

韓國老年學研究

Korean Journal of Research in Gerontology

1999, Vol. 8, 5-16

Intergenerational Solidarity: Norms, Affection, and Association in Caregiving and Noncaregiving Families

Eileen E. MaloneBeach

Central Michigan University

Hajime Otani

Central Michigan University

Mary K. DeGenova

University of New Hampshire

(Abstract) We investigated how elder care affects inter-
generational solidarity for the young adult children of parents provi-

This research was funded by Judy Bonner, Dean of the College of Human Environmental Sciences and the Research Grants Committee at the University of Alabama. The authors wish to thank Dr. Stephen J. Thoma and Ms. Meredith E. Taube, for research collaboration. The authors also thank the anonymous reviewers and the editor for their helpful comments on the draft of the paper.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Eileen E. MaloneBeach, Coordinator of Gerontology Program, Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, MI 48859, USA. Electronic mail may be sent to E.MALONEBEACH@CMICH.EDU.

ding care. The adult children of caregiving and noncaregiving families completed questionnaires that measured norms for family primacy, affectual solidarity, and associational solidarity. Comparisons of the two groups indicated that the adult children in caregiving families reported lower levels of affectual solidarity than the adult children in noncaregiving families did. Also, a marginally significant effect suggested that the adult children in caregiving families experience a lower level of associational solidarity than the adult children of noncaregiving families do. We concluded that elder care does have a negative effect on intergenerational solidarity of young adults in American Families.

[Key Words: Caregiving, Elder Care, Intergenerational Solidarity, Primary Caregiver]

Life expectancy has increased markedly in the 20th century. However, the added decades of life often include an erosion of the elder's ability to live independently. The plethora of caregiving studies of the past 20 years reflect societal concern with elder care and depict the response of individual caregivers to aging members' needs for care (Kramer, 1997; Zarit, 1989). While this research has largely focused on the primary caregiver, the literature on parent-child relations in late life has focused on the study of families in general but does not address caregiving families specifically (Atkinson, Kivett, & Campbell, 1986; Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Rossi & Rossi, 1990).

Thus, we are aware of the effects of caregiving on the primary caregiver and have rich theoretical frameworks for understanding parent-child relations in late life. Yet, relatively little is known about how caregiving affects intergenerational family relationships (i.e., elders, elders' children, and elder's grandchildren's children). The purpose of this investigation, therefore, was to examine how intergenerational solidarity is affected by

Intergenerational Solidarity

elder care. We compared young adults (i.e., the third generation) in caregiving families with young adults in families with older adults who do not need care. In particular, we were interested in the effects of elder care on intergenerational solidarity for the young adult children of caregiving parents.

In generational solidarity is defined as family cohesiveness and interdependence across time (McChesney & Bengtson, 1988). It is comprised of three components (Lawton, Silverstein, & Bengtson, 1994): parents' and children's norms for family primacy, parents' affection for children and children's affection for parents (affectual solidarity), and parent-child association (association solidarity). Norms for family primacy refers to perceived expectations of, and obligations between family members (Bengtson & Roberts, 1988, 1991; Bengtson & Schrader, 1982).

A family's shared history of interaction, negotiations, conflict, and life experiences underlie these shared interpretations and expectations (Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Huck, 1994). Norms are reworked and reinforced across time and become the ties that bind family members together. Affectual solidarity is the positive sentiment that parents and children have toward one another. It correlates positively with the third construct, associational solidarity, which is the perception of frequency and context of association between parents and children (Lee & Bengtson, 1990). In other words, parents and children who enjoy mutual affection tend to associate with each other more frequently.

We propose two possible ways that elder care can affect intergenerational solidarity for the adult children in caregiving families. One is that elder care may provide an opportunity for the family to emphasize each component. For instance, Beach (1997) found that caregiving parents, stressed by elder care, might call on their young adult children for help. The parents' requests may

reinforce the adult children's norms for family primacy. Also, affectual solidarity between parents and children may increase as the adult children pitch in to cover family needs. If affectual solidarity increases, then associational solidarity should also increase.

In contrast, elder care may have a negative impact on family solidarity. We suggest several reasons for potential negative effects. First, because elder care is time and energy consuming, the caregiving parents may not have as much time to spend with their adult children. Less shared time may lead to lower levels of associational solidarity. Second, because elder care is stressful, caregiving families often experience an increased level of conflict (Schlesinger & Kronebusch, 1994). In fact, a recent report by MaloneBeach, DeGenova, and Otani (1998) indicated that the young adult children in caregiving families report increased parental conflict. Increased conflict may reduce the level of affectual solidarity, which may in turn further reduce associational solidarity.

Third, norms for family primacy may also erode if the adult children become resentful of being called on to help their parents more frequently than their peers are or if they perceive these requests as off-time. Fourth, developmentally, young adults strive for independence from their parents and tend to emphasize how they differ from them (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971; Lynott & Roberts, 1997; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). It is, therefore, conceivable that caregiving provides an area of intergenerational relations for distinguishing the young adults from their parents. If so, we can expect the young adults in the caregiving families to report lower levels of intergenerational solidarity.

To investigate whether elder care impacts positively or negatively on intergenerational solidarity, we administered three measures of family solidarity to two groups of undergraduate

Intergenerational Solidarity

students in the United States. One group was comprised of adult children from caregiving families, whereas the other group was adult children of noncaregiving families. Our hypothesis was that elder care would produce either a positive or negative effect on the intergenerational solidarity that the adult children in caregiving families feel.

Method

Participants

Participants were undergraduate students at a major university in the southeastern region of the United States who were recruited through university courses. Students filled out questionnaires either in an extra class session or at home and returned the questionnaires within a week.

Of 101 students who participated, 36 identified themselves as adult children of caregiving families. To verify caregiving status, the parents of these students were telephoned. The caregiving group included only those students whose parents identified themselves as primary caregivers and who indicated that a change of residence for the elder would be necessitated if their caregiving efforts were withdrawn. The noncaregiving group was comprised of students who were also members of multigenerational families that included mid-life parents and aging grandparents. They are distinguished from the caregiving group by aging grandparents who are healthy and independent. As shown in Table 1, the adult children of caregiving and noncaregiving families did not differ in age or education. More women ($n = 87$) than men ($n = 14$) participated in this study. Most were single ($n = 92$). Twenty-nine were employed full time and 39 worked part time.

Instruments

Norms for family primacy. Norms for family primacy was assessed by seven items that addressed the obligations of adult children when their aging parents needed help, including co-residence and financial assistance. Items were scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”.

Affectual solidarity. Affectual solidarity is positive sentiment in parent-child relations. It was assessed by 10 items that tapped trust, fairness, understanding, respect, affection, closeness, communication, and ease in getting along (Bengtson & Schrader, 1982). These were reported in terms of the extent to which the respondent felt these sentiments reflected their relationships with their parents. Items were scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = “not well” to 5 = “extremely well”.

Associational solidarity. A single item indicator that addressed the perceived frequency of contact between the parent and child, “How often do you do things together with this parent?” tapped association. This included letters, phone calls, e-mail, as well as face-to-face interaction (Bengtson & Schrader, 1982; Mangen, 1988). The item was scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = “not often” to 5 = “extremely often”.

Results

First, Cronbach's α s were computed for the norms for family primacy and affectual solidarity measures. Both α s were sufficiently high, indicating that the measures were internally consistent ($\alpha = .92$ for the norms for family primacy, and $\alpha = .94$ for the affectual solidarity measure).

Intergenerational Solidarity

Table 1. Age and Education of the Adult Children in Caregiving and Noncaregiving Families and Means and Standard Deviations on Three Measures

Measures	Caregiving		Noncaregiving	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	22.24	4.40	21.66	1.55
Education	15.36	2.05	15.84	1.88
Family Primacy	11.19	3.06	10.69	2.89
Affectual Solidarity	42.36**	8.55	46.44**	4.83
Associational Solidarity	3.36	1.47	3.86	1.07

** $p < .05$.

Second, the participants' responses on the three measures were analyzed. Table 1 displays means and standard deviations for each measure. Scores were summed across the items for the measures of family primary (7 items) and affectual solidarity (10 items). As can be seen, the ratings were similar between the caregiving and noncaregiving participants on the measures of association and norms for family primacy. The rating was higher for the noncaregiving group than the caregiving group on the affectual solidarity measure.

Pearson correlations were computed among three measures. Norms for family primacy showed a significant negative correlation with association ($r = -.21$, $p < .05$, two-tailed). This indicates that stronger norms are related to lower levels of parent-child association. Norms for family primacy, however, were not

correlated with affectual solidarity ($r = -.06$, *n.s.*, two-tailed). The correlation between affectual and association was positive and significant ($r = .56$, $p < .01$, two-tailed). Not surprisingly, higher levels of affectual solidarity were related to higher levels of association. We also correlated participants' age with the three measures. We conducted this analysis to examine whether younger adults would show lower levels of association and family primacy because developmentally they may still be striving for independence from their parents. However, age was not correlated with any of the measures ($r = .03$, *n.s.*, two-tailed, with norms of family primacy, $r = .06$, *n.s.*, two-tailed, with affectual solidarity, and $r = .16$, *n.s.*, two-tailed, with association).

Next, we performed a multivariate analysis of variance to compare the caregiving and noncaregiving groups on the three measures. The results of this analysis showed a significant effect of group, Wilks' lambda = 0.92, $F_{3,97} = 2.70$, $p < .05$, two-tailed. Univariate analyses of variance indicated a significant group effect on affectual solidarity, $F_{1,99} = 7.75$, $MSE = 29.61$, $p < .01$, two-tailed. The adult children in noncaregiving families reported higher levels of affectual solidarity than those in caregiving families did. The univariate analysis also indicated that the groups effect was marginally significant for the association measure, $F_{1,99} = 5.80$, $MSE = 1.52$, $p < .06$, two-tailed.

Discussion

The results of the current investigation revealed that family caregiving to dependent elders has a negative effect on inter-generational solidarity for the young adult children in these families. In particular, affectual solidarity was negatively impacted by elder care. The adult children in caregiving families reported

Intergenerational Solidarity

lower levels of affectual solidarity than those in noncaregiving families did. This finding is noteworthy in light of a recent report by MaloneBeach et al. (1998) which indicated that adult children in caregiving families report higher levels of conflict with their parents than their counterparts in noncaregiving families. It is possible that affectual solidarity and parental conflict are inversely related. As children experience more conflict with their parents, their view of their parents may suffer.

The measure of affectual solidarity was also related to the measures of association. The higher level of affectual solidarity was associated with higher levels of association. Unfortunately, the group effect was only marginally significant. However, the difference does suggest that the adult children of caregiving families experience less association than the adult children of noncaregiving families.

It is also interesting to find that the measure of family primacy was unaffected by caregiving status. It seems that caregiving does not reinforce or negatively affect their sense of family obligation. Note, however, that the mean ratings were relatively low (1.60 per item for the caregiving and 1.53 per item for the noncaregiving groups on a 5-point scale), indicating that our sample did not have a strong sense of family obligation. It is, therefore, possible that the norms for family primacy were not affected by the caregiving status because our participants did not feel obligated to help their caregiving parents. The measure of family primacy was also negatively correlated with the association measure. It appears that a stronger sense of family obligation may have affected their perceptions of how much time they are spending together.

In summary, the results of the present investigation indicated that elder care impacts negatively on intergenerational solidarity.

We, therefore, conclude that elder care does not provide a positive experience for the young adults of caregiving parents in American families. However, elder care may have a different effect for Korean families because the norms for family primacy should be much stronger for Korean families than for American families. Would elder care impact negatively when family members share a strong sense of family obligation? Cross-cultural studies of this nature should reveal how cultural factors can moderate the effects of family caregiving for young adults.

References

- Atkinson, M., Kivett, V., & Campbell, R. (1986). Intergenerational solidarity: An examination of a theoretical model. *Journal of Gerontology*, 41, 408-416.
- Beach, D. (1997). Family caregiving: The positive impact on adolescent relationships. *The Gerontologist*, 37, 233-238.
- Bengtson, V., & Kuypers, J. (1971). Generational differences and the developmental stake. *Aging and Human Development*, 2, 249-260.
- Bengtson, V., & Roberts, R.. (1988, November). *Parent-child solidarity in aging families: An exercise in theory construction*. Paper presented at the Theory Construction and Methodology Workshop of the national Council of Family Relations, Philadelphia.
- Bengtson, V., & Roberts, R. (1991). Intergenerational solidarity in aging families: An example of formal theory construction. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 53, 856-870.
- Bengtson, V., & Schrader, S. (1982). Parent-child relations. In D. Mangen & W. Peterson (Eds.), *Handbook of research instruments in social gerontology*, 2, (pp. 115-185). Minneapolis:

Intergenerational Solidarity

University of Minnesota Press.

- Kramer, B. (1997). Gain in the caregiving experience: Where are we? What next? *The Gerontologist*, 37, 218-232.
- Lawton, L., Silverstein, M., & Bengtson, V. (1994). Solidarity between generations in families. In V. Bengtson & R. Harootyan (Eds.), *Intergenerational linkages*, (pp. 19-42). New York: Springer.
- Lee, R., & Bengtson, V. (1990). Is intergenerational solidarity a unidimensional construct? A second test of a formal model. *Journals of Gerontology: SOCIAL SCIENCES*, 45, S12-S120.
- Lynott, P., & Roberts, R. (1997). The developmental stake hypothesis and changing perceptions of intergenerational relations, 1971-1985. *The Gerontologist*, 37, 394-405.
- MaloneBeach, E., DeGenova, M., & Otani, H. (1998). Conflict, well-being and depression: Young adults in intergenerational caregiving and noncaregiving families. *Korean Journal of Research in Gerontology*, 7, 5-16.
- Mangen, D. (1988). Measuring intergenerational family relations. In D. Mangen, V. Bengtson, & P. Landry, Jr. (Eds.), *Measurement of intergenerational relations* (pp. 31-55). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- McChesney, K. Y. & Bengtson, V. L. (1988). Solidarity, integration, and cohesion in families: Concepts and theories. In D. Mangen, V. Bengtson, & P. Landry, Jr. (Eds.), *Measurement of Intergenerational Relations* (pp. 15-30). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Rossi, A., & Rossi, P. (1990). *Of Human Bonding: Parent-Child Relations Across the Life Span*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Schlesinger, M., & Kronebusch, K. (1994). Intergenerational tensions and conflict: Attitudes and perceptions about social

- justice and age-related needs. In V. Bengtson & R. Harootyan (Eds.), *Intergenerational linkages* (pp. 152-184). New York: Springer.
- Whitbeck, L., Hoyt, D., & Huck, S. (1994). Early family relationships, intergenerational solidarity, and support provided to parents by their adult children. *Journals of Gerontology: SOCIAL SCIENCES*, 49, S85-S94.
- Zarit, S. (1989). Do we need another stress and caregiving study? *The Gerontologist*, 29, 147-148.

(Received February 10, 1999)

(Revision May 15, 1999)

(Accepted July 20, 1999)