

# Giving and Receiving the "Right" Help: Evaluations of Aging Parents and Their Middle-Aged Children on Help Given and Received

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## Introduction

- The social support literature has long emphasized the importance of **subjective appraisals of support** (Pierce, Sarason, Sarason, Joseph, & Henderson, 1996; Vaux, 1988). Evidence suggests that, compared to structural and functional features of support, appraisal of received support is the most consistent and strongest predictor of emotional well-being and health outcomes (Uchino, 2004; Wethington & Kessler, 1986).
- Research on **intergenerational support** has mainly focused on structural and functional features, such as **the type** and **amount** of support exchanged between generations. We know relatively little about how each generation **feels** about the support that they give and receive, and whether they **appraise** this support as **adequate** and **appropriate**. Although measurement of the actual support exchanged is helpful to describe the patterns of exchanges, how people view and feel about support given and received may be central to understanding the motives for giving support and the consequences of receiving support (Bianchi, Hotz, McGarry, & Seltzer, 2008).
- Prior studies of intergenerational exchanges have used quality of the relationship as a proxy for whether each person involved in the exchange was satisfied with the help given or received. It may be, however, that **appraisals about specific aspects of support exchanged**, such as amount, content, or timing, has implications for quality of the relationship and well-being.
- Another consideration is that past studies of intergenerational exchanges have collected information on those exchanges from **a single family member**, either a middle-aged adult or older parent (Bianchi et al., 2007; Freedman, Wolf, Soldo, & Stephen, 1991). When both a parent and his/her adult child have been interviewed, **differences in perspectives** on the amount of support given and received have been found (Mandemakers & Dykstra, 2008; Shapiro, 2004). Another limitation of using a single informant is that many important dimensions **cannot be reported by proxy**, such as how parents and children view their relationships and exchanges with each other.

## Research Objectives

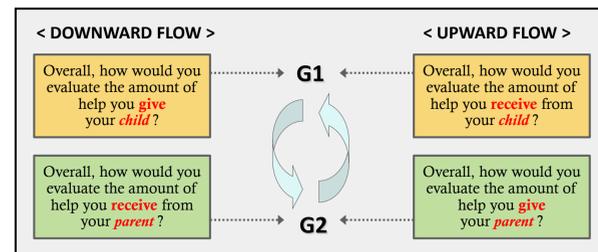
- This study examines how **aging parents (G1)** and **their adult children (G2)** evaluate the amount of support that they give and receive from each other.
- QUESTION 1:** How does each G1 and G2 evaluate the amount of support in downward and upward flows?
- QUESTION 2:** How do the evaluations about the amount of support correspond between dyadic members?
- QUESTION 3:** What factors are associated with G1's and G2's evaluations of the downward and upward flow of support?

## Participants

- This presentation is based on data from **The Family Exchanges Study** (Fingerman, Miller, Birditt, & Zarit, 2009). A sample of 633 middle-aged (40 to 60) participants with at least one living parent and one or more biological children over the age of 18 were identified through random digit dialing and interviewed by telephone in the Philadelphia area.
- From this original sample of **middle-aged adults**, 267 (42%) had **older parents** who also agreed to be interviewed. In 210 cases, one parent was interviewed and in 57 cases, both parents were interviewed (**Dyad N = 324**).

## Measures

- Independent Variables**
  - ✓ **Demographic Characteristics** (Table 1)
    - **Individual:** **Age** (year), **Education** (year), **Health** (1-5), **Marital Status** (Married=1, Not-married=0), **Income** (1-6)
    - **Dyadic:** **Distance** (Logged mile), **Co-residence** (Shared household=1, Independent household=0), **Gender Composition** (Father-Son, Father-Daughter, Mother-Son, Mother-Daughter)
  - ✓ **Actual Amount of Support**
    - 5 types of support in downward and upward flows: **Emotional Support, Practical Assistance, Listening to Talk about Daily Events, Advice and Financial Support**
    - Rated on an 8-point scale from 1 (*Less than once a year or not at all*) to 8 (*Daily*) and used mean of G1's and G2's reports
  - ✓ **Stress and Reward of Helping a Parent or Child**
    - **Stress** (1 item, 1-5)
    - **Reward** (1 item, 1-5)
- Dependent Variables**
  - : **G1's and G2's Evaluations of the Amount of Support**



- ① **MORE:** More than you would like (1) ~ A little more than you would like (2)
- ② **RIGHT:** About right (3)
- ③ **LESS:** A little less than you would like (4) ~ Less than you would like (5)

## Analysis Method

- **Descriptive statistics** examine how each G1 and G2 appraises the amount of support in downward and upward flows and how evaluations correspond between dyadic members.
- A series of **multinomial regression analyses** examine what factors are associated with G1's and G2's evaluations of the amount of support in downward and upward flows.

## Results

- G1's and G2's Evaluations of Help** (Table 2 and 3)
  - **A majority of participants** appraised the amount of support exchanged with their parent/child as **right**.
    - **G1:** Help given (65.1%) and help received (75.3%)
    - **G2:** Help given (57.1%) and help received (81.8%)
  - However, **a number of participants** also reported that they are giving and receiving **less** than they prefer.
    - **G1:** Help given (26.9%) and help received (12.7%)
    - **G2:** Help given (36.1%) and help received (10.1%)
- Agreement in G1's and G2's Evaluations** (Table 2 and 3)
  - **About a half** of the dyads **agreed** about the appropriateness of the amount of support exchanged between them.
    - **G1 = G2** (*More-More, Right-Right, Less-Less*)  
Downward = 59.6%, Upward = 51.9%
    - **G1 < G2** (*Right-More, Less-More, Less-Right*)  
Downward = 28.4%, Upward = 11.1%
    - **G1 > G2** (*More-Right, More-Less, Right-Less*)  
Downward = 12.0%, Upward = 37.0%

## 3. Factors Associated with G1's and G2's Evaluations of the Amount of Support

- Factors significantly associated with appraising the amount of support as either less or more than appropriate included the following:
  - ✓ **Demographic Characteristics: age and health**
    - **G1:** In poorer health → *less help given*
    - **G2:** In poorer health → *less help received*
    - In better health → *more help given*
    - To be older (G1) and younger (G2) → *less help given*
  - ✓ **Dyadic Characteristics: Co-residence and gender composition**
    - **G1:** More likely to share household → *less help received*
    - More likely to be father-son/daughter → *more help received*
    - **G2:** More likely to share household → *more help given*
    - More likely to be mother-son → *more help received*

Table 1. Individual and Dyadic Characteristics M (SD)

Characteristics	G1	G2
Age	75.97 (6.27)	49.65 (4.82)
Education	12.79 (2.44)	14.15 (2.04)
Income	3.05 (1.31)	4.48 (1.39)
Health	3.10 (1.11)	3.50 (1.02)
Married (Yes = 1)	0.49 (0.50)	0.72 (0.45)
White (Yes = 1)	0.68 (0.47)	0.67 (0.47)
Stress of Helping G1/G2	1.61 (1.10)	1.97 (1.10)
Reward of Helping G1/G2	4.28 (0.88)	4.28 (0.79)
Geographic Distance	240.81 (632.06)	
Co-reside (Yes = 1)	0.12 (0.32)	
Father-Son (Yes = 1)	0.12 (0.33)	
Father-Daughter (Yes = 1)	0.18 (0.39)	
Mother-Son (Yes = 1)	0.28 (0.45)	
Mother-Daughter (Yes = 1)	0.42 (0.49)	

Table 2. Evaluation on Downward Exchanges (from G1 to G2)

G1's Evaluation (Help Given)	G2's Evaluation (Help Received)			Total (%)
	① MORE	② RIGHT	③ LESS	
① MORE	6 (1.9)	18 (5.6)	2 (0.6)	26 (8.0)
② RIGHT	17 (5.2)	175 (54.0)	19 (5.9)	211 (65.1)
③ LESS	3 (0.9)	72 (22.2)	12 (3.7)	87 (26.9)
Total (%)	26 (8.0)	265 (81.8)	33 (10.2)	324 (100)

Table 3. Evaluation on Upward Exchanges (from G2 to G1)

G1's Evaluation (Help Received)	G2's Evaluation (Help Given)			Total (%)
	① MORE	② RIGHT	③ LESS	
① MORE	7 (2.2)	20 (6.2)	12 (3.7)	39 (12.0)
② RIGHT	12 (3.7)	144 (44.4)	88 (27.2)	244 (75.3)
③ LESS	3 (0.9)	21 (6.5)	17 (5.2)	41 (12.7)
Total (%)	22 (6.8)	185 (57.1)	117 (36.1)	324 (100)

Table 4. Factors Associated with G1's and G2's Evaluations

Comparison category is RIGHT amount of help	DOWNWARD (from G1 to G2)				UPWARD (from G2 to G1)			
	G1 (Help Given)		G2 (Help Received)		G1 (Help Received)		G2 (Help Given)	
	More	Less	More	Less	More	Less	More	Less
<b>G1's Characteristics</b>								
Age	0.09	-0.04	0.00	-0.00	-0.06	-0.01	-0.05	0.12***
Health	0.59	-0.45**	0.23	0.28	0.13	-0.18	-0.68	-0.26
Education	-0.09	0.09	0.01	-0.04	0.19	-0.08	-0.09	0.04
Income	-0.52	-0.13	-0.04	-0.23	-0.42	0.16	-0.05	-0.03
Married	-1.02	0.46	-0.69	-0.22	0.26	-0.87	1.42	-0.25
<b>G2's Characteristics</b>								
Age	-0.08	-0.01	-0.01	-0.05	0.04	0.01	0.06	-0.17***
Health	0.09	-0.23	-0.38	-0.63*	-0.01	-0.03	1.02*	-0.14
Education	0.15	-0.10	-0.03	0.06	-0.16	0.05	-0.18	0.10
Income	0.10	-0.07	0.24	-0.09	-0.17	-0.13	-0.10	-0.25
Married	-0.48	-0.07	-0.87	-0.98	-0.24	0.02	-0.80	0.47
<b>Dyadic Characteristics</b>								
Distance (logged)	0.05	-0.08	-0.02	0.15	0.21	-0.19	0.08	0.24
Co-residence	0.25	-0.33	-1.36	0.74	-1.08	2.34**	2.95*	0.30
Father-Son	-0.48	0.71	0.07	0.27	2.29*	-0.95	0.74	-0.78
Father-Daughter	-0.04	-0.49	0.08	0.03	1.93**	-0.95	1.25	-0.54
Mother-Son	-0.90	0.01	1.29*	-0.95	0.69	0.27	0.20	0.46
<b>Actual Amount of Support</b>								
Emotional support	-0.38	0.10	-0.04	-0.21	0.26	0.23	0.49	-0.18
Practical assistance	0.12	-0.26*	-0.15	-0.35	0.49*	-0.46*	0.11	-0.28*
Listening to talk	-0.30	-0.08	-0.21	-0.08	0.31	-0.60*	-0.17	0.01
Advice	0.38	-0.04	0.36	-0.04	-0.07	0.15	-0.33	0.05
Financial support	0.58*	-0.10	0.48	-0.33	0.24	-0.07	0.12	-0.03
<b>Stress and Reward regarding Helping G1/G2</b>								
Stress	0.83***	0.16	0.45	0.54*	-0.40	0.38*	1.21**	0.06
Reward	-0.18	-0.03	-0.56	-0.68*	-0.50*	-0.46	-1.23*	0.59**
Model Chi-Square	97.763***		77.566***		111.827***		114.267***	

\*\*\*p < .001. \*\*p < .01. \*p < .05.

## Discussion

- Although a majority of dyads agree about the appropriateness of the amount of support, a notable minority believe that they are giving and receiving more or less than they prefer.
- These discrepancies are associated with individual and familial situations as well as stress and reward obtained through intergenerational exchanges, suggesting a complexity in how support is perceived within a parent-child dyad.
- Although the amount of actual help (*e.g., practical assistance*) is sometimes significant in distinguishing how people evaluate the amount of help given and received, stress and reward are the most consistent predictors of evaluations of help given and received.

- ✓ **Actual Amount of Support: Practice assistance, listening to talk and financial support**
  - **G1:** Less practical assistance → *less help given and received*
  - More practical assistance → *more help received*
  - More financial support → *more help given*
  - Less listening to talk → *less help received*
  - **G2:** Less practical assistance → *less help given*
- ✓ **Stress and Reward regarding Helping G1/G2**
  - **G1:** More stressful → *more help given and less help received*
  - Less rewarding → *more help received*
  - **G2:** More stressful → *more help given and less help received*
  - Less rewarding → *more help given and less help received*
  - More rewarding → *less help given*