Informal support for the elderly in selected European countries from the perspective of caregivers

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Main purpose:

The goal of the current study is to investigate the extent and type of non-financial and informal support provided for people from outside of the household, in the context of individual, family-related, social, and economic characteristics of people providing help.

Partial objectives:

- a) to identify the individual characteristics of people providing non-financial support for the elderly from outside of the own household,
- b) to determine the impact of functioning of supporters in social networks on their involvement in non-financial help for the elderly from outside of the household.

The main goal is connected with the following hypotheses:

- 1. The frequency of aid is explained by the individual characteristics of caregivers such as age, sex, education, professional activity, and health status;
- 2. Provision of support varies depending on functioning of caregivers in social networks.

Population aging is a typical phenomenon related with demographic changes in developed societies. It is a process whose consequences are experienced in various areas of individual and social life. One of these consequences is demand for support, which will become bigger even when the people's health status is improving. Providing care for the people in need involves first and foremost people from the nearest environment (family, friends, neighbors) which constitute an informal support network (Grotowska-Leder 2008, Wóycicka 2009, Abramowska-Kmon, Kotowska 2009, Abramowska-Kmon 2011). Resources possessed by the people providing support are shaped, among other things, by demographic processes which influence the size and structure of families and households of those expecting support, as well as those providing help. Decrease in mortality results in the extension of vertical relationships (Bengtson, Rosenthal, Burton, 1990, Uhlenberg 1993). In addition, people tend to live longer

together as partners, parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. For people whose relationships were broken (when no new relationship arose), a decrease in mortality may mean longer life without a partner (de Jong Gierveld de Valk Blommesteijn, 2001). A decline in fertility, in turn, reduces horizontal relationships (Knipscheer 1992).

In consequence, people providing help may count on a limited support within this activity. Moreover, some difficulties arise (mainly related with time) in connection with the participation of caregivers in the labor market (Stypińska, Perek-Białas, 2014). These processes have an influence on relationships between older and younger generations, both in a family and society. Functioning within a network of family links between generations provides for a special nature of such relations within the context of mutual obligations and responsibility, as well as resultant flows of support from older to younger generations and vice versa. They are shaped by cultural, social and legal standards (Saraceno, Keck 2008). The responsibility for young and older generations is shared between the family (informal support) and the state and various institutions (formal, institutional support). The distribution of these obligations varies depending on a country and (among other things) on the type of a welfare state (Saraceno, Keck 2010, Dykstra, Komter 2012).

Therefore, we investigate informal support connected with practical help facilitating people's functioning in everyday's life, provided for elderly people in selected European countries. The provided support may involve personal care (e.g. dressing, bathing or showering, eating, getting in or out of bed, using the toilet) and practical household help (e.g. with home repairs, gardening, transportation, shopping, household chores or help with paperwork, such as filling out forms, settling financial or legal matters). We conduct our investigation from the perspective of caregivers.

In order to demonstrate the impact of individual characteristics of caregivers and their involvement in social networks on providing support, probit and logit models will be applied. Data extracted from a study "Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE)" will be used as a source of information. Based upon the literature (e.g. Craveiro et al. 2013, Fiori et al. 2007) and the quality of the data available (from the study SHARE) social networks of caregivers will be examined by following variables: size of the network (the number of named members in the personal social network), physical proximity of social network members (proportion of social network members living at a distance less than five km), quality of contact in social network (average perceived emotional closeness provided by

social network members) and participation in social activities (number of social activities in which the respondent had been engaged for example, voluntary, taking part in activities of a religious or in a political, going to a sport or social club).

The expected result of the research is to identify the conditions leading to the involvement of relatives and people from outside of the family in assisting the elderly. The obtained results can be used to provide directions for social policy supporting caregivers of older people.

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