

European Population Conference

EPC 2016

Abstract submission

Intergenerational flows of support between parents and adult children.

Authors:

Maria Evandrou, Jane Falkingham, Madelin Gomez-Leon and Athina Vlachantoni
ESRC Centre for Population Change and Centre for Research on Ageing
Faculty of Social, Human and Mathematical Sciences, University of Southampton, UK

Short abstract

Understanding patterns of intergenerational support is critical in the context of population ageing and changes in the policy landscape of health and social care provision. Existing research has usually analysed intergenerational support at a given time in the individuals' lifecourse. However, the lack of empirical data has rendered the study of the dynamic nature of such support a more difficult task. Using data from the 1958 National Child Development Survey, this paper examines the extent to which the receipt of help from one's parents in early adulthood affects the chances of adult-children to reciprocate with support later in life (when the children are aged 50). Results from the research show that three-quarters of both men and women had received some kind of help from their parents earlier in life, and more than half provided some kind of support towards their parents at age 50. Patterns of support received and provided across the lifecourse are markedly different by gender, with sons in early adulthood being more likely to have received help with finances and accommodation, and daughters with childcare, finances and emotional support. The results also show that the provision of support to parents was associated with having received support earlier in life. However, there seems to be a 'gradient of reciprocity' towards parents, which affects the type of help provided by adult children. Highly demanding types of help provided to parents are not necessarily associated with the past receipt of support, which corresponds with the altruism model (especially for daughters), while less demanding types of help are associated with the past receipt of support and correspond to reciprocity norms (especially for sons). Such findings have implications for the provision of informal care towards future cohorts of older people, and by extension, the organisation of formal systems of social care.

Extended abstract

The population ageing process is linked to an increasing proportion of individuals at older ages. In the UK, the proportion of population 65 and over was 16 per cent in 2011 and it is expected to increase to 23 per cent by 2035 (ONS, 2012a, 2012b). Along with the increasing population at older ages, a delay of the onset of permanent chronic illnesses and disabilities is occurring; shifting to later life the difficulties and needs associated to these conditions (Christensen, K. *et al.*, 2009). The increasing needs for support in individuals facing difficulties to cope with basic and instrumental activities of daily living become a major concern to sustain an active and healthy ageing (Deeken, J. F. *et al.*, 2003; Evandrou, M. and Glaser, K., 2004; Pillemer, K. and Sutor, J. J., 2014; Vlachantoni, A. *et al.*, 2011). In this respect, the provision of help towards older individuals is a key issue contributing to the maintenance of an adequate health and independent living standards for our ageing population.

Support from the family is one of the main sources of informal help that older individuals receive (Chiatti, C. *et al.*, 2013; Glaser, K., Evandrou, M. and Tomassini, C., 2006; Henz, U., 2009; Vlachantoni, A., 2010). Within families, children are the second most common source of help after spouses/partners. In the context of an increasing demand for informal care, understanding of factors associated with care provided by the children is of particular interest, since it is a resource that could reduce the need for formal care.

Longitudinal data recording transfers at different points in time is needed in order to better capture the nature of the exchange between family members. Recent research on intergenerational support has used longitudinal cohort data to control for dynamics and exchanges over time (Alessie, R., Angelini, V. and Pasini, G., 2014; Grundy, E., 2005; Grundy, E. and Read, S., 2012; Silverstein, M. *et al.*, 2002) while some research has used retrospective information from the same individuals (Henretta, J. C. *et al.*, 1997; Whitbeck, L. B., Simons, R. L. and Conger, R. D., 1991). Most studies using longitudinal data have found positive influences of early support received from parents on later provision of help to older parents with a stronger association for sons and little or no association at all for daughters. Most of such studies have observed this exchange of support in a short period of time or have scarce information on the types of help both received and provided. Thus, no study has yet explored the combination of a variety of help at both sides of the exchange relationship across different stages over the lifecourse.

This research intends to increase our knowledge of intergenerational exchange of support between adult children and older parents over the lifecourse in the British context. The aim of our research is to examine the patterns of reciprocity between parents and their adult children through the exchange of help at different stages of the lifecourse. We also investigate whether the type of help received early in life is related with adult children's likelihood of providing support to parents later in life.

In order to do so, we employ cohort data from the National Child Development Survey (NCDS). This survey collects information on support received from parents before the age of 42, and the provision of support to parents from children when the children are at the age of 50. The rich information from the NCDS allows us to apply a longitudinal approach by addressing the following three research questions:

1. *Do the patterns of help received from parents early in life, and help provided by the adult children to their parents later in life, differ by the gender of the children?*
2. *Does the support of parents to their children in their adulthood, increase the chances of being a carer for one's own parents later in life?*
3. *Does the pattern of reciprocity between parents and their children change when different types of help (received and provided) are considered?*

Understanding the determinants of providing care from children to parents is of great importance for public policy given that informal caring can reduce the probability of nursing home entry and formal home care demand. This research falls under the study of the intergenerational transfers within the family. In this strand of research, it is difficult to find in a single study a wide range of parent-children

transfers. In addition, it is even more difficult to find studies putting together this kind of information in a longitudinal perspective. Our contribution is to fill this gap in the studies of reciprocity between parents and adult-children using data on a variety of help received and provided at different time points. To our knowledge, this will be the first paper using the National Child Development Survey (NCDS) to analyse exchange of transfers between adults in their mid-life and their parents.

Data and methodology

The National Child Development Survey (NCDS) started with more than 17,000 children born in a single week in March 1958 in Great Britain and have been followed up through the course of their lives at several ages. The NCDS collected information on previous help received from parents at wave six, when the adult children were aged 42, and information on provision of help to parents when the children were aged 50, at wave eight. Thus our sample comprises all individuals who were interviewed at both ages 42 and 50, and were 'at risk' of providing care at age 50 (with at least one parent alive) and with no missing information on the co-variables included in the multivariate analysis, resulting in a final sub-sample of 6,607 individuals.

The NCDS asked respondents regarding a wide range of types of help both received from parents and provided to them. At age 42, a retrospective question concerning the support received from parents since leaving full-time education was included: *Tell me if your parents have helped you in any of the following ways since you left full-time education.* The analysis uses the following categories of types of help: help with accommodation, childcare, financial assistance, emotional support and other types (i.e. domestic help, transportation, gardening, health care).

Wave 8 included a question concerning the provision of support to the respondent's parent(s) regarding different types of help: *Do you regularly or frequently do any of the things listed for your parents?* (Response: No, none of the things listed; Yes, mentioning each of the types of help listed in a card). Using the types of help mentioned, we distinguish between the following three categories:

1. Personal help: dressing, eating, bathing
2. Basic help: washing, ironing, cleaning, cooking
3. Instrumental help: financial assistance, shopping, transportation, gardening, personal affairs, others

In order to address the first research question, we describe the patterns of help received and provided by adult children. We also illustrate the combinations within each set of support, distinguishing by the gender of the children. Subsequently, we construct logistic regression models to examine whether early transfers received from parents were later reciprocated with support towards older parents. We conduct multivariate analysis in two steps, corresponding with the second and third research questions. In the first step, the model has "providing any type of help" to older parents as the outcome variable, using as main predictors the different types of help received in the past previously mentioned. In the second step, we construct three sets of models, where the outcome variables correspond with each of the three categories of types of help provided: personal help, basic help and instrumental help. As in our previous models, the main predictors are the types of help received in the past.

We included as covariates the following characteristics of the adult children at the time of care provision to account for observable heterogeneity: living arrangements (living with dependent children, living with parents), housing tenure, education, marital status, one's own health status and the employment status for both the individual and the partner (self-employee or paid employment). We do not have information regarding the health of the parents, thus are unable to control directly for the level of parental need. However, we use as a proxy the information collected in the survey by the time of the care was provided (age 50). The question is as follows: *As parents get older, are there any aspects of their life that worry you?* (i.e. health, money, limitations with daily activities, etc.). Thus, we have constructed the variable 'Worries about parents' as a proxy for parental needs, under the assumption that it reflects the deterioration of health and living conditions of the parents.

Results

The results of our research will be presented in three sections. The first two sections analyse independently the patterns of receiving and providing help from the children’s perspective. In the third section, using the longitudinal nature of the data, we investigate whether children reciprocate help received in the past with provision of help later in the lifecourse, taking into account different types of help received and provided, and also the children’s socio-demographic characteristics.

We begin by showing the percentage of sons and daughters who received support from their parents, between leaving full-time education and the age of 42, as well as the prevalence of provision of care to their parents at the age of 50 (Table 1). Focusing on adult children having received support from their parents, around three-quarters of the children had received some form of help, with a slightly higher proportion for daughters than for sons. Later in life, at age 50, about half of the adult children reported having provided support to their parents, again with higher proportions in the case of daughters.

Table 1. Percentage of individuals* receiving support or providing help by gender of the children.

Received help from parents ⁺	(before age 42)		Provide help to parents	(at age 50)	
	Sons	Daughters		Sons	Daughters
Received help	74.1	76.7	Provide Informal help	54.6	56.7
Did not received help	25.9	23.3	Did not provide help	45.4	43.3
Total	100.0	100.0	Total	100.0	100.0

* Individuals at risk of providing help: those who have at least one parent alive at age 50

+ Help received between leaving full-time education and age 42.

Source: National Child Development Survey wave 6, author’s calculations.

Table 2 shows the combination of exchange of support between parents and adult-children. Among those who received help in the past, 57 per cent of sons and 60 per cent of daughters also provided support to their parents later in life. However, even among those who didn’t received any support (first row), almost half were providing some kind of support to their parents at age 50. Thus from the bivariate analysis between receiving and providing any help, we have found support for both the reciprocity and the altruism hypothesis.

Table 2. Reciprocity of help between parents and children, by sex.

Sons		Provide help to parents (Age 50)			Daughters		Provide help to parents (Age 50)		
		No	Yes	Total			No	Yes	Total
Receive help* from parents (before age 42)	No	51.4	48.6	100.0	Receive help from parents (before age 42)	No	53.4	46.6	100.0
	Yes	43.3	56.8	100.0		Yes	40.4	59.7	100.0
Total		45.4	54.6	100.0	Total		43.4	56.6	100.0

Pearson chi2(1) = 16.6023 Pr = 0.000

Pearson chi2(1) = 41.6081 Pr = 0.000

Note: (*) Help received by children between leaving full-time education and age 42.

Source: National Child Development Survey waves 6 & 8, author’s calculations.

Results from the multivariate models

The multivariate analysis allows us to further explore the exchange of help between parents and adult children in two ways. In the first step, we test if receiving several types of help early in life affects the provision of any help to parents when children were aged 50. The five predictors (help with

accommodation, finance, childcare, emotional support and others) were tested first individually, and then added together in the same model. Independent models were constructed for sons and daughters, and for all models, control variables were included.

Our study indicates that most of the help provided from adult children to their parents is related with instrumental tasks (i.e. transportation, shopping, gardening etc.) and to a lesser extent with basic and personal tasks. Nevertheless, a significant number of children, especially daughters, are providing more intense types of help. For example, three out of ten daughters were helping with cooking, and one in ten helps with dressing, eating or bathing. The proportion of sons helping with these more intense tasks is half of that among daughters. Moreover, the combinations of the three categories of help provided at this stage of the lifecourse are limited, and mainly found in the instrumental and basic types of help. Nevertheless, eight per cent of daughters and three per cent of sons provided instrumental, basic and personal help simultaneously.

Secondly, in order to answer our second research question, we examine the effect that having previously received help has on the probability of providing any support to parents. We found support for the reciprocity hypothesis in our general model of any type of help provided, for both daughters and sons. Firstly, we run independent models for each predictor: accommodation, finance, childcare and emotional help. We found reciprocity effect for the first three predictors in both sexes, while emotional help was significant only for daughters. In a second step, we modelled all types of help received as predictors in the same model. We found that sons who received help with accommodation and childcare reciprocate later in life with more help, while daughters reciprocate when receiving childcare and to a lesser extent for accommodation (only when they have worries about their parents).

These results offer partial support to previous findings. For example in the study by Geurts, T., Poortman, A.-R. and van Tilburg, T. G. (2012), they analysed provision of general and/or instrumental types of help to parents, where reciprocity was shown when receiving childcare in the case of sons, but not among daughters. However, we did find a strong relationship for both sexes, using any kind of help received, not only instrumental. Our results also show both reciprocal and altruistic responses for the three independent models of the help provided, and seem to vary according to the degree of involvement, or level of demand of the types of help provided. We found that children provide support to older parents with personal tasks, regardless of having received help in the past. This finding supports the altruism hypothesis for both sexes. Moreover, sons are more altruistic than daughters are when the provision of support to their parents is on basic help. The model shows that sons reciprocate when received help with accommodation, while daughters with accommodation and childcare. Instrumental help, which is the majority of help provided at this stage of the lifecourse, shows the strongest association with prior exchanges of support. In the case of sons with accommodation and childcare; and for daughters with childcare.

The findings presented here emphasise the importance of intergenerational exchange between parents and adult-children. They also show that an altruism and reciprocity responses vary when more or less essential types of help provided are examined. Thus, parents who support their children beyond their adolescence might expect to receive more help with instrumental tasks as they grow older, and support with such tasks can be crucial for their well-being in later life.

References

- Christensen, K., Doblhammer, G., Rau, R., & Vaupel, J. (2009). Ageing populations: the challenges ahead. *The Lancet*, 374(9696), 1196-1208. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(09)61460-4
- Geurts, T., Poortman, A.-R. and van Tilburg, T. G. (2012). Older Parents Providing Child Care for Adult Children: Does It Pay Off? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 74(2), 239-250.
- Office for National Statistics. (2012a). 2011 Census: Population Estimates for the United Kingdom, 27 March 2011. Office for National Statistics.
- Office for National Statistics. (2012c). Population Ageing in the United Kingdom, its Constituent Countries and the European Union.