Demographic shifts have created a context in which rising numbers of older adults are “aging alone.” Declining fertility rates mean that older adults today have fewer children than in the past, a scenario that is most acute in societies that have maintained restrictive population policies. Due to urbanization and migration, adult children may move far distances from their aging parents. Rising rates of divorce mean that older adults may no longer live with a spouse. These patterns are unfolding worldwide, although the magnitude varies widely across nations. Recent research by Margolis and Verdery (2017) found that 6.6% of U.S. adults ages 55 and older have neither a living spouse nor biological children and 1% lack a partner/spouse, any children, biological siblings, and biological parents – with these rates rising across successive cohorts.

The proportion of older adults who are “elder orphans” – growing old without a spouse, child, or proximate kin – could reach as high as one-in-five in future cohorts. They have fewer sources of emotional, practical, and informational support, and may be less well equipped to age in place. Yet researchers have also found that some adults aging without close kin still maintain high levels of social integration, through networks with friends, distant relatives, members of one’s religious community, and paid helpers. Likewise, many of those who have living kin may still experience emotional loneliness, or the feeling that their socioemotional needs have gone unmet. Others may not be able to turn to their kin for practical, emotional or financial support, especially those kin who struggle with personal or financial challenges of their own. Understanding the causes and consequences of both structural and emotional isolation in later life is a critical challenge for social gerontologists and policy makers, as this information may point to sites of early interventions that can improve older adults’ longevity and quality of life.

This special issue of JGSS seeks papers that focus on older adults “aging alone.” This may encompass those aging without any close kin, those whose social and emotional needs are unfulfilled, or those aging without at least one critical social tie such as a romantic partner, child, or sibling. The articles we seek will move the field forward conceptually and/or methodologically. Quantitative and qualitative approaches are welcome. We seek international submissions, and encourage cross-national comparisons. Potential topics include but are not limited to:

- Historical or cohort patterns of aging without close kin in Africa, Asia, North America, South America, Central America, Eastern Europe, the European Union, the Middle East, the Caribbean or Oceania.
- Factors associated with diverse pathways into aging alone (e.g., lifelong singlehood or childlessness, later-life family bereavement/estrangement, etc.)
- Implications of aging alone for physical, emotional, and financial well-being.
- Societal and public policy implications of aging alone.
- Adaptation, resilience, innovation, and the development of new social and interpersonal ties among those aging alone.

**Submission Procedures**

To avoid duplicate topics and to enable us to develop a comprehensive special issue, a 250-word abstract (using the Series B structured abstract format) describing the paper’s goals should be submitted by September 1, 2017. Please include all author names, affiliations, and contact information when answering the submission questions in ScholarOne. The Editor will invite selected authors to submit full manuscripts. Full manuscripts will be evaluated using the Journal’s usual peer review process; an invitation to submit a full manuscript is not a guarantee of publication in the special issue. Queries regarding submissions should be sent to Deborah Carr (Editor, Social Sciences) at carrds@bu.edu.

Abstract submission deadline: **SEPTEMBER 1, 2017**
Invitations to submit full manuscripts: **OCTOBER 1, 2017**
Manuscript submission deadline: **APRIL 1, 2018**

Articles will be available in Advanced Access shortly after final acceptance with an anticipated print publication date of July or September 2019