



Continuity and change in intergenerational family relationships: An examination of shifts in relationship type over a three-year period

Niels Schenk*, Pearl A. Dykstra

Department of Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Continuity
Life transitions
Intergenerational relationships
Typology
Ambivalence

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on shifts in adult child–parent relationship type using the first two waves of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS). The analyses are informed by both a life transitions perspective, and a reduction of ambivalence perspective. The intergenerational relationships typology represents different combinations of solidaristic acts and conflict. We employed Latent Transition Analysis to determine the prevalence and predictors of shifts. Less than 5% of the dyads shifted to a different type. Insofar shifts took place, they were most likely from the ambivalent type, and particularly so for relationships with mothers and daughters. Offspring (re)partnering, offspring divorce, parental widowhood, parental health decline, offspring unemployment, birth of a grandchild, and moving nearer, did not predict typology shifts, whereas the number of parental divorces was too small for analyses of change. Parental repartnering prompted a shift toward the discordant type with its low probabilities of contact and support exchange, and the relatively high likelihood of conflict over personal issues. Moving away prompted a shift from the ambivalent type with its high probabilities of supportive exchanges and conflict over material and personal issues. Over a period of 3 years, there is considerably more continuity in adult child–parent relationships than change.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Change in intergenerational family relationships over individual lifetime has been addressed in various ways. One approach is to examine life transitions in connection with ties up and down generational lines. The concept of linked lives (Elder, 1994; Hagestad, 2003) is often invoked to describe the ways in which decisions taken by a family member or events taking place in the life of a family member have repercussions for interactions. Parental divorce has received most attention in this body of literature, with studies generally showing a decline in intergenerational exchanges, but more strongly so for fathers than for mothers (Kalmijn, 2007).

Family change has also been examined in connection with successive stages of the life course. Individuation theory posits, for example, that as children move through adolescence, parent–child relations must be renegotiated to reflect the increasing symmetry in the relationship and the more adult-like status of the child (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986). The movement toward mutuality in relations with parents presumably sets the stage for the development of young adults' psychosocial competence. Findings generally show both increased autonomy and continuing relatedness in adolescents' relationships with their parents (Bucx, 2009). Whereas individuation applies to early adulthood, the concept of filial maturity (Cicirelli, 1988; Marcoen, 1995) applies to later stages of life when adult children are confronted with the increasing frailty of their parents. Filial maturity is the ability to engage in the relationship with aging parents in an empathetic and responsive way, without losing one's own autonomy, and concomitantly respecting parents in their autonomy.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: n.schenk@fsw.eur.nl (N. Schenk).

The tensions between autonomy and dependence which figure prominently in the life-stage view on change in intergenerational relationships are also central to the ambivalence perspective (Katz et al., 2005; Kiecolt, Blieszner, & Savla, 2011; Pillemer & Suitor, 2002; Willson, Shuey, Elder, & Wickrama, 2006). The psychological perspective on ambivalence is that family members may simultaneously have both warm and antagonistic feelings toward one another (Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998). The sociological perspective on ambivalence is that institutional forces exert competing and contradictory demands on the resources of family members (Connidis & McMullin, 2002). Ambivalence triggers changes in patterns of interaction as family members strive to find solutions (Bengtson, Giarrusso, Mabry, & Silverstein, 2002; Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Lüscher, 2002). Hence, the concept of ambivalence encourages a focus on the dynamics of negotiating intergenerational family relationships (Connidis, 2010). A variety of strategies may be used to reduce ambivalence, including conciliation, conflict, physical and emotional distancing, and avoidance. Lüscher (2002) emphasizes, however, that ambivalence might be irreconcilable.

Whereas the previously described perspectives stress change in intergenerational family relationships, others emphasize continuity over the life course (Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Continuity in intergenerational relationships is consistent with an attachment perspective (Ainsworth, 1989), which posits that early experiences of security, anxiety and care in the child–parent relationship are internalized in models of self and of relationships to others. These early models not only shape forthcoming relations, but are also invoked when new situations occur in the lives of family members (Merz, 2010).

In this paper we focus on continuity and change in the relationships between adult children and their parents over a three-year period. We do so by examining shifts in adult child–parent relationship type. A type is a combination of solidaristic acts (e.g. frequency of contact and exchanges of support) and conflict topics (e.g. money, politics) in the intergenerational relationship (cf. Van Gaalen & Dykstra, 2006). Our analyses are informed by both a life transitions perspective, and a reduction of ambivalence perspective. We improve on the literature in three ways. First, we address multiple solidarity and conflict dimensions in intergenerational ties rather than single relationship dimensions. Second, we consider transitions in both the adult child's life and the parent's life. Third, we examine whether particular types of adult child–parent relationships are more likely to shift than others. With this approach, we aim to provide a more nuanced picture of change and continuity in intergenerational relationships. We use two waves of data from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) (Dykstra et al., 2005, 2007), which is the Dutch participant in the Generations and Gender Programme (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2007).

2. Typologies of intergenerational relationships

Much of the longitudinal research on change in intergenerational family relationships has considered single

dimensions of the bond: coresidence (e.g., Smits, Van Gaalen, & Mulder, 2010), financial transfers (e.g., Shapiro & Remle, 2011; Sheng & Killian, 2009), emotional support (e.g., Ha, 2008), or perceived quality (e.g., Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998). Even when prospective designs incorporate multiple relationship dimensions, they tend to be considered in isolation of one another (Aquilino, 1997; Ha, Carr, Utz, & Nesse, 2006; Roan & Raley, 1996; Shapiro, 2003). A consideration of patterns of relationship dimensions is rare (for exceptions, see: Couch, Daly, & Wolf, 1999; Koh & MacDonald, 2006; Silverstein, Gans, & Yang, 2006).

In cross-sectional studies, greater attention has been devoted to complexity in adult child–parent ties, deriving from configurations of support and conflicting emotions (Silverstein & Giarrusso, 2010). A typological approach is a useful tool for gaining a nuanced understanding of parent–child relations in adulthood because it does not assume that components are additive or form a unitary construct. One of the earliest typologies was developed by Silverstein and Litwak (1993), who distinguished a household service and a social–emotional service dimension on the basis of factor analysis. The dimensions had distinct sets of predictors: parental need and geographic proximity for household services, and relationship quality for social–emotional services. Subsequent typologies were based on latent class analysis. The distinguishing feature in the typology of Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg (1993) was whether assistance was given up or down generational lines, whereas Silverstein and Bengtson (1997) considered combinations of affinity (emotional closeness and perceived agreement), opportunity structure (frequency of contact and geographic proximity), and function (flows of assistance). More recently, typologies have been developed that consider both positive and negative elements of intergenerational relationships. Affection and conflict are central in the typology of Giarrusso and colleagues (Giarrusso et al., 2005), and in that of Silverstein and colleagues (Silverstein, Gans, Lowenstein, Giarrusso, & Bengtson, 2010). Steinbach's (2008) typology also involves conflict and intimacy, but is based on a cross-classification rather than latent class analysis. Ferring and colleagues carried out cluster analyses of positive and negative emotions toward parents (Ferring, Michels, Boll, & Filipp, 2009). Van Gaalen and Dykstra (2006) developed a typology using several dimensions of solidarity and conflict.

Longitudinal analysis of shifts from one type to another in response to life events in the younger or older generation, or as family members work out their relationships, has been put on the agenda of family sociology (Bengtson et al., 2002; Giarrusso et al., 2005). To our knowledge, we are the first to take on this research challenge. Our starting point is a typology of adult child–parent relationships based on data from the first wave of the NKPS (Van Gaalen & Dykstra, 2006). We first describe the typology, and then consider how life transitions and relationship ambivalence might prompt shifts between wave 1 and wave 2 in relationship type.

The Van Gaalen and Dykstra (2006) typology considered combinations of various solidarity and conflict dimensions. The solidarity dimensions were: face to face contact, contact by other means than face to face, practical support to parents, practical support to adult children, financial support to adult children, and exchange of

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/313260>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/313260>

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