



Patterns of Support Exchanges between Middle-Aged Adults and Their Aging Parents

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Introduction

- Research on intergenerational support has examined only one direction of support, focusing on support given to aging parents. However, given that help and assistance from aging parents can still be important for middle-aged children's lives, it is necessary to consider **both support given and received** to describe fully the pattern of intergenerational exchanges in adult families. By focusing solely on support given, researchers have ignored the role that reciprocity may play in these exchanges (Silverstein et al., 2002).
- Previous studies have also tended to view different types and directions of support exchanged between parents and adult children in isolation of one another. An emerging perspective, however, emphasizes the multidimensionality and complexity of intergenerational relationships and incorporates multiple dimensions to characterize family typologies (Hogan et al., 1993; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997). A family typology approach that combines multiple dimensions of intergenerational exchanges allows us to examine how each family tries to arrange their different types of resources, also taking into account the support they receive.
- Theories (e.g., *solidarity and ambivalence models*) and empirical research show that the pattern of intergenerational exchanges and individuals or family's responses/emotions surrounding support exchanges can be pivotal in understanding the intergenerational relations. For example, those who engage in extensive support exchanges also are more prone to conflict, indicating ambivalent rather than cohesive relationship (van Gaalen & Dykstra, 2006).

Research Questions

QUESTION 1: How do middle-aged adults (aged 40 to 60) exchange different types of support with their aging parents (aged 57 to 96)?

QUESTION 2: What factors (e.g., individual needs/resources and beliefs, family characteristics, and relationship quality) are associated with the patterns of support exchanges?

Participants

- This study is based on data from *The Family Exchanges Study* (Fingerman et al., 2009). The original sample included 633 middle-aged adults (aged 40 to 60) who had at least one adult child and one living parent in 2008.
- From the original sample, we analyzed data from **629 middle-aged participants** who provided the complete information about each of living parents (**N = 862**) and their own background.

Measures

Support Exchanges

- Total **10 indicators** of support exchanges between middle-aged children and older parents (i.e., 5 types x 2 directions of flow)

Type of support (Intergenerational Support Scale; ISS)	Direction of flow
① Emotional support	Giving
② Listening to talk	
③ Advice	Receiving
④ Practical assistance	
⑤ Financial support	

- Rated the frequency of each type of support on a 8-point scale (less than once a year or not at all = 1 to daily = 8)

Covariates (Table 1)

Child characteristics:

Age (years), Gender (male = 1, female = 0), Years of education, Marital status (married = 1, not-married = 0), Minority status (racial minority = 1, non-Hispanic White = 0), Self-rated health (poor = 1 to excellent = 5), Number of children, Number of siblings, and Filial obligation (never = 1 to always = 5; 6 items; $\alpha = 0.79$)

Parent characteristics:

Age (years), Gender (male = 1, female = 0), Years of education, Marital status (married = 1, not-married = 0), ADL need (yes = 1, no = 0), and Number of problems (8 items)

Dyadic characteristics:

Residential distance (miles), Positive and negative relationship quality (not at all = 1 to great deal = 5; 2 items; $\alpha = 0.73$ and 0.68)

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Characteristics	Middle-aged child (N = 629)	Older parent (N = 862)
<i>Individual characteristics</i>		
Age	50.69 (4.98)	77.08 (6.82)
Male (yes = 1)	47.9%	37.4%
Years of education	14.19 (2.02)	12.18 (2.82)
Married (yes = 1)	69.6%	50.3%
Racial minority (yes = 1)	36.5%	--
Self-rated health	3.49 (1.06)	--
ADL need (yes = 1)	--	31.7%
Number of problems	--	1.50 (1.20)
Number of children	2.81 (1.46)	--
Number of siblings	3.22 (2.43)	--
Filial obligation	3.95 (0.55)	--
<i>Dyadic characteristics</i>		
Residential distance (miles)	236.16 (662.71)	
Positive relationship quality	3.98 (0.90)	
Negative relationship quality	1.97 (0.95)	

Analysis Method

- Latent Profile Analysis** was applied to the 10 indicators of support exchanges to classify the pattern of support between adult children and parents (*Complex Mixture in MPLUS*).
- Multilevel multinomial regressions** were conducted to examine factors associated with the pattern of support exchanges (*SAS PROC MIXED*).

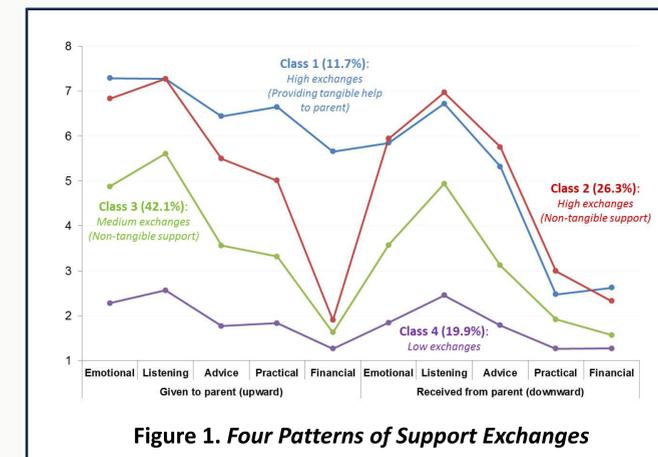


Figure 1. Four Patterns of Support Exchanges

Table 2. Multilevel Multinomial Logistic Regression Analysis for Support Exchange Patterns

	Class 1 High exchanges (providing tangible help)	Class 2 High exchanges (non-tangible support)	Class 3 Medium exchanges (non-tangible support)	Class 4 Low exchanges
	B	B	B	B
<i>Child characteristics</i>				
Age	-1.00*	-1.91***	-0.66*	(ref)
Male (yes = 1)	-0.04	-0.06	0.02	(ref)
Years of education	0.00	0.00	0.04	(ref)
Married (yes = 1)	-0.10	0.11	0.35	(ref)
Racial minority (yes = 1)	1.20*	-0.11	-0.54	(ref)
Self-rated health	-0.03	-0.10	0.07	(ref)
Number of children	0.06	0.17	0.10	(ref)
Number of siblings	-0.22*	-0.32***	-0.10†	(ref)
Filial obligation	1.64***	1.38***	0.12	(ref)
<i>Parent characteristics</i>				
Age	0.11*	0.11**	0.02	(ref)
Male (yes = 1)	-1.59***	-1.57**	-1.07***	(ref)
Years of education	0.01	0.13†	0.07	(ref)
Married (yes = 1)	-1.76**	-0.47	0.16	(ref)
ADL need (yes = 1)	0.71	-0.26	0.11	(ref)
# of Problems	0.31†	0.13	0.14	(ref)
<i>Dyadic characteristics</i>				
Distance (logged miles)	-0.79***	-0.44***	-0.14*	(ref)
Positive relationship quality	2.06***	2.28***	0.99***	(ref)
Negative relationship quality	1.07***	1.16***	0.27	(ref)

†p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Results and Discussion

- Four exchange patterns were identified: (1) "high exchanges – providing tangible help to older parents" (11.7%) (2) "high (non-tangible support) exchanges" (26.3%), (3) "moderate (non-tangible support) exchanges" (42.1%), and (4) "low exchanges" (19.9%).
- After controlling for individual needs/resources and residential distance, middle-aged adults who are in minority status are more likely to belong to a high exchange pattern with the highest levels of practical and financial support provided to parents (Class 1).
- Both dimensions of relationship quality with parents (i.e., positive and negative relationships) are positively associated with having high exchange patterns (Class 1 and 2), suggesting that extensive support exchanges with parents may entail ambivalence toward their parents.

- Younger children tend to show high and medium exchange patterns
- Racial minority children tend to show a high exchange pattern -- tangible help given to parents
- Children with less siblings tend to show high exchange patterns
- Children with stronger feelings of filial obligation tend to show high exchange patterns
- Older parents tend to have high exchange patterns
- Mothers tend to show high and medium exchange patterns
- Parents without spouse tend to show a high exchange pattern -- tangible help received from children
- Dyads living close tend to show high and medium exchange patterns
- Dyads with higher positive relationships tend to show high exchange patterns
- Dyads with higher negative relationships tend to show high exchange patterns