

The dynamics of household structure and household size in the Northern Dutch countryside: The importance of complex households

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Introduction

The Netherlands and especially the Dutch coastal area (the provinces Holland, Zeeland, Friesland and Groningen) stand out for its modern structure and prosperity already in the 17th century. High urbanisation, specialisation, commercialisation and proletarianisation are the key words with which this society can be characterised (Paping 2007d). The origins of this economic structure partly date back to the 12th and 13th century, when the whole of the Netherlands experienced a fast spread and growth of cities. In the 15th and 16th century the commercialisation of the Dutch coast resulted in a new jump (Van Bavel and Van Zanden 2004). The impressive growth of urban settlements (Amsterdam, Leiden, and Groningen) went together with a countryside which more and more was dominated by large farms, a massive group of unskilled labourers, and a substantial highly specialised middle class. Wage labour was an ordinary way of living (Van Bavel 2006).

It won't come as a surprise that this modern society was characterised by relatively 'modern' family relations. The position of females was for example comparatively well (De Moor and Van Zanden 2006). We do not have much information on the previous period, but ages at marriage of males and females were high in the 17th century and later on. Also neolocality was the rule, with newly-wed couples starting a new independent household. As in for instance 17th and 18th century England (Laslett e.a. 1966; Laslett and Wall 1972; Houlbrooke 1984) most of the people did not live in complex households (Van der Woude 1972).

Hajnal (1965 and 1983) connected in two famous articles the prevalence of more complex household structures to the existing marriage pattern. Marrying young and usually under the direction of the parents which were still alive, resulted very often in the cohabitation of three generations or more within one household. These systems are suggested to have predominantly existed in societies outside Western Europe. Within Western Europe juveniles married late and in general rather independent from their parents (the famous Western European Marriage Pattern). After marriage they usually set up households of their own. Three-generation households and other complex households containing other relatives than father, mother and (half) brothers and sisters were scarce. Hajnal proposed a dividing-line between the two systems running from Petersburg to Trieste in Italy; however, the accuracy of this line has been questioned lately (Szoltysek and Rzemieniecki 2005).

Even within Western Europe, frequent complex household types and especially stem families are usually suggested to be mainly found in the more traditional and economically backward parts, as for example the stem-family system in the Pyrenean valleys and on

highland Norwegian farms (Fauve-Chamoux 2006). The securing of the continuity of the house through the generations can be seen as the prime force in these systems, where more than one third of the households had a complex (be it extended or multiple) character and solitary living persons were very rare. Even in some of the inland provinces of the wealthy Netherlands which were comparatively less modern (less specialised, less urbanised and less commercialised) a very high incidence of complex households can be found, especially in the eastern parts (Drenthe, Overijssel and eastern Gelderland). Slicher van Bath (1957) found that in Salland (Overijssel) in 1749 complex family households had a share of 31%. In Havelte in Drenthe in 1829 about 24% of the households had a more complex character; however, 45% of the farmer households had, while only 10% of the labouring households were of this type (Verduin 1972, p. 102).

Table 1. Samples of household structures in the Netherlands before 1850

	N	% three-generation households	Other extended and multiple households	% total extended and multiple households
Overijssel 1749	7,763	13.9%	6.6%	20.5%
Drenthe (sand) 1829-1849	ca. 2.000	-	-	ca. 24%
West-Brabant 1800-1829	3.877	ca. 4%	ca. 6%	ca. 10%
Veluwe countryside (Gelderland) 1749	3.917	4%	3%	7%
Veluwe towns (Gelderland) 1749	2.715	2%	3%	5%
Holland 1622-1795	3.198	<1%	-	3.6%
Friesland (1 village) 1744	400	4%	4%	8%
Groningen clay area 1829-1849	3,306	6.5	3.6%	10.1%

Sources: Van der Woude (1972); Slicher van Bath (1957); Roessingh (1965); Verduin (1972); Klep (1973); This paper.

As can be proven for sandy Veluwe and western North-Brabant complex households in other parts of the inland and less modern provinces are rather uncommon. So in the largest part of the Netherlands extended and multiple households formed only a maximum of 10% of all the households, about half of them usually comprised three generations (table 1). In the large province of Holland in the 17th and 18th century complex households even were a peculiarity with a share under 4%. Although further investigation seems necessary, the relatively high figures for both the Groningen clay area and a few municipalities in rural Drenthe suggest that the share of complex households, and especially three-generation households seem to have risen around 1800. This proposition finds support in a preliminary analysis of the data in the Historical Sample of the Netherlands (HSN) regarding Dutch inhabitants born in the 19th century which shows fairly high shares of complex families in the Netherlands (Kok and Mandemakers 2007).

As mentioned before, complex family households usually are seen as having a function in securing the continuity of the family household, which of course was of more importance for farmers than for labourers. On the one hand the next generation did not have to postpone their marriage until the death of both parents for a regular livelihood, and on the

other hand the parents were capable of spending their last years in their house, having assured themselves of the necessary care and help in the family business. Implicit in this reasoning is that the primary goal of the actors was the continuity of the family on the specific farmstead through the generations. In general this continuity seems indeed to have been fairly large in the eastern parts of the Netherlands (de Haan 1994), as was also the case in the adjoining German inland regions (see for example Schlumbohm 1994). However, in the Groningen clay area as an example of the coastal countryside succession on farms was of far less importance (Paping 2008).



However, hybrid household structures were not completely absent in the modern Dutch coastal region, as the 10% cases found in the Groningen clay area in the first half of the 19th century show. Extended and multiple households are generally mostly identified with less modern societies and with agricultural (and sometimes proto-industrial) households. In this paper I want to address the question if existing extended and more complex household structures to be found at one date in the registers in a relatively modern economy can be

connected to a thrive to continuity of the family household over the generations (family succession) in certain branches of society? Or are these household structures mainly solutions for diverging temporary (housing and economic) problems of newly-wed couples and old-aged? In what cases people formed non-nuclear family households in this region? Was household structure connected to welfare or occupation? In the paper a database on more than 3.300 household will be analysed, and supplemented with more dynamic data on some individual cases.

Why live together?

Probably the biggest problem of a newly-wed couple in the past is where to live. Two partners who most of the time lived separately, had to decide for a joint place to stay taking into account their resources, at least in the case they had the social-cultural freedom to decide over their residence. In a lot of non-western cultures newly-wed couples have not. The problem of the place of residence also exists for all other persons; however, in most instances they seem to have the choice to stay. Nevertheless, in these cases there are also clear moments that there is some freedom to decide where to live, or at least there is sometimes a necessity to change residence.

Household structure and size is not only a result of all these “decisions” for a residence. It is also the result of a lot of purely demographic events: births and deaths, which are not very easy to regulate, at least this is the case with deaths. The number of births of new members to the household today is mostly quite strictly regulated thanks to contraception. In the past the most important way to regulate the number of children was the age at marriage; however, rudimentary methods of contraception, abstinence and infanticide were sometimes used.

Important is to ask the question why do people live together in one house. Several important and partly related reasons can be discerned:

- 1. Marriage and reproduction: usually bride and groom are living together.
- 2. Parental care: usually young children are living with their parents.
- 3. Care for disabled: some people can not take care of themselves and because of this have to live in a household with others. This is especially of importance for old-aged and handicapped people .
- 4. Higher productivity and/or production: Servants can work more efficiently when they live in the house of their master. This is of mutual economic interest. Servants earn higher wages, and employers are prepared to pay these wages because of the higher productivity (or perhaps production, inasmuch as live-in servants usually work more hours). For children working in a family business this factor also plays a role.
- 5. Lack of available houses: especially in the short run this will be of importance; however, if there are barriers to building new houses, rising population numbers will structurally result in more people grouping together in one house.
- 6. Economic vulnerability: some people do not have the resources to run a household of their own; they are partly economically dependent of others for their livelihood.
- 7. Economic efficient housing: living together in one house is cheaper; this of course especially is an attractive reason for economically vulnerable people. Efficiency is higher if one has a joint household economy than if one is only sharing the same roof.
- 8. Affection: some people tend to live together because they like each other, others split because they dislike each other.

-9. Morality and customs: strongly enforced social and legal rules can force people to gather in one household. For example there could be a social rule that young unmarried people should live with family members or with a master; or that newly-wed people move in with the husbands parents. Of course there can be social rules also which forbid specific people to live together, as for young unmarried males and females, or the more complicated social rule that if one child marries and moves in with (one of) the parents, the other children have to leave the household.

Besides all these reasons for people to live together in one house, one important disadvantage has especially to be mentioned among others. Living together nearly inevitably results in a loss of personal freedom; the extent is depending on very different factors. This factor could for be the prime reason for couples to naturally tend to strive towards living in independent (nuclear) households (Verdon 1998).

We have to clarify still another point. Living together in one house does not have to mean that there is one joint family economy, or perhaps you have to say one joint household economy. In some cases different household economies are sharing one house, but do not have much to do with each other for the rest of their life. If we define a household economy as people who are living together in one unit, in which most of the household tasks (cleaning, cooking, eating, caring etc.) are not divided in completely separate and unrelated individual parts.

Historical sources do not, however, offer the necessary information to point out different household economies. For this reason we arranged our data using several principles. Related persons in the same house are suggested to have a joint household economy, live-in servants are seen as part of the joint household. However, unrelated boarders and lodgers aged 16 and older who do not work for the family firm were seen as separate economic units, but they were always included in the average household size.¹ Single unrelated persons (not being servants) under the age of 16 living in the same house were seen as part of this family economy, and usually reckoned to be stepchildren or foster children. Of course it can be argued that some boarders and lodgers were completely included in the household and others not, however, we have no sources to divide between different kind of boarders and lodgers. Unrelated families (at least two persons)² living in the same house and not being servants were counted as different households. These principles were used quite strictly and caused only problems in a few instances of several unrelated persons living together in a poor house. If solitary persons were living in a poorhouse, they all were reckoned to be boarders and lodgers of the pauper mentioned first.

Some definitions

For this paper the well-known Laslett-Hammel (1974; see also Laslett 1972) scheme for household structure was at first extended slightly to include also some specific categories present in the Groningen clay area and to refine the data somewhat. The extension mainly was inspired by the presence of a lot of illegitimate children and a few unmarried couples also of a relatively large number of married males and females who lived in a household without their husband.

¹ This principle can be disputed, however it only relates to 1,4% of the population, has nearly never a significant effect on average household size, and raised average household over all with 0,06 persons.

² For the first household mentioned on a address also single persons were counted as household economies. Unmarried evidently living together as an unmarried couple, were considered to form a household together.

Table 2. An extended Laslett-Hammel scheme (Groningen clay area 1829-1850)

Household		N
1. Solitaries	1.a widowed	51
	1.a1 widowers	51
	1.a2 widows	128
	1. b single/unknown	87
	1.b1 single males	87
	1.b2 single females	40
	1.c single married	11
	1.c1 single married males	11
	1.c2 single married females	0
2.No family	2.a coresident siblings	60
	2.b other coresident relatives	19
	2.c unrelated persons [categorized as boarders/lodgers]	-
3. Simple family	3.a married couples no children	284
	3.b married couples with children	1,773
	3.c widowers with children	140
	3.d widows with children	328
	3.e unmarried man with (foster) children	2
	3.f unmarried woman with (foster) children	23
	3.g unmarried couple without children	4
	3.h unmarried couple with children	8
	3.i married woman with children	1
	3.j married man with children	13
4. Extended family	4.a extended upwards	123
	4.b extended downwards	51
	4.c extended laterally	112
	4.d combinations 4.a – 4.c	3
5. Multiple family	5.a secondary units up	9
	5.b secondary units down	28
	5.c units all on one level	4
	5.d frèrèches	4
	5.e other multiple families	0
Total		3,306

In the classification used in table 2 live-in servants and boarders and lodgers were not taken into account. A nuclear family consist of at least two persons or more (father, mother and children), at least one parent is still available. In the literature such a unit is called a CFU or Conjugal Family Unit. An extended family is reckoned to be a household in which a grandparent or grand child was living-in. However, the grandparent or grand child was not part of a separate nuclear family unit consisting of at least two distinct persons. In a multiple family household at least two separate nuclear units (CFU's) can be recognized. A three-generation household can be an extended or a multiple family household (categories 4a, 4b, 4d, 5a, 5b). A multiple household which comprises three generations is also called a stem family (5.a, 5.b). Table 2 shows that the extended Laslett-Hammel scheme has very much categories, which are only filled to a limited extent. In table 3 these categories are grouped together in a somewhat broader way to create larger categories.

Table 3. A grouped Laslett-Hammel scheme (Groningen clay area 1829-1850)

	N	%
Single living widowers (1.a1)	51	2
Single living widows (1.a2)	128	4
Other single living persons (1.b-1.c)	138	4
Siblings and other coresident relatives (2.a-2.b)	79	2
Married couples no children (3.a)	284	9
Married couples with children (3.b)	1,773	54

Widowers with children (3.c)	140	4
Widows with children (3.d)	328	10
Other simple family households (3.e-3.i)	51	2
Extended three-generation households (4.a-4.b, 4.d)	177	5
Laterally extended households (4.c)	112	4
Multiple family households (5.a-5.d)	45	1
Total	3,306	

The research area

Data on six municipalities in the Groningen clay area were used: Bedum (Van Schaik 2002) and Leens in 1829 (half November) and Hoogkerk (Kooij 1993), Uithuizen (Bolt 1982), Winschoten (Voerman 2001) and Zuidhorn (Boekholt 1986) in 1850 (1 January).³ These six municipalities comprised 19 Dutch reformed parishes: the urbanised regional centre of Winschoten, the larger villages of Uithuizen, Bedum, Leens, Zuidhorn and Noordhorn, the smaller villages of Hoogkerk, Wehe, Warfhuizen and Zuidwolde, and the tiny villages of Zuurdijk, Mensingeweer, Maarslag, Westerdijkshorn, Menkeweer, Onderwierum, Noordwolde, Leegkerk and Dorkwerd. All villages consisted of a mostly 12th or 13th century church, a rectory, a school, some middle class and labourers houses and only a few farms. The villages were surrounded by extensive grounds were the majority of the farms and some of the labourer houses could be found. There were also some small villages without a Dutch Reformed church as Den Hoorn, Onderdendam, Schouwerzijl and Enumatil. These six municipalities together are in most perspectives quite representative for the whole of the 36 municipalities in the Groningen clay area with about 85,000 inhabitants in 1850. However, it has to be pointed out that one of the two regional centres (Winschoten) was taken into account, which means that these regional centres are overrepresented.

The Groningen clay area was a part of the Dutch coastal countryside which inhabited about a quarter of the total Dutch population. Although it was a slightly peripheral region seen from the Amsterdam perspective, the economic structure and economic development was resembling closely those in the Holland, Zeeland and Friesland countryside. The economic structure differed largely from most of the inland provinces, where farmers formed a larger group, wage-labour was of less importance and the share of artisans and tradesmen was lower. Nevertheless Groningen had some peculiarities, of whom the very strong entitlements of the farmers on the ground have to be mentioned. For nearly all the farms contracts had been concluded in the second half of the 18th century which left the farmers in the near complete possession of the land, while the owners (nobility, patricians, institutions) were left with the right on an eternally fixed rent, which was substantially lower than the market rent for ground already by 1800 (Paping and Collenteur 2004). However, these contracts made it usually difficult to divide farms. Inasmuch as land reclamation possibilities were limited, the number of farms was stagnant.

The Groningen clay area experienced a fast population growth combined with heavy proletarianisation from the end of the 18th century onwards in line with developments elsewhere in Western Europe (Paping 2004). Population rose from 50,000 around 1790 to 85,000 around 1850 thanks to a healthy birth surplus. Every about 10-20 years, population growth was stopped for a few years, because of epidemics (malaria: the curse of the Dutch

³ Data is also available for Winschoten 1829 and 1870, Stedum 1829 and 1850, part of Bedum in 1850, Appingedam 1850 and part of 1870, Hoogkerk 1870, Uithuizen 1870. However, these were not yet taken into account, also because in most cases taxation data were missing.

coast), harassed the country for instance in 1826-1827 and 1847-1849. Population growth went on until the eighties of the 19th century, when the falling of agricultural prices resulted in an extreme depression with massive out-migration especially of farm labourers. However, until about 1850 there was not a large departure deficit (Paping 1995). The number of emigrants (mostly going to the city of Groningen and from 1846 onwards also to America: Paping 2004) was more or less balanced with the number of immigrants (mostly from Germany). As a consequence of the population growth numerous labourer and middle class houses were build from 1790 onwards, mainly in the villages or sometimes together in small hamlets in the countryside.

Between 1790 and 1850 the share of farmers in the heads of households with an occupation fell from 29% to 17%, while equally the share of unskilled labourers (mostly farm labourers) rose from 28% tot 40%. Consequently, about 43% of the heads of households had their prime job in industry and services; these were substantial economic sectors which production however was mainly directed to the needs of the local population and the supplying of inputs to the extremely market-oriented agriculture. The economy of the Groningen countryside was by international standards still very modern in the first half of the 19th century, with an excessive specialisation of production.

The general picture

In table 4 an overview is given of the different household structures in the Groningen clay area, their composition and average economic position. Simple nuclear families consisting of a married couple with or without children (3.a and 3.b) were the majority. Married couples (276) could also be found within 3-generation families, laterally extended families and multiple families. The amount of multiple family households is extremely low suggesting that there was an implicit social-cultural rule, which could be phrased in the following way: married couples never ought to live in the same house with related married couples. To make this even more clear, it is good to take a closer look to the 45 multiple households in the database who in theory could comprise two related married couples. However, only 18 out of 45 multiple households actually contained two couples. In one case two married sisters were living together, in fourteen cases a married daughter was living with both her parents and in only three cases a married son still lived together with his father and mother.

Table 4: household structure, household size and taxation record in the Groningen clay area, 1829-1850.

	N	head	chil- dren	rela- tives	ser- vants	boar- ders	Totals	Aver. tax
Widowers without relatives (1a1)	51	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.59	0.17	1.76	49
Widows without relatives (1a2)	128	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.28	0.15	1.43	40
Others living alone (1b-1c)	138	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.63	0.25	1.88	50
Relatives living together (2a-2b)	79	1.00	0.00	1.47	0.78	0.16	3.42	53
Married couple without children (3a)	284	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.44	0.06	2.51	47
Married couple with children (3b)	1773	2.00	3.04	0.00	0.57	0,04	5.65	51
Widower with children (3c)	140	1.00	2.90	0.00	0.81	0.08	5.00	59
Widow with children (3d)	328	1.00	2.57	0.00	0.38	0.07	4.03	45
Deviant simple families (3e-3k)	51	1.24	1.67	0.00	0.12	0.08	3.10	32
Extended 3-generation families (4a-4b, 4d)	177	1.77	1.97	1.13	0.47	0.06	5.40	50
Other (laterally) extended families (4c)	112	1.71	1.96	1.19	0.71	0.04	5.61	58
Multiple family houdeholds (5a-5e)	45	1.78	1.29	2.91	0.38	0.00	6.36	47
Total population	3306	1.70	2.22	0.18	0.55	0.06	4.71	50

The total population in the six municipalities under research consisted of 15,577 persons.⁴ In total 3,306 (21%) were head of a household, 2,320 (15%) were married to the head of a household, 7,337 (47%) were live-in children (live-in married children not taken into account), 587 (4%) were live-in other family members (including live-in married children), 1,814 (12%) were live-in servants and 213 (1%) were unrelated solitary boarders and lodgers.

The figures for average household size are not very surprising. Married couples with children, extended and multiple family household were relatively large. Solitary persons, despite have quite a lot of servants, lived of course on average in the smallest households. Coresident siblings and other siblings living together did not form large households, although they amazingly nearly employed the highest numbers of live-in personnel. Boarders and lodgers relatively often lived with other solitary persons.

Local tax records were available to get some idea of the economic position of the households. For each municipality the households were scaled from 0 to 100 according to their average tax position. Because 40% to 60% of the households did not pay taxes they were given all given a position of 20 to 30. The household paying the highest local tax received the position 100 (Paping 2007d). The average tax position of all the households was logically 50. The local tax was based on presumed wealth, but actually was levied quite arbitrarily on something in between net capital and annual income. However, the taxation differences between the inhabitants was closely controlled by the elected municipal government.

Most groups of households had an average tax score around 50. The group deviant household structures (3.e-3.k) filled with illegitimate mothers, unmarried couples, divorced or abandoned men and women and others belonged really mostly to the lowest substratum of society. Widows were doing bad in the tax classification (solitary or with children), their male colleagues had a significantly better tax performance.⁵ For the rest only the group laterally extended families attracts the attention as being on average better-off. This suggests that the more well-to-do couples had a higher inclination to absorb relatives in their household, and that relatives were more attracted to live in a wealthier household than in a poor household. The explanation seems rather straightforward. An important part of the lateral extensions comprised young unmarried sons and daughters. In the lower classes they would go and work as live-in personnel, but for the more well-to-do this was not always seen as a suitable alternative in which case they lived with relatives after the death of their parents. The tax data suggest that the arrangements with three generations or more than one Conjugal Family Unit were just as attractive for the rich as for the poor.

Married couples

On first glance the tables 2, 3 and 4 suggest that in the Groningen clay area a majority of 1,773 couples lived in a relatively simple family of two parents and their children. However, in reality part of these families were less simple as suggested. From these 1,773 households 46 shared a house with another household, another 52 had boarders and lodgers, and from the rest 446 had live-in personnel, leaving 1,229 households or 37% which comprised truly only

⁴ Census data for these 6 municipalities are for 1829: Bedum 2,720, Leens 2,736. And for end 1849: Hoogkerk 1,046, Uithuizen 2,728, Winschoten 4,123, Zuidhorn 2,248. In total this is 15,601 persons, a figure which compared with the counted number of 15,577 shows that the database is very complete.

⁵ The standard deviation of tax performance was usually around 20-25. If we take the database to be a sample and the sample size is about 100, differences of 5 are significantly different from the whole on a 5% level.

parents and their off-spring. This share in reality is even lower taking into account the fact that some of these households comprised children from earlier marriages.

Nevertheless, it can not be denied that in the majority of the households the present relatives formed a nuclear household with parents and children. In an additional 9% of the households the core was a married couple without children. These households were partly in a phase just before getting children, some couples were infertile (probably about 5%) and the children of some couples already had left the house. Not surprisingly, the number of married couples living without children rose, especially from the age of 55 onwards, because children left the household. Nevertheless, at least three quarter of the fathers between the age of 60 and 70 years (taking into account the presence of some childless couples) had still at least one child at home. Although these figures seem to suggest a common strategy of keeping an unmarried child at home to take care of the aging parent, this was not the whole story.

Table 5. Percentage of married couples without live-in children of all married couples living in a simple nuclear family, Groningen clay area 1829-1850 (male age groups: N = 2,057)

	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60	61-65	66-70	71+
%	24%	18%	10%	9%	6%	15%	10%	18%	28%	26%	59%
N	58	265	367	315	297	239	189	153	103	39	32
Children	1.08	1.69	2.47	3.06	3.58	3.11	2.89	2.48	1.61	1.95	0.78
Servants	0.19	0.52	0.61	0.67	0.51	0.64	0.46	0.44	0.46	0.77	0.66
Household size	3.27	4.26	5.13	5.77	6.13	5.77	5.38	4.99	4.09	4.72	3.53
Tax position	41	45	47	50	54	53	52	53	57	63	52

Table 5 seems to suggest that the small group of fathers and mothers above 70 usually lived without off-spring around. However, for this group of married couple who reached a very high age living in a more complex household became also of very great importance as table 6 shows. For the group husbands aged over 71 more than a third lived in such households. The problem for the majority of these old couples was that there were no unmarried children available any longer, presumably because all had married. In this situation there were only two solutions. 1. trying to survive in a household without children, which must have been unattractive because man power and earning capacity was in short supply. 2. choosing living arrangements with relatives other than unmarried children. In the majority of the last cases the old couples lived with grandchildren, widowed sons or daughters with their children, or daughters and illegitimate children. Only a minority indeed cohabitated with a complete couple of the younger generations. In the whole database only 17 cases were reported in total, pointing at the fact that this was a very uncommon strategy (see also later on).

One of the rare examples is the labourer and house-owner Pieter Oostenrijk and his wife who shared in November 1829 the household not only with their 13 year old daughter, but also with their 25 year old son Rinne Oostenrijk. Rinne married in 1825 and settled in Warfhuizen, the birth place of his wife. They moved to his parental household in the second half of 1829. For the next two decennia we know that both couples lived in Leens, but in the census of 1839 the son Rinne had moved to a different house. Clearly, the two couples only temporarily lived together in one household.

Table 6. Household position of all complete married couples Groningen clay area 1829-1850 (male age groups: N = 2,333)

	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60	61-65	66-70	71+

Nuclear family with children	55%	67%	77%	81%	87%	80%	85%	77%	66%	64%	27%
Nuclear family without children	18%	15%	8%	8%	6%	14%	9%	17%	22%	22%	39%
Extended or multiple household	23%	17%	15%	11%	7%	6%	6%	6%	12%	13%	35%
N	80	321	430	352	321	254	201	163	117	45	49

For newly-wed couples living in extended or multiple households was also a rather common phenomenon. They often lived with a widowed mother or father, or an unmarried brother or sister. Especially very young couples were often not capable to set up a nuclear household. However, for couples marrying around the normal age of 26-30 living with one of the parents was not uncommon for a certain stage in life. Later on in life most of the couples could do away with their live-in relatives, although this effect can partly be explained by the death of the live-in surviving parent. Clearly, the incidence of living in a complex household was a lifecycle event for couples. Although most of the couples possibly could escape from it, for a lot of very young and very old couples it was a very practical solution for their main problems (respectively housing and care).

It must not be forgotten that one third of these married couples did not live in a three-generation household, but was accompanied by brothers, sisters, nephews and nieces. Presumably these couples did not necessary solve their own problems, but the housing and caring problems of their live-in relatives. The same will be the case for married couples living with an old parent or a very young grandchild. However, in the first case entering a three-generation household could be an attractive way to get a hold on the parental house and business.

Interesting is to speculate on what should happen, *ceteris paribus* (other things remaining equal), when adult mortality falls and people marry younger. Logically the share of complex households will rise in that case. On the one hand, a fall in the age at marriage will diminish the number of available unmarried children to live-in during the sixties of the parents, which brings the parents into an unattractive nuclear household without children, man power and care, and which makes joining other relatives or a married child an interesting option. On the other hand, a fall in mortality will result in more couples reaching old age together, and as table 6 shows exactly these groups had a very high inclination to live in a complex household.

Table 5 shows a clear improvement of the average economic position of households in the first one or two decades after marriage. This improvement stops after the age of 45, the moment when the household reaches its maximum size. The economic contribution of the children becoming old enough to perform substantial economic labour within the family economy or to earn wage income was insignificant if one takes the tax data into account. The rise in tax position can possibly be related to the fact that most of the parental inheritances came free between the age of 25 and 45 (Paping 2007a). The anomalous rise in average economic position after the age of 60 will have a different kind of explanation. On the one hand it could be that more well-to-do survived till that age, on the other hand the more well-to-do males married younger women (Paping 2007b) and had a higher chance to remarry after being widowed, mostly again with younger women. The result was that under the rich more man still were married after the age of 60.

If we split the figures in table 5 in different occupational groups, different patterns can be discerned. In the tables 7, 8 and 9 we present the figures for the household structure and tax position of married couples living in a nuclear family household of the three largest and

most homogenous groups: farmers, unskilled labourers and employers and self-employed in industry and economic services (mainly artisans and tradesmen).

Table 7. Household structure and tax position of married labourer couples living in a simple nuclear family, Groningen clay area 1829-1850 (male age groups: N = 687)

	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60	61-65	66-70	71+
% all couples	48%	44%	34%	32%	27%	34%	31%	31%	33%	21%	16%
N	28	116	124	102	81	82	59	48	34	8	5
Children	1.04	1.72	2.58	3.11	2.93	2.55	2.00	1.60	1.24	1.00	1.00
Household size	3.04	3.73	4.65	5.14	4.96	4.57	4.05	3.63	3.26	3.00	3.40
Tax position	30	31	29	30	33	31	31	31	31	38	30

NB: % all couples means the share in all married couples living in nuclear family households.

The average economic position of labourer households did not change much during the lifecycle, or better such a change does not show up in the figures.⁶ The vast majority of the labourers did not pay any local taxes which were levied only on the richest 40-60% of the households. Labourers couples were relatively young, owing to three effects, firstly, labourers married slightly younger, secondly, some labourers experienced upward mobility to a position of tradesmen or farmer, thirdly as a result of the continuing process of proletarianisation in the 19th century younger labourer cohorts were larger than older. For partly the same reasons there were relatively few labourers in the high age classes. However this has also something to do with their higher mortality and less chances to remarry after the death of the partner.

The average size of a labourer household reached a peak when father was between 36 and 40, afterwards the size of the household decreased because the overwhelming majority of the children of labourers became live-in servants in the Groningen clay area (Paping 2004; Paping 2005) and left the parental household between the age of 12 and 15. Still, labourers had the intention to keep at least one child at home later on in life, often these children were maids or farm hands who returned to the parental home after some years of live-in service.

Table 8. Household structure and tax position of married farmer couples living in a simple nuclear family, Groningen clay area 1829-1850 (male age groups: N = 327)

	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60	61-65	66-70	71+
% all couples	5%	14%	12%	16%	16%	18%	20%	20%	18%	28%	19%
N	3	36	43	50	48	44	37	30	19	11	6
Children	1.33	2.08	2.86	3.02	3.25	4.02	4.05	3.60	2.16	1.64	1.67
Servants	1.33	2.36	2.53	2.44	1.71	2.11	1.65	1.67	1.32	1.55	1.67
Household size	4.67	6.50	7.44	7.46	6.98	8.14	7.70	7.27	5.47	5.18	5.33
Tax position	83	70	75	76	75	80	79	81	81	82	65

NB: % all couples means the share in all married couples living in nuclear family households.

The story of the farmer couples is rather the opposite of that of the labourers. There were only a few young (and very rich) married farmers, but their share rose consequently till the age of 50. Also the average economic position of the farmers rose constantly even until the male age of 65. Farmers tried to keep their children at home, because the farm offered enough work, that is the reason that the maximum number of children was reached only around the fathers

⁶ Schellekens (1995) found for poor households in a village in North-Brabant in the second half of the 18th century a negative development in the twenty years after marriage.

age of 50. This rise could continue for such a long period because of the age difference between males and females and because farmer widowers remarried younger wives. Interesting is the high average number of live-in servants of younger farmers, who later in life clearly replaced part of the servants for their grown-up children. This might explain the rise in average tax position of farmers when they grew older. Farmers household were very large, however their size falls when the farmers become older. This is not necessarily a sign that some of the land was rented out, but can be interpreted just as well as the result of households becoming completely inhabited by adults. If we include the older couple a potential labour force of 4-5 persons was still available in these farmer households.

Table 9. Household structure and tax position of employers and self-employed in industry and economic services (married couples living in a simple nuclear family), Groningen clay area 1829-1850 (male age groups: N =810)

	21- 25	26- 30	31- 35	36- 40	41- 45	46- 50	51- 55	56- 60	61- 65	66- 70	71+
% all couples	36%	33%	44%	43%	45%	36%	41%	35%	27%	41%	34%
N	21	88	160	135	134	87	77	53	28	16	11
Children	1.43	1.49	2.33	3.03	3.88	3.09	2.84	2.38	1.43	2.19	0.82
Servants	0.29	0.55	0.58	0.55	0.37	0.39	0.19	0.17	0.29	0.69	0.64
Household size	3.71	4.11	4.98	5.61	6.30	5.54	5.09	4.62	3.71	4.88	3.55
Tax position	52	50	53	54	57	56	55	55	56	63	57

NB: % all couples means the share in all married couples living in nuclear family households.

The artisans and tradesmen presented in table 9 in many respects occupied a middle position between farmers and labourers. Their average economic position was just in between, and improved slightly over time until the fathers forties; afterwards it stagnated. Again the number of live-in servants (although far less than of the farmers) was very high before the age of 40, but when the children became grown-up they replaced most of the live-in personnel. As a result average household size reached a peak when the father was between 41 and 45, to fall consequently afterwards. Average household size was higher than for labourers but less than for farmers.

Widows, widowers and the three-generation household

The largest group next to married couples, live-in children and servants were widows and widowers. For several reasons the number of widows was very high: 1. males tended to marry younger females; 2. the life chances of adult women were in the long run better than for adult men, despite a higher incidence of female mortality during the child-bearing years; 3. the chances of widowers to remarry were higher than for widows. Taking account of the high overall death rate of middle aged people the pre-modern society was crowded with widows. This was for a large part an extremely vulnerable group. The earning capacities of males were much higher than for females.

After the death of their husband it was difficult for the widow to continue the trade of her husband, especially if he was an artisan. Women were effectively excluded from this kind of occupations, although some were capable to keep control of the business as a non-cooperating supervisor. Other artisans widows had to search for work as unskilled labourers or seamstresses, while before the death of their husband they mainly did housekeeping tasks. For farmers widows it was relatively easy to keep in charge of the farm. The deceased husband could relatively easily be replaced by an adult farm hand. Labourers widows

continued usually to work as farm labourers, however, they had to try to find work for longer periods, because female farm labourers usually only could find work during the busiest summer season in agriculture which lasted some 3 to 6 months. The male labourer was responsible for the largest part of the household income, because he received a higher daily wage (women earned about 40% less) and could find agricultural work for 8 to 12 months.

As mentioned before, the difference in economic position of widows and widowers resulted in a significantly better tax performance for widowers living with children or solitarily (heads of households only). However, there were also a lot of widows and widowers who headed a more complex household or were not a head of a household at all. Compared to married couples (table 6) a considerable part of the widows was deserted by their children in a relatively early stage in life (after the age of 55). A lot of the older widows were not capable to sustain an attractive household economy of their own. Quite a few became part of a complex household, usually a three-generation household (128 of the 159 cases).

However, the largest group of widows of 61 and over (39%) lived a solitary life alone in a house, sometimes accompanied by a servant or a boarder or lodger. Some had to hire a room or bed in a house with strangers and a lot of them ended their life in a poorhouse. In this society there was no implicit or explicit rule to force children to take care of their old parents by taking them into their household. In 1829 the 76-year old Sapke Alberts lived for more than 50 years in house no. 41 in Warfhuizen, where she would die three years later. Since 1823 she was widow of a labourer, but incapable of working herself she was registered as having no occupation. One son and three daughters were still alive, two were labourers, one weaver and one shop-keeper in different villages five to ten kilometres away. She owned her own house, but not one of her married children was inclined to join her in her last years, although presumably they gave her some financial support. In every village one or more poorhouses were erected where poor widows and widowers spent their last years close to each other, however usually without having off-spring around.

Table 10. Living arrangements of widows according to age groups, Groningen clay area 1829-1850 (N=662)

	21-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60	61-65	66-70	71+
Solitary or boarder/lodger	14%	5%	10%	5%	21%	27%	40%	29%	43%
Living with children	71%	74%	83%	83%	67%	51%	30%	37%	20%
In complex households	14%	21%	7%	12%	12%	22%	30%	33%	37%
N	35	42	42	60	82	95	96	78	132

NB: Complex households include living with siblings or other relatives. Widows without offspring living as children with their parents are not taken into account.

From table 11 it becomes clear that the number of widowers was much lower than of widows. Next to several factors already mentioned, the higher death rate of men played a decisive role in this phenomenon. The difference in living arrangements through their lifetime with the widows wasn't very large. Old-aged widowers also had a large chance to spend the last years alone in a household, or as a boarder or lodger (33%), while they were also responsible for the existence of a lot of three-generation households (54 cases).

Table 11. Living arrangements of widowers according to age groups, Groningen clay area 1829-1850 (N=277)

	21-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60	61-65	66-70	71+
Solitary or boarder/lodger	18%	0%	20%	28%	17%	18%	24%	34%	40%
Living with children	71%	74%	68%	61%	75%	53%	46%	29%	19%

In complex households	12%	26%	12%	11%	8%	29%	30%	37%	42%
N	17	23	25	18	36	38	37	35	48

NB: Complex households include living with siblings or other relatives. Widowers without offspring living as children with their parents are not taken into account.

These widows and widowers more than older married couples formed the backbone of the 6.5% three-generation households in the Groningen clay area. However, it also has become clear that the number of three-generation households in theory could have been much higher. Assume for example that 85% of the widows, widowers and married couples had offspring and all of them had married children by the age of 56 and non before (not a strange assumption taking into account median ages at marriage to be 26 for males and 23 for females around 1820: Paping 2007b). This results in 943 times 85% is 802 potential three-generations households. In reality 214 three-generation households are being observed, amounting to 6.5% of a total of 3,306 households. Taking into account 43 older widows and widowers who were boarder or lodger and 7 who lived in laterally extended households, the number of households would fall to 2,768 and the share of three-generation households would rise to 29%, a share more than four times as high as actually observed.

A fall in mortality and a decrease of the age at marriage would raise this potential amount of three-generation households considerably. However, a higher age at marriage would result in a considerable fall in the share of potential three-generation households. Around 1785 the median age at marriage of males and females was about 29 and 27 in the Groningen clay area (Paping 2007b). If we repeat this simple calculation with the same figures (*ceteris paribus*) but taking the age of 61 as the watershed for having married children, then the share of potential three-generation households drops to 18% or with about four to ten. Although reliable data on household structures are not available before 1810, there are some good reasons to assume that the amount of three-generation households could have been considerably lower in the 18th century, even more so if we take account of the higher mortality level before 1780.

The most ordinary type of a three-generation household was a widowed mother or father living-in with a married couple with children, while no other relatives were around. Sometimes it was the other way around in the register and was the surviving father or mother still considered the head of the household. Most situations stem from two different developments in the past. One is that a child married and she and her partner settled in the paternal household. The second is that a couple settled somewhere and at some moment in time father and mother moved in.

An example of the first type is the farmer Harmannus Boerema (1765-1842). He married in 1798, though lived the first six years with his widowed father in Kloosterburen. In 1804 he acquired a farm in Usquert some 20 kilometres further on and the birth place of his wife, however, she died in 1808, and he bought in 1811 a farm of 27 hectare situated more near to his place of origin. Three children survived. His oldest son died on the farm in August 1826, two months after his oldest daughter married a widowed mill constructor. In December 1827 his youngest daughter (born in 1805) married a farmers son, and afterwards cohabitated with her father until January 1848 when he died. In first instance the farm was from the father but in the end the youngest daughter and her son acquired the property. Cohabitation was in this case an efficient way for the daughter and son-in-law to become farmers directly after marriage. For the father it was attractive because he did not had to run the large farm alone with only servants (in 1830 they employed 1 farm hand and 2 maids) and farm labourers and for the future he secured daughterly care.

In January 1830 the hatmaker Jan Beekman and his wife lived together with her mother Maria van Duinen in a rented house in Wehe. Maria (born 1767) was widow of a tailor in Saaxemhuizen since 1818. She had only two surviving children, both unmarried.

Afterwards her life is not very clear. Her daughter married highly pregnant in April 1826 a subordinate hatmaker, mother was at that moment day labourer in Eenrum. Her daughter settled down in Warfhuizen, but within a few years went to Wehe, at least around January 1830 her mother was living in the same house. Around 1831 Jan Beekman returned to his distant birth place Oude Pekela with his whole family, where he worked as a sailor in the marine. Maria van Duinen, however, stayed behind. In 1836 she still lived in Wehe, however, in a different house, when her unmarried son died aged 35. After that date she disappears from the sources. The three-generation household was in this case only a temporary stage, mainly to solve the housing problems of this poor family, and not a preferred situation. At the moment her son-in-law left the region because of better job opportunities elsewhere, Maria presumably organised to live again in a normal nuclear household with her unmarried son of 30, who had been a live-in servant previously.

Table 12. Three-generation households in the parishes of Leens, Wehe and Zuurdijk in existence in November 1829 (and 1839).

Place	Name parents	age	Occupation 1st/2nd generation	Acquiring house	Moment widow-hood	Marriage date live-in couple	Situation in house in 1839
Leens house 16	Widow Wierenga	73	Shopkeeper / shoemaker	1803	1812	Son: 1828	Others
Leens house 28	Widow Groothuis	70	Without / Shopkeeper	Rented	1823	Daug: 1829	Others
Leens house 43	Widow Mennema	49	Without / Labourer	Rented	Unknown from Frisia	Daug: c1826	Others
Leens house 48	Widow Rietema	68	Without / Labourer	Poorhouse	Unknown	Son: 1809	Others
Leens house 88	Widow Bles	79	Shopkeeper / labourer	C1780 (?)	Pre 1806	Daug: 1808	A son (!) instead
Leens house 93a	Widow Wiegers	66	Watchmaker	Mother is owner	Unknown	Son: 1825	Others
Leens house 102	Widow Helder	63	Labourer / Labourer	1802	1809	Daug: 1824	A son (!) instead
Leens house 109	Couple Oostenrijk (daughter aged 13)	54 / 54	Labourer / labourer	Parents are owners	-	Son: 1825; settled 1829	Parents without son
Leens house 112	Spinster de Vries	55	Labourer / labourer	Rented	Unmarried	Son: 1827	Others
Leens house 115	Widower Achterhof	59	Labourer / labourer	Pre 1806	1826	Son: 1828	Father without son
Leens house 121	Widow Warendorp	67	Farmer / farmer	1787	1807	Son: 1829	Only the son with family
Wehe house 19	Widower Bakker	71	Shopkeeper / cartwright	Pre 1806	1824	Daug: 1827	Same situation
Wehe house 23	Widower Danhof	66	Miller / miller	1804	1827	Daug: 1811	Same situation
Wehe house 28	Widow Spekkers	62	Labourer/hatmaker	Rented (c1828)	1818	Daug: 1826	Others
Wehe house 66	Widow Westerhof	74	Labourer / labourer	Pre 1789	Pre 1806	Daug: c1814	Only daughter (widow)
Wehe house 72	Widower Medema	59	Shoemaker / labourer	1816/25	1825	Daug: 1824	Same situation
Wehe (ship)	Widower Woltha	66	Shipper / shipper	On ship	1827	Son: 1821	-
Wehe (ship)	Widower Woltha	69	Shipper / shipper	On ship	1825	Daug: 1829	-
Zuurdijk house 4	Couple Boekhoud	77 / 75	Labourer / labourer	C1805	-	Daug: 1821	House disappeared
Zuurdijk	Widow Jeltens	64	(schoolmas.)	Rented	1814	Son: 1813	Others

house 24			/ labourer				
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Table 12 suggests that if three-generation households were connected to the handing over of a house to the next generation, this was an extremely unsuccessful strategy. In 1829 there were already quite a few cases with complications, for example when sons or sons-in-law had different occupations than the occupational activity of the parents. In a minority of the cases the house was not owned at all but rented, so there could be no case of handing over the house, the real owner could expel the inhabitants any year at his own wish. From the 18 cases in ten years half the houses moved into the hands of strangers, in two times a son succeeded instead of the daughter at home, in five times the oldest generation was still in charge of whom the live-in married children had moved elsewhere twice. Only in two houses (a farm and a labourer house) in these ten years the three-generation household ended up in the succession of the live-in married daughter or son. Most of the children at home had married a few years before 1829, in most instances after or around the year of the death of the lost parent. This might indeed point at the frequent use of a three-generation household to solve the temporary housing problems of the newly-wed couples.

Taking into account that the number of three-generation households was far below potential and that succession of houses and firms from one generation to another was not the rule in the Groningen clay area (only 18% of the sons and 9% of the daughters took over the parental household somewhere after marriage: Paping 2008) there are good reasons to think that there was a very different primary reason to form three-generation households. As mentioned before, three-generation households could be of mutual benefit for the surviving parent and the married child, if at least the surviving parent had something to offer in the form of property or a potential living. For the numerous labourers families this usually was not the case, cohabitation was practised because it was cheap, and married children took their responsibility over an aging parent. However, the position of the surviving parent with respect to the married child was seriously weakened by not allowing other children to join the family household. The rareness of multiple households makes perfectly clear that young couples in the Groningen clay area were not prepared to join a complex family household where the power base of the parent(s) was too big, despite the extent of the property which came into reach.

Extended and multiple households and occupational groups

In the introduction it was stated that extended and multiple households are usually connected to farmers, who in this way secure the handing over of the farm to the next generation. In Havelte in Drenthe in the eastern Netherlands 45% of the households of the richer farmers was complex in some way, but this was the case for only 10% of the farm labourer households (Verduin 1972). Table 13 clearly shows that the situation in the Groningen clay area was completely different. Indeed farmers were slightly more inclined to form complex households (the difference comes for a part from the relatively numerous laterally extended farmer households with live-in unmarried brothers and sisters). The percentage of complex households for unskilled labourers was in the Groningen clay area about the same as in Havelte.

Table 13. Occupations and household structure in the Groningen clay area (1829-1850).

	N	% of extended and	Average size all	Average size extended a.o.	Average tax rate all	Average tax rate extended
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		multiple households	households	households	households	a.o. households
Farmers	537	13%	6.79	7.00	78	80
Unskilled labourers	1,076	9%	3.92	4.86	31	32
Business in industry and economic services	1,145	11%	4.90	5.61	54	55
Female occupations	40	3%	2.08	-	31	-
Other occupations	271	5%	5.00	5.46	62	53
Without occupation	237	9%	2.81	4.57	50	53
Total	3,306	10%	4.71	5.60	50	53

The overall share of complex households was considerably less than in Havelte for two reasons. One, the share of farmers was much lower in the Groningen society than in Drenthe. Two, the tendency of farmers to live in complex households was much lower. Clearly, farmers had other strategies in the Groningen clay area. The most important goal of farming was not the handing over of the farm to the next generation, but to make a sound living out of the farm. The handing over of the farm to the next generation was only one alternative, next to selling or to running a farm without family help to secure a living until a long age, without disputes with son or son-in-law over who was actually in charge of the farm.

Extended and multiple households were relatively rare under the households with other occupations (5%), which is not very surprising taking into account that this group partly consists of skilled workers and partly of civil servants, preachers and physicians, indeed all households where there were not much job opportunities for a younger generation.

Concluding remarks

In the relatively modern Groningen clay area some 10% of the households had a complex character, from which 6.5% comprised three generations in the second quarter of the 19th century. There are good reasons that at least the share of three-generation households had risen considerably from the end of the 18th century onwards due to a fall in the age at marriage which increases the number of potential three-generation households. Multiple households were very rare, and it was even more unusual that two related married couples lived in one household. It is suggested that young married couples found these kind of household unattractive to live in because of the greater power the parents when more kin was present.

The presence of three-generation households had presumably mostly to do with the caring for old aged, the solving of housing problems of young couples and the savings one could make on housing by living together. Only in a few cases the three-generation household was used as a system to hand the house over to the next generation. Although this was more common under the farmers, even for them selling the farm was as good an alternative as handing the farm over to a son or daughter. The incidence of complex households was nearly just as common in the richer as in the poorer strata of the society.

As a result a lot of elderly were living solitary or tried to keep one or more unmarried children at home as long as possible. Independence and freedom seem in those cases to have been considered to be more important than responsibility or security. The majority of the very old (over 70), however, lived together with at least one off their off-spring or another relative.

Complex households were not necessarily a traditional feature but functioned quite efficiently as an important caring institution for the old-aged in this modern economy.

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