

## **Chapter 4**

### **Methodology and Research Design**

#### **Introduction**

The broad empirical goal of this thesis, as already stated in the previous chapters, is to unravel the welfare arrangements of the Portuguese elderly. The pursuit of that goal is done within a theoretical framework that sees the welfare arrangements of the elderly in the confluence of three main dimensions: i) the institutional settings that account for the social model of welfare provision chosen in each specific country, and that define the social policy environment in which the population finds different possibilities to answer their needs; ii) the family solidarity dynamics that account for the structure of opportunity related to family resources that each individual may activate in pursuit of answers to his needs; and iii) the cultural and normative dimension that accounts for what individuals believe is best and most desirable to tackle their needs, as well as what they prefer and expect from different agents of welfare provision.

After setting the theoretical framework of the research in the first chapter, the last two chapters have dealt with identifying the main traits of the Portuguese welfare state, in general and of social protection mechanisms in old age, in particular.

It has been shown that the Portuguese welfare state has developed within a specific historical path of modernisation that helps understand not only some of its institutional traits but also its structural financial constraints. The specificity of the socio-economic model of development of this country in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is visible in indicators, such as: the slow decline in agricultural workers without any peaks in industrial employment; the rapid change from an agrarian society to a post-fordist society; severe territorial cleavages; and the patchy development of social policies subsidiary of family-kin based solidarity. Social protection provided in old age was seen as reflecting the main structuring principles of a system that puts the emphasis on family networks' solidarity. Similar to other state-corporatist countries, the Portuguese system is biased towards income replacement benefits. These, however, show such generalised low levels that are expected to generate high levels of poverty among the elderly. Typical of a system that relies on families as primary welfare

providers, the Portuguese social protection system is marked by the underdevelopment of social services to the elderly.

The literature review and the review of the policy framework suggested some propositions that the thesis should address:

1. The Portuguese social protection system counts on families to act as primary welfare providers.
2. The underdevelopment of the care system and the generalised low levels of old age pensions and old age related cash benefits suggest that the welfare of the elderly can hardly be met by formal provision by public instances.
3. The generally meagre old age related cash benefits do not make credible any significant expression of private, market-based, welfare arrangements.
4. The expansion of the non-profit sector in the field of assistance to the elderly has provided a minimum safety net to tackle the cases of near destitution and has followed the principle of subsidiarity in relation to family provision.

The compilation of data on the main socio-demographic trends and features of the Portuguese population in recent years further suggested the following propositions:

5. The Portuguese population has been undergoing profound changes in its socio-demographic structures for the last 40 years, following a process of clear convergence with the better-off European countries and, in that sense, moving away from the pre-modern traits that used to justify labelling Portugal as a “traditional” society. Among the indicators of socio-demographic modernisation we find: a high rate of participation of women in the labour market; growing plurality of family models; low fertility rates; a rise in education levels; urbanisation of life styles; and decreasing impact of the Catholic Church in individual behaviour.
6. The trends identified above suggest that the Portuguese society is undergoing a process of erosion of the traditional social fabric that used to be taken as the basis for the familialisation of welfare provision.

In face of these propositions, there was a fundamental paradox that needed investigation: in contemporary Portugal we seem to have a formal system of social protection for old age that shows all the traits of a familialist system in a society that seems to be moving away from the socio-demographic structures typical of familialism, or at least, that allow familialism to operate effectively. Following the

identification of this apparent paradox the broad research hypothesis of this thesis can be put as follows:

“Familialism, as a logics of welfare provision, is no longer resilient or performing effectively for the Portuguese elderly.”

This chapter discusses the research methodology developed to address the research hypothesis phrased above.

The first section of the chapter deals with the operationalisation of the research hypothesis and with the conceptual rationale leading to the breaking up of the general hypothesis into research questions.

In the second section, I discuss the research method, specifically identifying the research paradigm and the study design, as well as the methodological and analytical approaches developed in terms of empirical analysis. It is in this section that I discuss data sources and data handling procedures.

The third section of the chapter brings the two previous sections together by mapping the empirical analysis in a systematic way. It links the conceptual framework to the empirical material analysed in the study, consequently leading the reader to the later chapters of the thesis.

This chapter is further complemented by an appendix (Appendix 3) where the reader finds a compilation of different technical details that are useful for assessing the quality of the procedures of data handling developed along the thesis and that provide some elements to enable an independent assessment of the relative value of the empirical material used.

## **1. Conceptual rationale and research questions**

The starting point of this thesis was, to a large extent, the observation of the situation in Portugal: the observation of the current social policy framework and of the main socio-demographic trends. This two-fold observation has led to the identification of some paradoxes and triggered some perplexities, which in turn have led to formulating a broad research hypothesis:

“Familialism, as a logics of welfare provision, is no longer resilient or performing effectively for the Portuguese elderly.”

To address this research hypothesis, I was compelled to observe the realities of life of the Portuguese elderly and of their families, looking for patterns or trends that can

be used to develop an explanatory scheme that accounts for the current welfare arrangements of the elderly population.

The research design, however, was not developed into a set of explanatory propositions derived from the main research hypothesis. On the contrary, building on an overall understanding of how one should address the observation of the realities of the Portuguese elderly, how to enquire the data and what to look for, the research design opens the way to alternative explanations, which will be built as data are analysed, and that are initially phrased in the form of questions. The next two sub-sections dwell on how this was done.

### **1.1. Conceptual rationale of the research**

The general conceptual design for the object of this research ('the welfare arrangements of the Portuguese elderly') was introduced as a diagram in chapter 1.

Briefly summarising what the diagram tried to depict, there is an understanding of welfare arrangements in old age as the output of a complex set of factors and forces, originating in different spheres of the social space, often interacting and mutually influencing each other.

Familialism is the term used to describe a social protection system where families are assumed to be the primary locus for social aid. More than that, they are assumed not to fail in performing that role. Translated into welfare arrangements, familialism can be assessed in several dimensions: materialised in institutions and policies; operational at the level of family dynamics; and expressed as social norms and values. These are the three dimensions included in the conceptual design of the research as introduced in chapter 1.

As already discussed in previous chapters, and leading to the research design of this study, welfare arrangements in old age were first addressed with their relation to the institutional setting. The analysis of the Portuguese social policy framework and of the socio-economic and demographic processes of the Portuguese society in the last 40 years has suggested that familialism does not have the clarity often found to be assumed in some related literature (Janssens, 1997). In summary, it was said that the Portuguese case shows the traits of a familialist state, with a social policy apparatus built around the principle of subsidiarity and reflecting the belief in families and households as the primary locus for social aid. But simultaneously it was observed

that the socio-demographic structures of the Portuguese society are increasingly bringing it closer to the realities of the most modern societies, suggesting a clear path of convergence with the broader space of the EU, this despite the resilience of some indicators of pre-modernity. Among the processes identified, it is useful to remember the increasing plurality of family models and the decrease of the size of families; the increasing participation rate of women in the labour market, especially for those working full-time; the rise in the education levels; and the urbanisation of the territory and hence the urbanisation of life styles.

It was largely because of some apparent paradoxes in the institutional settings of contemporary Portugal that I have raised some questions, later becoming a broad research hypothesis. From what was discussed in the last two chapters it resulted clearly that there is a potential widening of the space between the policy framework and the trends of modernisation of the Portuguese socio-demographic structures. These fractures, within the institutional setting, were interpreted as representing a potential source of constraints for the elderly and as a sufficient reason to question the resilience of familialism in their lives. In other words, the reasoning here was: the potential erosion of the traditional social fabric in which the familialist Portuguese welfare state was based is not being compensated by any significant upgrading in the social policy framework. This means that it is plausible to think that the elderly, and their families, are being pushed into a vacuum that needs to be understood and explained.

This has prompted me to question if familialism is in fact still resilient and operative as a solution for welfare provision for the elderly.

The resilience and performance of familialism in the welfare arrangements of the elderly is assessed by looking at two other dimensions: family dynamics and normative universe(s).

### **1.1.1. Looking at family dynamics**

On one side, it was important to take a close look at family dynamics to understand how individuals and families tackle their needs. Familialism is considered a social model and not just a quality of the social policy framework. In that sense, it was found of interest to identify patterns/trends of resilience and of erosion of familialism on the side of family dynamics. It is in the assessment of the balance of

forces between the two opposite trends that one can understand the expression and the performance of familialism as a logics of welfare provision.

There are two conceptual elements to emphasise in the analysis of family dynamics: kinship solidarity and household solidarity. They are intertwined.

Portugal has been broadly described as a global system of welfare provision that shows most of the traits of the conservative-corporatist state. However, there is one feature that marks some difference between the Portuguese system and that welfare state model: family solidarity goes beyond the nuclear family and includes other kin, namely those defined on a vertical line. This means that in the Portuguese welfare system the emphasis is put not only on the male breadwinner model of family organisation, but also on the extension of that model to include other members, namely ascendants of the nuclear couple. Some researchers like Naldini have actually suggested that in South European countries the family model incorporated in social policies is the kin model and not the male breadwinner model (Guerrero and Naldini, 1997).

This kinship solidarity is considered in close relation with the household as the real social unit implicit in the social policies framework. This is particularly so when the population in consideration are the elderly. Exchanges of support can take place within the household and between households. In familialist systems, both are expected to have a considerable expression.

Family dynamics are taken once more as a complex, multi-sided concept. The research takes as a starting assumption for the analysis of family dynamics the complexity of relations and meanings related to the experience of families. This implies considering not only the actual expressions of living arrangements and the outcomes associated to each type of living arrangement, but also the inner logics of family dynamics.

Family support in old age is considered in two main domains: financial support (which includes accommodation) and caring. These are the two traditional types of family obligations considered in most of the research on welfare provision by the family in old age.

### **1.1.2. Looking at social norms and values**

Seen as complementary to the analysis of family dynamics, it was felt important to address the normative universe around welfare arrangements. It is considered that, in

the chain of events that lead to different welfare arrangements in old age, it is crucial to understand not only the opportunity structure related to family dynamics, but also the system of normative constructs that act simultaneously as rationalisations of behaviour and as prospective motivators of such behaviour.

When assessing resilience/change in familialism as a logics of welfare provision in old age it is important to look at what people consider ‘the right way to do things’, what people prefer and what people actually expect from others and from themselves. Familialism was said to count a great deal on the willingness of families to act as welfare providers. This willingness in turn was said to be anchored in a set of values and norms that make it socially expected that families do take on that role. The question to investigate is to what extent does this proposition remain valid in contemporary Portugal.

Normative prescriptions should be considered in different levels of analysis: as prescribed social desirability; as general individual preferences; and as anticipated behaviour. These different levels of analysis suggest different degrees of incorporation and strength of social norms: from broad guiding principles to effective incorporation into action. It is considered important to assess the resilience of familialism at the three levels.

## **1.2. Research hypothesis and research questions**

In line with the conceptual rationale outlined above, the general research hypothesis was broken into subordinate questions, each phrased to address a specific aspect of that hypothesis. There are three research questions:

1. What are the living arrangements and living conditions of the Portuguese elderly compared to their European counterparts?
2. How and how much are Portuguese families engaging in welfare provision for the elderly?
3. What are the perceptions, expectations and preferences of the Portuguese in terms of welfare arrangements in old age?

The answers to these questions are sought in the analysis of family solidarity dynamics and in the analysis of the normative propositions that surround opinions and preferences about the delivery of welfare to the elderly, and is done in light of a

critical review of the main trends of socio-economic development of the country and of the broad system of social protection in the recent past.

The starting point was, as already mentioned several times in this chapter, the puzzling situation of familialisation of welfare provision on the side of the social policy framework in a country that shows clear indicators of erosion of the traditional socio-demographic assumptions of familism. The research hypothesis put forward implied figuring out where this was leaving the elderly and how this was affecting their lives.

By the way it was phrased, the research hypothesis involves analysing two sides of familism: resilience and performance. Although, one does not necessarily imply the other. The discussion put forward in the last two chapters suggested that the resilience of familism in Portugal could be related to the fact that there is no alternative to it. However, it did not suggest that familism is performing well as a logic of welfare provision in old age.

This general hypothesis needed testing from different angles of analysis. One angle involves measuring the incidence of indicators of familism at the level of family dynamics and at the level of social norms and values. The other angle involves assessing the outputs of those indicators, namely the levels of welfare achieved and the effective translation of perceived norms and values into actions.

The general hypothesis outlined above was broken into a set of questions in a systematic manner, each in turn developed into even more specific queries, leading to the analysis of data.

Research question 1: What are the living arrangements and the living conditions of the Portuguese elderly compared to their European counterparts?

- Do the Portuguese elderly organise their lives activating comparatively more family resources than their European counterparts living in less familialised social policy systems?
- Is it possible to identify a higher incidence of extended households with multi-generations cohabitation among the Portuguese elderly; a lower incidence of elderly living alone; and more intense flows of support from the family network (namely from adult children) to the old person?



This set of questions is addressed in chapter 5 of the thesis.

Research question 2: How and how much are Portuguese families engaging in welfare provision for the elderly?

- Does the identification of traits of familialism in the way the Portuguese elderly organise their lives translate into the effective fulfilment of their needs by means of family dynamics?
- Is the activation of family resources in old age tackling exclusively the needs of the elderly? Or is familialism in old age reflecting a system of provision of welfare that is organised around the functionality of the household unit and the relative roles of different generations for that functionality?
- Is familialism a socially selective model of social organisation that reproduces itself in social milieus still marked by the resilience of socio-economic indicators of pre-modernity?

This set of questions is addressed in chapter 6 of the thesis.

Research question 3: What are the perceptions, expectations and preferences of the Portuguese in terms of welfare arrangements in old age?

- Can familialism, as the dominant model of welfare provision in Portugal, be identified in the resilience of social norms and values that prescribe it as the rule?
- Is it possible to identify a generalised adherence to family solidarity as the norm in all European countries? Or can it be identified a higher acceptance of filial obligations towards the elderly amongst the Portuguese?
- Does the resilience of familialism in the universe of values translate into the sphere of preferences and expectations of the Portuguese elderly for support and care from the family?
- Is it possible to identify indicators of change in values surrounding family solidarity, namely across generations and across the social spectrum?

This set of questions is addressed in chapter 7 of the thesis.

The first dimension of empirical analysis to build my argumentative scheme involves looking at the dynamics at the level of families, namely of families with elderly members. The expected scenarios have different contours.

If families are no longer the primary locus of welfare provision for the elderly, then the vacuum of an underdeveloped social protection system that hardly leaves the elderly outside poverty is leading them to growing problems of social exclusion.

If, on the other hand, families are still performing effectively as welfare providers in old age, then there may be indicators that the social sustainability of familialism remains, despite the general processes of modernisation of the Portuguese society. In that scenario, it is important to identify how, why, at the expenses of who is this achieved? Another difficult question concerns - till when?

A third scenario can take us to the coexistence of resilience and change in family dynamics, which would impose the identification of the potential and limitations for families to function as primary welfare providers for the elderly.

Yet, family dynamics as a dimension of welfare arrangements in old age cannot be confined to a one-way view that takes the elderly as recipients of support from their families. My choice for the term welfare arrangements (rather than care or support in old age) should be self-explanatory. When analysing family dynamics, I consider the multiple roles of all individuals as members of a family, particularly the multiple roles of the elderly in the family system. One area of particular interest is precisely the exchanges of support where the elderly is the recipient in confrontation with exchanges where the elderly is the source. The argument implicit in this approach is that the elderly may have functions in the family economy that explain their welfare arrangements and that may be, at least partially, the reason for the resilience of some traits of familialism in the modes of organisation and functioning of families in Portugal. Among those functions, and given the general characteristics of the Portuguese welfare state, two areas were defined as priorities for analysis: caring after children and provision of accommodation. The potential roles of the elderly as agents that compensate for the gaps of the formal system in these two domains may have a considerable explanatory power to understand welfare arrangements in old age. If proven so, this type of dynamics would suggest that welfare arrangements in old age may not emerge directly from needs of the elderly and on the contrary, be built on the functional role of the elderly in a family unit.

The second dimension of empirical analysis to investigate takes me to the universe of social norms and values. The interest in examining norms and attitudes in a familialist social policy model arises from the need to test the real strength and resilience of what is largely considered the core cement of those systems. Once more the outcomes of the analysis could be several.

On one hand, family solidarity may become insufficiently strong to provide the needed support for older people if the norms and expectations on which it is underpinned are relaxed. In that sense, identifying elements of resilience and change in attitudes and preferences should be of great interest to discuss the effectiveness of familialism as a logics of welfare provision.

On the other hand, maybe familialism is still the social norm compelling families to go beyond their material limits to perform their role as primary welfare providers. If that is the case, the analysis could lead to discussions on the ways welfare policy can make use of social norms to maximise the potential of a given community.

As stated before, the explanatory hypotheses of this thesis were built in the interaction with the observation of patterns in data. The arguments presented in this sub-section should therefore be seen as a starting point for those hypotheses and not a finished set of propositions to be tested by data.

## **2. Considerations on research method**

The exploratory imprint of the study and the stated goal of identifying patterns and trends that can help to understand, by means of description, the full range of welfare arrangements of the Portuguese elderly has led me to adopt a research method that can be clarified in three aspects:

1. Patterns and trends that articulate individual dynamics and collective dynamics need survey data to be analysed. Survey data are considered the appropriate method for data selection in studies that have simultaneously an exploratory/descriptive nature and a research goal of providing a holistic synthesis (Hantrais, Mangen et al., 1985).
2. The focus on the Portuguese case involves a great deal of case-study analysis. However, the argument for the distinctiveness or uniqueness of certain phenomena can only be built from a comparative perspective. In that sense, it was considered that the analysis of data should articulate the case-study

approach with comparative cross-country analysis (Hantrais, Mangen et al., 1985).

3. In studies that aim to contribute to policy discussion, and although we can always learn from the past, it is also important to work with up-to-date data. The efforts in terms of data selection were organised from the beginning under the assumption that the research should be based on data as recent as possible, within the available data for addressing the research questions.

The next sub-sections address the practicalities of the research method, namely the processes of selection and handling of data.

The thesis has used different data sources that could be organised in two main groups. The first group includes the data sources used for the founding observation on the basis of which the research hypothesis, and subsequent research questions, were raised. The analysis of the data used in this stage of the research has in fact preceded this chapter and for that reason it was organised in an appendix to which the chapters 2 and 3 have referred to (see appendix 2).

The second group includes the data sources used for the empirical part of the research on the basis of which an overall explanatory model was built. The data sources used in this stage of the research are: the European Community Household Panel, especially the database for 1998 but also, on occasions, the database for 1994; the Family Budget Survey, released by the Portuguese National Statistics Office (INE), in particular the database for 2000; and the Eurobarometer Survey Series, especially the databases for years 1992, 1995 and 1998.

After some exploratory work of what data sources were available, and keeping in mind that the purpose of identifying trends/patterns could only be achieved by means of survey data for a large number of cases, the researcher was confronted with some alternatives, each presenting comparative advantages and disadvantages. After careful assessment of each alternative, the researcher has decided for the use of more than one data source hoping that the use of different data would allow for data triangulation and, as a consequence, to the strengthening of the explanatory schemes that would be developed on the basis of the empirical analysis. The datasets selected comprise information that was found appropriate to address the research questions of this thesis. The ECHP is a survey that, on top of the cross-national comparison element, gathers information on topics of great relevance to this thesis, that have never been addressed by any other comparable survey including the Portuguese case.

Such is the case, for example, of information on engagement in caring for somebody. The FBS, on the other hand, is the only detailed data source, in Portugal, that gathers information on characteristics of households and on financial dynamics of households. The EB series, finally, is not the only cross-national survey with data on attitudes and values but it was the one found appropriate for the thesis given it has included Portugal for many years and provides data on different dimensions of normative solidarity that can be used to test some of the arguments put forward along this thesis.

Next, I introduce a general description of each data source selected for the research. For each I provide a general overview of the content of the data and a general discussion on the main limitations of each database within the context of the thesis. In appendix 3 the reader can find some additional information on some technical characteristics of the data, namely those related to sampling methodologies, sample sizes, response rates and attrition rates (when applicable); the identification of the unit of analysis and the main variables/dimensions used in the analysis; the identification of the main procedures of weighting and harmonisation of data (when applicable). In appendix 3 the reader will also find some general figures on the samples and population distributions by age group to assess the level of representativeness of the data retained for analysis. Finally, the appendix includes information on original methodologies of measurement of key variables and considerations on data completeness for those same variables.

### **2.1. The European Community Household Panel (ECHP)**

The ECHP is a standardised survey carried out in Member States of the European Union under auspices of Eurostat. The survey involves annual interviews of a representative panel of households and individuals in each country, covering a wide range of topics. It was established largely in response to the increasing demand for comparable information across the Member States on income, work and employment, poverty and social exclusion, housing, health and a series of other social indicators concerning the living conditions of private households and persons.

The survey runs from 1994 to 2001<sup>1</sup>. In the first wave (1994) a sample of some 60 500 households (approximately 130 000 adults aged 16 years and over) were interviewed across 12 Member States including Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. Austria has joined the ECHP in wave 2 (1995), then Finland in wave 3 (1996) and Sweden in wave 4 (1997). At the time when the analysis was carried out, the available data included the first 5 waves of the ECHP (1994 to 1998). For most countries, the surveys were carried out using the harmonised ECHP questionnaire. For some countries, the national institutes in charge of the production of the ECHP have converted national data surveys into ECHP format (in Belgium and the Netherlands, the ECHP was linked from the beginning to already existing national panels; in Germany and the United Kingdom, the derived national data was provided from 1994 to 2001; in Luxembourg and Sweden the derived national data replaced the ECHP from 1997 onwards). It is necessary to be quite careful when analysing the converted data for these countries, as some information may not have been collected in the national surveys and thus appears as missing in the ECHP.

Direct access to the original data is restricted and Eurostat has developed an 'anonymised' version of the database: the ECHP Users' Database (ECHP-UDB). This was the database made available for this research under a research contract signed by the LSE with Eurostat<sup>2</sup>.

There are three main characteristics that make the ECHP a very interesting source of information for researchers and that explain its relevance for this specific research.

The first interesting characteristic of the ECHP is the multidimensional character of the topics covered, which is extremely promising in terms of its broad and integrative character, thus making it possible to inter-relate information of earnings, social benefits, employment, housing, family structures, social relations, and so on.

A second promising feature is the cross-national comparability of the data. The ECHP (apart from those countries using data derived from national sources, as noted above) is a harmonised and comparable dataset across countries. Comparability is achieved through a standardised design and common technical and implementation procedures, with centralised support and co-ordination by Eurostat.

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<sup>1</sup> The ECHP was interrupted after the 2001 wave and will be replaced from 2004 onwards by a new instrument called EU-SILC (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions).

<sup>2</sup> For a description of the ECHP-UDB see Eurostat (1999) ECHP-UDB Manual, waves 1,2 and 3

The third characteristic of interest in the ECHP survey is its unique features compared to other cross-national surveys – its panel design. Within each country, the original sample of households and persons is followed over time at annual interviews. As a result, the sample reflects demographic changes in the population and continues to remain representative of the population over time (except for losses due to sample attrition and non-inclusion of households). For reasons discussed below, on the limitations of the database for this research, the longitudinal dimension of the ECHP had to be left out from the analysis carried out within this thesis.

The main pitfall of the ECHP for this thesis has to do with the procedures for data management developed by Eurostat, namely the anonymisation procedure.

The anonymised version of the dataset that Eurostat made available for the research has dropped from the dataset some variables that were included in the original survey. Among those, and given their importance for this thesis, I highlight: region of location of household (NUTs aggregates); degree of urbanisation of region of location of household; savings from consuming food from own agriculture or gardening; fertility data (a question on having had children was dropped from the survey after the first wave); and information on reasons for moving in/out of households. The inexistence of data for these indicators has determined the exclusion from the empirical analysis of the longitudinal approach. Although it is analytically very important to address change when discussing welfare arrangements, the lack of data for the variables identified above, considering the phenomena of interest in the study, would make any longitudinal analysis severely incomplete and for purposes of explanation of limited use. Having said that, it was considered prudent not to include any longitudinal analysis in the thesis and to focus on cross-sectional readings.

The ECHP was tested for representativeness of the sample, especially after eliminating cases due to dropouts from the survey between waves 1 and 5. This was done taking into account in particular the relative weight of the target population in the ECHP samples (please see table A3.4 in appendix 3).

The data in table A3.4 indicate that the share of elderly, in particular those aged 80 or more, in the ECHP samples, tend to increase between 1994 and 1998 at a higher rate than they do in the respective populations.

This finding is in itself important given it can affect some analyses that involve considering trends of change along time. However, it would be particularly worrying

if the analysis would draw on the panel approach and on longitudinal readings. Given that, in this thesis, the bulk of the analysis of ECHP data is confined to year 1998, and given the shares of elderly in Portugal, for that particular year, are relatively close to those found in the general population, the researcher has considered the data were sufficiently representative of the target population.

## **2.2. The Portuguese Family Budget Survey (FBS)**

The search for an alternative source of data that could bring more wealth to the analysis of household dynamics, namely in terms of financial dynamics, has led the researcher to the Portuguese Family Budget Survey<sup>3</sup>.

The FBS is a national survey, carried out by the National Statistics Office (INE) on a yearly basis, and collects information covering a wide variety of items concerning consumption expenditure, income of private households, savings and indebtedness, among other household characteristics. The purpose of the FBS, in a more broad sense, is to give a picture of the living conditions of Portuguese private households in each defined point in time. In this sense, the survey gives a precise picture of the household's total consumption broken down in sufficient detail as a function of household characteristics (income, social and economic characteristics, size and composition, degree of urbanisation and region, etc.). The survey also provides information about the living conditions and expenditure levels.

The units of register are both the household and the individuals in the household. The database released for analysis includes 3 files: the 'household file', the 'individual file' and the 'household register file'. The household file includes information provided by the member of the household identified as the head of household. It records a series of characteristics of the household (household demographics, location, possession of goods) but mostly detailed information on household income and on household expenditure.

The 'individual file' records information for each person in the household, including children, and focus mainly on personal income and personal consumption.

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<sup>3</sup> This survey is the instrument known across the EU countries as the Household Budget Survey. In Portugal, the institution in charge of producing the survey has chosen the term 'Family' instead of 'Household'. Considering that this choice of labels may be reflecting the national/official understanding of the social unit 'household', it was decided to retain the original name of the survey.



The main interest in the FBS for this thesis is the possibility to analyse in some detail the financial dynamics of households with elderly people, enriching the discussion on family dynamics and exchanges of support.

The most recent dataset available at the time of the analysis reports to 2000 and was made available by contract between INE and the national funding institution that awarded a PhD scholarship to the researcher.

The main limitation of the FBS stems from its own nature and goals. Contrary to the ECHP survey, the FBS lacks multi-dimensionality, therefore making it impossible to relate dimensions of household/family dynamics (namely financial dynamics) with other household and individual indicators (for example, the health status of individuals). The analysis carried out throughout the thesis, in that sense, remains limited in the explanations provided and can only point to potential associations, requiring further research to be tested.

Similarly to what was done for the ECHP datasets, the FBS was assessed in terms of representativeness of the target population (the elderly). As can be confirmed by table A3.5 in appendix 3, the relative weight of the elderly groups in the FBS sample is very close to the respective weight in the national population. In fact, there is a slight overrepresentation of the elderly over 75 years in the FBS sample.

### **2.3. Eurobarometer Surveys (EB)**

The Eurobarometer Survey series (EB) is a programme of cross-national and cross-temporal comparative social research conducted on behalf of the European Commission and is designed to monitor social and political attitudes. It has been in place since the early seventies but it is since 1990 that it includes separate supplementary surveys on special issues. The range of topics covered by the EB survey programme is very wide and changes according to what is found more relevant in each moment in time. I have selected for this research the surveys that included data found suitable to address the normative dimension of welfare arrangements in old age.

The surveys selected from the series were:

- EB 37.2 on the topic of “Attitudes towards the elderly Europeans”. The data was gathered in 1992 and included several questions on perceptions, preferences and opinions on several issues related to the

elderly, their needs, and their roles in society, among others. The survey involved national samples of the overall population and samples of persons aged 60 years or more. The countries included in the survey were: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany (with a split for East and West), Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the UK.

- EB 44.0 (1995), EB 50.1 (1998) and EB 51.0 (1999) on general topics, but that included questions related to the topic of the 1992 survey.

The fact that it is available for different years, and with comparable questions included in different surveys, has made the EB series appear in the opinion of the researcher as the most adequate source of data for the analysis of values and norms related to the topic of welfare arrangements of the Portuguese elderly. Additionally, the fact that it includes data for all EU countries, before the May 2005 enlargement, signified that the analysis of norms and values could be done articulating the single-case and the comparative perspective approaches.

EB surveys are available to LSE members, students and staff, upon request to the data library.

Once more, the main limitations of the EB, are related to the design of the survey but also to some data management procedures.

One of the main pitfalls of the EB data is, as already stated above, the format of data on income released for analysis. The variable on income, available already harmonised, classifies each person in relation to the quartiles of the national distributions. The original figures for income are provided according to a 'country specific' series of intervals which, combined with the generalised high non-response rates for that variable (around 25% in all surveys) make it quite limited the use of income in the analysis.

#### **2.4. General notes on analysis of data**

The research has involved a great deal of descriptive analysis in line with a study design that aims at providing a holistic synthesis that can explain the trends observed in data. Hypotheses' testing was not at the core of the research framework and that reflected in the ways data were analysed.

The statistical procedures used for analysing data are those adequate for descriptive purposes. The analysis follows a general scheme of simple description at the univariate and bivariate level leading to multivariate synthesis that articulate the full scope of factors considered in the explanation of the trends/patterns observed in the data.

Multivariate analysis is used purely as a descriptive tool. The nature of modelling techniques in broader terms is descriptive, although some researchers use them as a basis for generalisations to wider populations. In this study, modelling techniques are taken solely in their quality of descriptive synthesis. Depending on the variables analysed at each stage of the research, multivariate analysis is carried out by means of multiple linear regression or by means of binary logistic regression.

### **3. Mapping the empirical analysis: from the world of ideas to the world of facts**

Rigour and validity are at the core of doing research and are intimately related to the researcher's need to measure phenomena (Blalock, 1985). Measurement, in turn, is intimately related to two processes: conceptualisation and operationalisation.

Conceptualisation is the process of taking a construct or concept and refining it by giving it a conceptual or theoretical definition. This is usually done under the guidance of the theoretical framework, perspective or approach the researcher is committed to. The process of conceptualisation of the research was already discussed and presented in section 1, and it is closely related to the chosen theoretical framework discussed in the beginning of the thesis and to the research questions raised.

The process of operationalisation makes the bridge to data analysis. Operationalisation is taking a conceptual definition and making it more precise by linking it to one or more specific, concrete indicators or operational definitions. The end result of operationalisation is the mapping of the empirical research, by which the link between the world of ideas and the world of empirical evidence is drawn. That is the topic of this section.

The issue of rigour and validity, although omnipresent along any research, takes a crucial role at this stage.

Validity, using terminology from Statistics discipline, refers to the truthfulness of findings. Said in other words, validity is the condition of having really measured what one wanted to measure.

The threats to validity are numerous and not always controllable or even perceptible. The complex nature of the social phenomena is just the starting bit of those threats. There is however a preliminary consideration that equips the researcher to deal with problems of validity: ensuring internal validity.

By internal validity it is commonly understood the need to use the most appropriate research design for what you are studying (Blalock, 1985). What I have done is to design the research to insure internal validity, hoping that the consistency between the patterns observed in the data and the explanatory arguments proposed will be a clear test for that.

Validity, however, cannot be achieved without the research first being reliable. Reliability, once more using terminology from Statistics, has to do with the consistency of findings and, in that sense, is directly related to procedures of data handling and analysis. Along the process of analysis of data, reliability was a constant concern and all efforts were made to guarantee reliability of findings. The efforts were concentrated around two specific issues perceived as the most relevant threats to reliability (and to validity) within the research carried out:

- Avoiding ambiguity in the analysis, namely not taking correlation for causation;
- Controlling for interaction, i.e. controlling for co-occurring effects that may render some phenomena invisible.

But other forces can also contaminate validity and rigour. Among these I highlight the ethics in data handling and analysis, an issue that becomes even more relevant in studies that involve a high degree of personal proximity to the topic of research or the case being analysed, and that evolve with a high degree of openness in the explanatory arguments. This is the case of this study, in both aspects.

The first step to deal with a potential problem is to acknowledge the problem itself. Along the research, and especially when analysing data, there was a constant concern with avoiding the simplest, often most obvious, explanations and with avoiding any pre-concepts about the patterns identified. The researcher has attempted to maintain all along the research process a critical attitude towards all procedures adopted.

The purpose of this last section of the chapter is to clarify some elements of liaison that make the bridge between the research goals and conceptual tools and hypotheses to the empirical world. It tries to summarise the actual indicators measured with the data available and to clarify the substantive meaning of those indicators by rooting them in the dimensions of empirical analysis defined in the study design.

This section is complemented by some additional information introduced in appendix 3, on the issue of measurement of variable in the original instruments of data collection. This is particularly relevant for some variables, as they play a central role in the analyses presented in chapters 5-7. The reader will find in appendix 3 a table (Table A3.6) summarising the modes by which some variables were measured in the original surveys and, when relevant, some information on data completeness for those same variables.

### **3.1. From family dynamics to the analysis of households and exchanges of support**

The chosen way to address family dynamics was quite influenced by the social network approaches that analyse family exchanges by measuring the personal networks of the individual and the flows of support and demand within (and between) those networks (Mugford and Kendig, 1986).

The empirical analysis of family dynamics has evolved around this two-folded approach: i) identifying the main personal network of the old person, considered to materialise in the close and intimate network of the household; and ii) identifying the flows of exchange of support within that network, considering the multiple roles of the old person both as receiver and provider of support.

#### **Households**

The focus on the household as the main personal network of the old person does not imply undervaluing the importance of social networks not based on the household. In fact, equally important when addressing the personal network of an older person is to measure the size and density of the network that involves relationships with other households, namely with households of descendants.

However, there is no data available to carry forward an extensive analysis of the personal networks of the Portuguese elderly outside their household. This limitation,

although serious from a conceptual perspective, may have a lesser impact in the assessment of personal networks in familialist systems. In those systems it was already argued that the household operates as the socio-economic anchor and in that sense, if one is to assess the resilience of familialism in the lives of the elderly, it is of central interest to assess its traditional forms of expression, namely those that materialise in large and intense personal networks as household units.

Households represent the space for close interpersonal ties that are a major source of support as well as of demand on individuals.

Drawing on the analyses others have done on households as networks of relations of support and demand, and especially on the contributions from the historical readings of household formation (Anderson, 1980), I take as an empirical reference the following typology of households (Laslett and Wall, 1972):

1. Solitaires. It includes all those living alone, namely single people and widowed.
2. Nuclear family. It includes married or cohabiting couples, with or without children as well as widowed with dependent children. The key element here is the bond by marriage (or consensual union) and the dependence of children from parents (or from surviving parent).
3. Extended family. It includes the extension of the nuclear family, upwards, downwards or laterally. The key elements in this category are: the presence or absence of dependent children (which involves different demands within the household); and the origin of the household and direction of extension.

Depending on the dataset used in each stage of the empirical analysis the above typology was operationalised in slightly different ways, but the core criteria are the ones identified above. The purpose is not to be exhaustive from a conceptual point of view but to use the best fitted tools to address the questions raised along the thesis.

#### Household typology for ECHP data:

- Living alone
- Living in couple
- Living in couple with non-married adult children
- Living alone with non-married adult children

- Living in extended household with dependent children
- Living in extended household without dependent children

The data from the ECHP does not allow the researcher to distinguish in a reliable way the direction of the extension in extended households. This means that we cannot distinguish for example between households for which the head of household is an elder person and for which the extension of the household was the result of taking in spouse(s) or descendants, from those households where the elder person moves in with a descendant.

However, the data allow distinguishing between extended households where there are dependent children present, from those where there are no dependent children. This distinction was considered very important for the analysis given that the presence of dependent children in the household often implies specific demands in terms of exchange of support, namely in terms of child care.

#### Household typology for FBS data

- Living alone
- Living in couple
- Living in own extended household
- Living in someone else's extended household

The main specificity of the typology used for the analysis of FBS data is the fact that it allows distinguishing the elderly that are living in extended households where the extension was done downwards (by incorporating spouses or descendants), from those living in households where the extension was done upwards (the elderly have moved in with descendants). However, this typology brings together the households where descendants are married and the households where descendants are not married.

FBS data does not allow the identification of the presence of dependent children in households.

#### **Exchanges of support**

The analysis of flows of exchange of support within the personal network of the old person is done according to some coordinates that, once again, derive from the

interaction between what is available in the data and what are the research goals of the study.

Firstly, given that the national case in focus is considered an example of familialisation of welfare state provision, and based on the proposition that the weak Portuguese welfare state leaves unattended gaps of provision, it makes sense to elect for analysis the domains of exchange of support that somehow fill-in those gaps.

As a result, the empirical analysis does not focus solely on the issue of caring for dependent elderly, which has been the elected topic of most of those who address family support in old age. Instead, it includes several dimensions of exchange of support, emphasising the idea of exchange. In other words, in each dimension of support it is not only the flows from family to the elderly that are of interest but also the flows of support from the elderly to their families. The dimensions of analysis elected are:

- Exchanges of care, where care is understood in a broad sense including the most demanding forms of caring for someone in cases of severe illness or dependency but also looking after children;
- Financial exchanges, which can only cover within household exchanges since there is no data available for between household flows. Despite this limitation, it is still of great interest the analysis of within household financial flows, especially the analysis of the pooling mechanisms in the formation of the household budget and the impact for the welfare of the elderly;
- Provision of accommodation, which is a topic of relative importance in familialist systems where housing policies are entirely absent or very underdeveloped and where the activation of family resources can be a solution to deal with needs related to accommodation.

The main target underlying the empirical analysis of family dynamics, and given the available data for an extensive quantitative analysis, is to provide an overall view of the incidence and type of family bonds in the living arrangements of the Portuguese elderly, to assess their potential as support networks and their performance as instances of provision of welfare.



### **3.2. From the normative universe to the analysis of adherence to values, preferences and intentions**

The analysis of social values and norms as a dimension of familialism is an attempt at measuring the adherence of the socio-cultural environment to the familialist ideal and principles. It draws on data from the EB surveys.

The social-cultural environment, and once more balancing research goals and available data, is decomposed in three spheres of empirical analysis:

- Family values, whereby I try to measure degrees of adherence to family solidarity norms and in particular to filial obligation norms;
- Preferences, whereby I try to identify the result of the incorporation of perceived norms and their translation into desired solutions to tackle welfare provision in old age;
- Intentions, whereby I try to identify potential planned behaviour and the result of the negotiation between perceived norms, preferences and personal/individual resources and constraints.

Although one may not necessarily find a coincidence of orientation in the three spheres of analysis elected, there is an underlying logical sequence to the three that ultimately allows measuring the resilience of familialism as a symbolic and normative framework.

The logical sequence would be: a high adherence to norms of family solidarity and filial obligation will increase the likelihood of preferring family support to deal with old-age related needs. This, however, is not necessarily incompatible with an equally high orientation to state responsibility, and can result from the joint effect of adherence to family solidarity norms and perceived lack of alternatives from other instances, namely from the state. In any case, the preference for family support should in turn correlate with an increased likelihood of expecting family support in case of need or, if the latter is perceived or anticipated as not available, may appear associated to higher levels of frustration and anxiety.

### **Conclusion**

The research objective of this study is the welfare arrangements of the Portuguese elderly. Welfare arrangements are considered in their quality of reflections of the

global system of welfare provision. They result from the interaction of different factors and forces originating in different spheres of the social space. Welfare arrangements appear in the confluence of institutional settings, of family dynamics and of normative systems.

The revision of the main trends and characteristics of the Portuguese welfare state, and in particular of the social protection mechanisms in old age, suggests that there is a potential mismatch between a familialised formal system of welfare provision in old age and the socio-economic fabric that traditionally allowed for the implementation of such a model. This prompted me to question how resilient and operative is familialism in the lives of the Portuguese elderly in recent times.

The study analyses resilience and performance of familialism by looking at welfare arrangements of the elderly from the side of family dynamics and from the side of normative prescriptions.

The broad research hypothesis is operationalised and broken down into subordinate questions, each related to a set of explanatory inquiries.

The first set of questions takes us to the analysis of living arrangements and living conditions of the Portuguese elderly from a cross-national comparative perspective. This part of the analysis is presented in chapter 5 of the thesis.

The second set of questions takes us to an in-depth analysis of family dynamics within the households of Portuguese elderly. The analysis focus on exchanges of support in the form of care, financial support and provision of accommodation and the results for it are presented in chapter 6 of the thesis.

The third and last set of questions takes us to the analysis of social norms and values related to family solidarity and involve both a cross-national comparative analysis and a case study focus. The analytical goal is to measure the adherence of the socio-cultural environment to the familialist ideal and principles. The results for this part of the analysis are introduced in chapter 7 of the thesis.

The study draws on survey data and on descriptive analysis. The data used for the empirical part of the research come from three different sources: the ECHP database provided by Eurostat; the FBS provided by INE; and the EB Survey Series, available for use at the LSE library.

The next three chapters of the thesis introduce the results of the empirical analysis and discuss the findings in light of the research framework. The final chapter of the

thesis will provide a global discussion of the findings and relate them to the broad research hypothesis of the thesis as well as to its policy implications.

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