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Article

Siblings as Overlooked Potential for Care and Support Across Households and Borders

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Abstract

The growing numbers of Lithuanian families living across borders have prompted the reflection on family relations through the lens of the need for care and support of dependent children and elderly parents. The authors of this article expand the analysis of family lives in the migration context beyond child–parent relationships and shift the attention to understudied areas where sibling relationships are located. Sibling relationships are considered embedded within the family and the wider network of personal relationships. This article builds on the personal networks approach to examine the position of siblings in the personal networks of Lithuanian family members and draws on a toolbox of analytical concepts provided by the solidarity approach to disclose how sibling relationships could come into play in the case of need. The analysis of statistical data and two surveys carried out in Lithuania as part of the research project funded by the Research Council of Lithuania enabled the authors to uncover different layers of involvement of siblings in “doing families” across households and borders and to highlight the gendered patterns of support expectations towards siblings if/when the need of elderly or child care would arise in the migration context. The research data provide empirical evidence that sibling relationships could be affected by differentiated mobility experiences of family members and the re-definition of family roles due to newly emerging multi-local interactions. Cross-border family practices create new patterns of family relationships and an “intimate, but different” type of solidarity, common to Lithuanian residents with prior migration experience.

Keywords

intergenerational solidarity; migration; personal networks; siblings; support expectations; support flows; transnational families

Issue

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1. Introduction

Sibling relationships were rarely the centre of attention of scholars researching family lives. They are considered to have been “overlooked” (Riley, 1987), “unrecognised” kin (Király et al., 2021), and “understudied” in both family and transnational studies (Baldassar & Brandhorst, 2021, p. 248). To date, a great part of the literature on care arrangements in transnational families has focused on nuclear family members, who remain in the country of origin, as the potential primary caregivers (Kordasiewicz et al., 2018). Recently, a strand of research studies has

emerged, turning the attention to siblings (Buchanan & Rotkirch, 2021) and close network members (Česnuitytė et al., 2017; Widmer et al., 2018), moving beyond the nuclear family unit to analyse the realm of family lives of multiple households.

This article aims to uncover the types of relationships among adult siblings and their (potential) involvement in caregiving roles across households and across borders to show that studies of kinsfolk should not be limited to the contribution of grandparents. Sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles represent a different generation and are uniquely influential and overlooked in the “latent kin

matrix” (Riley & Riley, 1993). Following Milardo’s (2009) ideas on the contribution of aunts and uncles in the generativity of family relationships, siblings could be seen as teachers and mentors of their nieces and nephews, as intergenerational buffers, engaged in emotion work, or as providers of financial and practical support in case of need. The organisation of families across households and national borders reveals highly interdependent family configurations inclusive of adults, dependent children, and elderly persons in need of care. By omitting siblings from the studies of transnational families, we simplify how families are done (cf. Morgan, 1996, 2011) across borders.

The growing number of transnational families due to the high mobility of the Lithuanian population since the country’s accession to the European Union in 2004 prompts one to reflect on the child and elderly care arrangements transcending national borders. The authors of this article expand the analysis of family lives in the migration context beyond child–parent relationships and shift the attention to understudied areas where sibling relationships are located.

As far as we know, to date, sibling relationships in transnational family life never have been at the centre of attention of family researchers in Lithuania. These relations were indirectly touched upon while analysing migrant families in various contexts, for example, when examining the factors of the formation of transnational families in post-communist society (Maslauskaitė & Stankūnienė, 2007), in analysing family practices (Juozeliūnienė & Seymour, 2020) and intergenerational relationships in transnational families (Budginaitė-Mačkinė, 2020; Juozeliūnienė et al., 2018). In these studies, the dependent child–parent relations, adult child–elderly parent relations and the involvement of grandparents in transnational caregiving practices were at the core of the analysis of care circulation in multiple households across borders. At the same time, the data from these studies shed light on siblings as potential care and support providers. Namely, it indicates that migration decisions and residence choices (both in the case of emigration and return migration) may be highly affected by the presence/absence of siblings in family configurations. Moreover, the geographical proximity/distance and presence/absence of siblings may influence the research participants’ decisions to create kin-based family configurations or non-kin “family-like” communities in the case of need.

After briefly presenting the key migration and demographic trends in the subsequent part of the article to shed light on the country context, we present the theoretical considerations in migration and family scholarship relevant to studying sibling relationships across households and borders. The article builds on the personal networks approach (Milardo & Wellman, 1992; Widmer et al., 2018) to examine the position of siblings in the personal networks of Lithuanian family members and draws on a toolbox of analytical concepts provided by

the solidarity approach (Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997) to disclose how sibling relationships could come into play in the case of need. The article is based on the analysis of statistical data and two surveys carried out in Lithuania as part of the research project funded by the Research Council of Lithuania to answer the following questions: To what extent are siblings included in the networks of significant persons and how important they are in the terms of support for family members caring for dependent children and elderly parents in the context of migration? What types of relationships exist within and between generations in Lithuanian families, and how could sibling relationships be affected and re-organised by mobility practices?

2. Country Context: Migration Trends and Restructuring of Family Configurations

In this section, the authors place sibling relationships in the context of the restructuring of family configurations and relational dynamics of family lives in Lithuania due to the great flows of transnational migration and several decades of low fertility rates. Transnational family researchers consider that the availability and commitment of close network members play a crucial role in the organisation of cross-border care practices (Kordasiewicz et al., 2018). Thus, the role of siblings in the circulation of care could be highly affected by the changing numbers of horizontal family ties and the increasing geographical distance of family members.

Decreasing fertility rates in Lithuania lead to a decreasing number of horizontal family ties, among them, the number of siblings. According to data provided by Statistics Lithuania (2022b), the overall number of births has declined over the last twenty-five years by more than half, from 42,376 in 1994 (earliest available data point) to 23,330 in 2021. Academics note that the fertility rate has decreased among women in all age groups (Maslauskaitė, 2021). Similarly to other European countries (e.g., Lappegård, 2020), the family-related changes in Lithuania have been manifested through a lower level of intent to marry, decreasing marriage rates, childbearing postponement and a slight increase in childlessness (e.g., Gedvilaitė-Kordušienė et al., 2019). The representative surveys carried out in Lithuania disclose a multi-generational family structure with a higher number of vertical ties than horizontal ones: As a rule, Lithuanian residents have more mothers and fathers than brothers and sisters (e.g., Stankūnienė, 2009). For example, according to the data from the representative survey of the Lithuanian population carried out in 2018 as part of the Global Migration and Lithuanian Family: Family Practices, Circulation of Care and Return Strategies project, approximately one in three respondents (36.1%) aged 18 and older had no (alive) siblings (Budginaitė-Mačkinė, 2020). The researchers predict that the trend of verticalisation of the family structure of the adult population will become even more evident in the coming

decades, as a significant share of Lithuanian residents aged 18 and older (born during the Soviet times or in the early 90s) still have at least one sibling. The Lithuanian population, which currently can still rely on their siblings' support, in the future may face additional challenges.

Migration-induced restructuration of family configurations is considered another significant factor in the context of analysis of sibling relationships in the realm of family lives of multiple households. According to the data from the above-mentioned representative survey, two in three respondents (63.9%) had at least one sibling at the time of the survey: A significant share of them lived in a different part of the country than their sisters (34.4%) and brothers (39.3%); furthermore, 12.6% of the survey participants indicated that their sisters live abroad and 9.3% of the respondents' brothers moved abroad. These data show that approximately one in three siblings live far from each other due to mobility within the country and one in ten Lithuanian residents are separated by national borders from at least one of their siblings due to international mobility. Such a noticeable share of siblings living abroad is related to the high mobility rates (Eurostat, 2022; Statistics Lithuania, 2022a). Lithuania's population has decreased by 679.2 thousand people since 1990 due to emigration, which constitutes about 18.4% of the population (EMN, 2022). This prompts the reflection on the role of siblings in families living across households and national borders.

3. Theoretical Considerations

Some transnational family researchers focus on sibling relationships due to the significant role they play as potential primary caregivers alongside other family members who remain in the country of origin (Kordasiewicz et al., 2018). Siblings are "invariably caught up" in the various forms of mobility and both transnationally mobile siblings and siblings who continue to live in the country of origin are influenced by the roles each other performs in the family (Baldassar & Brandhorst, 2021). The research studies show that sibling relationships are embedded within the close family and the wider network of personal relationships (Szydlik, 2008). The decisions involving siblings in caregiving roles greatly depend on the geographical distance of the residence, even within a country (Kordasiewicz et al., 2018). Furthermore, the geographical configuration of non-resident family networks and relationship dynamics with non-resident families (incl. siblings) may influence migration decisions (Thomas & Dommermuth, 2021). To shed light on the importance of sibling ties within and across borders and explore how sibling relations can contribute to the organisation of care and support in families under migration, the authors of this article combine personal network analysis with the intergenerational solidarity approach.

To examine the position of siblings in the wider network of personal relationships and support expectations directed at them in the context of migration, we rely on

the concept of personal networks (Milardo & Wellman, 1992) and theoretical insights from a configurational analysis perspective (Widmer & Jallinoja, 2008). Personal networks are considered to consist of individuals whom the individual deems important and close (Milardo & Wellman, 1992) for social, emotional, or symbolic reasons (Widmer et al., 2018). These concepts are used to analyse the structure of personal networks, the position of siblings in them, and expectations of support from siblings and other significant persons in the case of child and elderly care. All types of relationships are regarded as familial resources to be invoked by families experiencing migration.

The personal networks analysis is combined with the solidarity approach (Bengtson, 2001; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997), extended by the analysis of kin relations (Nauck, 2015). This approach enables the authors of the article to disclose how the relationships within generations (among siblings) alongside relations between generations (adult children–parents) come into play in transnational families. The analysis is conducted using the dimensions of solidarity as defined by Bengtson and colleagues, including *associational solidarity* (expressed in terms of the frequency of contact and its nature), *emotional solidarity* (characterised by the intensity of emotional closeness/distance), *consensus solidarity* (degree of similarity in opinions and beliefs between and within generations), *structural solidarity* (expressed in terms of geographic proximity/distance and the number of vertical and horizontal ties), and *functional solidarity* (referring to the flows of practical, financial and emotional support). The latter two dimensions are of particular interest in this article. Given the complexity of family life, these dimensions are analysed together and used to derive a typology of solidarity between and within generations (Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997).

When analysing the personal networks and solidarity within and between generations, special attention is paid to the gender dimension. Previous research indicates that women tend to maintain more ties with family, kin and other individuals included in their personal networks (Rainie et al., 2012). Gender can be linked to the expression of filial norms and the readiness of individuals to help their family members (Haberkern & Szydlik, 2010), as well as to types of intergenerational solidarity and expectations of support from personal networks in the context of migration. Prior research focusing on the Lithuanian case has revealed the importance of women (particularly mothers) in intergenerational relations (Juozeliūnienė & Budginaitė, 2016; Kanopienė, 2014; Tureikytė, 2015) and different types of assistance to families with migration experience, depending on the gender of the family member remaining in Lithuania (Juozeliūnienė et al., 2018). In this article, we compare the support expectations of the Lithuanian population towards their sisters and their brothers and examine to what extent the relationship patterns within and across generations are gendered.

This article contributes to both family and personal networks studies, as well as scholarship on child and elderly care arrangements transcending national borders. The combination of the analysis of personal networks with a solidarity approach allows the authors to reveal the significance of siblings in personal networks and determine the relationship patterns based on expectations of support that exist towards siblings in the context of care for elderly parents and dependent children. It contributes to the development of migrant family research in Lithuania and complements typological studies of intergenerational solidarity in the context of migration in Eastern and Central Europe.

4. Data and Methods

The article draws from an analysis of available statistics (EMN, 2022; Eurostat, 2022; Statistics Lithuania, 2022a, 2022b) and an analysis of data from two surveys carried out in Lithuania. The first survey (Migration and Family Processes: Representative Study) is an Omnibus-type representative survey of the Lithuanian population aged 18 and older, conducted in June–July 2018 ($N = 1005$). The second survey (Migration and Family Processes: Quota Study) is a quota survey of persons aged 18 and older with direct experience of international migration (defined as living abroad for a period of 6 months or longer since 2004) conducted in August 2018 ($N = 406$) in Lithuania targeting two groups of respondents: Lithuanian residents who at the time of the departure had dependent children (up to 18 years old) residing in Lithuania ($N = 306$) and Lithuanian residents who at the time of departure had parents requiring care in Lithuania ($N = 100$). The respondents with direct experience of international migration resided in Lithuania at the time of the survey. The questions used to collect data on networks of significant persons and intergenerational solidarity were identical in both surveys. Both surveys were implemented as part of the project Global Migration and Lithuanian Family: Family Practices, Circulation of Care and Return Strategies (led by prof. Irena Juozeliūnienė) supported by the Lithuanian Research Council and to date remain one of the most extensive data sources in Lithuania to study family and personal relationships within and across national borders. The analysis of the above-mentioned data sources was carried out while implementing a postdoctoral research project (No. 09.3.3-LMT-K-712-23-0155).

To identify the extent to which siblings are included in the networks of significant persons and their importance in the terms of support for family members with child care and care for elderly parents, we selected questions from the standardised questionnaires related to these aspects. The respondents of each survey were first asked to list persons significant to them over the last 12 months (in a positive or negative sense); later they were asked about the demographic characteristics of every listed important person (gender, age, place of

residence) and relationship type. In addition, the participants of both surveys had to answer two specific questions about support expectations. The respondents, who have dependent children, were asked who from the list of persons significant to them could help them with child care if/when needed. The respondents, who have at least one parent alive, were asked who from the list of significant persons could help them with care for elderly parent(s), if/when the need for such care arises. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used to analyse the networks of significant individuals (in terms of their characteristics and support expectations) and the factors explaining the variations between them. Analysis was conducted using the software package SPSS.

To examine the relationships between siblings, we selected a series of questions about the nature of their relationship with their sister and brother, if existent. If there was more than one sibling, the questions were asked about the oldest sister/brother. In addition, to derive a relationship typology with the family of origin (Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997), we included identical questions about the nature of their mother and father, if alive. Respondents were asked to rate their respective relationships related to the five above-mentioned dimensions of solidarity based on the following indicators: the geographical proximity to this person, the frequency of contact, emotional closeness, the similarity of opinions and beliefs, and practical support provided to and received from this person. These indicators were dichotomised and entered into a series of latent class analyses using Mplus software to derive a relationship typology, without a predefined number of classes. We started with the model with only one class and continued increasing it to determine if the set of available model diagnostics (such as L^2 , BIC, AIC, and entropy values) point to a certain number of classes to retain. L^2 indicates the goodness of fit, taking into account p value (when p value is higher than .05, it is recommended to choose the model which has one less class). The goodness of fit is also assessed by using several information criteria, such as the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) and Akaike information criterion (AIC), each of which is designed to favour models with smaller numbers of parameters (and penalise models with larger numbers of parameters): lower values indicate a better fit; if lowest BIC and AIC value is identified in different models, we choose by BIC value. An entropy value close to 1 indicates clear delineation to classes, 0.8 value is considered suitable for choosing the model (Celeux & Soromenho, 1996). The model diagnostics and the information on the detected latent groups are provided in Tables 1–4 included in the Supplementary File. Following the methodological guidance of the authors adhering to the solidarity approach (Guo et al., 2012; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997), the latent class analysis included only the information about the relationships with siblings and parents who do not reside in the same household as the respondent. After the intergenerational relationships

were classified into a typology of intergenerational solidarity using latent class analysis, inferential statistical methods were used to analyse the relationships between sociodemographic and family traits, migration experience, and the family relationship types identified. Supplementary questions were used to determine the communication content (i.e., talking about child-rearing; talking about important personal matters) and to identify the designated child and elderly care providers while respondents having direct migration experience lived abroad. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were applied using the software package SPSS to analyse the communication content and the factors explaining the variations between them.

5. Results

5.1. The Significance of Siblings in Personal Networks

Following Szydlik (2008), sibling relationships are considered to be embedded within the family and the wider network of personal relationships. In this part of the article, we aim to analyse, firstly, the place attributed to siblings in the networks of significant persons of the Lithuanian population; secondly, to examine to what extent Lithuanian residents would count on their sisters and/or brothers, if/when the need to care for underage child(ren) and/or elderly parent(s) would arise. The siblings' place in the personal networks will be compared to the place attributed to other significant persons, including both kin and non-blood-related ties.

The analysis of personal networks reveals that they are dominated by close family ties (69.2%): The mem-

bers of the family of procreation (spouse/partner, children; 39.2%) and family of origin (30.0%, namely 10.5% mothers, 7.4% sisters, 6.6% fathers, 5.4% brothers) are most likely to be considered significant persons. Meanwhile more distant kin (grandparents, grandchildren, aunts/uncles, nieces/nephews, in-laws, other kin related by blood or marriage) and non-blood-related individuals (friends, acquaintances, neighbours, etc.) represent respectively 19.4% and 11.5% of the personal networks. Compared to the non-kin, siblings (12.8%) seem to be similarly likely to be considered significant persons by the respondents. Regardless of the "ascribed rather than voluntary" nature of sibling relationships, they can be more enduring (cf. Cicirelli, 1995) and one may potentially expect a higher level of support expectations directed towards siblings in comparison to other non-kin relations.

When asked whom they could rely on, if/when the need arises to take care of elderly parent(s) or dependent children (e.g., in the context of migration), survey respondents answered differently depending on the type of care needed. The analysis revealed that Lithuanian residents consider themselves most likely to rely on members of the family of procreation (51.7%) if/when their elderly parent(s) require(s) care (see Figure 1). Meanwhile, if/when the need for support with child care occurs, the Lithuanian population would mainly count on their family of origin (48.1%; see Figure 2).

Looking specifically at support expectations directed towards siblings, we can notice that siblings are more likely to be considered as potentially able to assume or share responsibilities for parental care (28.1%) compared to child care (12.8%). If/when the need arises to take care of elderly parent(s) (see Figure 1), siblings

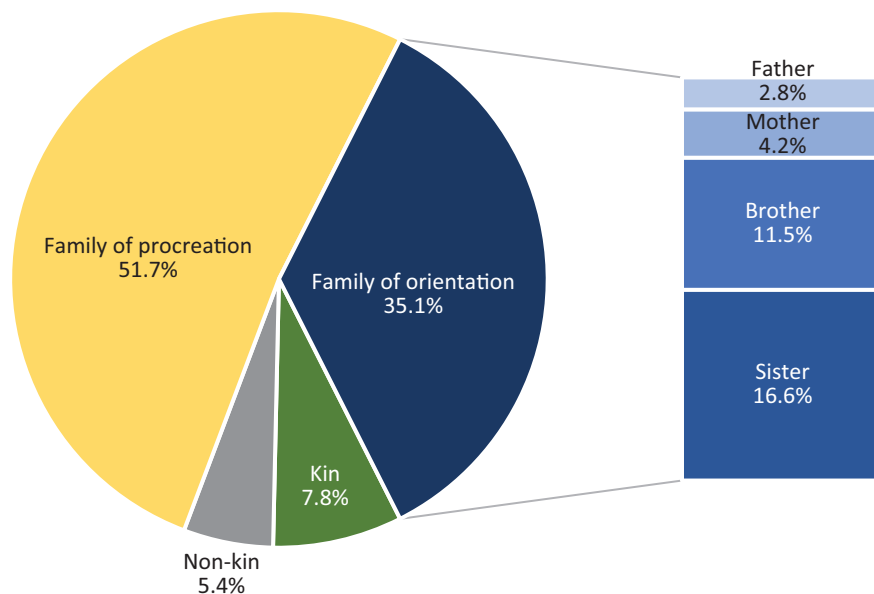


Figure 1. Significant persons that could provide support with care for elderly parents. Source: Data derived from the 2018 representative survey Migration and Family Processes: Representative Study ($N = 1005$) and complemented with information by 910 respondents ($N/N = 95$); there were about 1092 significant persons who could provide such care (27.9% of all significant persons mentioned).

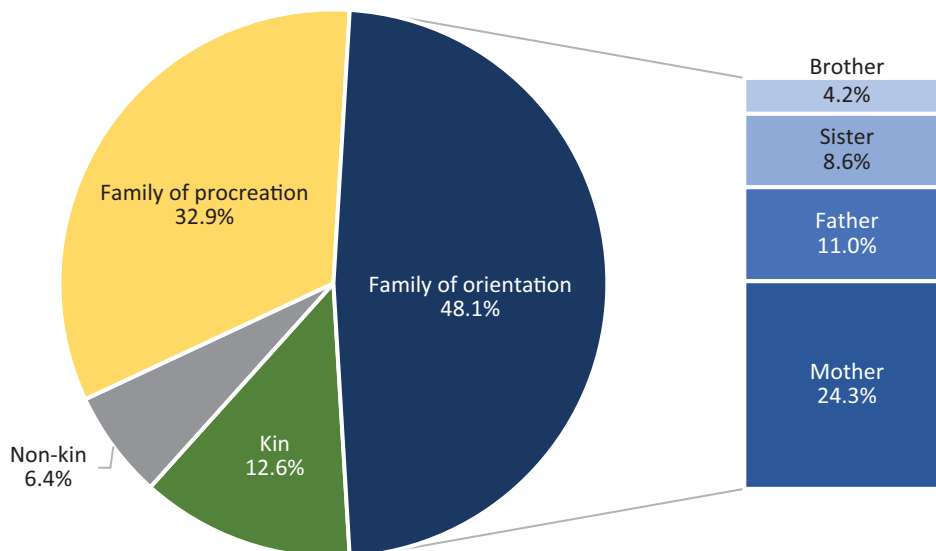


Figure 2. Significant persons that could provide support with care for dependent child(ren). Source: Data derived from the 2018 representative survey Migration and Family Processes: Representative Study ($N = 1005$) and complemented with information by 977 respondents ($N/N = 28$); there were about 918 significant persons who could provide such care (23.5% of all significant persons mentioned).

(27.9%) emerge as the most likely care providers from the family of origin, even if in a few cases respondents would still hope to rely on one of the elderly parents to provide support to the other (4.2% indicated that they would count on their elderly mother for support; 2.8% indicated that they would count on their elderly father). The support expectations seem to be similarly gendered in both horizontal and vertical family lines, even if the differences are not particularly high.

In the case of support with child care (see Figure 2), respondents were twice as likely to count on their mother (child’s grandmother; 24.3%) compared to their siblings (child’s aunts and uncles; 12.8%) as potential care providers. Nevertheless, siblings seem to be almost as likely to be considered as potential support providers as the respondent’s father (child’s grandfather; 11.0%) and other kin (12.6%). It is also noteworthy that when choosing who could potentially help to take care of their dependent children, Lithuanian residents more often named their sister (child’s aunt; 8.6%) than their brother (child’s uncle; 4.2%). This reveals that overall the support expectations are more often directed to women in the horizontal family line (as well as in the vertical one) and indicates that support expectations can be potentially gendered in the migration context as well.

When compared to non-kin (friends, acquaintances, etc.), siblings emerge as more important child and elderly care providers than other kin relations beyond the nuclear family and non-blood-relations (see Figures 1 and 2). Having determined the position of siblings in the networks of significant persons and the support expectations directed at them, in the next section we analyse the solidarity dimensions through which siblings’ potential for care and support may be expressed.

5.2. Siblings’ Potential for Care and Support Through the Lens of Solidarity Dimensions

By exploring the realm of sibling relationships as an overlooked potential for care and support in cases of need, we aimed to better understand the relationships within and between generations, and how sibling relationships could be affected and re-organised by mobility practices. To do so, we draw on a toolbox of analytical concepts provided by the solidarity approach (Bengtson, 2001; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997).

First, the analysis of solidarity patterns within and between generations allowed us to determine siblings’ potential for care and support in the field of familial relationships and uncover key layers of siblings’ involvement in doing families across borders.

The data show that generally, the Lithuanian population feels close to their family of origin, including siblings (particularly sisters) even if/when they live in another part of the country or abroad. Latent class analysis yielded four patterns indicating different types of solidarity, which were also common in the wider literature on solidarity across and within generations (e.g., Nauck, 2015). The relationships characterised by high solidarity in all dimensions were classified as “tight-knit” (30.3% of relations with the family of origin were attributed to this type). A pattern of high emotional closeness and consensus, as well as frequent communication, despite the low level of practical support due to the geographical distance, was defined as “intimate, but geographically distant” (39.1%; i.e., the most common relationship type in Lithuania). The relationship pattern characterised by geographical proximity and a high level of mutual support, but lacking both emotional closeness and similarity of

opinions, was labelled as “obligatory” solidarity (12.6%). Low scores on all solidarity dimensions were indicative of a “detached” relationship type (18.0%). Overall, “intimate, but geographically distant” and “tight-knit” relationships with the family of origin are the most common types of relationships in Lithuania, while such relationship types as “detached” and “obligatory” proved to be less prevalent.

In comparing the solidarity types within and between generations (see Figure 3), we can see that the patterns, according to which the relationships among siblings are structured, differ from relationship patterns with parents. Even if emotional closeness and similarity of opinions continue to be particularly characteristic of sibling ties, geographical distance is an important factor in structuring these relationships. Having a closer look at the sibling relationship patterns defined by close geographical proximity (“tight-knit” and “obligatory”), we can observe that “tight-knit” relationships are much less widespread among siblings (24.2% of sister–sister dyads, 17.8% of brother–brother dyads, 15.6% of brother–sister dyads, and 15.0% of sister–brother dyads) compared to parents (58.2% of daughter–mother dyads, 40.7% of son–mother dyads, 37.7% of daughter–father dyads, and 34.8% of son–father dyads). Nevertheless, such a pattern of relationships (defined by high solidarity on all dimensions) is more common than “obligatory” relationships.

Looking at the two remaining relationship patterns defined by geographical distance (with siblings living in another part of the country or abroad), it is evident that in some cases sibling relationships weaken and break loose at a distance (28.9% of brother–sister dyads, 26.3% of relations among brothers, 25.1% of sister–brother dyads and 16.9% of relations among sisters were defined

as “detached”). This happens less often in the case of relationships with mothers (6.0% of daughter–mother dyads, 7.3% of son–mother dyads), but almost as often with fathers when living at a distance from them (24.6% of daughter–father dyads and 19.6% of son–father dyads are classified as “detached”).

Last, but not least, regardless of the significant share of “detached” relationships between the siblings, most of the sibling relationships at a distance fall into the category of “intimate, but geographically distant” (49.2–52.9% of sibling dyads are attributed to this relationship type; see Figure 3) and are defined by continuous communication, close emotional bonds, and similarity of opinions, regardless of the low level of practical support among them. It is noteworthy that the prevalence of this relationship pattern appears to be slightly more acute among the siblings in younger cohorts (18–29 years old), who do not have (yet) a spouse/partner and/or children. Other sociodemographic characteristics (education, occupational status, and respondent’s gender), however, do not seem to affect the distribution of relationship types among siblings in a statistically significant way, as the results of inferential statistics analysis indicate (results not shown here; for more details on the results of inferential statistics analysis see Budginaitė-Mačkinė, 2020).

The distribution of relationship types between Lithuanian residents and their siblings is at least to some extent gendered (see Figure 3), even if differences remain relatively small. Namely, a larger share of relationships among sisters (24.2%) can be defined as “tight-knit” (compared to 17.8% among brothers, 15.6% of relationships between male respondents and their sisters, and 15.0% of relationships between female respondents and

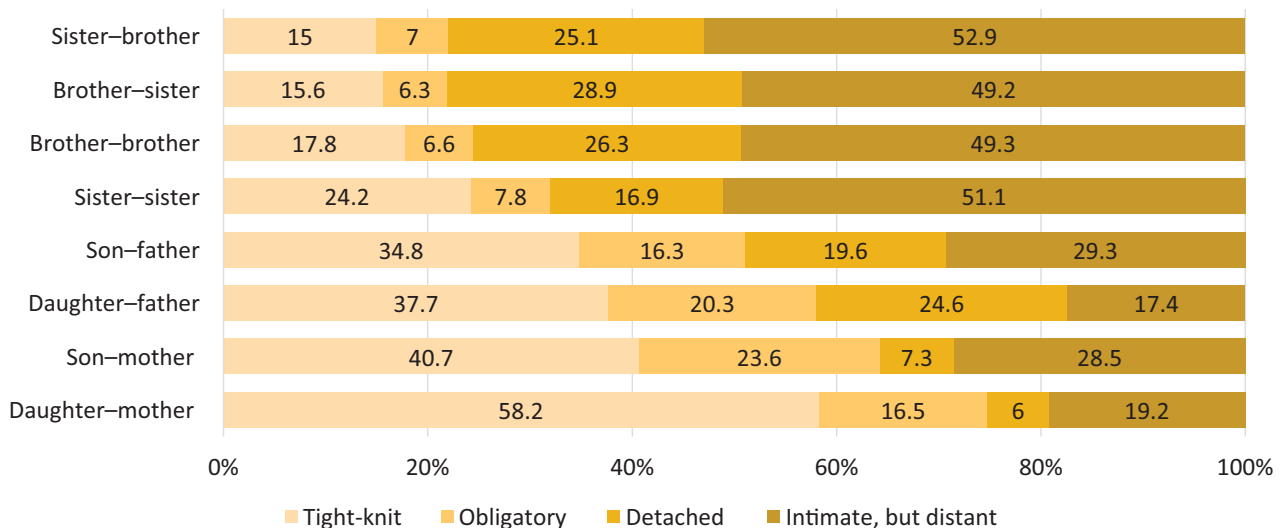


Figure 3. Solidarity within and between generations in Lithuania. Notes: The typology of relationships developed based on the information about 719 sibling dyads and 602 adult child–parent dyads (1322 dyads in total); the respondent is presented as the first part of the dyad (for example, the sister–brother dyad indicates that it refers to a relationship between the female respondent and her brother). Source: Data derived from the 2018 representative survey Migration and Family Processes: Representative Study.

their sisters). At the same time, the “detached” relationship type is less prevalent among sisters (16.9%) than other sibling dyads (25.1% to 28.9%). The gendered relationship patterns become even more evident if the typological relationship analysis is complemented with further analysis of separate solidarity dimensions. The examination of the communication content reveals that even if the Lithuanian population seems to be close with both sisters and brothers, sisters are much more likely to become Lithuanian residents’ confidants on important personal matters (84.8% of respondents discuss such issues with sisters and 59.2% with brothers) and child-rearing issues (individuals who have dependent children are more likely to talk with sisters than brothers: 65.8% and 51.7% respectively). This highlights the particular importance of sisters and confirms that relationship patterns between siblings may be gendered.

Second, research reveals that sibling relationships could be affected by the differentiation of mobility experiences among family members and the re-definition of family roles due to the newly emerging multi-local interactions. Namely, different life-trajectories of mobile Lithuanians and their non-migrant siblings give new meanings to sibling relationships while keeping them “knitted together” (Coe & Wu, 2016) in a way non-migrant siblings fulfil care roles instead of mobile ones.

Looking specifically at transnational care arrangements, the analysis of quota survey data shows that siblings may act as care providers for both underage children and elderly parents remaining in Lithuania. It is especially true for the organisation of elderly parents’ care. The analysis of elderly parents’ care arrangements in Lithuania upon the respondent’s departure

abroad showed that the largest share of the designated caregivers belonged to siblings (31.9%), compared to maternal/paternal relatives (7.7%) and parents’ spouses/partners (6.7%). The prevalence of siblings over other relatives or parents’ spouses shows that (adult) children are the main responsible and main resource for care and support towards older parents. Responsibility for providing the child(ren) remaining in Lithuania with living quarters quite often fell on the shoulders of the family of orientation (including siblings) (44.9%) in transnational child-care arrangements (6.2%; Juozeliūnienė et al., 2020).

Third, the data from the quota survey of persons with direct experience of international migration (and transnational family life) give empirical evidence that newly emerging transnational practices create new patterns of family relationships and types of solidarity.

To classify the complex relationships of mobile Lithuanians with their family of origin, we used latent class analysis, which yielded four types of relationship patterns. Three out of four relationship types correspond to traditional types of solidarity observed in other typological studies: namely, “tight-knit”, “close, but geographically distant,” and “detached” relationships (Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997; the main characteristics of these relationship types were presented above; see Figure 4).

The analysis of the relationships between respondents, who have been previously separated by a considerable geographical distance and at the time of the survey resided in Lithuania, points to the emergence of an “intimate, but different” relationship type as a new solidarity type induced by migration. Such relationships are characterised by all the dimensions of solidarity among and between generations except for similarity of

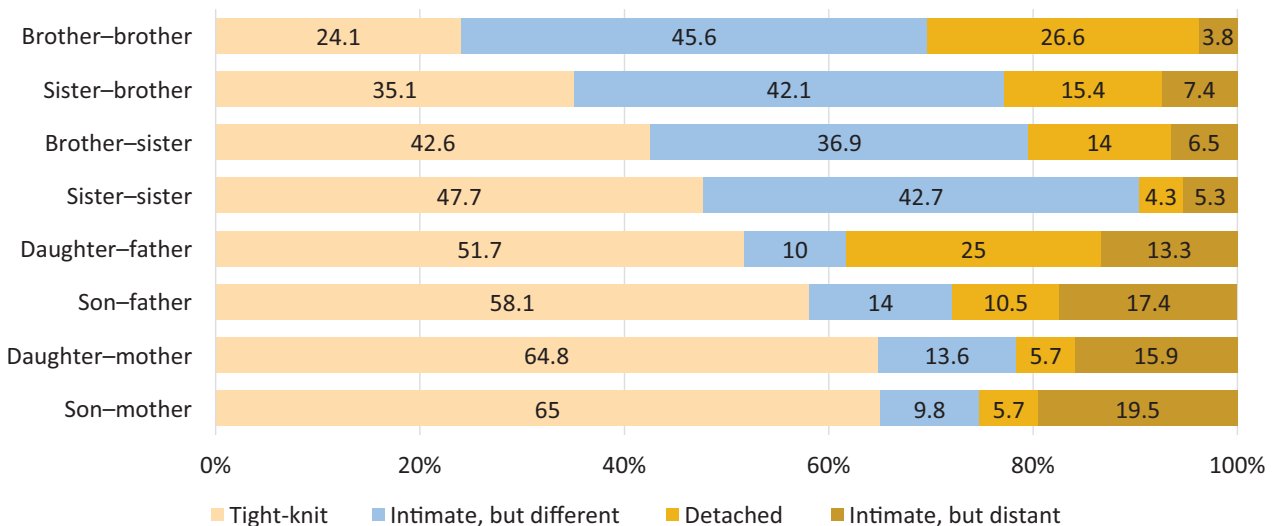


Figure 4. Solidarity within and between generations in Lithuanian migrant families. Notes: The typology of relationships developed based on the information about 227 sibling dyads and 357 adult child–parent dyads (584 dyads in total); the respondent is presented as the first part of the dyad (for example, the sister–brother dyad indicates that it refers to the relationship between the female respondent and her brother). Source: Data derived from the 2018 quota survey Migration and Family Processes: Quota Study of the Lithuanian population with direct migration experience.

opinion. This relationship type can be situated between “tight-knit” and “obligatory” relationships: It shares most of the characteristics with these two relationship types, but it differs from “tight-knit” relationships by a low level of similarity of opinions and differs from “obligatory” relationships by high emotional closeness. Since emotional closeness is considered to be an important basis of relationship quality, the new solidarity type is considered to be a modified version of “tight-knit” relationships and was named “intimate, but different”. This relationship type is widespread in all sibling dyads (see Figure 4).

The above-mentioned “intimate, but different” relationship type was not found in the general Lithuanian population and is typical only of Lithuanians with direct experience of migration. This indicates the formation of a new family solidarity type in the context of migration, especially in relationships with sisters and brothers (see Figure 4). The relationship between Lithuanians who previously lived abroad and their siblings (and parents) who remained in Lithuania continue to be defined by emotional closeness, but at the same time differences in opinions on important matters start to become more evident. This points to both changes in attitudes while living abroad and a higher likelihood of mobility among the Lithuanian population who do not share similar opinions with their siblings (and parents), even before migration. It is important to note that, regardless of the difference of opinions, Lithuanian residents who have prior migration experience feel emotionally close to their siblings, which is an important aspect when it comes to determining support potential in the future in case of need.

6. Conclusion

The growing number of Lithuanian families living across borders has prompted the reflection on family relations through the lens of the need for care and support of dependent children and elderly parents, with a particular focus on sibling relationships as overlooked and understudied kin. The analysis of the empirical data presented in this article enabled the authors to disclose sibling relationships as familial resources to be invoked by families experiencing migration as well as to test the solidarity approach to analyse the ways these relationships come into play in transnational families.

The analysis of personal networks of Lithuanian residents, in which sibling relations and other ties are embedded, reveals that siblings emerge as more important care providers than other kin relations beyond the nuclear family and non-blood-relations. Overall, a considerable share of the population sees siblings as likely support providers when it comes to the care of elderly parents and, to a smaller extent, child care. Such patterns of support expectations indicate that Lithuanian residents who have at least one sibling could count on them in the context of migration, particularly if the need for care for elderly parents arises. Similarly, they could potentially rely on them if/when exposed to various ongoing polit-

ical, economic, and public health-related uncertainties that may increase the need for additional support both within and across borders.

At the same time, we may expect that the siblings’ potential for care and support across households and borders will decrease over time in quantitative terms. Considering the ongoing demographic changes in Lithuanian society and the decreasing number of horizontal ties, future generations may find themselves more strained with care responsibilities and have even fewer blood relations to rely on, especially in the case of elderly parents’ care. In other words, the Lithuanian population, which currently can still rely on their siblings’ support, in the future may face challenges due to the decreasing numbers of horizontal family ties, among them, the number of siblings, as well as migration-induced increasing geographical distance of siblings’ residence. This, in turn, may encourage future generations to reconsider their migration decisions altogether, increase the flow of return migration due to the emerging needs of care of elderly parents, or increase the emigration rate of the elderly population joining their single child abroad. The lack of siblings may lead to “intergenerational care slotting” (cf. Leinaweaver, 2010) in the future, involving a higher number of non-kin in the multidirectional care exchanges following one’s emigration.

The authors of this article uncover different layers of involvement of siblings in doing families across households and borders. The data indicate that intimate relations with siblings are maintained even when living far from each other and geographical distance does not necessarily imply emotional distance or detachment. The high prevalence of close relationships even at a distance (as demonstrated by the high share of “intimate, but geographically distant” relationship type) generally shows that the support between siblings living at a distance may be potentially activated in the case of need, be it by getting involved in practical care or other types of support (emotional, financial) from a distance. Furthermore, even at a distance, siblings (particularly sisters) may be an important source of support and advice through active communication between siblings on child-rearing practices.

The analysis of both personal networks and solidarity within generations points to the gendered patterns of support expectations towards siblings, as higher support expectations from the Lithuanian population towards their sisters in comparison to their brothers indicate. Similarly, solidarity among sisters tends to be slightly higher compared to the other sibling dyads, particularly on some solidarity dimensions. Awareness that non-mobile siblings (sisters more so than brothers) could step in and help to fulfil care roles may become a factor facilitating decisions to migrate and lead (at least for a certain time) a transnational family life.

Finally, the research data give empirical evidence that the siblings’ potential for care and support may also change over time in terms of relationship quality.

The analysis of the patterns of intragenerational solidarity reveals that sibling relationships could be affected by the differentiation of mobility experiences among family members and the re-definition of family roles due to the newly emerging multi-local interactions. The direct experience of international migration (and transnational family life) creates new patterns of family relationships and a new type of solidarity, namely, “intimate, but different”. Such relationships are characterised by all the dimensions of solidarity except for the similarity of opinions. Opinions on important matters held by the mobile population start to differ from their siblings remaining in Lithuania, but the relationships remain emotionally close. This indicates that relations do not weaken, only get reorganised adjusting to the mobile family life. We may assume that the diversification of attitudes among siblings connects with different engagement in transnational practices and diverse social and cultural contexts of the countries of destination. Taking into consideration that thinking and doing are intertwined in practice (Smart, 2007, p. 38), migration-induced differences in the conceptualisation of living family lives could lead to contradictory and/or ambivalent ways of understanding familial commitments and caring practices. However, cross-border living experiences allow the maintaining of close emotional bonds between siblings and give reason to believe that different ways in which relationships exist in one’s imagination could be negotiated and new scripts of siblings’ commitment-based relationships can emerge due to migration experience in the family.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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