

# The Timing of Life

Understanding Cross-National Differences in  
the Organization of the Life Course in Europe

Aart C. Liefbroer



# Team members

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- **Francesco Billari (Bocconi University, Milan)**
- **Arnstein Aassve (Bocconi University, Milan)**

# Focus

- **Increasing our understanding of the views of European men and women about the organization of the life course**
- **Background: Much attention to determinants and cross-national differences in the actual timing and sequencing of life-events (lives as lived), but little to the determinants and cross-national differences in the perceptions and ideas about timing and sequencing of life-events (lives as constructed)**

# IP1: The Cultural Segmentation of the Life Course (PI: Spéder)

- What age boundaries do Europeans perceive with regard to entry into adulthood, 'middle age' and 'old age'? Which events serve as markers for the transition to adulthood and for the transition to old age?
- How can we explain cross-national and regional differences?

# IP2: Norms about the Sequencing and Combination of Life-Course Roles in Contemporary Society (PI: Liefbroer)

- To what extent do norms about sequencing and combining life-course roles exist in contemporary societies?
- How can differences in such norms across Europe be explained?

# IP3: Life Planning and Future Orientation (PI: Hagestad)

- To what extent do Europeans feel that life planning is possible, and to what extent do they actually engage in life planning activities?
- How can we explain differences across Europe in the extent to which people are engaged in life planning?

# AP: Age Norms in Contemporary Society (PI's: Billari & Aassve)

- To what extent do age norms about life-course roles exist in contemporary societies?
- How can differences in such norms across Europe be explained?

# Commonality between IP's

- **Common theoretical approach: Life Course approach**
- **Common datasets: Module on 'Timing of Life' in ESS 2006; same kind of contextual data**
- **Common methodology: multi-level approach**



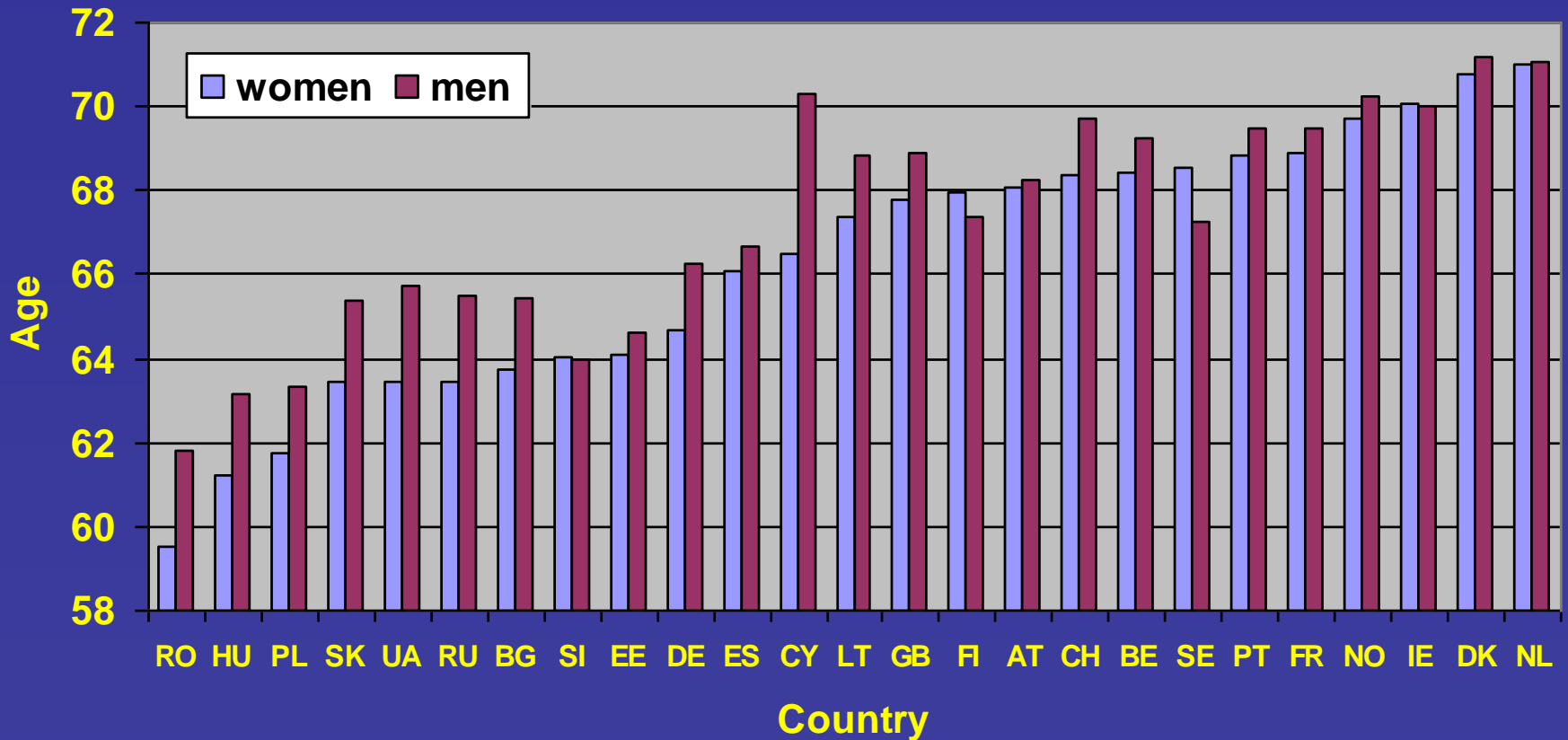
# Brief example

- When do people in different countries feel that one enters old age?
- How large are the differences across Europe?
- Can we explain these differences?

# Question wording

- **People differ in their ideas about the ages at which girls or women become adults, middle-aged or old.**
  - (And) at what age, approximately, would you say women reach old age?
- **Split ballot. Half of the respondents get female, half male version**

# Opinion on age at entry into old age



# Regression of entry into old age among females

Constant	66.4**					
Var individual	8.45**					
Var countries	3.19**					

# Regression of entry into old age

Constant	66.4**	53.0**				
Gender respondent		3.1**				
Age		0.2**				
Age square		-0.1**				
Educational level		0.3**				
Var individual	8.45**	8.03**				
Var countries	3.19**	3.28**				

# Regression of entry into old age

Constant	66.4**	53.0**	-2.1			
Gender respondent		3.1**	3.1**			
Age		0.2**	0.2**			
Age square		-0.1**	-0.1**			
Educational level		0.3**	0.3**			
Life expectancy			0.7**			
Var individual	8.45**	8.03**	8.03**			
Var countries	3.19**	3.28**	2.40**			

# Regression of entry into old age

Constant	66.4**	53.0**	-2.1	-4.2		
Gender respondent		3.1**	3.1**	3.0**		
Age		0.2**	0.2**	0.2**		
Age square		-0.1**	-0.1**	-0.1**		
Educational level		0.3**	0.3**	0.3**		
Life expectancy			0.7**	0.6**		
Ideal age at retirement				0.2**		
Var individual	8.45**	8.03**	8.03**	7.91**		
Var countries	3.19**	3.28**	2.40**	2.17**		

# Regression of entry into old age

Constant	66.4**	53.0**	-2.1	-4.2	47.1**	
Gender respondent		3.1**	3.1**	3.0**	3.1**	
Age		0.2**	0.2**	0.2**	0.2**	
Age square		-0.1**	-0.1**	-0.1**	-0.1**	
Educational level		0.3**	0.3**	0.3**	0.3**	
Life expectancy			0.7**	0.6**		
Ideal age at retirement				0.2**		
GDP per capita					0.2**	
Var individual	8.45**	8.03**	8.03**	7.91**	8.03**	
Var countries	3.19**	3.28**	2.40**	2.17**	1.96**	



# Regression of entry into old age

Constant	66.4**	53.0**	-2.1	-4.2	47.1**	38.9**
Gender respondent		3.1**	3.1**	3.0**	3.1**	3.1**
Age		0.2**	0.2**	0.2**	0.2**	0.2**
Age square		-0.1**	-0.1**	-0.1**	-0.1**	-0.1**
Educational level		0.3**	0.3**	0.3**	0.3**	0.3**
Life expectancy			0.7**	0.6**		
Ideal age at retirement				0.2**		0.2**
GDP per capita					0.2**	0.2**
Var individual	8.45**	8.03**	8.03**	7.91**	8.03**	7.91**
Var countries	3.19**	3.28**	2.40**	2.17**	1.96**	1.84**

# Important issues

- **Theory:** How sharply-focused are our theoretical ideas? First six months will be used to generate a common set of general hypotheses
- **Data:** How appropriate are our indicators of relevant macro-concepts? First six months will be used to decide on a common set of micro- and macro-indicators
- **Method:** Include sub-national regional level? First year will be used to theoretically and empirically assess this issue

# Practicalities (I)

- All three IP's funded by national scientific organisations
- AP funded by internal money of Bocconi
- Post-docs in The Netherlands and Hungary, and pre-doc in Italy have started, pre-doc in Norway not yet
- Kick-off meeting LIFETIMING October 9 & 10 in The Hague

# Practicalities (II)

- **Two meetings a year, partly with specialists from outside the CRP**
- **Opportunities for temporary stays of pre- and post-docs at partner institutes**
- **Output: journal articles, edited volume, policy-oriented publication(s)**