Editorial

Dear colleagues,

Spring has arrived and along with the excitement of new life and changes in the surroundings a lot is going on at PRC. A group of PRC members, under the direction of Clara Mulder, are organizing the International Conference of Population Geographies (ICPG) at the end of June. The Organizing Committee of the Dutch Demography Day consists of several current and former PRC members; the Call for Abstracts has been opened for the conference. We have welcomed new colleagues, as well as a new editor of the PRC Newsletter. Sanne Visser will take over the duties of the editor from now on.

At the beginning of June, PRC members again came together for our annual HEIdag. Having presented the new PRC Research Programme last November, we now brainstormed to determine a mission statement of our research programme.

In this issue we present some interesting contributions from our PRC colleagues. Fanny Janssen gives an overview of the projects in her research line of Population, Mortality and Health. Sylvia Karen Rutagumirwa shares some experiences from her fieldwork in Tanzania. Research Master’s student Amanda Thijssen sends us a message from Australia, where she is currently engaged in an internship under the supervision of Meredith Tavener, a former member of the PRC. PRC alumnus Meta Leban Buschenhenke reflects on her year studying for her MSc Population Studies and subsequent career. We also get acquainted with a new colleague, post-doc researcher Sepideh Yousefzadeh, and share the news and activities of PRC members during the last half-year.

For more news, please follow us on our website http://www.rug.nl/research/ursi/prc/ or Facebook: Population Research Centre Groningen. We wish you a pleasant start to the summer!

Kind regards,

Also on behalf of Clara Mulder (Head of the PRC)

Sanne Visser and Anu Kõu (Editors)
Mortality and Health at population level
Fanny Janssen

As a geographer, demographer and epidemiologist, Fanny Janssen mainly conducts research and guides PhD students within the research lines ‘Population, Mortality and Health’ (at the Population Research Centre) and ‘Applying demographic and geographic techniques to medicine use’ (at the Department of Pharmacoepidemiology). Her focus is on mortality and health at the population level, studying mainly the Netherlands and Europe. Her topics of interests include (cause-specific) mortality, health and medicine use at the level of population, trends over time, determinants, smoking, cohort effects, projection of health & mortality, and local and regional differences in health & mortality. Two of the central themes of her current research are: the description and explanation of variations in mortality/health and inherent trends; and the projection of future mortality/health.

Variations in mortality/health
Together with previous Population Studies master’s students Aletta Spriensma and Anthe van den Hende and with post-doc Eva Kibele, Fanny has examined trends over time in regional mortality differences in the Netherlands, and the roles of smoking and migration in these trends. She is currently – together with Eva Kibele and Aletta Dijkstra - involved in a project with the National Institute for Public Health and Environment (RIVM) on the role of selective migration in health differences between regions in the Netherlands, those with and without population decline.

Alongside Professor Eelko Hak from pharmacoepidemiology, Fanny is supervising former research master students Maarten Bijlsma and Aletta Dijkstra; the former in his PhD work on cohort variations in long-term effects on health of population-level interventions (influenza vaccination, statin therapy) in the Netherlands, and the latter in her research on explaining and projecting local variations in medicine use for diabetes, depression and cardiovascular disease in the Northern Netherlands.

Fanny is also examining changes over time in the age at death distribution of adults in high-income countries. With Joop de Beer (Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute), she is working on a model that distinguishes between compression of mortality before the modal age (=the age at which most deaths occur) and compression after the modal age. With Valentin Rousson and Fred Paccaud (Institute for Social and Preventive Medicine, Lausanne, Switzerland), she is exploring the role of smoking in the changes in the survival curves of ten European countries over the period from 1950 to 1999.

Future mortality/health
The outcomes of Fanny’s work are expected to aid the projection of health and mortality into the future. A good illustration of this is the projection of mortality by means of the separate projections of smoking-related mortality and non-smoking-related mortality, taking into account the trends in other countries. The methodology – which she developed together with Leo van Wissen and Anton Kunst (University of Amsterdam) – will be published in Demography shortly, and forms the basis for an improved methodology for the projection of mortality as an integral part of the official Dutch population forecast by Statistics Netherlands. Additional sensitivity analyses to improve the mortality projection methodology will be part of the PhD thesis by Lenny Stoeldraijer from Statistics Netherlands (promotor: Leo van Wissen; copromotor: Fanny Janssen). The results from the PhD thesis of Shirish Darak on the reproductive career of couples with HIV in Western India (promotor: Inge Hutter; copromotor: Fanny Janssen) can be used to aid the estimation and projection of HIV prevalence.
Message from the Field: Sylvia Karen Rutagumirwa

Tanzania, November 2012 - April 2013

My research focuses on masculinities and femininities in health-seeking behaviour among elderly in Pwani (Tanzania Coastal region). I used qualitative research approaches for this study, collecting data in two phases, beginning in November 2012, during the dry season, and finishing in April 2013, during the rainy season.

My data collection journey started very well. I was fortunate enough to be hosted by the family of a friend. All the arrangements were made during the field visit. I arrived in Mane-rumango village around 2.30 pm and travelled the 22 kilometres from the village to my host family by bodaboda (motorcycle). On my arrival I was met by smiling faces and given a warm welcome by my host family. Their house was mud plastered with a thatch roof. Beside the family house were big mango trees that gave shade to family. It was the dry season, and family members were lying on mats under the tree to escape the burning heat outside. I lived there for a couple of weeks and each day I had so much to learn. I realized that living with Zaramo’s family gave me more insight into the culture than I ever would have gained otherwise. Since many of the villages I visited had no electricity for charging laptop batteries, I was unable to transcribe the data soon after interviews. In order to keep track of what had happened, I conducted a debriefing session with my research assistants shortly after each discussion session had ended.

The second phase of my data collection was in urban Pwani during the rainy season. The rainy season brought with it several new challenges. For instance, sometimes participants did not turn up for appointments so we had to postpone the discussions to another time or day. Sometimes the houses were leaking so we were forced to change the location or wait until the rain stopped.

One thing I can say is that each research is different from every other and their challenges also differ. Conducting research on the elderly in Tanzania was a very unique and exciting experience, but not without its challenges. Before I started my data collection, I heard various discouraging stories about researching on the elderly in Tanzania. For instance, some said that old people are reluctant to participate in research. Some even advised me to change my focus to another age group. I experienced increasing mixed feelings, excitement and anxiety as I prepared to start fieldwork. I had no idea what would happen. I even wondered whether it was possible to establish rapport with the elderly.

Over the course of my research I found that the elderly in Tanzania were very willing to cooperate with my research, and that they were able to provide detailed explanations. But this depends on how you approach them. For an elderly person to participate fully in research, he/she must get used to you and trust you. Furthermore, old people judge you based on how you conduct yourself: they consider the way you are dressed, the way you speak and how you think of them. Even when they give you information, they give it bit by bit in the beginning and then, when they get used to you, they provide you with all the information, including some you might view as too candid. To illustrate, perhaps I should quote what some elders said in the FGDs: ‘Let us tell you the truth, as you are a researcher and since you came here in a civilized manner, lived with us, respected us, and you dress decently, we’ll give you the whole truth. Most researchers, who come here, just come with questionnaires they want us to fill and [then] leave. The truth is people don’t tell them the truth. They just answer them so that they will finish and leave.’

Some situations I encountered in the field left me emotionally drained. As a researcher, I realized that I was carried away by empathy for my research subjects. The majority of my elderly participants live in very poor conditions: some survive on a single meal a day or go without one at all. I lived with them and I saw this. How is a researcher supposed to handle such a situation? Your role is to just get the information from them and after the interview you leave them the way you found them! How do you keep them for two hours during FGDs while they are hungry? Research ethics dictate that you are not supposed to pay participants. But even if you wanted to pay them, how would you do it? Where would you get the money to pay them? If you give them refreshments in the form of soft drinks and snacks during the discussion, they tell you, ‘instead of giving us those drinks and snacks, its better you give us money of the same value so that we can buy at least one meal to share with our grandchildren at home.’ What can you do? Even those who ask you to give them drinks and snacks do not eat them; they take them home to their grandchildren. This is a situation that raises many difficult ethical questions.
New PRC member: Sepideh Yousefzadeh

My name is Sepideh Yousefzadeh. I am a new post-doc researcher at the Faculty of Demography, working with Dr. Hinke Haisma. I started my journey in academia as a practitioner and activist. Working with children and women has always been a central part of my experience. My PhD research (at Maastricht Graduate School of Governance) was on multidimensional child poverty in Iran between 1984 and 2009. In my research, I combined three concepts in order to define multiple dimensions of poverty among Iranian children: deprivation from basic needs, social exclusion and socio-political construction of childhood.

I have over 17 years of experience in development projects within local, multicultural and international settings. A significant part of my experience has been in Iran, but I have also worked in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Lebanon with refugees and displaced people. My most recent experience was with UNICEF in Iran, where we developed partnerships with a number of religious and academic institutions, as well as government ministries, to engage them in child rights advocacy and child-focused public policy.

I obtained my bachelor’s degree in midwifery from Shiraz University in Iran, and my master’s degree in public administration from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. At the University of Groningen I will carry out further research on different dimensions of children’s growth, including nutrition. I look forward very much to contributing to the well-being of children around the world through this research.

Message from internship: Amanda Thijssen

Going down under!

As research master’s students, we all have to go on a study abroad. After seeing all my friends’ lovely pictures and hearing all their wonderful stories, I thought it was time for me to visit Australia. I talked about it with Louise Meijering and it seemed a good idea to email the only Australian researcher we knew, Meredith Tavener. Luckily, she seemed to like the idea of having a Dutch student wandering around, so off I went!

Here in Newcastle, Meredith and I are working on analysing the written free-text comments of older women who have had a stroke, as part of the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health. It is a challenging project with a lot of qualitative data. I spent the first few weeks learning to use NVivo, reading the texts, and coding all the comments. Now, after seven weeks, I think I know all the women’s stories by heart! It was very interesting to see how detailed some women were in writing down their life stories and what they believed would be interesting for other people to read. One story, which will stay with me for a while, is a rather long comment by a woman who had an obsession with her neighbour’s cats which kept on ruining her garden. I did not know people could write so much about cats!

Sadly, my stay in Newcastle has almost come to an end. I have learned a lot about managing huge quantities of qualitative data, working with NVivo, writing papers and, of course, learning to work in different environments. Doing this study abroad has been one of the most valuable experiences of my master’s study so far. Thanks Meredith!

Amanda Thijssen
Research master’s student
Interview with an Alumnus


What made you decide to do the Master's in Population Studies in Groningen?

After I finished studying geography at University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, I already knew that I wanted to continue my study in the Netherlands. I also wanted to move to Groningen, because my boyfriend (now husband) was studying in Groningen at that time. I chose Population Studies because the topics were interesting and the courses were in English. It also allowed specialization on topics that I already studied in Slovenia.

Can you tell us something about your experiences during your studies?

I have to say that enrolling in population studies was one of the best decisions of my life. The pace was quite intense, we received a lot of information in a fairly short time, but I just loved it! We were quite a small group of students and I really enjoyed all the time together in the classrooms and also in our free time. I am still in contact with some of my course mates, one of whom is now also my work colleague.

What did you do after your master's?

A couple of weeks before my graduation, I applied for a job at I&O Research, a research agency from Enschede. I work there now as a data analyst, which means that I program questionnaires so that they are suitable for data collection through the computer/Internet, telephone or paper. I also work with raw data and manage citizen panels from different municipalities. We do a lot of research/data collection for municipalities, GGDs and for other government organizations. Two of my work colleagues also studied Population Studies in Groningen, which in my opinion shows that demographers must make good data analysts.

Do you still use the knowledge that you acquired in Groningen?

For my work I do not use the specific knowledge that I acquired from population studies, but I work daily with the SPSS computer program and have built on the knowledge of SPSS that I acquired in Groningen. Knowledge of SPSS was a really good basis for the work that I do today.

Announcements

The programme of the 7th International Conference on Population Geographies is now online: http://www.rug.nl/research/ursi/events/icpg2013/programme. The registration for the conference is still open.

21st annual Population Studies postgraduate conference, PopFest, will take place at University of Southampton, 8-10 July 2013.

On Wednesday 27 November 2013 the Dutch Demographic Society (NVD) will host the Sixth Dutch Demography Day. Demographers and researchers from other disciplines will have the opportunity to present their current research. Abstracts (maximum 200 words) can be submitted until 1 July through www.nvdemografie.nl. For more information or registration, please visit the website.
New PhD Nashrul Wajdi has started working at PRC. Under the supervision of Clara Mulder and Leo van Wissen, he will analyse internal migration in Indonesia.

Vera Dimitrievska is in Macedonia to prepare for fieldwork related to her PhD research on induced abortion, contraceptive behaviour and the cultural and social context in Macedonia.

Hans Elshof continues work on his PhD research in The Hague, at NIDI. After working at the PRC for two years, he will carry on his research in The Hague.

**Recent publications**


**Courses**

In March and April, Bettie Oosterhoff taught a short course on conducting qualitative research for bachelor’s students of the School of Health, Hanze University of Applied Sciences. Participants were students of physical therapy, specializing in ‘Adults, Children or Elderly’ and students of the multidisciplinary minors ‘Care & Technology’, ‘Health & Society’ and ‘Healthy Ageing’.

**Education**

Four NFP fellowships have been awarded for our Master’s in Population Studies. In addition, we will welcome – from the beginning of the next academic year – one candidate who will be funded through the Erasmus Mundus AURORA programme.

**PRC News**

New PhD Nashrul Wajdi has started working at PRC. Under the supervision of Clara Mulder and Leo van Wissen, he will analyse internal migration in Indonesia.

Vera Dimitrievska is in Macedonia to prepare for fieldwork related to her PhD research on induced abortion, contraceptive behaviour and the cultural and social context in Macedonia.

Hans Elshof continues work on his PhD research in The Hague, at NIDI. After working at the PRC for two years, he will carry on his research in The Hague.
We are saddened by the news of the unexpected death of a former student, Rabbi’ah Al Khusyairi from Indonesia, who was met a tragic accident on 20 May. Rabbi’ah, who was in the 2011-12 MSc Population Studies batch of students, was known to be hardworking, cheerful and sociable. Our sincere condolences go out to her family, friends and fellow students. We wish them much strength in dealing with this great loss.

**External activities**

December 13-14: Liesbeth de Wit, Louise Meijering, Inge Hutter and Jan Bakker participated in the kick-off meeting for the FP7 IROHLA project, which is about Intervention Research on Health Literacy among Ageing Populations.

December 22: Hinke Haisma and Sanne Visser presented their research on geography, identity and food (in Dutch) in Annerveenschkanaal, in collaboration with the PEERgroup (a joint group of artists who work on art and food) [http://www.peergroup.nl/projecten/hinke-haisma-over-geografie-identiteit-en-voedsel/](http://www.peergroup.nl/projecten/hinke-haisma-over-geografie-identiteit-en-voedsel/)


January: Inge Hutter, Ajay Bailey and Hinke Haisma attended Ageglobe India, a 3-day workshop in Kerala.

February 6-8: Eva Kibele presented ‘Regional mortality differences in Germany’ at a plenary session of the Giornate di Studio sulla Popolazione 2013 (Population Days 2013), in Bressanone/Brixen, Italy, representing the German Society for Demography.

January 27-February 24: Billie de Haas visited Uganda to disseminate a report with the preliminary findings of her PhD research on sexuality education. The findings were discussed with teachers who had participated in the research, school administrators, NGOs and government officials. These discussions helped to validate the findings and have resulted in the development of recommendations to improve sexuality education.

February 18-20: Louise Meijering participated in a workshop on the International Classroom, which was organised by the U4 Network, a collaboration between the Universities of Groningen, Ghent, Göttingen and Uppsala.

March 14: Hinke Haisma was the external examiner for Susan Nielsen’s PhD on milk intake, energy metabolism and growth in infants exclusively breast-fed to 6 months of age. College of Medical, Veterinary & Life Sciences, School of Medicine, University of Glasgow, Scotland.

March: Clara Mulder was interviewed by RTL for the news programme Editie NL. She commented on research concerning internal migration in the Netherlands, which found that a large part of the Dutch population lives in the province or region where they were born.

April 19: Hinke Haisma was a guest lecturer in the course ‘Sociological perspectives on Mother and Child Care in Europe’ for bachelor’s students studying European Public Health at Maastricht University (Prof. Klasien Horstman).

May: as a part of her Rosalind Franklin Fellowship track, Hinke Haisma’s promotion to Associate Professor in Population and Child Health (with ius promovendi) was approved by the examining committee.