



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Social Science Research

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/ssresearch](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/ssresearch)

# Intergenerational solidarity and intragenerational relations between adult siblings

Karsten Hank<sup>a,\*</sup>, Anja Steinbach<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Cologne, Germany

<sup>b</sup> University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany

## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Intergenerational solidarity  
Intragenerational solidarity  
Parents  
Siblings  
Germany

## ABSTRACT

Few studies have yet investigated how intergenerational solidarity between parents and adult children is associated with intragenerational relations between siblings. Theoretically, one might expect compensation between inter- and intragenerational relationship solidarity as well as spillover effects from parent-child solidarity to sibling solidarity. Using data from the German Family Panel (pairfam), this study analyzes 5410 interviews with young adults who provided detailed information on the relationships to their parents and up to four siblings. Focusing on four dimensions of relationships in families (contact, emotional closeness, intimacy, and conflict), hierarchical linear regression results provide general support for the assumption that inter- and intragenerational relations reinforce each other. We also find evidence for the existence of partially compensating relationships: more frequent intergenerational conflicts, for example, not only predict more frequent conflicts between siblings, but also greater intimacy. The results are in line with predictions derived from family systems theory as well as social learning and attachment theories.

## 1. Introduction

Next to a long tradition of research investigating *intergenerational* solidarity between parents and adult children (see [Kalmijn, 2014](#); [Seltzer and Bianchi, 2013](#), for recent reviews), a growing number of studies also address *intragenerational* relations between adult siblings (e.g., [Steinbach and Hank, 2018](#); [Walker et al., 2005](#)). This seems important, because even though multigenerational (that is, ‘vertical’) bonds have gained in importance relative to nuclear family ties ([Bengtson, 2001](#)), siblings (that is, ‘horizontal bonds’) remain an important social resource over the life course (e.g., [Spitze and Trent, 2018](#); [White, 2001](#)). However, although we know that offspring and sibling structural characteristics are closely associated with, for example, both upward (e.g., [Tolkacheva et al., 2014](#)) and downward (e.g., [Goodsell et al., 2015](#)) exchanges of instrumental and financial support within families, relatively little is known yet about the role of intergenerational family relations in shaping intragenerational solidarity between siblings (but see [Derkman et al., 2011](#); [Voorpostel and Blieszner, 2008](#)). This is unfortunate, because insufficiently accounting for potential linkages between parent-child and sibling solidarity provides us with an incomplete picture of the complexities of *family* solidarity that an individual is likely to experience. Even though our focus in this article is on emotional bonds (see below), it is also closely related to the more general idea of family members’ ‘linked lives’ and its role in the study of social and economic inequalities (e.g., [Gilligan et al., 2018](#)). Understanding better how such inequalities might emerge from family interactions thus appears as an important task.

Family systems theory (see [Cox and Paley, 1997](#)) provides a useful conceptual framework to assess this issue, because it directs

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [hank@wiso.uni-koeln.de](mailto:hank@wiso.uni-koeln.de) (K. Hank), [anja.steinbach@uni-due.de](mailto:anja.steinbach@uni-due.de) (A. Steinbach).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2018.08.003>

Received 2 October 2017; Received in revised form 11 June 2018; Accepted 7 August 2018

0049-089X/ © 2018 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

attention to the interdependence among the subsystems that comprise families. We perceive parent-child relationships on the one hand and sibling relationships on the other hand as two such subsystems, whose solidarity relations might be linked by two theoretically ambiguous mechanisms. High solidarity in intragenerational relations may, for example, compensate for low solidarity in intergenerational relations (*compensation* mechanism). However, there might as well be spillover effects from the levels of solidarity experienced in the parent-child relationship to solidarity among siblings (*reinforcing* mechanism). Empirical evidence suggesting which one of these mechanisms dominates – and whether this is moderated by structural characteristics of family members, such as gender – is scarce, though.

Whereas previous research often focused on effects of structural characteristics of family members on solidarity, we are interested in finding out how solidarity in one subsystem of the family is associated with solidarity in another subsystem. That is, instead of focusing on, for example, structural opportunities and constraints shaping solidarity in family relations (determined by family size, sex composition, or other socio-demographic characteristics), we observe associations between actual behaviors and feelings characterizing individuals' relations in different subsystems of the family. To this end, we draw on the solidarity-conflict model proposed by Bengtson and colleagues (e.g., Bengtson et al., 2002), considering four core dimensions of relationships in families, namely frequency of contact, emotional closeness and intimacy, as well as conflict, which have been suggested to be important precursors to exchanges of instrumental or financial support (that is, functional solidarity).

The analysis is based on data from Wave 5 of the German Family Panel (see Huinink et al., 2011). Interviews were conducted with 5410 young adults representative of three birth cohorts (1971-73, 1981-83, and 1991-93), who provided detailed information on various aspects of the relationships to their parents and up to four siblings. The German example seems well-suited, because it represents – in several ways – an ‘average’ case: Considering, for example, levels of coresidence and contact, Germany is characterized by a pattern of intergenerational relationships in-between the ‘extremes’ of the (Western) European continuum marked by relatively ‘weak’ family ties in the Nordic countries and relatively ‘strong’ family ties in the Mediterranean ones (Hank, 2007; also see Silverstein et al., 2010). The remainder of this article is structured as follows: after a brief overview of previous research, we describe the data and method employed in the analysis. We then present our empirical findings, which are discussed in the concluding section.

## 2. Previous research and theoretical background

Understanding the complexities of family relations benefits from a theoretical mapping of the dimensions that connect individuals within families. The solidarity-conflict model (Bengtson et al., 2002) provides a useful conceptual scheme to organize the emotions, behaviors, and norms characterizing these relationships, considering them as a multidimensional construct. According to this model, family cohesion (or: solidarity) depends on functional dependencies (mechanical solidarity), normative motivations (organic solidarity), as well as on levels of interaction and affection (see Kalmijn, 2014: 386). Scholars referring to the solidarity-conflict model when investigating relationships between family members increasingly take into account the generational complexity of family structures. Next to authors calling for more studies taking a three-generation perspective that includes grandparents (e.g., Birditt et al., 2012; Silverstein et al., 1998), others aim to reach beyond a merely dyadic perspective on intergenerational solidarity assessing the role of siblings in adult children's relationship to parents (and vice versa; e.g., Derkman et al., 2011; van Gaalen et al., 2008).

Research on siblings has a longstanding tradition focusing on structural characteristics (e.g., sibship size, sex composition, birth order) determining siblings' position in the family, which gives rise to social and psychological processes impacting individuals' development and adjustment over the entire life course (e.g., Steelman et al., 2002). Accordingly, previous studies investigated the association of a variety of sibling structure variables with multiple dimensions of intergenerational solidarity, such as proximity (e.g., Holmlund et al., 2013) and contact (e.g., van Gaalen et al., 2008), or financial transfers (e.g., Emery, 2013) and other helping behaviors (e.g., Goodsell et al., 2015); see Spitze and Logan (1991) for an early comprehensive study.

This research showed, *first*, that having siblings tends to be associated with greater geographic distance and less contact to parents (e.g., Holmlund et al., 2013; van Gaalen et al., 2008) as well as a lower probability to exchange financial or instrumental support with parents (e.g., Emery, 2013; Goodsell et al., 2015). *Second*, if birth order effects are detected, firstborns are disadvantaged in that they are more likely to be selected into parent care (e.g., Leopold et al., 2014), whereas lastborn siblings are less likely to receive parental support (e.g., Emery, 2013). Moreover, Pollet & Nettle (2009) showed that middleborns did not differ from other birth orders in the assessment of their relationship quality with parents, but that firstborns have better sibling relationships than laterborns. *Third*, there is evidence of gender differences indicating that sisters (daughters) tend to be more likely to care for parents than brothers (sons) (see Grigoryeva, 2017, for a recent investigation). Moreover, Goodsell et al. (2015) found that adults with more sisters receive less practical help from parents, whereas this does not hold for brothers. The authors suggest two alternative explanations for the observed pattern: resource dilution (that is, daughters draw more on parents' resources, leaving less for other siblings) and cooperative networks (that is, sisters cooperate more among each other, thus requiring less help from parents). Next to associations of such structural characteristics of sibling relationships with solidarity in parent-child relations, van Gaalen et al. (2008) also showed that the quality of intragenerational relationships matters: for example, having emotionally closer siblings has a negative effect on parent-child contact.

A much smaller literature has yet investigated, how parent-child relations – and, more specifically, solidarity – affect intergenerational solidarity at different stages of the life course,<sup>1</sup> for example during adolescence (Derkman et al., 2011) or adulthood

<sup>1</sup> A different but related strand of research addresses the association between parental behaviors – such as parental differential treatment or parenting styles – and siblings' relationships (see, for example, Danielsbacka and Tanskanen, 2015; Meunier et al., 2012; Milevsky et al., 2011).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/11020539>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/11020539>

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