

Perceptions of Filial Obligations among migrant and non-migrant Elderly: a Comparison at the Country of Origin and Destination

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Intergenerational support is an important way to secure old age, particularly in societies with less developed public support systems. Migration from these societies to societies where public support systems are well developed put to question the importance of intergenerational support (Warnes, Kellaheer, & Torres 2004). Up to now few empirical studies have analyzed both the perceptions of filial obligations in the country of origin of migrants and in the host country. The literature that deals with immigrant elderly focuses predominantly on the countries of settlement. A comparison of perceptions of elderly at the country of origin and destination is still largely lacking even though it is often suggested that some convergence to the norms and values predominant in the host society takes place after migration (Seelbach and Die 1988).

The main objective of this study is to assess how migration from a country with poorly developed public support system to a country that provides welfare state security affects the perceptions of older persons regarding filial obligations. In this sense, it is useful to also include into the analysis the country of origin of the immigrant elderly. In this paper we try to single out the effect that migration has on the perceptions regarding intergenerational support. We use survey data on elderly living in the Netherlands Antilles as well as data on elderly with an Antillean and Dutch origin in the Netherlands. This provides the unique opportunity to compare the perceptions of elderly in the place of origin and place of destination in our analyses.

A second aim of the study is to understand the conditions under which elderly attach more or less importance to filial obligations. Besides ethnic origin, we focus on a number of socio-demographic characteristics previous research showed to be of importance for filial obligation perceptions of the elderly (Glick and Van Hook 2002; Mitchell, Wister and Gee 2004). The inclusion of the Dutch elderly, in this case, helps to ascertain whether differences are primarily related to the immigrant origin or refer to a general phenomenon found among all elderly.

Filial obligations and acculturation

Parents' expectations of their children are found to differ by ethnic group (Burr and Mutchler 1999; Fuligni and Pedersen 2002; Lee, Peek, and Coward 1998; Rosenthal 1986). Rossi and Rossi (1990) defined norms of filial responsibility as culturally-defined rights and duties that specify both the ways in which family members are expected to behave toward each other and the obligations to exchange and provide support to one another. The literature shows that norms of filial responsibility vary by cultural background, but they are inconclusive about the direction of the relationship (Gans & Silverstein 2006). Lee and Aytac (1998) found that Black elderly parents in the United States had higher expectations of filial obligations than Whites, but Seelbach (1981) and Hanson, Sauer and Seelbach (1983) did not corroborate this finding difference. In the case of Hispanics in the United States, it is also argued that the immigration experience creates strong links to traditional family-oriented cultures in the countries of origin (Bean and Tienda 1987).

Theories of differences in 'family systems' suggest that family relations and the related expectations reflect the importance attached to kinship in a society. Several

authors have argued that in more collectivistic societies, kinship ties take centre stage (Todd 1985; Kagitcibasi 1996; Nauck 2007; Reher 1998). In the Antilles, the family is of great importance and intergenerational ties are strong. Immigrant older people from the Antilles currently living in the Netherlands grew up in a society where intergenerational interdependence was a prerequisite for a family's material wellbeing. Dutch society on the other hand is characterised by independence or autonomy of older parent and adult child and support to the elderly is for a large share also provided by the (welfare) state. We therefore hypothesised that older persons of immigrant origin would agree more strongly than Dutch elders that children should support their parents (H1).

Acculturation theories suggest that over time immigrants adjust their perceptions and orientations to the patterns of the country of residence (Alba and Nee 1997). Nevertheless, immigrants are also thought to adhere to the traditions of their countries of origin, in particular in the private domain (Berry 1980). Based on these notions, we formulated a second related hypothesis: as a result of acculturation immigrant elderly of Antillean origin will be less of the opinion that children should support their parents, than elderly in the Antilles (H2).

Socio-demographic position and support necessity

Previous research has found clear relationships between various socio-demographic characteristics and levels of adherence to filial obligations. Marital status, education and gender are features that are often related to opinions and perceptions regarding the family (Kalmijn, 2004; Roschelle, 1997; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Spitze & Logan, 1990). Seelbach (1981) also found that, as parents age, they expect to receive more support from their children. This leads us to expect that elderly who are married, who are women, who are more educated, and who are older will be less of the opinion that children should support parents than is the case for those who are unmarried, who are men, who are less educated, and who are younger (H3).

Lee, Netzer and Coward (1994) and Lee, Peek and Coward (1998) also showed that elderly parents who are in bad health expect more from their children than those in good conditions. In addition, those with a large number of children are assumed to be more of the opinion that children should provide support to their parents. Given the crucial role of women in providing support within the family, expectations of elderly with at least one daughter may be even higher than among those who have no daughter. Our hypothesis therefore is that elderly who are in bad health condition, who have a larger number of children, and who have at least one daughter are more of the opinion that children should support parents (H4).

Data and method

For our analyses we pooled data from different surveys conducted in both the Antilles and the Netherlands. All surveys included similar information on perceptions of filial obligations of children in providing care and co-residence to their elderly parents. All surveys were carried out in 2002 and 2003.

On the Dutch side we include data from the first round of *The Netherlands Kinship Panel Study* (NKPS) (Dykstra *et al.* 2005) and the *Social Position and Provisions Ethnic Minorities Survey* (SPVA). The NKPS included a main sample (Dutch respondents) and a migrant sample (including Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, and Antillean respondents). The SPVA is a migrant survey. In all surveys the respondents were interviewed in their homes, in most cases by an interviewer of the same ethnic background. In our study immigrants were compared with Dutch respondents living in

the 13 cities in which the immigrants were sampled. The present analysis is confined to the respondents aged 50-80 years, resulting in a sample of 264 Antillean and 621 Dutch elderly living in the Netherlands.

On the Antillean side, we include data from the Study on Support Necessity and Networks of Older Persons on Curaçao which was carried out by the Permanent Commission for Population Issues (Permanente Commissie, 2003). The survey was based on a household sample drawn from the population registers on Curaçao, consisting of 453 persons of 60 years and older who were interviewed in person at their homes.

Dependent variables

The dependent variable in the analyses refers to the level of agreement with two aspects of filial obligation. Respondents were asked to rank on a five-point Likert scale (from '1' for 'fully agree' to '5' for 'fully disagree') how strongly they agreed with the statements that: a) 'children should care for their sick parents'; and b) 'if children should provide co-residence for old parents'.

Independent variables

Ethnic origin. The ethnic background of the respondents was defined according to the country of birth and that of the respondent's parents. Those born in the Antilles or with at least one parent born there were defined as Antillean. Elderly born and currently living at the Antilles were distinguished as the Antilles at origin. For each group, a separate dummy variable was created to compare them to the Dutch.

Age group. We distinguish between four age groups by using dummy variables for those aged less than 60 years, those between 60 and 64, those aged 65-74 and those who are aged 75 and up (reference group).

Gender. A dichotomous variable (men '0', women '1').

Physical health. Respondents were asked to rate their general physical health on a five-point scale that ranged from '1' for 'very well' to '5' for 'very bad'. This variable was entered into the analyses as a continuous variable.

Educational level. The educational level of the respondent was measured as the highest educational level to which the respondent had been enrolled (with or without completion or accreditation). Three levels were distinguished and entered into the analyses as dummy variables. Those with lower or middle secondary education and those with higher secondary education were compared to those with elementary education.

Marital status. Respondents who are married at the time of the interview (reference group) were compared with those who were divorced, widowed or never married by including separate dummy variables.

Number of children. The number of surviving children is entered as a continuous variable in the analyses.

Daughter. A dummy variable indicated whether the respondent has at least one (surviving) daughter. Those without a daughter are the reference category.

Table 1 provides the descriptives for the independent variables.

Methods

Bivariate analyses provided the first insight into the variations in the respondents' perceptions of the role of children in providing care and co-residence. Differences between ethnic groups were tested with Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) *post hoc* test. Secondly, ordinal logistic regression was used to study the effects of

ethnic origin and socio-demographic characteristics on perceived filial obligations using the pooled dataset.

Table 1 Description of independent variables, mean and (SD) per (ethnic) group

Variable	Range	Antilleans at origin (<i>n</i> = 384)	Antilleans in the Netherlands (<i>n</i> = 264)	Dutch (<i>n</i> = 621)
Age groups				
50-59	0/1	0.00 (0.00)	0.62 (0.49)	0.48 (0.49)
60-64	0/1	0.30 (0.49)	0.21 (0.40)	0.17 (0.37)
65-70	0/1	0.22 (0.41)	0.08 (0.27)	0.11 (0.32)
70+ (ref.)	0/1	0.48 (0.50)	0.10 (0.29)	0.24 (0.43)
Woman	0/1	0.60 (0.48)	0.53 (0.50)	0.58 (0.49)
Physical well being (1=good–5=bad)	1-5	2.18 (0.87)	2.64 (0.98)	2.20 (0.85)
Marital status				
Married (ref.)	0/1	0.48 (0.50)	0.27 (0.45)	0.48 (0.49)
Never married	0/1	0.13 (0.34)	0.20 (0.40)	0.16 (0.37)
Widowed	0/1	0.29 (0.45)	0.10 (0.30)	0.18 (0.38)
Divorced	0/1	0.10 (0.30)	0.42 (0.49)	0.18 (0.38)
Educational level				
Max. elementary (ref.)	0/1	0.63 (0.48)	0.13 (0.33)	0.18 (0.38)
Lower-middle sec.	0/1	0.21 (0.41)	0.68 (0.47)	0.33 (0.47)
Higher sec. +	0/1	0.16 (0.36)	0.19 (0.39)	0.49 (0.50)
Number of children	0-7	4.67 (2.65)	2.44 (2.39)	1.81 (1.45)
Daughter	0/1	0.88 (0.32)	0.55 (0.49)	0.58 (0.49)

Findings

Perceptions of filial obligations at origin and destination

Table 2 provides an overview of the perceptions of filial obligation among each of the three distinguished groups of elderly. We find that Antillean elderly at origin agree most with the statement that children should provide care to their parents. Dutch agree the least with this and the Antillean immigrants take an intermediate position. Differences between each of the three groups are found to be significant ($p < .05$).

A similar pattern is found with respect to co-residence (second part Table 2). Again we find that Antillean older persons in the Antilles are more of the opinion that children should provide co-residence to their parents than is the case for Antillean immigrant elderly living in the Netherlands. The Dutch agree the least with the statements on the importance of children to provide co-residence to their parents.

Table 2 Agreement regarding filial obligations of children for elderly parents, by ethnic group, Means and standard deviations

	Provide care				Co-residence			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>ran</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Ra</i>	<i>N</i>
			<i>ge</i>				<i>nge</i>	
Antilleans at origin	1.76 _a	1.16	1-5	381	2.70 _a	1.48	1-5	374
Antillean immigrants	2.43 _b	1.04	1-5	264	3.12 _b	1.19	1-5	264
Dutch	2.84 _c	0.98	1-5	559	3.90 _c	0.89	1-5	561

Note: Means in the same column that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$ in the multiple comparison Least Significant Difference (LSD) test.

The importance of ethnic and socio-demographic background

The multivariate analyses confirm the descriptive findings on perceived filial obligations in providing care (Table 3). Controlling for individual background characteristics we find that respondents in the Antilles are still more likely to be of the opinion that children should provide care to their parents than is the case for native Dutch respondents. Immigrant elderly of Antillean origin residing in the Netherlands agree more with the filial obligation of providing care than Dutch but less than is the case for those at origin in the Antilles.

Furthermore, women are less of the opinion that children should care for their parents than is the case for men. In addition, we find an overall relation between marital status and perceived obligations. Older persons who are currently unmarried, either because they never married, are widowed or divorced, are more of the opinion that children should take care of their parents. Finally, we find that higher educated elderly are less likely to be of the opinion that children should care for their parents.

Other characteristics of the person, namely age and health condition, are not found to be of importance for perceptions of filial obligations of care. Also characteristics of the family reflected in the number of children and having at least one daughter are unrelated to the perceptions of older persons on this point.

Clear differences between the ethnic groups are also found when we analyze the perceptions regarding the question whether children should provide co-residence to their elderly parents (second part Table 3). Antillean elderly are more of the opinion that children should provide co-residence than Dutch. This difference is most pronounced for those living in the Antilles. These findings are in line with our hypothesis on ethnic differences.

Furthermore, we find that women are less of the opinion that children should take their parents in their homes than is the case for men. Those whose physical well-being is worse agree more strongly with providing co-residence. In addition, our findings show that compared to elderly who are married, those who are never married are of the opinion that children should provide a home to their parents. Finally, the analyses indicate that higher educated are more likely to be of the opinion that children have less obligations regarding providing a house for their elderly parents. Contrary to our hypotheses the other indicators of socio-demographic position and support necessity are not found to be related to the perceptions of filial obligations of co-residence.

Including interaction terms between the independent variables and ethnic origin provides insight in the extend to which each of the characteristics has the same importance among the three distinguished ethnic groups (not in Table). Overall we find the same effects for the three ethnic groups. Two differences stand out. First, among the Antilleans, both in the country of origin and in the Antilles, we find clear

differences between those who are married and those who are never-married. This is not the case for the Dutch. Second, gender is of importance for the perceptions of Dutch elderly whereas this is not the case for the Antilleans (at origin and destination).

Table 3 *Coefficients for predicting level of agreement with the role of children for providing care and co-residence*

	<i>Provide care</i>		<i>Co-residence</i>	
	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Ethnic origin (Dutch ref.)				
Antillean at origin	-1.926***	0.17	-1.369***	0.16
Antillean immigrant in NL	-0.517***	0.16	-0.888***	0.16
Age groups (70+ ref.)				
50-59	-0.235	0.17	-0.234	0.17
60-64	-0.253	0.17	0.286	0.17
65-70	-0.044	0.18	-0.047	0.18
Woman	0.236*	0.12	0.246*	0.12
Physical well being	-0.083	0.06	-0.223***	0.06
Marital status (married ref.)				
Never married	-0.585***	0.17	-0.667***	0.17
Widowed	-0.346*	0.16	-0.177	0.16
Divorced	-0.303*	0.15	-0.137	0.15
Educational level (max. elementary ref.)				
Lower-middle sec.	0.734***	0.16	0.716***	0.15
Higher sec. +	0.853***	0.17	0.933***	0.17
Number of children	-0.039	0.03	-0.058*	0.03
Daughter	0.170	0.13	0.123	0.13
Nagelkerke pseudo R^2	.26		.22	

Notes: B: Ordinal logistic regression coefficients; negative coefficients indicate stronger agreement s.e. standard error.

Preliminary conclusions

Our study focused on perceptions of elderly living in the Antilles, those of Antillean origin in the Netherlands and Dutch. Our unique data allow for a comparison of immigrants at origin and destination. Therefore a first step could be made to assess the importance of migration for perceptions of filial obligations.

We find overall support for our hypothesis on ethnic differences. Theories on acculturation are confirmed by our empirical tests. Elderly in the Antilles adhere most and Dutch elderly the least to norms of filial obligation. Antillean immigrants living in the Netherlands take an intermediate position. This indicates that among the latter group some adjustment to the perceptions predominant in the Netherlands may have taken place. The fact that care and housing to the elderly is provided by the welfare state arrangements available in the Netherlands may result in less necessity to provide these types of support by children.

Furthermore, it is of importance to note the clear differences in perceptions between those with no or limited education and the more highly educated for all ethnic groups alike. In line with our hypothesis the higher educated are more of the opinion that children have less support obligations. This also points to the fact that

ignoring educational attainment of the individual may result in an overestimation of the ethnic factor for perceptions on filial obligations.

The finding that the differences in perceptions of men and women are less pronounced among the Antilleans than is the case for the Dutch suggests that norms of filial obligation are overall stronger among the Antilleans. In addition, the fact that Dutch women adhere less to support obligations of children may indicate that they themselves have experienced the burden of taking care of one's parents. Immigrants with Antillean origin may not have this experience because they emigrated before their parents were old and Antilleans at origin may share the provision of support within the wider family network.

In line with the findings of Burr and Mutchler (1999) our results show that perceptions of filial obligation differ depending on the specific norm. Adherence to the importance that children provide care is found to be stronger than is the case for providing housing. This indicates that although instrumental support between parents and children may be perceived to be less important, the emotional bonds between the generations remain strong.

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