The Structure of Intergenerational Exchanges of Middle-Aged Adults with Their Parents and Parents-In-Law in Korea

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Introduction

o Each parent and adult offspring is usually involved in exchanges of support with multiple family members, and the exchanges are likely to be affected by other relationships within a family system (Davey, Janke, & Savla, 2004). Given the competition for and depletion of resources that an individual or a family can provide, it is important to consider **multiple relationships within a family** when examining issues of intergenerational exchanges.

o To date, most studies on within-family differences have focused on the fact that an aging parent can exchange support with multiple grown offspring (Henretta, Hill, Li, Soldo, & Wolf, 1997; Pillemer & Suitor, 2008). Offspring who are married also can have **multiple parents** to consider in exchanging support (*e.g., parents* and *parents-in-law*).

o Recent research has recognized couples as a team in providing care for aging parents, including a focus on **in-law relations** in studying intergenerational support (Henz, 2009; Szinovacz & Davey, 2008). Most of these studies, however, have considered only **one direction of support** – support given to elderly parents and parents-in-law. The full impact of exchanges of adult offspring with parents and parents-in-law may depend on looking at both upward and downward flows of support between them.

o As a family systems perspective suggests, inter-generational exchanges can have implications for other subsystems within a family (*e.g., marital system*). Given that relationships with parents-in-law are basically acquired through marriage, it is necessary to examine how the quality of **marital relationships** exerts an effect on the pattern of intergenerational exchanges between parents and parents-in-law.

Research Questions

QUESTION 1: What is the pattern of exchanges of different types of support (*e.g., emotional, instrumental, and financial support*) of married adult children with both parents and parents-in-law?

QUESTION 2: Are there differences in the patterns of exchanges with parents and parents-in-law by gender of adult offspring?

QUESTION 3: How are the patterns of intergenerational exchanges between parents and parents-in-law associated with marital quality of adult offspring?

Participants

o This study is based on data from **"Successful Midlife Development: Mental Health and Work/Family Life Course In Korea and the United States"** (Han, Lee, Ok, Ryff, & Marks, 2002). This study was designed to collect Korean data corresponding with the MIDUS dataset.

o The original sample consisted of 1,667 adults aged 30~59 residing in 16 municipal cities and provinces in Korea. For this study, we analyzed **937 married adults** who have at least one parent and parent-in-law alive.

Measures

o **Dependent Variables**

✓ **Support Exchanges**

• A total of **12 indicators** of support exchanges with parents and parents-in-law were measured (*3 types of support x 2 directions of flow x 2 sets of parents*).

Type of support	Direction of flow	To / From
Financial support Emotional support Instrumental support	Giving Receiving	Parents Parents-in-law

• The support items were originally rated on a 4-point scale, but we dichotomized them for analysis: 1 = Yes ("*sometimes*" and "*often*") and 2 = No ("*not at all*" and "*rarely*")

o **Covariates**

✓ **Demographic Characteristics**

• **Age**: $M = 39.2$ ($SD = 6.3$)
• **Gender**: Female = 1 (46.7%)
• **Education** (4-point scale; 1 = *elementary school and under* to 4 = *college and above*): $M = 3.3$ ($SD = 0.7$)
• **Household income** (unit of 10,000 won, Korean currency): $M = 277$ ($SD = 318$)
• **Employment of respondent and spouse**: Dual earner = 1 (48.9%)

✓ **Geographic Distance from Parents / Parents-in-law**
(6-point scale; 0 = *live together* to 5 = *live overseas*): $M = 2.3$ ($SD = 1.3$) for parents; $M = 2.3$ ($SD = 1.3$) for parents-in-law

✓ **Marital Quality**

• **Spouse support** (mean of 6 items; 4-point scale; 1 = *a lot* to 4 = *not at all*; $\alpha = .84$): $M = 2.9$ ($SD = 0.5$)
• **Spouse strain** (mean of 6 items; 4-point scale; 1 = *often* to 4 = *never*; $\alpha = .88$): $M = 1.9$ ($SD = 0.5$)

Analysis Method

o To classify the pattern of intergenerational exchanges, **Latent Class Analysis** (LCA) was applied to the 12 indicators of support exchanges (*SAS PROC LCA*; Lanza, Collins, Lemmon, & Schafer, 2007).

o To examine the effects of covariates on latent class membership, **multinomial logistic regression** was used.

Results

1. Latent Patterns of Intergenerational Exchanges with Parents and Parents-In-Law

o A **5-class model** was identified as optimal for pattern of intergenerational exchanges between parents and parents-in-law (*Table 1*).

Table 1. *Model Fit Comparisons of Latent Class Models*

Model	G^2	df	AIC	BIC
2-Class	2912.81	4070	2962.81	3083.83
3-Class	2544.28	4057	2620.28	2804.22
4-Class	2251.03	4044	2353.03	2599.90
5-Class	**2079.49**	**4031**	**2207.49**	**2517.29**
6-Class	1987.94	4018	2141.94	2514.66
7-Class	1915.39	4005	2095.39	2531.03

o Among 5 classes, **3 classes** showed **balanced patterns** between parents and parents-in-law (total = 60%): ① high exchanges with both sides of parents (16%), ② low exchanges with both sides of parents (22%), and ③ giving more to both sides of parents than receiving from them (23%) (*Figure 1*).
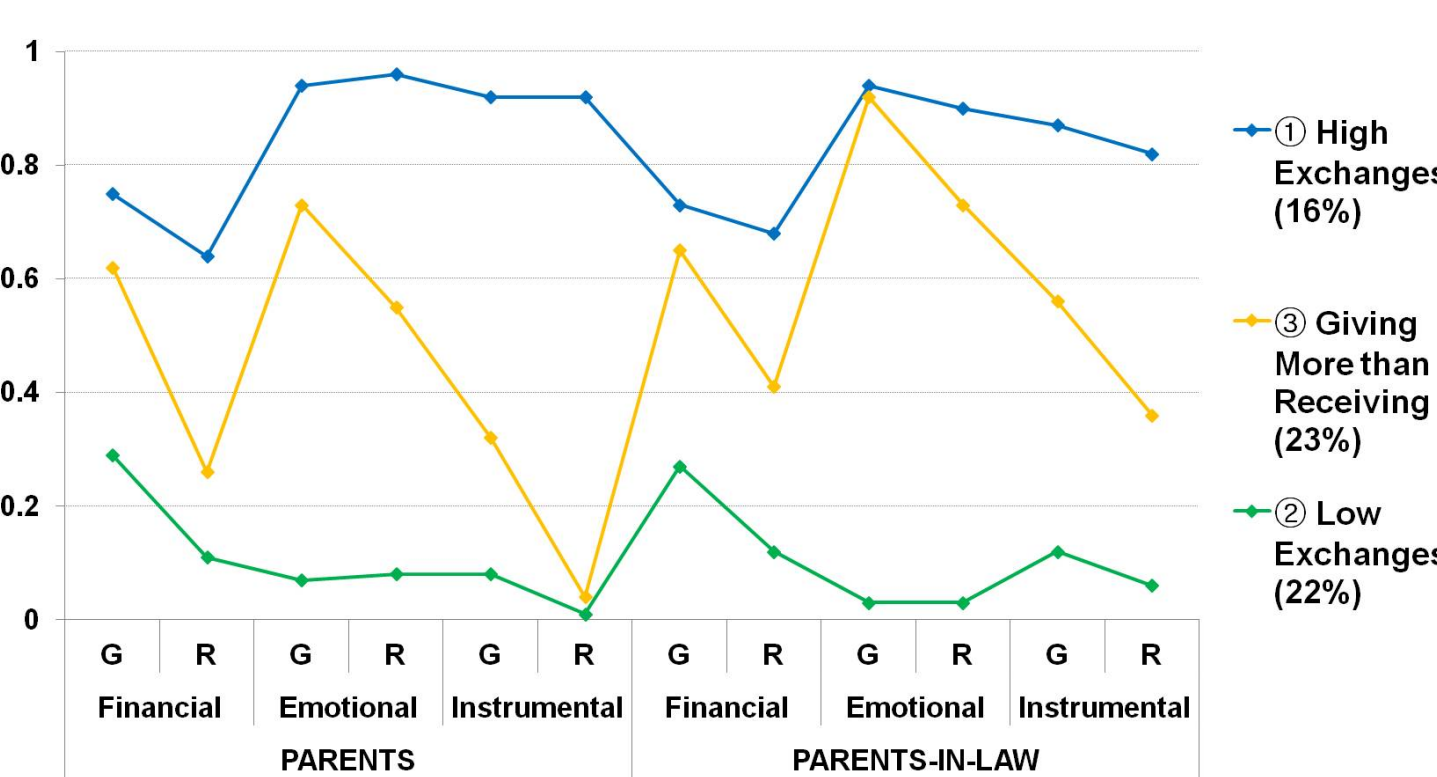

Figure 1. *Balanced Patterns between Parents and Parents-In-Law*

o The other **2 classes** revealed **imbalanced patterns** between parents and parents-in-law (total = 40%): ④ exchanges only with own parents (24%) and ⑤ high emotional exchange with own parents, but giving parents-in-law only tangible support (17%) (*Figure 2*).

➪ **Class 5 shows an obligatory pattern of exchanges with parents-in-law** (*with low levels of emotional support between them*).
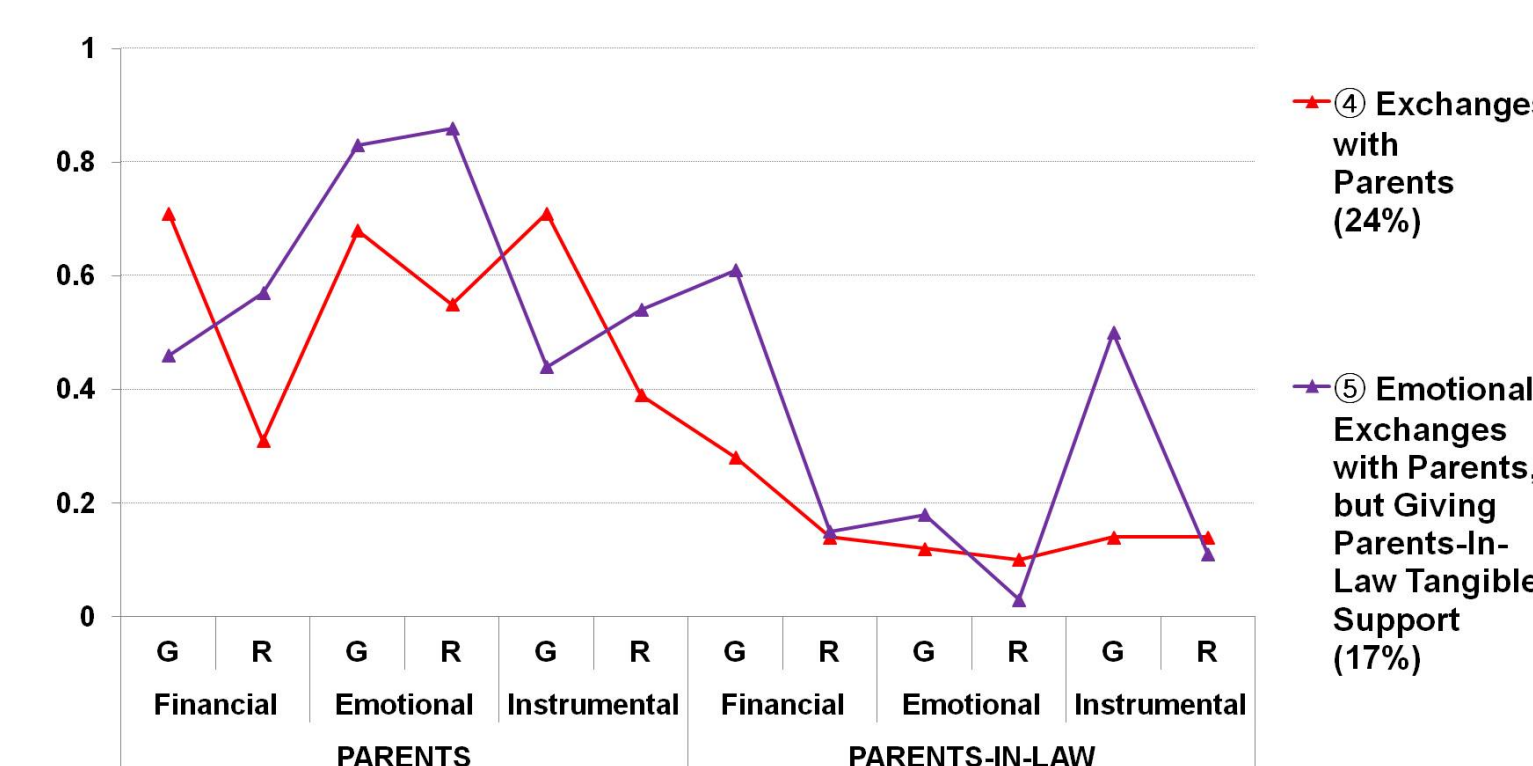

Figure 2. *Imbalanced Patterns between Parents and Parents-In-Law*

2. Gender Differences in Membership Probabilities of Latent Class (*Table 2*)

o Whereas men were more likely to be a member of Class 2 (*low exchanges with both sides of parents*), women were more likely to be a member of Class 3 (*giving more than receiving*).

o Whereas men were more likely to belong to Class 4 (*exchanges only with own parents*), women were more likely to be in Class 5 (*giving only tangible support to parents-in-law*).

➪ **These gender differences reflect gendered role of women as support provider/kin-keeper as well as patrilineal patterns in Korean families.**

Table 2. *Latent Class Membership Probabilities by Gender*

	BALANCED			IMBALANCED	
	Class 1 *High exchanges*	Class 2 *Low exchanges*	Class 3 *Giving more*	Class 4 *Only with own parents*	Class 5 *Giving P-I-L only tangible support*
Total	0.16	0.22	0.23	0.24	0.17
Male	0.16	0.24	0.19	0.41	0.00
Female	0.17	0.20	0.27	0.06	0.35

3. Effects of Marital Quality on Latent Class Membership (*Table 3*)

o After controlling demographic variables of respondents and geographic distances from their parents and parents-in-law, **both dimensions of marital quality** were **significantly associated** with the class membership (*p* < .001 for spouse support; *p* < .05 for spouse strain), especially, with membership of imbalanced classes.

o Compared to the reference class (*high exchanges with both sets of parents*), Class 4 (*exchanges only with own parents*) showed lower levels in both spouse support and strain (OR = 0.44 for support; OR = 0.46 for strain).

o Also, Class 5 (*giving parents-in-law only tangible support*) revealed lower levels of spouse support (OR = 0.64) and higher levels of spouse strain (OR = 1.99), compared to the reference class.

Table 3. *Odds Ratios for Effects of Covariates on Latent Class Membership* (*Multinomial Logistic Regression*)

	$\Delta 2 LL$ ($\Delta df = 4$)	BALANCED		IMBALANCED	
		Class 2 *Low exchanges*	Class 3 *Giving more*	Class 4 *Only with own parents*	Class 5 *Giving P-I-L only tangible*
Age	31.49***	1.01	1.06	1.08	0.95
Female (*Yes* = 1)	34.51***	0.84	1.33	0.03	2.24
Education	12.85*	0.47	0.72	0.57	0.81
Household income	6.12, NS	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Dual earner (*Yes* = 1)	6.64, NS	0.73	1.10	0.80	0.59
Distance from P	28.80***	1.33	1.31	0.93	0.83
Distance from P-I-L	30.99***	1.37	1.14	2.07	1.46
Spouse support	20.38***	**0.39**	1.22	**0.44**	**0.64**
Spouse strain	10.88*	1.07	1.11	**0.46**	**1.99**

Notes. **Reference = Class 1** (*high exchanges with both sides of parents*). Reference class has odds ratio of 1.00. *p < .05. **p <.01. ***p < .001.

Discussion

o Intergenerational exchanges in Korean families have been traditionally characterized as a patrilineal pattern with strong filial obligations on sons and daughters-in-law. However, the five classes of support exchanges between parents and parents-in-law suggest that there is a substantial variability in the exchange pattern, showing a mixed form of patrilineal tradition and bilateral changes. Also, the pattern of exchanges showed significant associations with adult children's marital quality.