

Intergenerational Functional Solidarity in the Family: The Case of Latvia

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INTRODUCTION

Relationship among family members belonging to different generations has always been the subject of much discussion both in the classical literature and in the scientific world. Economic, demographic and social processes, along with the trends of globalisation, migration, emancipation, longer life expectancy and population aging, as well as individualism and physical distancing, weakening emotional and social ties, are changing not only the family structure itself (Progress of the World's... 2019; Dzenovska 2006) and family functional possibilities, but also create new conditions for family interaction. Traditional family expectations in Latvia have been associated with the help and support among family members, especially of adult children to parents in their old age. Support from older parents in the care of the younger generation is also expected. Changes in the family structure and the delegation of family functions to institutions raise the question of whether the family continues to provide help and support to its members and whether parents can rely on the support by their children.

Despite the importance of the problem, there is a lack of studies that focus on intergenerational relationships in the family; this topic has not been widely studied in Latvia. A couple of research can be mentioned: Banceviča (2012) has focused on the study of intergenerational solidarity with the emphasis on the macro level; and some aspects – such as views on support, care for grandchildren and mutual support network – are covered by the study of the University of Latvia and the Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre within the framework of the Generation and Gender Programme (Latvijas ģimenes paaudzēs 2019). Our study focuses on some aspects related to the exchange of help between adult children and their parents. The theoretical framework consists of Bengtson's and Roberts' theory of intergenerational solidarity in the family. The aim of the paper is to discuss the manifestations of the functional dimension of intergenerational solidarity in the family and its influencing factors.

Empirical data were collected by the method of web-survey, which took place between June 2019 and January 2020. The sample ($n = 410$) consists of adult children with at least one parent alive. Data were collected from population of Latvia on different aspects of intergenerational solidarity, particularly about its functional dimension, and socio-economic and socio-demographic factors that promote or reduce the mutual exchange of help and support among adult children and parents.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY IN THE FAMILY AND ITS FUNCTIONAL DIMENSION

The phenomenon of intergenerational solidarity was introduced and its research was initiated in North America. Combining findings of sociological and social psychological studies and theories about the family and its development trends, Bengtson and Roberts (1991) developed their own theory of intergenerational solidarity in the family and elaborated a model for its measurement.

Intergenerational solidarity in the family is defined as a social cohesion between generations or an intergenerational link between parents and children when children have grown up and form their own families; it is a multifaceted, multidimensional construct reflected in six distinct elements of parent-child interaction: affection, association, consensus, resource sharing, the strength of family norms, and the opportunity structure for parent-child interaction (Bengtson, Roberts 1991; Bengtson, Oyama 2007; Yilmaz et al. 2018).

When studying intergenerational solidarity in the family, Bengtson and Roberts (1991) do not consider the family in its traditional sense and do not separate the family by type and composition, rather attention is paid to the basis of the intergenerational solidarity – the relationship between the adult child and the parent, and vice versa, and its different manifestations within six dimensions: associational, affectual, consensual, functional, normative and structural solidarity. Although not all researchers fully agree with Bengtson's model, criticising it for focusing too much on solidarity and harmony, ignoring conflict and nonconsensual aspects of family relationships, this, as Lowenstein (2007) points out, has been a dominant paradigm during last decades.

Researchers have not always studied all six dimensions; most of the research has focused on only one dimension – functional solidarity, which is understood as mutual support, helping and exchange of resources between generations (Bengtson, Settersten 2016; Bengtson, Roberts 1991), containing three main types of support (Kalmijn 2005):

- a) practical – helping parents with household chores, caring for parents if they are sick or disabled, or helping parents raise children (care for grandchildren);
- b) financial – money that parents give to their children or vice versa. Heritage is also included in this category;
- c) social – visiting and paying attention to parents. Often this is understood as emotional support.

Functional solidarity can be looked upon through the prism of altruism (Wolff et al. 2005) and exchange theory (Kalmijn 2005; Coimbra, Mendonca 2013). Exchange can take different forms, for example, as children grow up, parents invest in the child's future, but adult children repay the 'debt' to their parents. Another model sees the assistance provided by an adult child to parents in exchange for future benefits. This exchange includes a certain element of altruism, as heritage and other potential benefits in the future are not guaranteed, especially if there are other heirs. The most common is direct exchange where children help their parents inside and outside the household, while parents help to raise their grandchildren.

Analysis of previous studies shows that researchers focus on various factors, that have impact on functional solidarity: the gender of an adult child (Di Nicola, 2015), marital status and family composition (Connidis, 2015), economic situation and available resources (Ribar, Wilhelm, 2006), culture and traditions (Koyano, 2008). The intensity of support, without the above-mentioned, is affected also by the child's occupation, the parent's health condition, as well as the distance between the adult child's and parent's place of residence, and other factors. Several of them are addressed in this study.

RESEARCH METHOD AND SAMPLE

To collect empirical data, quantitative methodology – web-survey method was used. The call to participate in the study was placed on social networks. 410 questionnaires were completed by Latvian residents who have at least one parent alive. 71% of respondents have both parents alive. In that case, one had to be chosen for whom information would be provided. As a result, 87% of respondents chose the mother and 13% the father. About 1/3 of the sample has retired parents but the majority – 65% – provided answers about the parent which had not reached the age of retirement (it was 63 years and 6 months in 2019 and 63 years and 9 months in 2020).

The questionnaire was based on the Bengtson's and Roberts' model of intergenerational solidarity in the family. To measure functional solidarity, a block of questions was included on the provision and receipt of support within the household (house cleaning, laundry, cooking, personal hygiene, etc.) and outside the household (transport assistance, joint shopping, doctor visits, gardening, etc.). Also questions on financial and emotional support were included.

Descriptive statistics and *p*-value (if it is less than 0.05, the result is considered as statistically significant) are used for data analysis.

The sample (*n* = 410) consists of 81% women and 19% men aged 18 to 62 years, median = 31 years (standard deviation = 11.01). More than a half are married or living with a partner, however, about one in three is single. This is understandable when looking at the age structure of the respondents where younger individuals (almost 3/4 are up to 39 years old) dominate. The age structure also influences the occupation of the respondents, so in this study, about a third are students (See Figs. 1–3).

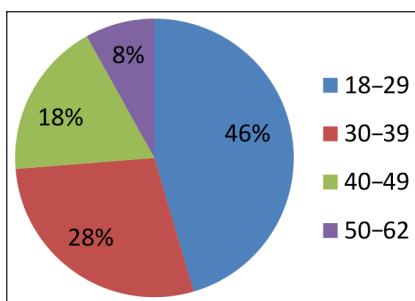


Fig. 1. Sample structure by age (%)

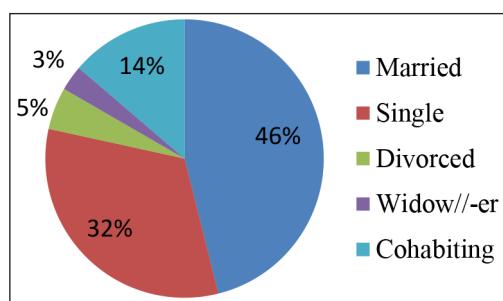


Fig. 2. Sample structure by marital status (%)

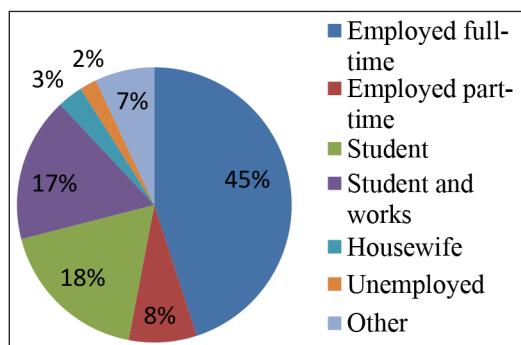


Fig. 3. Sample structure by employment (%)

More than a half of the respondents – 60% – have a child/children; and 88% have a sister or brother. The respondents are quite well-off by their self-assessment: 12% rate their current financial situation as very good, 39% as good, 44% as average, only 4% as bad, and 0.5% as very bad. The fact that every fifth respondent lives with the parent in the same household certainly affects mutual relations and the functional solidarity in the family.

It should be noted that the sample is not representative. The composition of the sample influences the results obtained and limits the degree of generalization, however, it allows identifying the dominant trends in the manifestations of the functional dimension of intergenerational solidarity in the family.

EXCHANGE OF HELP BETWEEN AN ADULT CHILD AND A PARENT

In the study, the functional solidarity takes the form of mutual assistance within and outside the household, financial support and emotional support provided between the adult child and the parent. The study also includes the help received from parents in caring for grandchildren.

The results obtained on the trends of the provision and receipt of intergenerational support in this study are similar to the trends observed in other countries, for example, Norway, England, Germany, Spain and Israel (Lovenstein, Daatland 2006). More than a half of the respondents (59%) has helped their parents with household work (household cleaning, laundry, cooking, personal hygiene, etc.) in the last 3 months, much more – three quarters (76%) have been involved in providing support outside the household (help with transport, general shopping, doctor visits, gardening, etc.). There are more respondents who have provided assistance than those who have received it, with the exception of financial support, where the opposite trend is observed. However, a quite significant difference in respect to financial support can be noted between our results in Latvia and other countries: it is provided by 43% (in the above-mentioned countries 4–23%) and received by 55% (7–47%, respectively). There are also some differences in the direction of financial flow. Higher rates of financial support in Latvia may reflect different economic situations of the countries in question, but they can also be caused by cultural-historical factors (Coimbra, Mendonca 2013), as well as family traditions and the financial situation of family members. In general, the data allow concluding that various manifestations of the functional solidarity are found in Latvian families represented in our sample.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

Previous studies (Silverstein et al. 1995; Grundy, Henretta 2006; Ribar, Wilhelm 2006) reveal the impact of socio-demographic and socio-economic factors on intergenerational solidarity in the family, including functional solidarity.

GENDER AND AGE

Analysing the functional assistance by the adult child's gender (son or daughter), data show that both women and men report higher rates of provided than received help. There is no significant gender difference ($p = 0.38–0.43$ ($p > 0.05$)) in provided help in the household and outside it (Table 1).

The difference appears in receiving help of childcare: adult daughters get it almost twice as more as adult sons (45 and 21%, respectively ($p = 0.016 < 0.05$)). It can be assumed that this is because the daughters are emotionally closer to their mothers (Dykstra, Fokkema 2011),

Table 1. Provided and received support by gender and age (%)

Gender	Help provided to parents			Help received from parents			
	In the household	Outside the household	Financial support	In the household	Outside the household	Financial support	Child care
Male	56	77	49	46	49	49	21
Female	60	76	45	43	56	56	45
Age							
18–29	76	76	34	54	74	72	29
30–39	47	76	43	44	45	44	62
40–49	35	78	49	24	30	41	38
50–62	59	71	82	29	35	29	35

and the fact that women are still more involved in childcare in many families is also having an impact, so more women than men report received assistance from their parents in this area. The results of the study also show some gender differences in the provision and receipt of financial support between a child-son and a child-daughter: more daughters receive than the sons, and fewer daughters provide. Thus, it can be pointed out that the gender of an adult child has some effect on intergenerational functional solidarity. However, our results differ from those obtained in the studies in other countries, for example, The Netherlands (Dykstra, Fokkema 2011) and Germany (Nauck, Steinbach 2009), where daughters more often provide domestic help to parents than sons.

The results obtained in relation to the age at first seem surprising and contradict the expected – the greatest exchange of help in the household and also outside it takes place in the youngest respondents (18–29 years) and their parents. This may be explained by the fact that young, financially dependent adult children live with their parents and share a common household. However, other age groups are also involved in supporting their parents, especially outside the household. The financial support provided to parents increases with the age of the respondents; up to 82% of those aged 50–62 have provided it. The opposite trend is observed in receiving financial support from parents, which decreases from 72% in the youngest age group to 29% in the oldest. A similar trend in relation to help received from parents both at home and outside the household is observed.

Analysis of the data shows that the age of the adult child affects the intensity and direction of the flow of assistance, but this should not be seen in isolation from other factors that may be related to the respondent's age, such as occupation, financial situation, having children, etc., and their impact on intergenerational functional solidarity should not be neglected.

MARITAL STATUS

The marital status of the adult child, as well as having own children in the family, are factors that have a significant impact on functional solidarity. As the data show, there are significant differences between married and unmarried children in different forms of support (Table 2).

The results show that single adult children are more likely to provide functional assistance to their parents than married children, at the same time they receive more financial support from their parents. This is contrary to what Dykstra (1998) has found, but to some extent

Table 2. Provided and received support by marital status (%)

Marital status	Help provided to parents			Help received from parents			
	In the household	Outside the household	Financial support	In the household	Outside the household	Financial support	Child care
Married	46	74	41	33	47	48	54
Single	73	77	32	58	67	73	20
Divorced	60	80	80	50	20	40	60
Widow/-er	67	67	100	0	33	0	33
Cohabiting	67	78	56	44	63	41	37
With a child	47	75	49	34	43	45	16
Without children	77	77	34	57	72	69	0

is in line with Connidis' (2015) findings on greater support for parents of unmarried daughters without children. Our results with high probability can be explained by the composition of our sample where young individuals prevail. A significant part of single adult children continue living in their parents' homes and are more likely to provide parents with functional assistance in exchange for financial support from them. Another argument that may explain the results obtained is that adult unmarried children are mostly young people who are continuing their education and are not financially stable, so the parents support them.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

General trend is that those who have more resources – finances and time – available are more likely to support their parents or adult children (Ribar, Wilhelm 2006). Our results are somewhat different in this respect. According to the results of the study, students provide the most help to their parents, not only in the household, but also outside. At the same time, unlike working or non-working adult children, they receive the most financial assistance from a parent. However, adult children who combine studying with work do not have the opportunity to provide regular domestic help to their parents possibly due to lack of time, but they help their parents outside the household and are less dependent on their parents financially (Table 3).

The analysis shows that there is a significant impact of the time dimension in the provision of help and possibly also the age of the respondents and whether they share a household with their parents play some role. Additional research is needed to explain why non-working adult children help their parents so little in the household. It is also difficult to explain the fact that about half of non-working adult children provide financial assistance to their parents.

The results of the study show the effect of self-assessment of financial situation on the exchange of help, especially in the household. The general trend is that better financial situation of the adult child reduces the involvement of both children and parents in the exchange of support. The flow of financial assistance is mostly from parents to children with a poor or very poor material condition. Interestingly, wealthy children also receive financial support from their parents (21%). These results allow assumption that financial assistance is affected not only by the availability or lack of resources, but also by other factors.

Table 3. Provided and received support by occupation and financial situation (%)

	Help provided to parents			Help received from parents			
	In the household	Outside the household	Financial support	In the household	Outside the household	Financial support	Child care
Occupation							
Full-time	48	72	42	30	40	42	40
Part-time	67	93	47	47	47	40	53
Student	84	84	30	65	81	78	32
Student and works	66	74	54	49	66	66	43
Does not work	36	55	45	55	36	64	45
Financial situation – self-assessment							
Very good	42	71	42	42	42	21	29
Good	58	76	48	39	53	59	51
Average	62	77	41	45	57	59	35
Bad/very bad	90	80	30	70	80	60	30

STATUS OF PARENTS

The logical assumption is that as parents get older their health deteriorates, so they need more support. The opposite trend follows from the results of this study, especially with regard to help to parents in the household (Table 4).

In respect to financial support differences between two groups of parents – retired and non-retired – are significant ($p = 0.00$; $p < 0.05$): more children provide it to retired than non-retired parents and fewer receive it from retired parents. The trend is understandable given the low level of pensions in Latvia (CSB 2020), thus the financial opportunities of pensioners are limited.

Table 4. Provided and received support by parent's situation (%)

	Help provided to parents			Help received from parents			
	In the household	Outside the household	Financial support	In the household	Outside the household	Financial support	Child care
Status of a parent							
Non-retired	68	77	35	47	64	64	39
Retired	43	75	57	36	38	37	44
Health condition of a parent							
Very good	78	83	22	67	78	67	22
Good	54	76	35	39	54	57	42
Average	64	74	55	49	58	53	47
Bad/very bad	50	75	50	25	29	42	29

Two trends emerge from the analysis of the impact of parent's health condition on the exchange of functional assistance. One that might contradict expectations is that more respondents report helping parents in good health than those in poor health. Here, the explanation may be related to the sample structure. The second trend is that with the deteriorating of health of parents, increases the number of children providing and decreases the number of those receiving financial support.

Regarding mutual emotional support between family members, it can be stated that 86% of adult children emotionally support their parent and 80% receive it from their parent. Emotional support is not affected by age, gender or socio-economic factors, and is similar to other research findings.

CONCLUSIONS

Functional solidarity is one of the six components of intergenerational solidarity in the family. It includes both the provision and receipt of assistance between adult children and parents, as well as mutual financial and emotional support. Parents continue to help their children even after they have grown up and have their own families, and adult children support parents.

The results of the study show that the flow of help between an adult child and a parent is unevenly distributed, the direction and intensity of help are influenced by several factors: adult child's age, marital status and existence of a child, occupation and financial situation. Important for intergenerational functional solidarity are also the status of parents – retired or non-retired, as well as the health condition. Unlike other studies, this does not show a significant effect of the adult child's gender on functional solidarity ($p > 0.05$), which probably is determined by the study sample.

The study revealed the following trends: younger adult children provide more support in the household and receive more financial support than other age groups; respondents having a child receive and provide less assistance than respondents who do not have children; financial assistance from parents is more frequent to women than men, and if the financial situation of an adult child is worse. Depending on the health condition of the parents, there are two trends observed – the exchange of help is more intensive with parents in good health than those who are in poor health, and the worse the health of parents is, the more likely adult children receive less support than they provide.

To allow deeper and more substantiated analysis and explanation of the impact of different factors on intergenerational functional solidarity in Latvia, a more in-depth study with a larger and representative sample would be needed.

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Kartų funkcinis solidarumas šeimoje: Latvijos atvejis

Santrauka

Globalizacija, migracija, visuomenės senėjimas ir kiti socialiniai procesai veikia šeimą ir šeimos narių santykius, ypač skirtinį kartų ryšius šeimose.

Straipsnyje dėmesys skiriamas V. L. Bengtsono ir R. E. L. Robertso pristatytam kartų solidarumui šeimoje, ypač vienai jo dimensijų – funkciniam solidarumui, aiškinamasi, kaip jų veikia socialiniai demografiniai ir socialiniai ekonominiai veiksnių. Empiriniai duomenys buvo gauti atlikus internetinę apklausą 2019 m. birželio – 2020 m. sausio mėn. Latvijoje ($N = 410$).

Gauti rezultatai rodo, kad bendra paramos tarp kartų teikimo ir gavimo tendencija yra panaši į kitose šalyse pastebėtias tendencijas. Funkcinį solidarumą veikia suaugusio vaiko amžius, šeiminė padėtis, profesija ir finansinė padėtis, taip pat tévų statusas – ar jie yra senatvės pensininkai, ar ne. Reikšmingą poveikį kartų funkciniam solidarumui atlieka tévų sveikatos būklė. Mažiau svarbi yra vaiko lytis, išskyrus finansinės paramos sritį.

Raktažodžiai: kartų solidarumas šeimoje, funkcinis solidarumas, suaugusių vaikų ir tévų tarpusavio paramos mainai