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CARe in an INterGenerational context (CARING)

Tiziana Nazio explores emotional and practical support in old age

The steady decline in fertility across most European countries has altered the structure of social networks and intergenerational relations because people are having fewer children (David-Barrett, 2019). More distant relatives or friends might increasingly replace biological family members (like children, siblings and parents) or kin by marriage. Kinship structures consist of more generations and are becoming also more diverse due to an increased plurality of family models (e.g. rainbow, blended, single-parent families and more single-persons households). While individuals face more responsibilities towards younger and older generations and for longer periods, there are now fewer siblings and aunts/uncles, in comparison to the past, with whom to share the care provision. Not only kin are fewer but also busier due to increased female labour force participation and longer employment contributions required from both men and women.

This research explores how early family formation events relate to the emotional and practical support that people receive and give in older ages. There are large differences across Europe in the population profile, the economies and the institutional contexts. Every country has its combination of long-term care services, monetary transfers and other measures to support persons in old age, when in need (Saraceno & Keck 2010). Notwithstanding, social relations and emotional support are universal needs and families occupy a central position in providing informal care for old age persons, even in those countries whose welfare states offer generous provisions.

Family formation in the early phase of the life course can directly impact the

availability of kin in later ages by establishing ties with spouses, children and in-laws. It may also affect the opportunity to ground and develop long-term relationships and networks that may replace kin in old age. Whereas family disruption, especially for men, seems to reduce support in old age, little is known about the role played by re-partnering. Although it also can be expected that childless or single individuals may adapt early and substitute kin ties with nonfamily ties, literature has not reached a clear consensus yet on the effects of childlessness on support in older ages (Albertini & Mencarini 2012, Klaus & Schnettler 2016, Djundeva et al. 2018).

With SHARE survey data (Börsch-Supan et al. 2013) for five countries, this project detected typical family trajectories in early adulthood and investigated whether they have a bearing on social support given and received in later life. The project yielded four main findings.

First, it identified nine common patterns of family trajectories for the birth cohorts 1927-58, with countries differing in their proportions of each type of trajectory.

Second, early family trajectories were predictive of the size of old age individuals' emotional support networks (individuals considered confidants, people with whom they most often discuss important things) independently from the current family circumstance and number of children. Emotional support networks often include partners (for 80% of those who had one) and, for those who had children, in around half of the cases comprised one or more of them. However, neither the number of children nor partner's presence predicted the size of emotional support networks. Some of the nine family trajectories

identified are associated with the size of the elderly's emotional support networks in later ages. Childless individuals and couples who had one single child tend to report smaller networks. Further, family disruption resulted in smaller networks, but only in the more traditional Czech Republic and Italy. Re-establishing a family, however, seemed to make up for the lost network: multiple unions, where union dissolution was followed by stable re-partnering, did not result in a smaller network size anywhere except in the Czech Republic.

What happens beyond relational networks? Who provides help to whom? A third result shows that although family trajectories may shape the size of emotional support networks, they do not change the probability of receiving (or giving) practical help or personal care from outside one's household. Help and support comprise both practical help (e.g. home repairs, gardening, transportation, shopping, household chores or help with paperwork) and personal care provision (e.g. dressing, bathing or showering, eating, getting in or out of bed, using the toilet). It is the number of living children and the presence of a partner that strongly predict concrete instances of support. Early family trajectories may only play an indirect role in that having larger networks also contributes to making care exchanges more likely. Further, results indicate that a higher physical distance to the network members reduces the probability of receiving or providing help, and individuals who experienced couple dissolution tend to live at a higher distance. Unlike emotional support, exchanges of practical help and personal care require a higher degree of proximity, because they entail face-to-face interactions.





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The distribution of elderly care that couples provide to parents, parents-in-law, children or grandchildren revealed the fourth pattern; the gendered nature of care, with women doing the larger share, but do men shift their care responsibilities of older generations to their spouses? Rather than to partners, parental care seems more likely to move across siblings, but more to sisters than brothers, especially when caregiving becomes intense. Finally, although upward and downward caring responsibilities might compete, individuals who are more inclined to provide care tend to do so in both directions. (Luppi and Nazio, 2019).

Overall, results show that gender remains a strong influence in the structure of intergenerational relations. Furthermore, the family building that people do early in life is a predictor of the size and composition of the emotional support networks they will have in later life. It is instead the structure of current family circumstance, rather than family trajectories, that best predicts exchanges

in terms of practical help. The overlap of emotional support networks and care providers reveal that for people in couples it is the partners, when able, who generally provide informal care within households. Outside of the household, it is children who are most likely to provide support when the need arises and receive help from parents in turn. However, children are largely not mentioned within the emotional support networks. Emotional support networks still provide an important complementary source of practical support and personal care, with some individuals offering both types of support.

Although technology contributes to maintaining high degrees of emotional closeness and support like never before, care provision in terms of practical help and personal care requires proximity. Living without a partner, being childless or having only one child who lives at a distance are associated with a higher risk of care deficit. Trends like geographical mobility

and spatial segregation, which often follow higher educational investments, housing dynamics, migrations from rural areas and urban development might all contribute to increasing the risk of care deficit. Availability of kin and a support network in the vicinity, as well as spatial variations in service availability, have major implications for differences in old age persons' quality of life and for their well-being.

The variety of circumstances that people experience is expected to increase in the future due to the growing complexity of family trajectories, (re)shaping kinship and emotional bonding. Also, income security in old age might increasingly diversify as a result of different contributions and saving capacity due to diverging employment careers (O'Reilly et al. 2019, OECD 2017).

While caregivers become fewer, the pressure on them is expected to increase with the growing mismatch between care demands and their capacity to provide

care. More elderly adults, especially women, will find themselves simultaneously providing care to both elderly parents as well as grandchildren, all during a longer duration of employment. Women's careers and pension contributions are put at risk by informal care provision, grandparenting as well as elderly care, especially in countries where service provision is lower. What could help bridge this gap? Among other measures, strengthening service provision, affording leave schemes and flexible working arrangements for informal

caregivers, independently from their relation to the caretaker, the family form and the household composition. These measures might encourage men to take on care responsibilities and help to reduce the current gender disparities. Affording the possibility to account for periods in care as contributing towards social security might instead reduce the gendered risk of poverty in old age, especially the gender pension gap due to women's higher risk of interrupted careers for assuming caretaking responsibilities (Nazio 2019).

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SUMMARY

The project analysed the role played by early life course family formation trajectories (at 16–46 years) in shaping emotional support networks and care provision to old age persons in Europe (50+ years) for the birth cohorts 1927–66. Sequence and cluster analyses, together with multivariate models, explored the size of emotional support networks for the elderly, and the likelihood to report help received or given. It also explored the overlap of the two types of care, i.e. how the emotional support network contributed to also offering practical help or personal care. Analyses were based on secondary data analysis of retrospectively collected information from wave 3 and 7 and cross-sectional data from wave 4, 6 and 7 of the data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) for five countries: Italy, East and West Germany, France, Denmark and Czech Republic.

PROJECT PARTNERS


This research has been conducted at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center between September 2017 and August 2019, under the supervision of Prof. Anette Fasang. The project also enjoyed a stay at Population Europe, and received support from the scientific advisory of Prof. Heike Solga, Prof. Michaela Kreyenfeld and Dr Lena Hipp.

PROJECT LEAD PROFILE

Nazio is tenured Senior Researcher at Turin University, Affiliate Fellow at Collegio Carlo Alberto and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research Fellow at the Berlin Social Science Center (WZB), Berlin. Her research examines how family configurations and ties affect individuals' life courses, emphasizing the role of social background, employment, social interactions and institutional settings. She published in the journals *European Sociological Review*, *European Journal of Population*, *Work, Employment & Society*, *Demographic Research* and *International Migration Review*.

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