

## **Solidarity between Parents and Adult Children in Europe: Intra- and inter country variation of intergenerational solidarity and its determinants**

### ***Background***

In the second part of the last century, major demographic and socio-economic transformations have been taking place in Europe. The most notable *demographic* change is the ageing of Europe's populations, as a result of the transition from relatively high to (very) low fertility and increased life expectancy. On the *socio-economic* front, the most notable changes are: the expansion of education, the development, expansion and adaptation of welfare systems (including social protection, pension and early retirement schemes, provision of state care support), and the massive influx of women into the paid labour force. Along these transformations, Europe faced broader societal changes, like the processes of individualisation and secularisation, increasing geographic mobility, women's emancipation, and changing care preferences.

These demographic and socio-economic transformations undoubtedly have changed the family's relations and functions. There is a lively debate, however, whether it has resulted in 'lost' or 'changed' *intergenerational solidarity*. Those who believe in the 'decline of the family' are particularly concerned about the role that divorce and remarriage play in fracturing and weakening intergenerational ties. They further emphasize the negative consequences of the welfare state expansion for the foundation of intergenerational solidarity. Basic functions of the family have been transferred to other social institutions, lowering the obligation of families to care and therefore, the likelihood that families will withdraw, be substituted or even '*crowded out*' in their supportive role. In addition, the increased female participation in the workforce has lowered the ability and maybe also the willingness of women to support the older generation. Those who believe in 'changed' rather than 'lost' intergenerational solidarity, on the other hand, suggest a move from 'isolated nuclear families' to 'modified extended families'. They point to potential positive consequences of the increase in the duration of shared lives across generations. The extension of life has enhanced the availability of a 'latent network' of aging parents who can be activated to nurture and support family members in need. Furthermore, it is suggested that generous welfare state services complement rather than substitute for crowd out family care: because of public services, family members are better able to combine support with other commitments and preferences, resulting in a higher total coverage of need.

Despite earlier research findings, our knowledge of the current stage of intergenerational solidarity in Europe is limited. In part, this is because of the scope and working method of the previous studies. Firstly, many studies have been focussed on either 'families with young children' or 'older parents in need', giving only insight into the kin support obtained during a 'crisis'. It is likely that the incidence of intergenerational support at any particular time is much lower than the life-time prevalence of support. Moreover, variations between the individuals will be limited in case of examining quite homogeneous groups. Secondly, due to the main research subjects, there has been a significant bias toward examining specific domain of intergenerational solidarity – functional exchange (support systems) – with the risk of underestimating the strength and reciprocity of intergenerational relations and of exaggerating the extent to which the family is in decline. In case of studying more domains of intergenerational solidarity, the domains have largely been examined in isolation of one another, neglecting 'variegated' types and generalising about a 'modal' type of intergenerational solidarity. Moreover, the extent to which different types of support are involved in reciprocal exchanges (e.g. providing emotional support in return for practical help) remains in the shadow. Thirdly, in order to explain variations in intergenerational

solidarity between individuals, attention has often focused on the socio-demographic characteristics of one of the giving-receiving sides. This neglects the fact that the lives of the recipients and donors are connected (linked lives). Finally, most research on intergenerational solidarity has been carried out in single or only a few European countries and therefore, has not been able to consider in detail the impact of different degrees of welfare state involvement.

### ***Objective***

The main objectives of this paper are:

- (a) to gain insight into the within-country and between-country variations in the strength, nature and direction of intergenerational solidarity in Europe; and
- (b) to deepen our understanding of its determinants.

The focus will be on the relations between parents and their adult children, the critical nexus in intergenerational webs. Four areas of intergenerational solidarity will be taken into consideration: *structural* (geographic proximity), *associational* (contact frequency), *functional* (transfers of care assistance, household help, and financial support) and *normative* (family obligations). With regard to the first objective, the main research question we shall address is which types of parent-child solidarity can be distinguished in Europe and what their incidence is within and across the countries. With regard to the second objective, the research question is to what extent socio-demographic characteristics of *both* parents and adult children (reflecting the family structure, needs and resources) are associated with the different types of intergenerational solidarity.

### ***Data***

We will use data from the ‘Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe’ (SHARE), a multidisciplinary and cross-national data base of truly comparable micro data on, among other things, social background, health, socio-economic status, and support networks of some 22,000 European individuals aged 50 or older. SHARE was carried out in eleven European countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. These countries evince different welfare state regimes (private versus public oriented) and family cultures (family oriented versus individualist), and also reflect elements of a north-south divide (from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean).

### ***Methodology***

Unlike most previous studies which rank people within and across countries along separate solidarity measures, we will contrast different solidarity measures simultaneously, resulting in different intergenerational solidarity types. In this way, we gain a better understanding of the current complexity and contradictions of parent-child relationships. Therefore, we will start to employ *latent class analysis* (LCA) to examine the *typological* structure underlying measurements of intergenerational solidarity. Next, after identifying several types of intergenerational relationships, we will examine the distribution of these types in the population within and between the eleven European countries in question.

In the second stage of the analyses, we will examine the extent to which these differences in solidarity typologies persist in the context of family structure and each generation’s constraints, opportunities for support, needs and resources and whether, after controlling for these socio-demographic characteristics, country differences still remain. In order to do so, we will use *multinomial logistic regression analysis*. The socio-demographic variables used in the multivariate analysis cover *both* parents’ characteristics and characteristics of the (closest living, most contacted or most supported) adult child. The former include, among other things, the respondent’s age (birth cohort), sex, partnership/marital status, activity status,

health, and socio-economic status. The available information on the child covers, among other things, age, sex, partnership/marital status, activity status, and own parenthood. Additionally, special attention will be given to the within-country and between-country variation, to discover whether similar outcomes are produced across the eleven European countries, as structuralists would assume, or alternatively that they are nationally specific, as expected if cultural influences are strong (i.e., cultural attributes modify the effects of social structure).

### ***Expected results and outcomes***

We expect that our research findings will show that intergenerational solidarity still prevails in most European families, although there are not negligible intra- and inter-country differences in (the distribution of) styles of parent-child relationships; there is no one ‘modal’ type within and across European countries.

Overall, the balance of support transfers is expected to be from parents to their adult children. Unlike practical household help and financial assistance, however, personal care received by parents from children is expected to be higher than personal care provided by parents to children, especially when parents are in times of need.

Given the matrilineal tilt often found in family relations (women are generally the kin keepers and those who tend to be expected to take responsibility for the care of other generations), we predict that mothers and daughters have more cohesive intergenerational relations than do fathers and sons. So, mothers will be more likely than fathers to be integrated with their adult children, and particularly with their daughters. Further, given the unique strengths of the mother-daughter bond in terms of greater lifelong contact and exchanges of functional assistance, we also expect that mothers and fathers will have qualitatively different types of relations with daughters and sons, respectively. In addition, the key supporting role is likely to be played by parents as their adult children are in their family-building phase, especially if their children combine child care with a paid job. Finally, the divorce or separation of parents is expected to weaken intergenerational relations, while marital status of the adult child is expected to exert little influence on relationship qualities. Moreover, the magnitude of the negative effects of marital disruption in the parental generation is likely to be more pronounced in relations with fathers than in relations with mothers.

Country differences are expected to be more evident in the nature of intergenerational solidarity than in its strength. We hypothesise that the distribution of typologies of parent-child relationships differs from country to country, reflecting both the influence of individual agency and social-cultural structure (reflecting, among other things, the degree of welfare state involvement, level of public services, family versus individualist orientation).