

We completed our discussion groups, sometimes called focus groups, in late Summer 2008. Some of our key findings are set out below. This was preliminary research, and it helped us to plan the in-depth interviews which we undertook with 45 older couples.

- It seems to be very difficult for couples who have been together for a long time to change the financial arrangements between them, or they just never think about doing this. Once a pattern has settled, which seems to happen soon after they get together, it seems to be their pattern for life.

- People may have joint bank accounts or separate bank accounts, but whose name is on the bank accounts seems to bear little resemblance to who controls the money in it. A joint account may still be mostly or entirely controlled by one person. This is sometimes the person who puts the most or all of the money into it, but not always.

- The finances of older couples who have recently got together seem to be very differently organised to those who have been together for many years, especially if there are children and grandchildren involved. People find it simpler to keep their finances more separate, which means they feel that they have to ask fewer permissions of their partners to spend money on their own families. They are also more concerned about who will inherit their money

- Many older people feel very uncomfortable using credit cards and debit cards. Fear of crime plays a part in this, as people are concerned about being mugged and about their details being stolen. There is sometimes tension between men and women in a couple about the use of cash, debit and credit cards.

- Few older people seem able to save, and many are having to draw on savings to pay the rising costs of living especially since fuel and food costs have risen so substantially. People were very concerned to be able to pay for their own funerals. Although many would like to be able to leave something to their children, most believed that their current needs should take priority.

- There is a tendency to 'make do', such as with an older car, rather than spend significant amounts on a newer car. Holidays are important to many retired people, though these often take the form of short breaks within the UK rather than foreign travel.

- Loss of physical abilities and mobility can mean that people are no longer able to perform tasks such as household maintenance and gardening, and have to pay for these services – which puts pressure on a budget which already may be severely reduced after retirement.

- For people in the age group we are researching, women's state retirement age is still 60 whereas men's is 65. This can be a source of concern, and occasionally friction, between

couples. Further, many women in this age group paid only the (now defunct) married woman's reduced rate, which means they do not have an adequate pension in their own right.

- A significant minority of those we spoke to had not made wills, even though they and/or their partner are over 65. Dying intestate (without a will) can cause problems for one's partner and family, especially if you are not married, have been married more than once, or have no children.

But your views may differ from these!

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