The Family Life of Old People



Peter Townsend





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ACCESS FOR ALL

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K. H. Schaeffer and Elliott Sclar

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Our cities are being strangled by the technology that made them possible. In Access for All two American experts examine the problem through historical analysis and specific case history. They argue that while improved transport enabled the horrifically overcrowded cities of the last century to expand and attain a balance between individual privacy and the economies of scale, the same process resulted in a growth and dispersion of the urban areas which led individuals, in their search for privacy, to lose the concept of community.

Only through an understanding of the complex processes involved can we reverse the trend and recreate a working version of the city: a version which may enable us to control our modern equivalent of Frankenstein's

monster.

FAMILY AND KINSHIP IN EAST LONDON

Michael Young and Peter Willmott

The two authors of this most human of surveys are sociologists.

They spent three years on 'field work' in Bethnal Green and on a new housing estate in Essex. The result is a fascinating study, made during a period of extensive rehousing, of family and community ties and the pull of the 'wider family' on working-class people.

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'This shrewd - and in places extremely amusing - book combines warmth of feeling with careful sociological method' - The Financial Times

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"No short account can do justice to this book, charmingly written, engaging, absorbing" - British Medical Journal

Obviously there have been changes in the two districts under survey during the last five years. This edition in Pelicans, with its fresh introduction and simplified appendix is justified by the standing the report has achieved as a modern classic of sociology.



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THE FAMILY LIFE OF OLD PEOPLE

After leaving Cambridge Peter Townsend undertook research into social policy for Political and Economic Planning, helped to produce reports on poverty, the cost of social services, pensions, primary and secondary schools, and investigated the problem of unemployment in Lancashire. In 1954 he was appointed research officer of the newly founded Institute of Community Studies in Bethnal Green, and wrote this book as a result. In 1957 he joined the London School of Economics and embarked on a national study of old people's homes, published in 1962 as The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales. He undertook a national survey of old people in Britain which was part of a cross-national survey carried out also in the United States and Denmark. One book on the British findings (with Dorothy Wedderburn) was published under the title The Aged in the Welfare State. The next, giving the cross-national findings (with Ethel Shanas, Dorothy Wedderburn and others), Old People in Three Industrial Societies, was published in 1968. In 1965 he published a study of poverty, The Poor and the Poorest (with Brian Abel-Smith). His other publications include The Concept of Poverty (1970) and Labour and Inequality (1972), both of which he edited; The Social Minority (1973) and Sociology and Social Policy (1975). Peter Townsend has been Professor of Sociology at the University of Essex since 1963 and Pro-Vice-Chancellor since 1975. He is married and has four children.



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THE FAMILY LIFE OF **OLD PEOPLE**







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For my grandmother and mother



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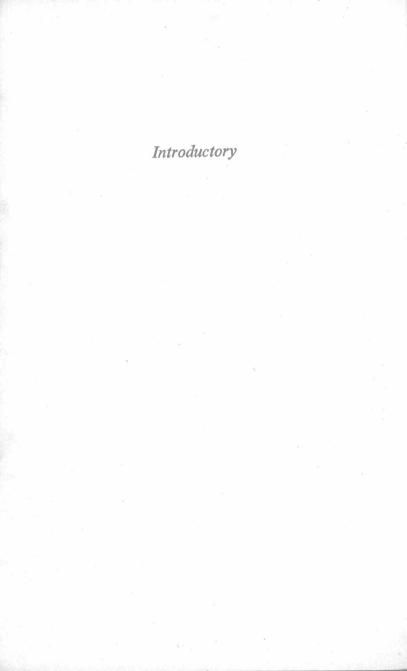
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CHAPTER 1

The Study in Outline

THIS book is in two parts. The first describes the family life of people of pensionable age in a working-class borough of East London; the second discusses the chief social problems of old age against the background of family organization and relationships.

Concern about the growing number of old people springs partly from an assumption that many of them are isolated from their families and from the community. It is widely believed that the ties of kinship are much less enduring than they once were and that as a consequence the immediate family of parents and unmarried children, of which the individual is a member for only part of his lifetime, has replaced the larger family of three or four generations, of which the individual is a member for the whole of his life, as the fundamental unit of society. Such an assumption is of very great importance and demands careful examination.

The first trial interview I had when I started this study was with an old man whose situation suggested the assumption might be right. He was an old widower of seventy-six years of age who lived alone in two rooms on the third floor of a block of tenement flats. His wife had died two years previously and he had no children. He was a very thin, large-boned man with a high-domed forehead and a permanent stoop. His frayed waistcoat and trousers hung in folds. At the time of calling, 5.30 p.m., he was having his first meal of the day, a hot-pot of mashed peas and ham washed down with a pint of tea from a large mug. The living-room was dilapidated, with old black-out curtains covering the windows, crockery placed on newspapers, and piles of old magazines tucked under the chairs. In one corner of the room by an open fireplace (a 'kitchener') stood a small table covered with worn lino cloth and in another corner stood a broken meat-safe with scraps of food inside. There was a photo of his wife in her twenties on the mantelpiece together with one of a barmaid and a pin-up from a Sunday

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