment of volunteer work and the globalisation of care work. With regard to the work situation of women 50+, publications of the Federal Statistical Office could meaningfully supplement data from the Federal Labour Agency on two points. First through the increased and differentiated publication of data on individuals who are not gainfully employed and, second, through the publication of data on individuals performing care collected as part of care statistics (Pflegerstatistik). The differentiation by “age” of existing data is more than adequate. In light of discussions on raising the age of retirement, moreover, an increase in the highest listed group (65+) should certainly be considered.

Concerning the *material situation* the ongoing critical observation of restructuring processes in the area of social welfare pertaining to retirement benefits for women is necessary. Besides older women’s financial support of family members and their consumption habits could prove of interest as research topics. In order to adequately address the complexity of income and expenditure distribution, it would be advisable to examine class-related disparities comprehensively and thoroughly. The statistical data on the material situation of women 50+ published by the Federal Statistical Office could be improved in many ways: As a rule data on services for asylum seekers, care-related aid, assistance for social reintegration of persons with disability, housing assistance and aid for victims of war should be differentiated for “age” and “gender” and the age categories in higher age groups should be as detailed as possible. For a comprehensive analysis of the income situation of women 50+ special gender-evaluated samplings of the household-related statistics would be necessary as well as a more exact and thorough differentiation of these data according to different types of income. The almost complete lack of data on expenditures by women 50+ could be rectified by a cross-listed publication of “age” and “gender” for heads of household in the publications providing statistics on household expenditures as well as income and consumption surveys. Data relating to the housing situation of women 50+ could be improved by expanding the highest listed age group (65+) in the comprehensive results of the micro-census on household living conditions.

In the area of *social integration* the analysis of studies indicates that the statistical characteristics “household structure” and “marital status”, which often serve as indicators for inclusion in kinship networks, should not be overestimated. Instead qualitative studies could provide new and interesting results on the quality of networks. In turn, they could address the topics, rarely treated until now, of change and plurality of partnership, family, friendship and neighbourhood structures. Topics that are little researched include the mobility and leisure-time activities of women 50+, their concepts of self-identity, their experiences of discrimination regarding, above all, “gender” and “age”. Studies on psycho-social aspects of the situation of women 50+ should no longer ignore the topics mourning and death. From a gerontological point of view, it would be of benefit if in the extensive micro-census data on household structures, marital status and partnership published by the Federal Statistical Office the highest listed age group (75+ or 65+) was raised.

Apart from the named thematic suggestions in the areas under study the following systematic suggestions for the conception of social science studies on the situation of women 50+ can be derived from the mapping exercise:

- The empirical basis on which studies depend should be strengthened. Longitudinal studies, above all, might provide interesting data for investigating ageing processes.

- The increased reception, application and development of current theoretical concepts in the areas of feminist as well as age and ageing research could close some of the gaps and open new venues for future work. For example: areas of post-modern feminist and gerontological research originating in English-speaking countries, which until now have remained unreferenced in research on women 50+ in Germany, might provide interesting impetus.
- Systematic observations bringing together individual aspects of the living conditions of women 50+ or the disparate results of existing research would prove helpful.
- Apart from the so called 3rd age which is in the focus of research also the so called 4th age should be object of research.
- In order to carry out a comprehensive analysis of gender relationships among older generations, a broad reference base not limited to women would be necessary.
- It seems very important that the selection of categories for study not remain limited to "gender" and "age". The simultaneous investigation of the categories "class", "ethnic background", "disability/illness", "space" and "sexuality" is essential for achieving differentiated observations on the complex and heterogeneous situation of women 50+.

As regards official statistics the mapping exercise suggests the following improvements of the collation and publication of data:

- The attempt by Eurostat to "enage" statistics on European level should be discussed and considered in the German institutions of official statistics.
- A critical re-examination of current classifications of age is needed and in many cases the highest age groups listed have to be raised.
- The gender-bias of household-related data could be partially compensated for through specially-evaluated samplings, as is the case in micro-census data on households and women (Statistisches Bundesamt 2002e).
- Users of the data would benefit from summary publications on the living conditions of the general population in the age bracket of "50 or over" containing comprehensive gender-related information, e.g. an updated version of the 1991 publication "Im Blickpunkt: Ältere Menschen" (Focus On: Older Persons) (Statistisches Bundesamt 1992) along with detailed collections of tables.

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