Vulnerable relations: lifecourse, wellbeing and social exclusion in Buenos Aires, Argentina

PETER LLOYD-SHERLOCK* and CATHERINE LOCKE*

ABSTRACT

Many have presumed that in developing countries contact with children is beneficial to older people's wellbeing, and particularly that women receive more support from children than men because of their lifelong commitment to family responsibilities. This study questions these stylised notions through an analysis of 22 life histories of older women and men living in a district with high rates of social exclusion in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It focuses on the subjective accounts of relationships with children and grandchildren and their influence on current wellbeing. The life histories reveal complex lived experiences and the significance of key events. The informants speak of the anxiety and harm caused by struggling children, about problems of remote relations with successful children, and of the insecurity of the neighbourhood. The analysis contrasts a materialistic interpretation of the influence of children on older people's wellbeing with the informants' more holistic evaluation of family relationships. By applying a lifecourse framework, we demonstrate among other things that children may be a key source of vulnerability for older people, that the gendering of parent-child relations and later-life wellbeing is nuanced, and that both local and national conditions influence relationships with specific children, with implications for the inter-generational transmission of wellbeing.

KEY WORDS – lifecourse, wellbeing, social exclusion, parent-child relations.

Introduction

It is widely accepted that wellbeing in later life is highly relational, perhaps more than at other ages, and that relationships with offspring are especially significant. There is a tendency, particularly in developing countries, to portray these relationships in stylised terms. These include an assumption that *ceteris paribus* higher levels of contact with offspring (including

* School for Development Studies, University of East Anglia, Norwich, Norfolk, UK.

co-residence) lead to higher levels of material security and general well-being in later life (United Nations Population Division 2005). There is also a tendency to assume asymmetric dependency in both the material and affective domains, whereby older people are almost always 'net beneficiaries' (United Nations Population Fund 2002). A third common assumption is that older women are more likely than older men to receive support from offspring as a consequence of their lifelong commitment to family responsibilities (Beales 2000).

The evidence for these assumptions is not however robust, and the settings in which these relationships operate are highly diverse, complex and dynamic. This paper explores older people's perceptions of their relationships with their children and other offspring in a socially excluded neighbourhood of Buenos Aires. It considers the informants' understandings of the effects of these relationships on their current wellbeing in both material terms and more holistically. To this end, we draw on insights from gender studies that have highlighted the importance of relational aspects of wellbeing (Jackson 1997), and explore the way that the informants made sense of their relations with specific children. This approach chimes with the increasingly holistic and subjective understandings of wellbeing that are being adopted in mainstream 'development studies' (Gough *et al.* 2006), and it contrasts sharply with the many studies of older people in the developing world that have been exclusively concerned with income poverty (Lloyd-Sherlock 2006*a*). It also enables us to move away from an over-generalised understanding of the links between gender, 'family capital' and wellbeing in later life, and to engage with more situated analyses of how meanings about family relationships are constructed.

As well as distinguishing between 'narrow material' and 'open subjective' approaches to wellbeing, the paper seeks to locate older people's current experiences in a lifecourse framework. Rather than treating later life as a discrete life stage, it is framed as part of a process of lifelong transition. More specifically, we explore the extent to which the forms and meanings of relationships with offspring and subjective understandings of wellbeing are mediated by lifetime experiences. In doing so, we make use of the notion of 'successful ageing' (Rowe and Kahn 1998), which takes into account quality of life and interpretations of past experience (a life 'well lived'). By combining these lifecourse perspectives with different approaches to wellbeing, the paper offers an account of inter-generational relationships as experienced by socially-excluded older people. This brings to light several findings that directly challenge several established assumptions about later life in developing countries.

Relational wellbeing, family capital and the gendered lifecourse

A great part of development studies research on older people's lives in low-income countries has focused on a narrow range of material concerns and obvious policy issues, such as income security, access to pensions and, less emphatically, health status (Barrientos, Gorman and Heslop 2003; Lloyd-Sherlock 2004). It is widely believed that in countries with poorly-developed pension systems, family members, particularly children, are a vital form of social insurance for old age (United Nations Population Fund 2002). Where pension provision is more widespread, research has focused on the extent to which benefits are pooled across households and whether they crowd out or bolster other forms of support (Lloyd-Sherlock 2006*b*). Consequently, most research on older people's living arrangements and contacts with offspring has been concerned primarily with flows of material and instrumental support (Palloni and Peláez 2002; Gomes da Conceição and Montes de Oca Zavala 2003; Aboderin 2004). Notwithstanding the ambivalent findings, the idea has persisted that links with children, in particular co-residence, are closely linked to material wellbeing in later life. A recent survey of Latin America and the Caribbean reported that, 'co-residence significantly increases the probability of receiving support … the number of living children positively affects the chances of older persons receiving financial assistance' (United Nations Population Division 2005: 104).

It has been widely recognised by gerontological studies in developed and developing country settings that material exchange between the generations commonly flows in both directions, that not all children contribute to the wellbeing of their older parents, and that many older people give more than they receive (Schröder-Butterfill 2004; Lloyd-Sherlock 1997; Henretta, Grundy and Harris 2002; Hoff 2007). Despite this, there is an implicit assumption that in low-income settings children are sources of potential material wellbeing in later life, which can be lost through childlessness, AIDS-related mortality, migration or other factors. The possibility that children may also generate material vulnerability and ill-being in later life has rarely been considered. The most prominent conceptual frameworks that inform much research on the circumstances of older people in developing countries can be critiqued for their simplistic generalisations about family relations across extremely diverse and dynamic settings, for their reductionist representation of children as an investment or asset on which older people can rely, and their focus on individualised and material understandings of wellbeing in old age. Although they draw support from evidence of the alleged strength of social norms about children's obligations to elderly parents in diverse contexts, it is rarely

acknowledged that such norms are culturally specific and that they change in response to wider economic, social and political developments. Moreover, it should not be assumed that social norms translate into social practice. Notions of relational wellbeing engage closely with how access to material wellbeing is mediated by specific social relations. These relations unfold over time and are contingent on several factors. A relational approach to wellbeing is also valuable because it reveals how subjective wellbeing is bound up with gendered concerns about children and other close relatives and friends. In other words, these social relations matter not just as conduits of material support, but also because they have intrinsic emotional value and are a significant source of wellbeing in their own right.

Whilst lifecourse approaches to older people's wellbeing have indeed recognised many of these dynamics, a stylised view has emerged, which contrasts older women's tendency to benefit from their earlier reproductive endeavours with older men's isolation and diluted 'family capital' – a result of their conflictive or disinterested relations with children earlier in life (Gomes da Conceição and Montes de Oca Zavala 2003). These polarised representations conflate social stereotypes and norms with wider social practice and neglect the negotiability of family relations as the various members age. Social constructions of parent-child relations feed into this process, but the subjective agency of parents and children means that they are not trapped by these normative frameworks. Indeed, other insights from lifecourse perspectives on ageing have usefully drawn attention to the way old age involves renegotiating parent-child relations, as well as a desire to make sense of one's life that can lead to closer relations with children in later years (Schröder-Butterfill 2004; Varley and Blasco 2003).

Research design and the urban setting

The evidence for this study was collected in 2006 through 22 in-depth life-history interviews with older people living in Bajo Flores, a neighbourhood of the City of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and supplemented by key informant interviews with local community figures.[1] We took an exploratory approach that enabled the informants to define their current wellbeing in their own terms and to focus on those life experiences that they deemed particularly significant. Nevertheless, the study was guided by the premise that wellbeing in later life was highly relational, and that both the form and meanings of these relations were strongly mediated by experiences through the lifecourse.

The selection of the research setting reflected several considerations. There have been complex socio-economic changes in Argentina during the lives of its older residents. In their childhood and youth, the country's level of prosperity was comparable to many 'developed' countries, and booming industrial centres such as Buenos Aires led to large flows of migrants from the relatively poor northern provinces (Lewis 2002). This period also saw the establishment of a relatively embracing welfare state, including near-universal education and health-care, as well as pensions for formal-sector workers. From the mid-1970s, the country experienced economic instability and decline, the virtual collapse of its urban industries and rising poverty and unemployment. Thus, opportunities have shifted through the lives of informants, and between them and younger generations.

These processes of change have had complex effects on families and inter-generational relationships. By the 1990s, the great majority of households in Argentina were nuclear rather than extended, and 37 per cent had at least one person aged 60 or more years (Sunkel 2006). It is widely claimed that social change and economic instability have put families under growing strain, to the particular detriment of women's wellbeing. Over recent decades, divorce, female household-headship and children born outside marriage have all risen, along with the tendency for adult children to remain living with their older parents (Jelín 2005; Sunkel 2006). Clear indications of shifting norms and attitudes are however less evident. On the one hand, studies from various regions of Latin America point to the resilience of the inter-generational obligations that are embedded in Roman Catholic teaching (Varley and Blasco 2003; Melhuus 1996). On the other hand, some studies suggest that there has been a weakening of traditional models of authority based on age, as a more youth-centred and individualistic set of values have taken hold (Jelín 2005). Interestingly, anthropological research in impoverished rural and urban districts of Mexico back in the 1950s and 1960s referred to similar normative shifts (Lewis 1951, 1969).

The research was conducted in a single neighbourhood of Buenos Aires, Bajo Flores. Although not intended to represent wider conditions in Argentina or even Buenos Aires, the district's history has been closely linked to the national experience. The neighbourhood was first established as a shanty town during the 1940s by northern migrants who moved to the city for employment, but since the 1970s has faced deepening social problems. Bajo Flores is today notorious across Buenos Aires for high levels of crime, drug dealing and street violence.[2] Partly in response to these problems, the neighbourhood has attracted various social investments. Most of the original shanties have been replaced by state-financed

housing, and the infrastructure has been upgraded, including schools and health centres. Over the past five years, the residents have been targeted by several personal-assistance programmes that offer both food and cash (Villatoro 2005). These have reduced income poverty in the neighbourhood, but have had little if any effect on long-term unemployment and drug abuse. The problems faced by Bajo Flores are not exceptional in Latin America. In many of its regions, similar anti-poverty programmes have made considerable progress in reducing urban poverty, while unemployment and drug-related violence have increased (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean 2006; Moser *et al.* 2003). A growing number of older people live in such neighbourhoods, but both the districts and the age group remain largely ignored by academic and policy researchers, partly because of the intrinsic difficulties of working in dangerous environments.

The interpretation of the narratives

The analysis reported in this paper focused on the impact of parent-child relationships on wellbeing in later life *as experienced by the informants*. The absence of complementary perspectives, such as from the interviewees' children, spouses, close relatives and friends, means that the narratives are but a partial picture of the informants' wellbeing. Furthermore, life histories involve informants 'storifying' their lives, so that they make sense for researchers (Riessman 1994: 114). Such accounts can to varying degrees exhibit self-justification or self-blame, as well as a tendency to order random events. Our interpretation of the data was not concerned with constructing reliable factual accounts, but sought to generate a rich sense of the subjective wellbeing of older people, with particular reference to their understanding of their relationships with children. As such, the narratives reveal how older people use their understanding of family relationships to make sense of their unfolding relations with children and their current wellbeing.

Gender ideologies influence the production of individual life-history narratives in complex ways. They permeate the way in which individuals perceive, articulate and make sense of their lives, and directly influence their material conditions. For instance, some of the male informants tended to be less prepared to discuss their life experiences, other than those associated with work, in other than a superficial way. Normative ideas about masculinities and femininities shape what can be thought and said, and also inform the ways in which individuals evaluate their lifetime experiences. The contradictions between, on the one hand, finding a way of talking about or making sense of injustices or disappointments

experienced in life and, on the other, the constraints or expectations of gendered normative frameworks, mean that the silences and ambiguities in the accounts are significant data.

The complexity of the narratives meant that it was necessary to strike a balance between capturing the richness of the individual narratives and teasing out a more general, systematic picture from the entire data set. The informants' life trajectories were diverse and usually complex: some had had many children and grandchildren, which created difficulties with the analysis of multiple relationships over time. The majority of the informants' lives involved considerable instability – complex migratory trajectories, moves within the city, changes in household structure, marital instability and uncertain livelihoods. For many informants, it was difficult to identify one or more key turning points among the frequent radical changes in their lives. Rather than trying to resolve these complexities or to obtain complete information about the changing structures of kinship networks over time, we focused instead on commonalities and differences in how the informants referred to particular relationships, turning points or changes in circumstance that they said were significant influences on the course of their lives. These complexities add to the richness of the case studies, reveal the limitations of simple life-cycle or life-stage frameworks for understanding individual's experiences, and call into question ortho-dox conceptualisations of inter-generational relationships and wellbeing in later life.

Wellbeing and relations with children and grandchildren

Previous studies of older people's wellbeing and their family relations in Latin America have made two main points. First, it has been observed that older people, particularly women, are increasingly likely to live alone, and that this is associated with disadvantage and vulnerability (United Nations Population Division 2005). This trend has been driven by several factors, including a sharp fall in the birth rate (that has reduced the number of surviving children), geographical mobility, and changing atti-tudes to co-residence. On the other hand, it is also widely claimed that older people with pensions tend to share the income with younger relatives, and that this has boosted inter-generational exchange and co-residence (Bertranou and Grushka 2002).

Table 1 presents the numbers of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren as reported by the informants. The plentiful availability of descendants might suggest that the informants could expect substantial support through their family networks, perhaps especially the women.[3]

T A B L E 1. *The informants' household sizes and reported offspring*

Pseudonyms	Age (years)	Household size	Living children[1]	Grandchildren and great-grandchildren[1]
Women				
Monica	69	4	10	17
Lena	58	7	8	At least 8
Clara	65	3	7	At least 17
Silvia	75	1	7	'Too many to count'
Eulogia	73	2	6	34
Ernesta	76	2	6	32
Magdalena	69	8	6	At least 14
Ana	80	5	5	At least 11
Flora	76	1	5	16
Leticia	70	2	3	19
Sandra	57	3	3	
Patricia	68	2	3	5
Paula	60	1	3	At least 4
Daniela	68	2	3	29
Susana	78	7	3	23 (4 great-great grandchildren)
Carolina	76	1	2	2
Helena	73	2	1	4
Mean	66	2.9	4.5	
Men				
Antonio	73	5	3	At least 8
Carlos	79	5	3	5
Alfredo	62	1	1	4
Roberto	64	1	1	6
Miguel	76	1	0	0
Mean	59	2.2	1.3	

Note: 1. As reported by the informants.

Of the 22 informants, 17 had at least three surviving children. Only one informant had no (great-) grandchildren, and for many the number of grandchildren was strikingly high. Since most informants had become grandparents by their early forties, at the time of the research many of the grandchildren were adults. Being a grandparent was not therefore necessarily associated with old age, and there was considerable potential for grandparent-grandchildren links to be significant for late-life well-being. While seven informants reported that they lived alone, most had several offspring living in Bajo Flores.

Despite the apparently numerous offspring, only one informant saw herself as heavily reliant on younger relatives for economic support. In the great majority of cases, the informants claimed no reliance, or indicated that one of more of their children were economically dependent on them. The extent to which they relied on younger relatives for instrumental help was less clear, with most keenly affirming their independence. There was

strong evidence, however, that the women were more likely to see themselves as net care-givers rather than net care-receivers – they said that they provided support for spouses, grandchildren and, in several cases, seriously disabled children. Taking a material approach to wellbeing, it appears that family networks and inter-generational exchange were relatively unimportant.[4] This is surprising since less than one-half of the informants received pensions and many were impoverished.[5] In some cases, older people with children in the neighbourhood were forced to rely on charity and begging. Several expressed deep bitterness at the lack of support they received. According to one older woman, 'I worked while I had the strength to. I gave them [my children] everything. Now I've lost my strength and can't do anything, they've just vanished into thin air'. Her words point to the felt injustice of her situation; she affirmed that she has been a good mother and did not deserve to be abandoned in old age.

The in-depth life histories provide an opportunity to supplement a material approach to wellbeing with richer understandings and interpretations. The next section presents two case studies that illustrate the multi-faceted nature of these relationships. Each informant's account contains significant unique features, and so it is not possible to choose a single case that exemplifies wider experiences. Nevertheless, Eulogia and Roberto's testimonies give a sense of the range of gendered experiences and the different issues that need to be considered. The section concludes by making some more general observations about inter-generational relationships and the way that informants constructed ideas about specific children in making sense of their lives.

Eulogia's relationships with her daughters

At the time of the interview, Eulogia was aged 73 years. She had six daughters, 24 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren. She maintained contact with all of them, and every year they came together to celebrate her birthday. Eulogia talked about her various daughters in very different ways. She was rather disparaging about four of them, comparing her own life of hard work and 'struggle' – working as a seamstress for 25 years 'without getting up from the machine' – to the daughters' easy lives. She was emphatic that none of the four did anything for her, but instead 'had the cheek' to come to her for money. According to Eulogia, the daughters had become over-reliant on welfare handouts and were incompetent at managing their husbands' money. She was especially bitter that none of them had made any effort to help with her husband's funeral costs. She went on to complain (somewhat contradictorily) that one daughter was too wrapped up in her own work to raise her children

properly, and that this had led one grandson to get involved in drugs and crime.

Eulogia talked about her other two daughters very differently. One of these had her own family, while the youngest, María, was unmarried and still lived with her. María had been studying at university when Eulogia's husband fell terminally ill, six years before. According to Eulogia, María dropped out of university to care for him, and they both became severely depressed when he died. This prevented María from returning to her studies. At the time of the research, she helped Eulogia make and sell meat-pasties at a local market, which was their main livelihood. Eulogia was very compassionate about María, and portrayed her as sensitive, unworldly and good-hearted. Eulogia expressed concern that when she would become too old to look out for her, María would be unable to cope with life. Eulogia claimed that María had no desire to marry, having seen her sisters' generally unhappy marriages. Following her husband's death, Eulogia and María both converted to evangelical Christianity, which over time helped them both to overcome their grief.

Eulogia described Ana, her fifth daughter, as more independent than María, but evaluated her more positively than the other four. Ana occasionally helped with making the pasties and shared their evangelical faith. When Eulogia once travelled away from Buenos Aires for three months, she arranged for Ana to look after María. Eulogia claimed that the main purpose of the trip was to help María get used to coping on her own.

Eulogia's moral evaluations of her children were central to her life story. Her construction of four of her daughters as problematic clearly associated their neglect of filial obligations with their irresponsibility as mothers and wives. There was not, however, a straightforward relationship between the level of the support that she received from a daughter and Eulogia's judgement of her. For Eulogia, the key issues were whether the daughter shared her religious faith, whether she felt their ethic of struggle and hard work compared favourably with her own, and the extent to which they could rely on each other at difficult times. Her husband's death had been a gauge of these qualities, and had either affirmed or remoulded her attitude to each daughter. Whilst the tradition in Argentina is for the youngest daughter to stay at home to care for the parents in old age, Eulogia, who appeared energetic, entrepreneurial and independent, emphasised her youngest daughter's vulnerability and dependence on her.

Roberto's renewed relationship with his adult daughter

Roberto was aged 64 years at the time of interview and provided a very different narrative. He had only one daughter, from a short-lived marriage

more than 40 years before that collapsed when the daughter was only a few months old. He then migrated to Buenos Aires and lost all contact with her. Roberto claimed that he never remarried because he never came to terms with the loss of his first family. About one year before our research, he visited his place of birth and tracked down his daughter's telephone number. She was 40 years old, married with six children and living in a middle-class neighbourhood of Buenos Aires. Since then he had visited her every week, and described their re-acquaintance as a near-miraculous, life-changing event:

My life changed when I found my daughter. I'm a totally different person now. Before I didn't have dealings with anyone, didn't talk to anyone, just stayed inside my room, not talking to anyone. But when I found her it all changed, as if all the guilt had been lifted away because I hadn't gone looking for her when her mother had taken her off.

Roberto's life may have been 'transformed', but he said that he received little material support from his daughter, even though he was in a very bad economic position. Following a serious accident two years before, he had been unable to work but had yet to receive a pension. He lived in a tumbledown shack and had survived on a small payment that he received after the accident and by visiting soup kitchens. He said that his daughter did not visit him in Bajo Flores, because he did not want her to see how he lived. Later in the interview, Roberto admitted that he sometimes felt depressed, useless and alone, despite having found his daughter. Given his daughter's relative success, his 'shameful' circumstances and the guilt of abandoning the parental role, Roberto regarded her limited and one-sided engagement with him as excusable and, to some extent, was as he wished.

Interpreting relationships between parents and adult children

These two contrasting accounts demonstrate the difficulty of systematically analysing the relationships between the informants and their children. Whilst Euologia and Roberto superficially conformed to opposed gender stereotypes (that older women keep in contact with many children, while older men have tenuous links to few children), their individual circumstances were much more complex. Both situations make apparent that although material exchange was limited, each informant's wider sense of wellbeing was strongly influenced by the ways in which they perceived their children and their relationships. Key influences were how the informant judged the child's moral worth and how they evaluated their past and present roles as parents. Drawing on all the interviews, it is

possible to identify a number of broad themes among the ways in which the children were perceived.

Several informants referred with pride to the children they perceived to have been successful. Of these, some had obtained university degrees and all were either in high-status jobs or had a spouse with such a job. In almost every case, these children had moved away from Bajo Flores to better districts of the city. As with Roberto's daughter, most of these children provided little direct support and rarely came to see them. It was understood that the neighbourhood was too dangerous to visit, that the children led busy lives, and that they had to put their own children's needs first. The informants compared their own inferior origins, limited education and, as they described them, humble achievements to their children's, and some interviewees reasoned that they had little to offer them. It is possible that the informants were inclined to portray most children who had moved away as 'successful', since it was difficult for those living in the neighbourhood to gainsay this, and it justified the little contact they had with them.

Another category of children can be loosely referred to as 'strugglers'. The informants emphasised the difficult lives led by these children, mainly through economic stress, lack of stable jobs, and marital crises. They had varying levels of sympathy with these children, as Eulogia's account testified, but overall they appeared to be more a source of concern and bitterness than of support or contentment. A third category, which overlapped with the strugglers, were the children who were perceived as highly problematic and that caused unhappiness. This often entailed a construction of the child as a burden. These views were expressed about children that the informants felt had 'gone off the rails' or 'strayed from the right path in life', most commonly through drug addiction, violence, criminality and imprisonment.[6] Several children had directly harmed the informant by assault, stealing from them and, in one case, attempting to appropriate their house. Other children had significant disabilities or mental or physical health problems, which left them highly dependent on the informants.

The number of 'struggling' or 'problem' children was much greater than the number regarded as successful. In many cases, this had substantial impact on the informants' lives. One informant lived with a seriously disabled daughter and a violent, mentally unstable grandson, and another child had died in prison in violent circumstances. One informant had been robbed by her drug-addict daughter two days before the interview; she was raising several of the daughter's children. Another informant lived with a mentally disabled son with learning difficulties, and had lost a second son as a result of political violence. Concerns about the welfare

of children emerged as a major theme in almost all the interviews. Many of the concerns stemmed from major past or present crises, and had a strong negative influence on the informants' sense of wellbeing. Almost every informant had at least one child who had gone through a serious life crisis that had impacted on the informant's wellbeing. Past crises, particularly those involving a child's death, were an enduring cause of sadness and depression.

The concern that a child or grandchild might 'go off the rails', or that a problem child would behave 'destructively' (harming either themselves or the informant), was a prevalent source of unhappiness and vulnerability among the older people in the neighbourhood. While it has something in common with the abuse of older people, this aspect of later life vulnerability has not been identified in other studies (Schröder-Butterfill and Marianti 2006), which may be because of the paucity of research in violent, socially-excluded settings. It may also reflect the taken-for-granted assumption that children are a potential resource in later life, rather than adopting a more realistic view of parent-child relationships. It is entirely plausible that this pattern of relationships is particular to neighbourhoods like Bajo Flores. Living in such a neighbourhood may contribute to problematic relationships, and receiving scant support from children reduces an older person's opportunities to live elsewhere. Nevertheless, it would be dangerous to assume that older people living in other socially-excluded neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires or indeed any Latin American city are immune to these forms of vulnerability.

Lifecourse events and wellbeing

So far, the paper has demonstrated the value of going beyond material approaches to wellbeing and inter-generational exchange. It has also shown the difficulty of identifying direct, generalisable links between the level of current contacts with offspring and wellbeing in later life. It is already evident from Euologia and Roberto's stories that key events in the past had influenced the meaning and value of current relations with children: Eulogia saw the events surrounding her husband's death as particularly telling of her various daughters' filial commitments; and Roberto's actions to re-establish relations with his daughter were 'transformational'. Now we use a lifecourse framework to examine how particular turning points were constructed by older people as crucial for their relations with their children and perceived wellbeing over time, and to elucidate the interplay of wider events and personal biographies.

As applied to sociology, life course approaches have made several important contributions for the analysis of diverse personal narratives (Elder Jr 1998; Heinz and Krüger 2001). Several guiding precepts have been established: (i) that individuals construct their own lifecourses through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances; (ii) that lives are lived inter-dependently (linked lives), and that historical and social influences are expressed through networks of shared relationships; (iii) that the developmental impact of a succession of life transitions or events depends on when they occur in a person's life (timing), and (iv) that individual lifecourses are embedded in the historical times and places they experience over their lifetimes. The concept of 'successful ageing' (Rowe and Kahn 1998), or of 'a life well-lived', engages particularly well with our concerns about how respondents' interpretations of past experiences and relationships with particular children influence perceptions of current wellbeing and relations with children. As in the previous section, we shall illustrate the application of a lifecourse framework through two different case studies before reaching more general observations.

Daniela's accommodation of her poverty

Daniela (aged 68 years) and her husband (72 years) lived without others in a small, poorly maintained, two-room house built by the government on the edge of the shanty town. They shared her husband's pension (470 pesos, equivalent to £55 a month), and their per capita income was below the official poverty line (£45). Daniela had started the process of claiming a pension of her own, although whether it would be granted was unclear. She had had four children, and three were still alive. They received no material support from their surviving children, and had no other form of income or livelihood. While Daniela's material standard of living was not good, she assessed the relational elements of her wellbeing quite positively. She felt that she and her husband got along with each other well, and were happy living without their children. Daniela placed great emphasis on her active lifestyle, many friends and wide social network, which centred on her religious beliefs – Daniela had converted to evangelical Christianity and was an active church member. She took particular pleasure from her 21 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren, with whom she had frequent contacts.

According to Daniela, her early childhood experiences in Buenos Aires, particularly her mother's behaviour, had had a major influence on her material circumstances throughout her life. Soon after she was born, her father died and her mother placed her in the care of relatively

affluent godparents whilst she went to work. Daniela was very happy with this arrangement, but her godmother died when Daniela was aged 12 years, and her mother insisted that she return to live with her. Daniela said:

I wanted to stay put, because there were children of my own age in the same house. Their mother had been like a second mum to me and asked me to stay … but my mother said, 'Pah!' She gave me a good slap and took me away crying, so fast that we didn't stay for my godmother's funeral. I never found out where they buried her.

Daniela's mother's marriage swiftly collapsed, their economic situation deteriorated and by the time Daniela was 16-years-of-age, they were living in a shanty town. A few months after arriving there, Daniela married a local man and soon had her first child. Daniela felt that she and her husband had been trapped in chronic poverty. She contrasted her life with the way it might have been without her mother's problems or if her godmother had lived.

   Given Daniela's narrative, her assessment that she 'has a good life' is striking. This positive outlook is firmly rooted in her evangelical beliefs, which were a source of resilience in the face of difficult circumstances. She explained, 'It's very beautiful. I feel so well now, I feel accompanied, never alone. It gives me vitality that I need to keep going in life. I tell everyone I can that they have to go [to the evangelical church] now because there are so many bad things happening in the world.' Daniela converted to evangelical Christianity in 1986 when she was aged 49 years. Shortly before, her youngest son, Rubén was 'abandoned' by his wife, who took their two young children. Daniela had been devastated by the news, was furious with her daughter-in-law, and became depressed. She recollected:

I felt really bad. It even started to give me heart problems and high blood pressure. … Then I went to the [evangelical] church … and they all started praying. I saw this great light. It was like I was coming to life again … something bad escaped from deep inside me – I'd really wanted to murder that woman.

Daniela said that this experience gave her the inner strength to cope with the crisis. After a few years, her son remarried. By that time, Daniela felt she had overcome his loss and that her prayer had played an important part in his recovery. It is particularly telling that when later another child, Luís, died following a long history of illness and alcohol abuse, Daniela felt more able to cope with this crisis than with the earlier divorce. As well as her conversion, her contrasting moral evaluations of Luís as a 'problem child' and Carlos as a 'deserving struggler' may explain her different responses.

Carlos's generative investment in a grandson

When interviewed, Carlos was aged 79 years. He had been seriously injured in an accident at work several years before and received the basic pension. The household lived off this pension, along with his son-in-law's earnings as a bus driver and food parcels from an assistance programme. Carlos did not get on very well with his 67-years-old wife and other family members, was concerned and frustrated by his health problems, had few friends in Bajo Flores, and was unable to get about as much as he used to. Nevertheless he said:

When I go to bed, I look at my house and I give thanks to God. I still find it hard to believe that I am living like this, in this place. … Apart from that, I feel happy because I have such great daughters. They came out so lovely, thanks to God. And the lad was more than that, [sighs] that's something that … [tails off]. It almost did me in; he was so lovely.

Like Daniela and many other informants, Carlos had an unstable and difficult early life. He was born in one of the poorest provinces of Argentina, Tucumán, where the economy was dominated by sugar-cane monoculture. He had worked in the cane fields from the age of 14 years, but when many of the sugar mills closed in the mid-1960s, he decided to migrate the 700 miles to Buenos Aires. Carlos struggled to find stable work and had to move house several times, but he was acutely aware of the even more impoverished conditions in Tucumán. He explained:

I'm glad I came here because of all the poverty in Tucumán. It breaks your heart to see how the people live there. The people back in my village have to work on a daily rate cutting down scrub … and they don't get hardly anything for it. All over the province, people have to work like that just for food.

Carlos's subjective wellbeing was not influenced by a single transformational event like Daniela's conversion, but was profoundly shaped by his only son's death and the subsequent events. Carlos recalled: 'I cried a lot about my son, for a whole week. And after three months I'd gone down from 68 kilos to 60, then 57. I walked the streets talking to myself. I would see some young men and think they were my son. You can lose a mother, father or brother, but your own son – that's tough'. Carlos was finally able to bring himself out of depression when he discovered that his son had left a child that he had not previously known about. His vivid account of the events continued:

… but his girlfriend didn't want the child to come to our house or to know us. Then one day my daughter's boyfriend came. … I didn't want to go out [as he suggested], I didn't want to listen to the football, to do anything. … He said, 'Carlos, a woman and a child are looking for you'. The girl's grandmother had escaped; that is, she'd stolen the child away and brought it here so we could know

about it. The kid didn't know anything about us. I went down to the door … there was this lady with a kid. [The child] said, 'Hello, granddad'. I didn't do anything. I was so surprised; I was stuck in the doorframe, like I was glued to it. … I picked him up in my arms, just to have him for a moment. It really was my own son in my arms.

Carlos's grandson was eight years-of-age at the time. Since then, Carlos has maintained contact with him, but the boy has not matched Carlos's expectations. Carlos said, 'I wanted to take him under my wing to make sure he studied. I told him, "If you end up with your father's memory, you'll be a marvel". But he didn't want to study … he quit after eight years. It's a couple of weeks since I've seen him'. Carlos continues to feel the death of his only son keenly, and this has tempered any sense of an improved life since leaving Tucumán. He enjoys contact with his remaining daughters, and is proud of the 'way they have turned out' and of his grandchildren. As with his son's boy, his understanding of his relationship with the grandchildren is sometimes parental. Carlos also recollected that 'we had my granddaughter with us for a while when she was very little. It was almost like she was my … [tails off]. I had her for almost a year. She was brought up by me'.

Coping with life's reverses

In similarly constrained circumstances, Daniela's and Carlos's constructions of their lives were very different. Their subjective perceptions of their wellbeing were strongly influenced by non-material considerations: their intimate relations, friendships and spirituality. Whilst religious belief was a source of comfort for Carlos, for Daniela it also provided an active social life that supplemented her family contacts and had transformed the way she had come to terms with her past crises. Both singled out particular experiences in the past that they felt had determined the course of their lives: for Daniela, these were the circumstances surrounding her childhood and conversion; for Carlos, they were his migration to Buenos Aires and his son's death.

Despite their very different lives, Daniela's and Carlos's subjective wellbeing cannot be understood solely by reference to their current circumstances, but have to be interpreted through their wider life experiences or biographies. Their agency was demonstrated by Daniela's conversion, partly in response to Ruben's divorce, and by Carlos's attempt to parent his son's boy and his granddaughter. The interdependence of their lives with those of their children was complex and a source of both vulnerability and satisfaction, each of which varied in intensity and importance over time. Daniela and Carlos's experiences question the common assumption

that older women's lives are more 'linked' to those of their children than older men's lives. In fact, religion had transformed Daniela's relations with her children and their lives, and had given her substantial resilience in the face of a child's death. It had enabled her to supplement, and to some extent substitute, social relationships with children with those formed through the church. Carlos's primary pain (his intense grief over the death of his son) and principal pleasure (how his daughters 'turned out') were both rooted in his relationships with his children, and he used the idiom of parenting to express his love for his grandchildren.

The timing of specific life events is critical to their impact, as evinced by the different effects that the loss of a son had on Daniela and Carlos. Luis's death was not as severe a blow to Daniela as was Ruben's divorce, partly because it occurred after her conversion. Carlos's son's death had been a bitter blow, partly because he was the only male descendant and because it occurred when the mother's child bearing was complete. That individual lives are embedded in specific times and places was manifest in the fact that Daniela's and Carlos's choices and experiences were shaped by broader historical events. Evangelism was making inroads into neighbourhoods like Bajo Flores and actively sought converts around the time when Ruben was divorced (Semán 2000). The collapse of Tucumán's sugar industry and the greater availability of jobs in Buenos Aires for migrants from the north-east influenced Carlos's decision to move to the city. Given the unique articulations of these experiences, it is not possible to capture them systematically for the entire set of interviews. In other narratives, the distinction between material and non-material aspects of wellbeing was not always as evident. Nonetheless many of the accounts resonate with Daniela's and Carlos's stories. Collectively they demonstrate the value of examining different facets of wellbeing from a lifecourse perspective.

The link that Daniela made between her childhood experiences and her wellbeing in later life was echoed in many other testimonies. Most of the informants referred to difficult childhoods, including unstable relationships, frequent violence and serious abuse. Many claimed to have been denied access to education and forced to work. For several informants, this had a great impact on their wellbeing in later life. Several connections were described. For some, these difficult childhoods had marked the start of a sequence of vulnerabilities, such as a lifetime of low-paid jobs or an early marriage (as a means of escape from an unhappy home life). Many informants still felt angry, traumatised and depressed about what they had experienced. In more than one case, this included serious diagnosed mental health problems. More generally, these experiences had done much to shape the informants' attitudes towards their

own children, and had underpinned their efforts to ensure that their children had a better start in life. This ambition in turn influenced the wider relationships with their children.

A second set of common experiences was associated with migration to Buenos Aires. Echoing Roberto's testimony, several informants claimed that their move was prompted by a family crisis, in many cases a failed marriage. Among the informants were several women who took the decision to leave young children behind with other relatives for several years. While justifying their decision, they claimed that this had often led to bitterness on the part of the children, which had affected their subsequent relationships. One informant carefully referred to a social norm that sanctions a husband's unreasonable treatment of his wife as a legitimate reason for abandoning her children, then related that they saw her as a poor mother, and then reasoned that she has been unfairly treated by her children. In her own words:

They didn't understand why I'd gone; it wasn't because I didn't love them. It was because my husband treated me so badly. If I'd have stayed there, I'd have been dead. My patience just snapped. … I left them with their father, so that he could learn what it really meant to have children, and so he could see how much they missed their mother. … Ever since then, the children have been so bitter; they never understood.

Like Daniela and Eulogia, several other informants had converted to evangelical Christianity. Various evangelical churches have been spreading rapidly among poorer groups across Latin America (Martin 1990). Their particular success in Bajo Flores partly reflected its high level of social exclusion and the insecurity experienced by many of its residents, and partly its relative neglect by local Catholic organisations. Excepting religious groups, community networks were poorly developed in the district, and many older people could not rely on their offspring for material or affective support. Many accounts of the informants' conversions cited crises related to children or husbands. Flora's case was fairly typical. She was converted by her son, who himself had been converted after a life of 'vice, drugs and drink'. Immediately following his conversion, Flora's son became hard working and responsible, and prayed for her. She suggested that his concern contributed to her recovery. This narrative also demonstrates ways in which she thanked God. When she fell seriously ill and was hospitalised, her son and other converts came to the interplay of specific lifecourse events and inter-generational relationships. In many cases, as with Daniela, the conversion framed the informants' general sense of wellbeing, and enabled them to come to terms with material hardships and disappointments about their children. According to another

informant, Sandra, 'I know that I have to do without a lot of things; that I haven't been able to do a lot of things I'd dreamed about doing – like improving myself, staying in work, buying stuff for the kids, a computer, but I still have this strong faith, so I keep on hoping and trusting'.

While all the narratives contain significant examples of the interplay between discrete lifecourse events, wellbeing and relationships with off-spring, a key theme for all the informants was persistent instability and insecurity. Since early childhood, this had affected most aspects of their lives: relationships, employment, living conditions and engagement with the authorities. For example, many informants had been forced to move home frequently within Buenos Aires, particularly in 1976 when a large part of Bajo Flores was demolished by the military government. Most informants' uncertain and insecure lives and relationships were projections explain of past experiences. This may also the attractiveness of the 'certainties' of evangelical beliefs and of the support of church communities and networks.

Conclusions

In the harsh couplet, 'They fuck you up, your mum and dad. / They may not mean to, but they do', Philip Larkin encapsulated the accepted wisdom that children are deeply vulnerable to their parents' actions and attitudes.[7] This paper has shown that a parent's welfare and self-esteem is equally vulnerable to their children's behaviour and attitudes. How parents deal with the resultant problems and crises can have a large effect on their wellbeing and their evaluation of their own lives – a key aspect of 'successful ageing'. By drawing attention to these broader aspects of wellbeing, the paper offers a different perspective on older people's lives from that usually adopted in development studies, which tend to focus on a narrow range of material concerns such as income, access to pensions and, less consistently, health. Without denying the importance of such issues, this study has given older people the voice to evaluate their own wellbeing and to identify the aspects that they feel to be most significant. It has shown that life histories, though not without problems, are an effective tool for obtaining these insights. By focusing on subjective perceptions of inter-generational relations, the study has drawn attention to the importance of questioning received meanings about family roles and their significance.

The paper has demonstrated that a comprehensive appreciation of older people's current wellbeing must make reference to their lifecourse and wider experiences. Histories of relationships with children and other

close family members are usually a central element of these experiences, but these relationships are unpredictable, and can be as much a source of crisis and vulnerability as of support and fulfilment. Contrary to the expectation that 'successful children' are the key to material security in old age, for many of our informants, having such children was deeply ambiguous. They provided little material support and relations with them were often distant, even though the informants had pride in their achievements. Relationships with children are also profoundly influenced by external factors, such as a setting of local social exclusion or national economic decline. By embedding individual biography within local geographies and wider histories, the lifecourse approach offers helpful insights for understanding how older people's lives are constructed from social relations that unfold over long periods of time, and reveals how they are punctuated by unpredictable events or key turning points that may or may not be of their own making, and their relations to the broader tide of historical events. The findings have demonstrated the importance of early life events for wellbeing in old age. This suggests that the difficult circumstances faced by young people in neighbourhoods like Bajo Flores will have lasting affects on their lives and will eventually shape their own wellbeing as older people.

The gendered lifecourses of those interviewed suggest that the conventional connections made between gender, 'family capital' and older people's wellbeing are simplistic. Whilst the informants' narratives made discursive use of social norms about gendered parent-child relations, these norms do not capture the complexity of actual relationships and the possibilities for renegotiating the meaning of these relationships over time. Older men were somewhat more likely to have lost contact with children earlier in their lives. In most cases the separation was perceived as involuntary, either as a result of estrangement or migration, rather than as a result of selfish or irresponsible behaviour, and the informants expressed deep regrets. Several female informants also felt, however, that they had suffered from loss of contact with a child as a result of a disintegrated relationship or a long-distance migration, and some expressed strong regrets about this. Furthermore, loss of contact or distant relations with children early in life did not preclude re-establishing or improving relations with children and grandchildren in later life, nor sadly the converse – relations with children could also become more distant or problematic in later life for both men and women.

The older informants' relationships with their children at the time of the research did not all fit the stylised notion that children are especially important to older women. For instance, Daniela's testimony indicates that, while her children remained important to her, she was less

emotionally dependent on them than Carlos was on his. Rather than discount the importance of gendered identities in later life, these stories demonstrate their complex effects. For example, Carlos's struggle to cope also reflected his frustration at no longer being able to work, a concern which was sometimes voiced by the female informants but was not as strongly tied to their self-esteem. Gender matters, but not in the simplified and predictable way that is commonly assumed.

The informants' accounts draw attention to the dangers of idealising family relations as a support for older people in socially-excluded settings. While the wellbeing of older people is strongly influenced by these relationships, they tend to be unpredictable, and norms of inter-generational obligations are complex. This calls into question the stylised views of household dynamics which increasingly underpin social policies in developing countries (Sunkel 2006). Instead of relying on assumptions of household altruism, social policy interventions must be grounded in empirical research in specific settings, which may give a rather different picture. Many aspects of the narratives resonate closely with the concepts of marginality and the 'culture of poverty' that were influential in the 1950s and 1960s, but subsequently attacked and eschewed for providing an overly-negative, passive and judgemental view of the poor (Lewis 1969; Perlman 1976). Rather than viewing marginality as a culture produced by poor people who are characterised by fatalism and irresponsibility, our account stresses the agency of older people in coping with problematic social relations that are associated with socially-excluded contexts.[8] The paper has also demonstrated how neighbourhood and community relations are equally significant for older people, and that interventions at this level must go beyond material provision to address more complex social issues. Dealing with local problems of drug abuse and unemployment might do much to reduce older people's vulnerability to their children 'going off the rails', the general fears they expressed about living in such a dangerous neighbourhood, and the reluctance of more 'successful' children to maintain strong contact with them.

Acknowledgements

assistant, as well as transcribing and providing thoughtful inputs. The research was funded by the co-authors.

NOTES

1 The 17 women and five men interviewees were chosen opportunistically through a gatekeeper who lived in the neighbourhood. Rather than specify a chronological age, the gatekeeper was asked to seek out individuals who considered themselves 'older people'. Their actual ages ranged from 57 to 80 years, with 20 aged over 60 years. Most interviews were conducted in the gatekeeper's own house and usually entailed a single meeting. The fieldwork took place in August 2006.
2 See Prignano (1991) for the foundation and early growth of Bajo Flores.
3 It should be borne in mind that the data are neither objective records nor representative information, and should be seen as part of wider, subjective narratives. Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe the lower number of children reported by men. This may be the result of sampling bias. It may also be a reflection of some men's weaker lifetime contacts with offspring and a reluctance to accept paternity.
4 This broadly corresponds with the findings of Lloyd-Sherlock's earlier research on inter-generational exchange in three Buenos Aires shanty towns (Lloyd-Sherlock 1997).
5 Relatively low levels of pension coverage occur because of the large number of non-Argentines among the residents and because many informants were too young to obtain non-contributory benefits (most are available only from age 70 years).
6 The term most widely used was *salir del camino* [stray from the path], an expression which reflects the strong Christian beliefs of most of the informants.
7 From *This be the Verse* by Phillip Larkin (1990: 180).
8 Interestingly, research with older Maori women in New Zealand, a group in many ways just as socially excluded as the residents of Bajo Flores, revealed similarly problematic relationships with grandchildren (Armstrong 2003).

References

Armstrong, J. 2003. Is being a grandmother being old? Cross-ethnic perspectives from New Zealand. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, **18**, 2, 185–202.

Barrientos, A., Gorman, M. and Heslop, A. 2003. Old age poverty in developing countries: contributions and dependence in later life. *World Development*, **31**, 3, 555–70.

Beales, S. 2000. Why should we invest in older women and men: the experience of HelpAge International. *Gender and Development*, **8**, 2, 9–18.

Bertranou, F. and Grushka, C. 2002. *The Non-contributory Pension Programme in Argentina: Assessing the Impact on Poverty Reduction*. Extension of Social Security Working Paper 5, International Labour Organisation, Geneva.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) 2006. *Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean 2005–2006*. ECLAC, Santiago de Chile.

Elder Jr, G. 1998. The life course as developmental theory. *Child Development*, **69**, 1, 1–12.

Gomes da Conceição, C. and Montes de Oca Zavala, V. 2003. Ageing in Mexico: families, informal care and reciprocity. In Lloyd-Sherlock, P. (ed.), *Living Longer: Ageing, Development and Social Protection*. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Report, Zed Books, London, 230–48.

Gough, I., McGregor, A. and Camfield, L. 2006. *Wellbeing in Developing Countries: Conceptual Foundations of the WeD Programme*. WeD Working Paper 19, Wellbeing in Developing Countries Research Group, University of Bath, Bath, Avon.

Heinz, W. and Krüger, H. 2001. Life course: innovations and challenges for social research. *Current Sociology*, **49**, 2, 29–55.

Henretta, J. C., Grundy, E. and Harris, S. 2002. The influence of socio-economic and health differences on parents' provision of help to adult children: a British – United States comparison. *Ageing & Society*, **22**, 4, 441–58.

Hoff, A. 2007. Patterns of intergenerational support in grandparent-grandchild and parent-child relationships in Germany. *Ageing & Society*, **27**, 5, 645–68.

Jackson, C. 1997. Post-poverty, gender and development. *IDS Bulletin* (Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, Sussex), **28**, 3, 145–55.

Jelín, E. 2005. Las familias latinoamericanos en el marco de las transformaciones globales. Hacia una nueva agenda de las políticas públicas [Latin American families in the midst of global transformations: towards a new public policy agenda]. In Arraigada, I. (ed.), *Políticas hacia las familias, protección e inclusión social* [*Family Policies, Social Inclusion and Social Protection*]. Serie Seminarios y Conferencias 46, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Santiago de Chile.

Larkin, P. 1990. *Collected Poems*. Faber and Faber, London.

Lewis, C. 2002. *Argentina: A Short History*. Oneworld, Oxford.

Lewis, O. 1951. *Life in a Mexican Village: Tepoztlán Restudied*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Illinois.

Lewis, O. 1969. *A Death in the Sánchez Family*. Random House, New York.

Lloyd-Sherlock, P. 1997. *Old Age and Urban Poverty in the Developing World: The Shanty Towns of Buenos Aires*. Macmillan, London.

Lloyd-Sherlock, P. 2004. Ageing, development and social protection: a research agenda. In Lloyd-Sherlock, P. (ed.), *Living Longer: Ageing, Development and Social Protection*. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Report, Zed Books, London, 1–17.

Lloyd-Sherlock, P. 2006a. Vulnerability, poverty and older people in developing countries: insights from Thailand. *Ageing & Society*, **26**, 1, 81–103.

Lloyd-Sherlock, P. 2006b. Simple transfers, complex outcomes: the impacts of pensions on poor households in Brazil. *Development and Change*, **37**, 5, 969–95.

Martin, D. 1990. *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*. Blackwell, Oxford.

Melhuus, M. 1996. Power, value and the ambiguous meanings of gender. In Melhuus, M. and Stolen, K. (eds), *Machos, Mistresses, Madonnas: Contesting the Power of Latin American Gender Imagery*. Verso, London, 230–89.

Moser, C., Winton, A. and Moser, A., 2003. Violence, Fear and Insecurity and the Urban Poor in Latin America. Paper for the World Bank Latin American and Caribbean Region Study of Urban Poverty. Mimeo.

Palloni, A. and Peláez, M. 2002. *SABE – Survey on Health and Well-being of Elders*. Preliminary report, Pan American Health Organisation, Washington DC.

Perlman, J. 1976. *The Myth of Marginality: Urban Poverty and Politics in Rio de Janeiro*. University of California Press, Berkeley, California.

Prignano, A. 1991. *El Bajo Flores: Un barrio de Buenos Aires* [*Bajo Flores: A Neighbourhood of Buenos Aires*]. Junta de Estudios Históricos de San José de Flores, Buenos Aires.

Riessman, C. K. 1994. Making sense of marital violence: one woman's narrative. In Riessman, C. K. (ed.), *Qualitative Studies in Social Work Research*. Sage, London, 113–32.

Rowe, J. and Kahn, R. 1998. *Successful Aging*. Pantheon, New York.

Schröder-Butterfill, E. and Marianti, R. 2006. A framework for understanding old-age vulnerabilities. *Ageing & Society*, **26**, 1, 9–35.

Schröder-Butterfill, E. 2004. Inter-generational family support provided by older people in Indonesia. *Ageing & Society*, **24**, 4, 497–530.

Semán, P. 2000. El pentecostalismo y la religiosidad de los sectores populares [Pentecostal Christianity and religion among the popular sectors]. In Svampa, M. (ed.), *Desde abajo. La transformación de las identidades sociales* [*Coming From Below: The Transformation of Social Identities*]. Editorial Biblos, Buenos Aires.

Sunkel, G. 2006. El papel de la familia en la protección social en América Latina [The role of the family in social protection in Latin America]. Serie Políticas Sociales 120, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Santiago de Chile.

United Nations Population Division 2005. *Living Conditions of Older Persons Around the World.* United Nations Organisation, New York.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 2002. *Population Ageing and Development: Operational Challenges in Developing Countries.* UNFPA, New York.

Varley, A. and Blasco, M. 2003. Older women's living arrangements and family relationships in urban Mexico. *Women's Studies International Forum*, **26**, 6, 525–39.

Villatoro, P. 2005. Conditional cash transfer programmes: experiences from Latin America. *CEPAL Review* (Economic Commission for Latin America, Santiago de Chile), **86**, 1, 83–96.

Address for correspondence:
Peter Lloyd-Sherlock, School for Development Studies,
University of East Anglia, Norwich, Norfolk NR4 7TJ, UK.

E-mail: p.lloyd-sherlock@uea.ac.uk