

Changes in Intergenerational Relationships in the Family and Young Adults' Relationships with Grandparents

Extended Abstract

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On the basis of the intergenerational solidarity theory, the parent-as-mediator perspective, and the kin-keeping framework, this study examines whether changes in intergenerational relationships in the family are associated with changes in contact and closeness between young adults and their grandparents. Specifically, this study investigates whether changes in both parents' ties to their offspring, parents, and parents-in-law matter for the grandparent-grandchild relationships. Drawing on data from Waves 2 and 3 of the National Survey of Families and Households, this study examines reports of 796 young adults (ages 18-34) on their relationships with grandparents.

As a result of recent increases in life expectancy, grandparents and grandchildren today spend more years in their respective intergenerational roles than in the past. Relationships between adult grandchildren and their grandparents are important for the wellbeing of both generations, because they can provide each other with various kinds of support. It is important, therefore, to examine factors that can facilitate a stronger grandparent-grandchild bond over the life course. Other intergenerational relationships in the family are likely important among these factors. This study extends prior research in this area by examining the role of parents' ties with young adults, their own parents, and parents-in-law, thus incorporating both within and across lineage intergenerational relationships, and by assessing whether changes in these intergenerational relationships in the family are associated with changes in grandchildren's relationships with each of their living grandparents over time.

The theory of intergenerational solidarity provides a general framework for examining interrelatedness and interdependence of intergenerational relationships in the family. This theory maintains that relationship quality between two family members can depend on patterns of interactions between other family members. The parent-as-mediator theory states that parents influence the nature of the grandparent-grandchild relationship. The kin-keeping perspectives, however, suggests that mothers are more influential for the grandparent-grandchild bond because women are major kin-keepers in the family. The present paper argues that not only mothers but also fathers can be important for the intergenerational solidarity between grandchildren and grandparents.

The findings of the present study suggest that it is important to examine grandparent-grandchild ties within a complete kinship network. In support of the parent-as-mediator theory, the findings indicate that both parents' intergenerational relationships are related to the grandparent-grandchild bond. Changes in parents' relationships with the grandchild and grandparent generations were found to be related to changes in the grandparent-grandchild bond within and across lineage lines. In general, improvements in the intergenerational relationships in the family were associated with increases in closeness between young adults and their grandparents. However, improvements in the mother-child relationship were related to decreases in contact between young adults and their maternal grandparents. In support of the kin-keeping perspective, the findings indicate that mothers' intergenerational relationships are influential for the grandparent-grandchild bond. However, contrary to the kin-keeping perspective, the results support the idea that not only mothers but also fathers can significantly contribute to

intergenerational solidarity between young adults and their grandparents within and across lineage lines.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of a web of intergenerational ties in the family. These ties are often particularly important today with the growing diversity in families and the challenges parents face in maintaining their marriage or partnership. Insights into the development of grandparent-grandchild relationships within a complete kinship network can help family professionals provide family members with better mediation, assistance, and support when family problems arise.