



## The temporal structure of intergenerational exchange: A within-family analysis of parent–child reciprocity



Thomas Leopold <sup>a,\*</sup>, Marcel Raab <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Bamberg, Kapuzinerstr. 16, 96047 Bamberg, Germany, and European University Institute, Via delle Fontanelle 10, 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole, Italy

<sup>b</sup> University of Bamberg and WZB Berlin Social Research Center, Germany

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 21 March 2013

Accepted 1 May 2013

#### Keywords:

Intergenerational transfers

Reciprocity

Parent–child relationships

Within-family analysis

Exchange

### ABSTRACT

Previous studies of parent–child reciprocity have focused either on the long term (generalized exchange over the life course) or on the short term (concurrent exchange in later life). The purpose of this research was to investigate the linkage between both temporal patterns of reciprocity within an integrative conceptual framework. We assessed whether long-term and short-term reciprocity operated as interdependent mechanisms that initially selected and subsequently relieved intergenerational caregiving relationships. We used data from the Asset and Health Dynamics Among the Oldest Old study (AHEAD) provided by frail, single-living parents of at least two children ( $N = 1010$  respondents comprising 3768 parent–child dyads). Fixed-effects conditional logit models estimated between-sibling differences in assistance provided to parents, measured by instrumental help (i.e., assistance with IADLs) and hands-on care (i.e., assistance with ADLs). Key predictors were two measures of financial transfers given to children referring to longer and shorter recall periods. Receiving earlier and current financial transfers increased adult children's propensity to support their parents in later life. The effect of earlier transfers pertained to help rather than care whereas the reverse was true for the effect of current transfers. We found no evidence for a linkage between long-term and short-term reciprocity. Overall, the results indicate that adult children might balance long-term support accounts relative to their siblings, suggesting an intra-generational orientation on equity.

© 2013 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

### Introduction

The principle of reciprocity is widely regarded as a fundamental mechanism governing intergenerational transfers of time and money (Henretta, Hill, Li, Soldo, & Wolf, 1997; Hjälm, 2012; Hollstein & Bria, 1998; Leopold & Raab, 2011; Silverstein, Conroy, Wang, Giarrusso, & Bengtson, 2002). Understood as a moral norm, reciprocity “defines certain actions and obligations as repayments for the benefits received” (Gouldner, 1960, p. 170). Recipients of intergenerational support remain indebted to the giver until balance is restored by an equivalent repayment. A major reason for the continuing scientific interest in reciprocity is its character as a universal, stable, and reliable norm: If

reciprocity influences instrumental assistance between the generations, adult children's support to their elderly parents is unlikely to erode even in rapidly aging societies that burden families with increasing demands for help and care.

The literature has investigated two temporal patterns of reciprocal exchange<sup>1</sup> in parent–child relationships, long-term

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of the present study, we employ a rather basic notion of reciprocity building on the premise that receivers adhere to a norm that demands repayment of a debt. Scholarly traditions diverge with regard to the question of why this occurs. Economic exchange theory emphasizes self-interested motives behind the reciprocation of a transfer (e.g., avoiding shame and guilt, protecting reputation). Social exchange theory directs attention to the – often long-term – relationships between exchange partners and the role of trust and obligation in building and maintaining social cohesion (Silverstein et al., 2002). It was beyond the scope of the present study to discuss and test these perspectives in detail.

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +49 951 863 3051.

E-mail addresses: [thomas.leopold@uni-bamberg.de](mailto:thomas.leopold@uni-bamberg.de) (T. Leopold), [marcel.raab@uni-bamberg.de](mailto:marcel.raab@uni-bamberg.de) (M. Raab).

and short-term. The idea of *long-term reciprocity* posits that adult children repay parental support several years or even decades later (Finch & Mason, 1993; Hollstein & Bria, 1998). Accordingly, research on long-term reciprocity has conceptualized earlier parental support given to children as investment strategies or insurance policies (Silverstein et al., 2002) and, from a *within-family* perspective, as a factor influencing the selection of a caregiver among siblings (Henretta et al., 1997). These perspectives share the premise that earlier parental support is exogenous to a child's later assistance.

The idea of *short-term reciprocity* (Leopold & Raab, 2011) relates to late-life situations in which a child already provides support to an infirm parent. In these situations, reciprocity is assumed to operate within a much shorter time interval between giving and receiving. This concept proposes contemporaneous exchange as a disburdening arrangement in which elderly parents give financial support more often to those of their children who provide care.

So far, the ideas of long-term and short-term reciprocity have only been tested separately. The present study attempts to examine both temporal patterns within a common framework. Investigating the nature of their linkage integrates previous research on reciprocity in parent–child relationships and, at a more general level, contributes to understanding how mutual support in families operates. Our conceptual approach suggests two contrasting views: The first posits a sequential linkage of long-term and short-term reciprocity across the family life course. From a within-family perspective, this sequence of exchange patterns involves (long-term) selection and (short-term) disburdening of caregiving relationships. The second view suggests the absence of a sequential linkage, positing that long-term and short-term reciprocity operate independently within families.

We draw on data provided by single-living respondents from the first wave of the Asset and Health Dynamics Among the Oldest Old (AHEAD) study. Using within-family fixed-effects models, these data allow us to jointly investigate long-term and short-term reciprocity in parent–child relationships. Our analysis proceeds in four steps. First, we outline a conceptual model encompassing long-term as well as short-term patterns of parent–child reciprocity. Second, based on this conceptual model, we replicate and reexamine findings from a study that used the AHEAD data to investigate long-term reciprocity in parent–child relationships (Henretta et al., 1997). Third, we test whether the AHEAD data support the concept of short-term reciprocity (Leopold & Raab, 2011). Finally, we examine two contrasting hypotheses about the linkage between both temporal patterns of reciprocity.

## Theoretical background

The long-term definition of reciprocity in parent–child relationships refers to their intimate, stable, and lasting character. Although at any one point in time, parent–child relations may appear asymmetrical, a support balance is achieved over the long term according to an implicit contract that demands equivalent compensation of the benefits received. In this sense, adherence to the norm of reciprocity guides a child's later repayment of debts to parents accumulated earlier in life. Dyadic analyses of panel data supported this idea, revealing that earlier financial support from parents

produced a time-contingent repayment from an adult child (Silverstein et al., 2002). This exchange of money versus time pointed to an insurance mechanism triggered by parental health decline. A related finding emerged from within-family analyses of support provision to an infirm parent. Henretta et al. (1997) posited that reciprocity operates as a *selection mechanism* determining which child in a family provides assistance. Their study showed that those children who had received more financial support than their siblings were more likely to provide help and care in later life. In fact, previous receipt of transfers emerged as one of the key predictors of later support to parents: In terms of effect size, previous parental transfers were almost as important as gender in predicting a child's propensity to provide support in later life.

In a recent study on short-term reciprocity, we proposed a different temporal structure of reciprocal exchange in late parent–child relationships (Leopold & Raab, 2011). The analytical strategy drew on several ideas from Henretta et al. (1997), using a sample of infirm, single-living parents and estimating fixed-effects models to examine transactional patterns within families in the currencies of money versus time. The purpose of reciprocal exchange, however, was conceptualized differently: Rather than conditioning selection into caregiving, we assumed short-term reciprocity to ease a caregiving relationship that already existed. The corresponding pattern of exchange involved gifts and return-gifts that co-occurred within a time window of less than a year. The idea was that an elderly parent who provided concurrent reciprocation eased stress and burden of a caregiving child and alleviated feelings of dependency in times of physical decline. In contrast to long-term reciprocity, equivalence was less important because parents' contributions were not assumed to be proportional to the assistance received. For parents who required support, the issue was contributing to the best of their abilities rather than engaging in balanced exchange. In our empirical analyses with data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), we found that children who provided assistance to a frail parent more than doubled their chances of receiving concurrent financial transfers from that parent compared to non-helping siblings. Importantly, this effect was distinctly related to the intensity of a child's support as an indicator for stress and burden, emerging most clearly if a child provided time-consuming assistance.

It is important to note that in each of these quantitative studies of long-term and short-term reciprocity, children's transfers of time<sup>2</sup> (i.e., instrumental help and care) were exchanged against parents' transfers of money. This *heteromorphic* exchange (i.e., transfers of different currencies) is, on the one hand, consistent with specific age-related needs of both generations. Previous financial transfers from parents, for instance, are often indispensable for adult children to “get a start in life” or to recover from adverse events such as divorce (Leopold & Schneider, 2011). In later life, frail parents are clearly in need of time transfers. Moreover, financial transfers appear to be a more viable form of repayment, as

<sup>2</sup> In this manuscript we use the term time transfer as a broad category encompassing instrumental support of different types and intensities. This term is commonly used in the literature to reference one of the three main currencies of intergenerational transfers (time, money, and space; see Soldo & Hill, 1993).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10513153>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10513153>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)