

Cohort change in perceptions of filial obligations among immigrants and Dutch

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Introduction

Norms on filial obligation are often supposed to differ between ethnic groups. Immigrants from non-western countries come from societies without welfare state provisions in which family support is strong compared to the western host societies with welfare state arrangements (Bolzman, Poncioni–Derigo, Vial, & Fibbi, 2004; Reher, 1998). How and to what extent the immigration experience affects perceptions regarding filial obligation is, however, still rather unexplored. In addition, the available research focuses on North-America and much less is known on how these compare to the European situation. Given the provision of welfare state arrangements in many European societies, like the Netherlands, one could assume that perceptions regarding care for the elderly are different from those societies in which the state offers only very limited support to families in this respect. However, as most welfare state arrangements were developed in the 1960-70s the older cohorts of Dutch also were raised in a time that intergenerational support obligations were necessarily high. Overall we may assume that there will be a decline in norms of filial obligations in the younger cohorts. This decline may, however, be stronger among immigrant groups and apply especially for those who are more acculturated to the Dutch society. This change in perceptions between the cohorts may create serious intergenerational tensions in particular in immigrant families. It is therefore relevant to get more advanced insights into the determinants of norms of filial obligations. In particular now that a substantial and growing share of the population in many western countries has an immigrant origin. In the Netherlands, for example, around 10% of the 16.4 million inhabitants originate from non-Western backgrounds.

The aims of this paper are twofold: first we question whether perceptions of filial obligations differ between different cohorts of immigrants and Dutch. Secondly, we explore differences in perceptions between cohorts among each of the ethnic groups. We analyze and compare cohort changes for each of the groups and assess the importance of acculturation for cohort change among the immigrant groups. Our study focuses on the Netherlands and includes Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese, Antilleans as well as native Dutch.

Theory

Norms of filial obligations refer to a societal attitude towards the duty of (adult) children to meet the needs of their ageing parents (Seelbach & Die 1988; Walker *et al.* 1990). 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. It is argued that an individual's expectations of and attitudes toward filial obligation develop during socialisation, by personal experiences as well as by observing relationships between family members of different generations (Goldscheider & Lawton 1998; Burr & Mutchler 1999).

Theories on '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 (Kagitcibasi 1996; Nauck 2007; Todd 1985). It can be assumed that many immigrant older people in The Netherlands were socialized in such kinship-oriented societies, where intergenerational interdependence was a prerequisite for a family's material wellbeing. Based on these theories of different family-systems immigrants in the Netherlands are expected to have grown up in more traditional group oriented societies. Even though immigrant children are raised in the Netherlands, parental socialization into ethnic specific behavior is of importance for the perceptions and behavior of young immigrants (De Valk & Liefbroer, 2007). We therefore hypothesize that all cohorts of immigrants will be more often of the opinion that children should support their parents than is the case for Dutch (*H1*).

According to acculturation theories immigrants will focus their perceptions to their country of residence. This is in particular the case for immigrant children who are born or largely raised in the receiving society. Given the development of the welfare state we can assume that over time and generations attitudes towards support of the elderly have changed. Whereas the older generation still sees the necessity of support provided by children this might be much less the case for the younger generations. Although the effect of generational shift may be universal it can be expected to be even larger for immigrant families. As many of the older immigrants were born and raised in the countries of origin they may still attach to the culture norms they were socialized in. The younger generation of immigrants, however, is more likely to be raised in the Netherlands and their perceptions may thus be more similar to the Dutch. Based on these notions we expect that older cohorts of immigrants will be more of the opinion that children should support their parents than younger cohorts of immigrants (*H2*).

Acculturation theories suggest that over time immigrants adjust their perceptions and orientations to the cultural patterns of the country of residence (Alba and Nee, 1997). Living in the host society for a longer period of time or being born in the host society increases exposure to new values. This line of reasoning would lead to expectations of larger cohort differences in the importance attached to filial obligation among immigrant families than is the case for natives (*H3*).

Finally, the individual level of acculturation can indicate the orientation towards the host society. Those immigrants who are more oriented towards Dutch society may therefore have perceptions of filial obligations that are more similar to the perceptions of the Dutch in the same cohort (*H4*).

Data

Data from the first round of the *Netherlands Kinship Panel Study* (Dykstra, Kalmijn, Knijn, Komter, Liefbroer, & Mulder, 2004) are used. We include the main and immigrant sample. The main sample is a nationally representative sample of about 8,000 Dutch respondents. The immigrant sample was drawn from 13 Dutch cities in which 50 per cent of the immigrants from the four main ethnic groups live. It includes 1,400 immigrants with a Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese or Antillean origin. The topics covered in the main and the immigrant questionnaires were similar, and provide comparable data. The respondents were interviewed in their homes, in most cases by an interviewer of the same ethnic background. All interviews followed a structured questionnaire in Dutch that was available in Turkish and Arabic as well. In our study immigrants were compared with Dutch respondents living in the 13 cities in which the immigrants were sampled. We include all respondents aged 18-80 years in our analyses resulting in a total sample of 3,200 respondents.

Measures

Dependent variable

We use three variables related to filial obligation of children towards parents. Respondents were asked (on a five point Likert scale) whether they agreed with the statement that “children who live nearby should visit their parents at least once a week”, “children should care for their sick parents”, and “if parents are old, children should provide co-residence for them”. Answer categories ranged from 1) fully agree (group oriented) to 5) fully disagree (individualistic oriented).

Analyses

Descriptive analyses on perceptions are provided by ethnic group. Differences in (mean) group opinions and differences between cohorts are tested using posthoc multi-group comparisons (Least Significant Difference). We use regression analyses to study cohort changes and the effect of acculturation on perceptions of filial obligations among immigrants.

First results

Comparing the perceptions of the total group of immigrants and Dutch shows that around one-half of the Turkish and Moroccan respondents agreed with the statement that children who live nearby should visit their parents at least once a week, that 36 per cent of the Surinamese agreed with this statement, as did 16 per cent of the Antilleans and the Dutch. By contrast, three to four per cent of Turks and Moroccans did not agree with the statement as against 26 per cent of the Dutch. Testing differences between the ethnic groups using a post hoc LSD comparison (not in Table) shows that the opinions of the Turks and Moroccans did differ significantly from each other. All other groups differ significantly from each other as well as from the Turkish and Moroccan respondents.

When respondents were asked if when parents are old, children should provide co-residence for them, ethnic differences are even more pronounced. No less than 84 percent of the Moroccans (strongly) agree with this statement against only 11 percent of the Dutch. Turks, Surinamese and Antilleans (in descending order) hold a middle position, but clearly are more of the opinion that children should provide co residence to their parents than the Dutch. The results of the LSD post-hoc test (not in Table) confirm that there are significant differences between each of the five ethnic groups.

Finally, around 40 percent of Dutch respondents (strongly) agree that adult children should take care of their parents when these are sick. Again, all immigrant groups (strongly) agree with this statement more often, with 65 percent of the Antilleans and up to 90 percent of the Moroccans think this is a child's duty. Our test for group differences (not in Table) revealed that the Surinamese and Antillean did not differ from each other but their opinion differed from all other groups. Overall, these bivariate comparisons indicate that the Dutch agreed least with all statements and their views differed from each of the immigrant groups.

Moreover, we examined differences between cohorts within groups, by distinguishing three age categories: those aged 18-30, 31-50, and those 51-80. Contrary to our expectation the findings do not show that younger cohorts of immigrants who most likely are more acculturated in Dutch society agree less with filial obligations. For the Turkish, Moroccan

and Surinamese group no significant cohort differences are found for any of our dependent variables. Only for the Antillean group, we see that the older cohorts agree more with the statement that children should take care of their parents when they are sick, but no generational differences are found for the other statements. Surprisingly, most cohort differences are found for the Dutch. Younger Dutch respondents agree significantly more with the statements that children should take care of their sick parents and should provide co-residence for their elderly parents than do Dutch elderly. On the other hand, older Dutch respondents more strongly agree with the statement that children should visit their parents at least once a week than do younger respondents.

The multivariate analyses will provide further insight in cohort change and the role of acculturation.

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