Title

Do Our Histories Align? Harmonizing Partnership Trajectories, Economic Conditions and Health Indicators in GGS and SHARE

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Theme from the call:

Data & Methods (Bruno Masquelier)

Extended Abstract

Introduction

Bridging data from different surveys to create a more comprehensive view of the life course presents significant methodological challenges, particularly when surveys cover distinct age ranges and utilize independent samples. This paper presents a methodological pilot study assessing the potential for harmonizing two major European longitudinal surveys: the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) and the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE). As an initial Proof of Concept (Phase 1), this stage focuses strictly on the harmonization of selected foundational demographic, economic, and health variables. The aim is to assess how these datasets can be synchronized to allow for methodologically sound analyses within a life course perspective, specifically focusing on the intersection of mid-life and later-life conditions.

The French Case Study

In the French context, the age ranges of GGS (18-79 years) and SHARE (50 years and over) provide a unique opportunity for methodological testing. We utilize the natural age overlap of respondents aged 50–79 as a "bridge" to integrate the databases into a common dataset. Given the sample size France serves as an ideal testbed ensuring robust and reliable analyses. This setting allows us to address technical and conceptual challenges within a controlled environment before scaling the framework to other European contexts.

Theoretical Focus & The Gap

Previous harmonization efforts have demonstrated the potential of integrating demographic and socio-economic data across diverse sources. Notable examples include:

- **Gateway to Global Aging** – where SHARE database has been harmonized with its sister studies like HRS, ELSA, JSTAR, CHARLES and others, to facilitate comparisons of populations aged 50 years and over from different continents (Gateway *website*).
- **Harmonized Histories (GGP)** – a project that harmonized GGS and other national surveys (e.g. from USA, UK, Spain, Uruguay) to facilitate cross-national research on topics related to transition to adulthood, family formation, and non-marital childbearing, enabling event history analysis (*GGP website: Data / Harmonized Histories*) - the availability of this harmonized dataset resulted in a rich list of scientific publications (see *List of Publications* on the *GGP website: Data / Harmonized Histories)*.
- **HaSpaD** – the project enables the creation of an individualized and harmonized data set of German couple biographies from various source data sets, like SOEP, SHARE, GGS, General German Social Survey, etc. (Schulz, S. et al. 2021).
- **SHARE-Linkage –** a project which links SHARE survey data with administrative pension and social insurance records for several participating countries, including Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy. It combines administrative data from respective Pension Insurance Offices and contextual factors of the survey respondents. Hence, it enables the investigation of connections between various aspects of respondents´ lives and their working history or their socio-economic status in later life (*SHARE website: Record Linkage Project*)

To our knowledge, the HaSpaD project is the only existing attempt to integrate GGS and SHARE data. However, this integration was limited exclusively to German respondents (Schulz et al., 2021). No initiative so far has developed a harmonized framework that enables the joint use of GGS and SHARE data across all participating countries. Our study addresses this gap by initiating a scalable, cross-national harmonization framework. By focusing on Phase 1 – the validation of core variables – we lay the groundwork for a cross-nationally harmonized dataset applicable to all countries involved in both survey programmes.

Data & Methods

The analysis utilizes French data from GGS Round II, Wave 1 and SHARE Wave 9. This pilot study executes a practical data integration trial designed to assess the feasibility of harmonizing parallel survey structures within a Proof of Concept framework. Instead of assuming a direct translation between datasets, our approach follows a multi-stage evaluation process:

1. **Assessment of selected variables** – we focus on foundational indicators across three domains: basic demographics, economic conditions, and health measures. Specifically, the comparability of life satisfaction and self-perceived health is

rigorously tested to determine if these variables can support robust cross-survey analyses.

2. **Theoretical vs. empirical alignment** – a core element of this phase is identifying variables that present a "theoretical perfect match" (such as age, gender, or life satisfaction scales) and evaluating their actual empirical consistency. Preliminary findings suggest that even conceptually aligned variables can exhibit significant distributional discrepancies due to methodological factors.
3. **Identification of methodological barriers** – the study evaluates how different survey administration modes – predominantly CAWI / CATI in GGS versus CAPI in SHARE – impact data quality. We investigate whether these mode effects lead to variations in extreme response patterns (e.g., in life satisfaction) or distinct missing data structures.

By focusing on these practical hurdles – including the reconciliation of differing weighting schemes (normalized analytic weights vs. population expansion weights) – this initial phase establishes whether the "theoretical match" between GGS and SHARE holds up to empirical scrutiny.

Expected Findings & Future Horizons

The paper aims to deliver a methodological roadmap for researchers interested in combining GGS and SHARE data. The pilot study is expected to identify specific domains where harmonization is feasible and analytically valuable, while clearly defining the technical barriers that remain. By proving the concept through foundational variables in the French case, we highlight how synchronized datasets can increase sample sizes for specific cohorts and open new avenues for robust statistical modeling of the life course. This initial phase contributes to the development of tools that enable researchers to leverage the full potential of longitudinal data infrastructures in Europe.

References:

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