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in New Zealand: factors influencing
parental support for children within
a three-generational context**

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**Solidarity across generations in New Zealand:
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within a three-generational context**

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Abstract

Interest in ascertaining the nature and extent of intergenerational exchanges between those in mid-life, and members of their kinship network has arisen because demographic, social and policy changes have brought into question the ability of individuals in this stage of the family and individual life course to respond to what may be the conflicting support needs of older and younger generations. Trends of delayed childbearing for example, suggest that at mid-life, individuals are increasingly likely to be involved in parenting roles. At the same time, as they contemplate their own pre-retirement needs, they may also be more involved with the caring needs of ageing parents who are living longer. It has thus been argued that the mid-life period carries the potential for complex, and perhaps competing intergenerational requirements for support and care, compromising the ability of those in this life stage to show their solidarity towards both younger and older kin. Research on intergenerational relations has focused mainly on the adult child and elderly parent dyad in the context of population ageing and much less work has been done to understand the nature of intergenerational exchanges in the context of more complex structures extending beyond dyads to include triads of three co-surviving generations. This paper addresses this lacuna by establishing whether, in the context of a kinship structure of three co-surviving generations, the likelihood of a child receiving assistance from their mid-life parent is influenced by the characteristics of an ascending generation, the mid-life respondent's own ageing parent. Empirical investigation draws on the theoretical framework of micro-level, inter-generational solidarity developed by Bengtson and others, in which exchanges of assistance are conceptualised as bonds of functional solidarity. Underlying the analysis is therefore an investigation of the premise that mid-life individuals are at the centre of competing inter-generational requirements. Data are from the 1997 New Zealand survey 'Transactions in the Mid-Life Family', a sample of 750 males and females aged between 40 and 54. Analysis is based on a sub-population of 310 respondents with at least one surviving ageing parent or in-law and one child aged over 15, none of whom live together. Multivariate logistic regression techniques are used and the dependant variable of functional solidarity is represented as a three-category variable of emotional, in-kind and financial support. Findings indicate that when an ageing parent's bond with the mid-life respondent is characterised by emotional support, this also enhances the child's chances of benefiting from all dimensions of parental support. Likewise, children are more likely to benefit from in-kind help if their own grandparents also receive it. Results do not clearly suggest that a greater number of elderly members in a kin network necessarily represent a drain on the mid-life respondent's resources, at least not those of an emotional nature. Life-course specific support requirements of younger and older generations may mean that mid-life individuals in fact respond to complementary rather than competing needs.

Keywords: mid-life, solidarity, intergenerational relations, New Zealand

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, increasing emphasis has been placed by policy makers on the family's obligations to take responsibility for its members' needs through the exchange of help or care-giving. This policy orientation belies an assumption that members of kinship networks are both willing and able to engage in intergenerational exchanges as a way of maintaining solidarity at the micro-level of the family.

There has been a particular interest in ascertaining the nature and extent of intergenerational exchanges between those in mid-life, and members of their kinship networks (Allen, Blieszner and Roberto, 2000), in part because key demographic, social and policy changes have brought into question the ability of individuals in this stage of the family and individual life course to respond to what *may* be the conflicting support needs of older and younger generations (Boland Hamil and Goldsberg, 1997; Statistics New Zealand, 1998b; Bengtson, Rosenthal and Burton, 1996; Brody, 1990; Koopman-Boyden et al, 2000). The current trend towards delayed childbearing for example, (Pool, Jackson and Dickson, 1998) suggests that at mid-life, parents are increasingly likely to be involved in parenting roles, rather than experiencing the departure of young adults from the home (Foulke, Alford-Cooper & Butler, 1993). In New Zealand, increasing financial costs of higher education and difficulties of insertion into employment have heightened concerns that young adults will prolong their reliance on parental financial resources, at a period of their lives when those in mid-life may need to think of their own pre-retirement needs (Pool, 1992; Statistics New Zealand, 2001a; Education Student Allowances Notice, New Zealand Regulations 1997/5).

At the same time, mid-life individuals will increasingly find their parents surviving to older ages as a result of life expectancy improvements, and as the consequence of a broad policy shift, situating the care and support for dependants away from the institutional environment towards the informal communities of family, friends and volunteers, they may also find themselves prime carers for ageing parents (Opie, 1992 Upton, 1991; Department of Social Welfare, 1996). This has been of particular concern in New Zealand because of the expectation that women with ageing parents will assume the brunt of their care requirements at a time when they are themselves likely to be engaged in multiple roles of parent, spouse and paid employee (McPherson, 1993; Age Concern 1992; Ministry of Women's Affairs 1993).

The mid-life period thus carries the potential for complex, and perhaps competing intergenerational requirements for support and care, which may compromise the ability of those in this stage of life to show their solidarity towards the younger and older members of their kin network.

Much research on intergenerational support has focused on the relationships between adult children and their own elderly parents in response to a growing awareness of the constraints to intergenerational exchanges posed by population ageing (Whitbeck, Hoyt and Huck, 1994; Lee and Netzer, 1994; Hoyert, 1991). Much less work has been done however to understand the nature of intergenerational exchanges in the context of more complex structures which extend beyond dyadic relationships to include triads of three co-surviving generations (Bengtson, 2001). This focus is particularly important in the context of mid-life individuals who may be 'sandwiched' between the demands of younger and older generations.

Building on recent research (Hillcoat-Nallétamby and Dharmalingam, 2002) we address this lacune by establishing whether, in the context of a kinship structure characterised by three co-surviving generations, the likelihood of a child receiving assistance from their mid-life parent is influenced by the characteristics of an ascending generation, the mid-life respondent's own parent. Underlying our analysis is therefore an investigation of the premise that mid-life individuals are at the centre of competing inter-generational requirements. Should this be the case, their capacity

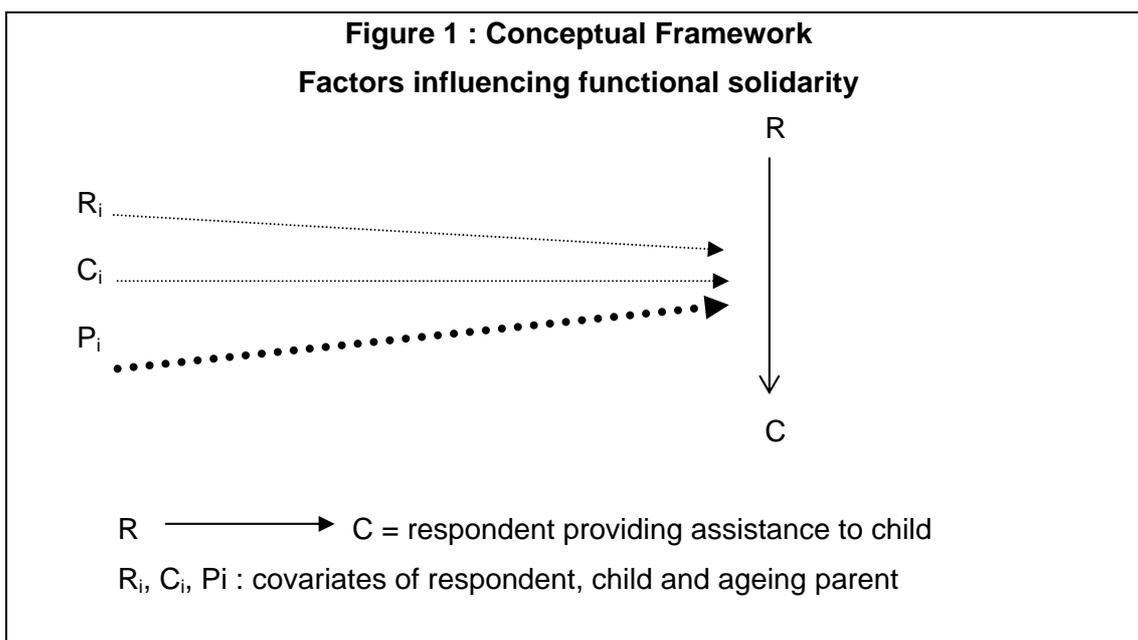
to provide support to their own children may be compromised by the needs of their own ageing parents.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Our empirical investigation draws on Bengtson and colleagues' theoretical framework, in which inter-generational solidarity is conceived as bonds existing at the micro-level between parents and children (Bengtson, 2001; Mangen et al, 1988). These bonds may be based on a set of six inter-dependent or isolate elements: 1) structural solidarity (geographic proximity separating individuals); associational solidarity (frequency of contact between individuals); affective solidarity (sentiments of affection); consensual solidarity (shared opinions); functional solidarity (exchange of assistance); normative solidarity (values pertaining to obligations across generations). Our focus in this paper is on functional solidarity, conceptualised in terms of whether the respondent reports providing specific types of assistance to their child or ageing parent more than once a year (see Table 1).

The notion of *generation* is conceptualised in terms of individuals within a structure of kinship bonds (Koopman-Boyden and Hillcoat-Nallétamby, 2000), represented by relationships that may exist between *ego* (the reference person, in this case the mid-life respondent), their surviving *descendants* (children), *ascendants* (parents/in-laws and grandparents/in-laws) and collaterals (partners, sisters, etc.).

Figure 1 represents the premise that the mid-life respondent's capacity as a parent to engage in functional solidarity by providing support to one of their children may be influenced by the attributes of three co-surviving generations: R_i (*ego*: the mid-life respondent), C_i (*descendant*: ego's own child), P_i (*ascendant*: ego's ageing parent). Our particular focus in this paper is on how selected attributes of the ageing parent generation (P_i) influence the relationship of functional solidarity shown by R_i to C_i . This is established at the multivariate level by taking functional solidarity as an dependant variable, introducing the ageing parent generation attributes as explanatory factors, then controlling for the attributes of R and C.



METHODOLOGY

Data

Data come from the 1997 New Zealand survey 'Transactions in the Mid-Life Family', which provides a sample of 750 males and females aged between 40 and 54. The sample was selected on a nationwide basis and identified by area stratification according to population size (Dharmalingam, 2000). Of all eligible respondents randomly selected for interview, the final success rate for contacts throughout New Zealand was 54%. Sampling weights derived to adjust for deviation of the sample from the corresponding age groups of the 1996 New Zealand population census were applied to improve representativeness according to gender, marital status, ethnicity, employment status and age. As the response rate is fairly low, results are interpreted in relation to other relevant national and international research in the area. Analysis presented in this paper is for a sub-population of 310 respondents who have at least one surviving parent or parent-in-law and one child aged over 15, none of whom live together. As the mid-life respondent may have more than one child and ageing parent, a focal individual in each generation group was selected². The data set includes only a limited number of questions on child attributes (see Table 1), and we are unable to measure the flow of support from child to parent due to incomplete data collection.

Measures of functional solidarity

The types of help the mid-life respondent reports giving to their child are regrouped into four categories to provide an indicator of functional solidarity. The categories represent the dependant variables in our statistical analysis, and are treated as dichotomous (1 if a child receives support from the respondent, 0 otherwise): any type of care received, direct financial, indirect financial (service type help which would otherwise have had to be purchased) and emotional help. As individuals can receive more than one type of assistance, analysis is limited to whether giving at least one type of assistance was reported.

Statistical techniques and Model Specification

Empirical analysis is completed using multivariate logistic regression techniques, appropriate when the dependant variable has two response categories. Models show how the probability of being in a particular outcome category versus the likelihood of being in another, is modified when the specified independent variables are introduced (Tabachnick, B. 1996). The parameters of the models are expressed as odds ratios, the reference category taking on the value 1. As illustrated in Figure 1, the aim of the multivariate analysis was to establish the net effect of the ageing parents' attributes on the likelihood that the mid-life parent will provide assistance to their own child. This is achieved in several stages for each dependent variable (see Table 4). The selected attributes of the ageing parent generation and the size of the ageing kinship group are first introduced as explanatory factors (Model 1), then selected child and respondent attributes (see Table 1) are introduced as control variables (Models 2 and 3 respectively). We limit the presentation of results of odds ratios in Table 4 to the explanatory variables for ageing parents only, in order to clearly reflect this focus. In this way, we see the net effect of the older generation's characteristics on the odds or likelihood that the child will benefit from emotional, direct financial and indirect financial support from the respondent. Functional

² Of all children not living with their parents, a focal child was identified as follows: child receiving the greatest number of types of assistance from their parent selected; amongst those receiving no support, those maintaining the most frequent contact with the respondent selected. This gave an initial study population of 380 dyads. Based on this set, a focal member of the generation of parents of the respondent was selected for all those with a surviving parent or parent-in-law. When more than one parent or in-law was alive, we selected them based on the same criteria as those used for identification of the focal child. In this way, we have maximized the potential for the mid-life respondent to be exposed to the giving of help to two other generations.

solidarity also serves as an explanatory variable for the ageing parent generation, but as only a very small proportion (<5%) received financial assistance, we have used only two categories to describe the types of assistance they receive - indirect financial (including financial assistance) and emotional support.

RESULTS

Characteristics of Respondent, Child and Parent

Initial descriptive results (Table 1) show that just over half of the child population is female, two thirds are aged below 25, the majority of Non-Maori ethnicity and just under half related to the respondent through direct biological parental descent. About one sixth have a health problem and about the same proportion live within 3 kilometres of their parents' home. Over three quarters of the ageing parent population are female. Over one third benefit from emotional or indirect financial assistance from the respondent. Of a potential network of four surviving parents or parents-in-law (taking into account only the current union status of the respondent), two thirds of the respondents have only two surviving parents.

Table 1 : Univariate distribution of total study population of respondents, non co-residing focal child and focal parent (% , N = 310, weighted data)

DEPENDANT VARIABLE :		
RESPONDENT PROVIDES ASSISTANCE TO CHILD (% = YES)		
Assistance given	80.7	Care/assistance provided by respondent to child at least once a year
Financial assistance	53.4	Financial assistance
Indirect financial assistance	27.4	Material support, services, etc provided by respondent to child: gardening, house maintenance/work, meal preparation, personal health, shopping, transport, childcare, other
Emotional	56.7	Emotional support, financial advice, sport, leisure. Of the 56.7%, 50.2% received emotional.
CHILD CHARACTERISTICS		
Gender:		
Male	46.2	
Female	53.8	
Age		
<25	64.2	
>25	35.8	
Ethnicity		
Non-Maori	85.7	
Maori	14.3	
From current/past parental union?		
Born of current union	47.2	
Other (step, foster)	14.1	
Born of previous union	38.7	
Child has health problem?		
Yes	15.7	
No	84.3	
Structure (distance)		
<3km	13.4	
3-100	41.3	
100+	45.3	

Table 1 continued

AGEING PARENT CHARACTERISTICS		
Gender		
Male	22.8	
Female	77.2	
Total surviving parents + in laws		
1-2	66.1	
3+	33.9	
Receives indirect financial support from respondent?	37.5	(includes financial)
Yes		
Receives emotional support from respondent?		
Yes	35.8	
MID-LIFE RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS		
Gender		
Male	42.7	
Female	57.3	
Current age		
40-44	26.2	
45-49	38.4	
50-54	35.4	
Ethnicity		
Non-Maori	89.7	
Maori	10.3	
Residence		
City + Town	77.7	
Rural	22.3	
Religion		
None	29.2	
Some	70.8	
Union status		
Not currently in union	20.0	(single, widowed, divorced, separated)
In union	80.0	(legal and de facto)
Highest educational qualification		
None	22.7	
Secondary	49.3	
Tertiary other	18.9	
University	9.1	
Employment status		
Self-employed	29.4	
Homemaker	11.0	
Full and part time	54.4	
Unemployed and other	5.2	(retired, student, voluntary worker)
Partner employment status		
No partner	16.1	
Self and family	21.8	
Homemaker + other	10.5	
Full and part time	51.6	
Respondent has health problem? (yes)	34.4	Any long term health problem/condition lasting six months or more and which limits activity
Respondent's tot. annual income (NZ\$)		
0-14,999	18.1	
15-40,999	40.9	
41,000+	26.5	
Other	14.5	(don't know and missing)

Table 1 continued

Total number of children		
1-2	34.9	
3	28.3	
4+	36.8	
Total in household		
1-2	43.8	
3	25.4	
4+	30.7	

Of all mid-life respondents, over half are female, about one quarter below the age of 45, the majority of Non-Maori ethnicity, with close to three quarters declaring some form of religious affiliation. One fifth are currently not in any form of union, approximately the same proportion live in rural locations, and have no school qualification. The majority (over 80%) are engaged in some form of paid employment, and about 40% earn a personal annual income of between \$NZ15,000 and \$NZ41,000. One third declare suffering from a long-term health condition which limits their activities. Just over one third of respondents have a total of one or two children, and over forty percent live in households of one or two individuals.

Bivariate results

We confine the presentation of bivariate results to the associations between four ageing parent attributes and the four dependant variables (Table 2). Children with grandmothers are less likely than those with a grandfather to receive financial assistance from the respondent. They are also less likely to receive financial and emotional assistance if the ageing parent is one of only two surviving members of that generation. There is a strong and positive correlation between all emotional and financial forms of functional solidarity and whether the ageing parental receives emotional support, although the relationship is much weaker for indirect financial support.

Table 2 : Bivariate distribution by dependant variables and ageing parent characteristics. (Percentages = 'yes'; N = 310; weighted)

AGEING PARENT CHARACTERISTICS	FUNCTIONAL SOLIDARITY: RESPONDENT PROVIDES ASSISTANCE TO CHILD?			
	Assistance	Financial	Indirect financial	Emotional
Gender				
Male	81.7	73.2***	21.4	60.6
Female	80.3	47.5	29.2	55.6
Tot. surviving parents+ in-laws				
1-2	80.0	48.3***	29.3	52.7**
3+	81.9	63.2	23.8	64.8
Indirect financial				
Yes	84.2	52.5	39.2***	55.8
Emotional				
Yes	92.8***	71.2***	34.2**	81.1***

p<10% *; p<5% **; p<1% ***

Types of assistance provided to child and ageing parent

Table 3 shows that the majority of both ageing parent and child groups³ receive *some* type of assistance from the respondent (less than 40% and 20% of parents and children respectively receive no assistance). Taken separately however, the types of assistance received across the two groups vary considerably. Whilst over half of all focal children receive emotional and financial assistance (56.7% and 53.4% respectively), only a minority of ageing parents receive financial assistance (3.7%), and just over one third, emotional support. The types of indirect financial assistance received vary quite markedly. This is clearly reflected in the odds ratios. Children are clearly much less likely to receive any form of indirect financial assistance than ageing parents, with the exception of meal preparation and childcare. In contrast, they are over thirty times more likely than parents to benefit from financial help, and nearly two and a half times more likely to receive emotional support.

Table 3: Types of assistance provided by the respondent to the child and ageing parent (Percentages and odds ratios.)

TYPE OF ASSISTANCE	Ageing Parent % N = 310	Child N = 310 %	Odds ratios Child/Parent
EMOTIONAL	35.8	56.7	2.35***
FINANCIAL	3.7	53.4	31.22***
INDIRECT FINANCIAL	36.0	27.4	0.66**
▪ Gardening	5.2	1.2	0.24***
▪ House maintenance/work	14.7	4.5	0.31***
▪ Meal preparation	5.8	6.1	1.05
▪ Personal health	5.5	1.8	0.28***
▪ Shopping	7.0	2.0	0.25***
▪ Transport	10.0	5.5	0.52**
▪ Childcare	-	6.9	-
▪ Other ⁴	11.4	14.5	1.33
NONE	39.5	19.3	0.49***

p<1% ***; p<5%; ** p<10%* . Percentages do not add up to 100% due to multiple responses

There is therefore a clear generational difference at play in the likelihood of a respondent providing assistance per se, as well as type of assistance to both children and their own parents. Functional solidarity of an indirect financial nature clearly seems to characterise the flow of transaction from respondent to parent, whilst financial assistance is confined to children. Emotional support seems to be common to both sets of dyadic transactions.

Multivariate results

In Table 4, results show that across all models and all types of functional solidarity, the child is more likely to benefit from assistance if the respondent's own parent also benefits from emotional support. This effect is the most pronounced when the child also receives emotional support (Set IV, odds ratios for emotional support are all close to 6).

³ For a detailed analysis of the influence of child characteristics on the likelihood of receiving parental support see Hillcoat-Nallétamby and Dharmalingam, 2003.

⁴ Frequencies less than <5% of total reportings. Parents: care/disability, childcare, advice, education, sports, leisure, general care, clothing, gift, accommodation, car repair, social assistance, help business, all sorts, other. Child: care/disability, advice, education, leisure, general care, clothing, sport, gifts, accommodation, car repairs, social assistance, help with business, all types, other. Also includes mobility.

Table 4: Odds Ratios for Models of Functional Solidarity (N = 310). Odds ratios: yes =1; no =0.

AGEING PARENT CHARACTERISTICS		SET I : ASSISTANCE GIVEN (yes/no)		
		Model 1 ⁵	Model 2	Model 3
Indirect financial	No	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Yes	1.28	0.98	0.93
Emotional	No	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Yes	4.19***	3.83***	2.99**
Gender	Male	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Female	0.89	0.85	0.56
Total surviving parents + in laws	1-2	1.00	1.00	1.00
	3+	1.08	1.17	1.61
<i>Log likelihood</i>		132.0	113.2	91.0
<i>Wald chi2</i>		13.14	47.5	68.3
		SET II : FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE (yes/no)		
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Indirect financial	No	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Yes	1.00	0.89	0.95
Emotional	No	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Yes	3.31***	3.03***	2.39***
Gender	Male	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Female	0.32***	0.35***	0.35***
Total surviving parents + in laws	1-2	1.00	1.00	1.00
	3+	1.68*	1.46	1.36
<i>Log likelihood</i>		178.7	165.0	141.9
<i>Wald chi2</i>		28.1	46.2	72.5
		SET III: INDIRECT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE (yes/no)		
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Indirect financial	No	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Yes	2.98***	2.51***	2.98***
Emotional	No	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Yes	1.73*	1.71*	1.81*
Gender	Male	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Female	1.34	1.14	1.18
Total surviving parents + in laws	1-2	1.00	1.00	1.00
	3+	0.89	0.88	1.15
<i>Log likelihood</i>		157.9	142.2	124.9
<i>Wald chi2</i>		17.1	37.1	59.4
		SET IV : EMOTIONAL ASSISTANCE (yes/no)		
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Indirect financial	No	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Yes	0.95	0.97	0.85
Emotional	No	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Yes	5.92***	5.91***	5.83***
Gender	Male	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Female	0.89	0.88	0.97
Total surviving parents + in laws	1-2	1.00	1.00	1.00
	3+	1.66	1.65	1.93*
<i>Log likelihood</i>		173.0	166.6	145.2
<i>Wald chi2</i>		35.1	40.5	66.3

p<10% *; p<5% **; p<1% *** .

⁵ Model 1: parent characteristics; Model 2: parent characteristics controlling for child characteristics; Model 3: parent characteristics controlling for child and respondent characteristics.

If the parent benefits from indirect financial help, it increases almost three-fold, the likelihood of the child also receiving this support (Set III). This result is somewhat surprising as we might have expected a negative relationship between child and parental receipt of indirect support if this resource is conceptualised as a limited supply in terms of the time or action required by the respondent to render unpaid services or assistance to two generations at the same time. Table 3 provides some explanation. The types of indirect support that each generation receives are quite different. Parents are on average more likely than children to receive each type of indirect financial support from the respondent. On balance therefore, the variation in the types of indirect support given to children and parents probably accounts for the strong and positive correlation of the odds ratios obtained.

All models in Set II indicate that a respondent is much less likely to give financial support to their child, if the focal parent is a grandmother. This is initially plausible. Older women are perhaps more in need of financial assistance than their male counterparts, partly because of economic dependence on male earnings, but also due to life expectancy differences which would render the likelihood of living alone more probable for women. Respondents may therefore find that they have to forego provision of financial support to their own children in favour of providing this type of functional solidarity to their own parents. However our data do not support this initial explanation. As noted earlier (see Table 3) only a very small number of ageing parents actually benefit from financial support.

A second possible explanation might be that the gender of the grandparent is a proxy for some characteristics of the child or the respondent, but this explanation can be ruled out. With each successive model, we have introduced child and respondent characteristics, but the direction, magnitude and significance of the odds ratios do not vary (Set II, odds ratios for the variable 'gender').

The third explanation could be that the relationship between child receipt of financial assistance and parent gender is spurious. The observed relationship could perhaps be due to the interaction between the gender of the grandparent and the characteristics of the child or respondent. In our multivariate analysis we found that child age was very strongly associated with receiving financial support (full models not shown). The older the child, the less likely they are to receive parental help. When incorporating an interaction term for the two variables (grandparent gender and child age) in the full model (not shown here), we found that grandparent gender lost its independent effect on the likelihood of the child receiving monetary support, but the interaction effect and the effect of child age were significant.

How do we make sense of these findings? From exploratory analysis (not shown here) we know that most female grandparents are single or widowed, and that older children are less likely than younger offspring to receive financial support from the respondent. As widowed women are likely to be older than non-widowed, it is possible that their grandchildren are on average, older as well. The relationship between grandparent gender and child receipt of financial support (models in Set II) would therefore be spurious as it would be attributable to parent and child age. We are not able to explore this further because we do not have data on the age of the ageing parent. However, referring to secondary sources, we can lend some support to this explanation. New Zealand Census data for 1996 indicate the average age of widowed women amongst all those aged 60+ to be 76.3 years, but for all those who are not widowed, to be 67.5 years.

Variation between models: controlling for child and respondent characteristics

Of the four ageing parent variables included in the multivariate analysis, some have captured the effects of child and respondent characteristics. Although children whose grandparents receive emotional support are more likely to receive financial and emotional assistance from the respondent (Sets II and IV), this likelihood is progressively reduced as child and respondent characteristics are introduced into the models (Models 2 and 3). This notwithstanding, the odds for this parental characteristic remain positive and significant in the final model, indicating that it clearly does have an independent effect upon the likelihood of children benefiting from respondent support. In the case of children receiving indirect financial assistance (Set III) the introduction of child characteristics (Model 2) has the effect of slightly reducing the odds ratios for both parental solidarity variables, but they are then strengthened once respondent characteristics are introduced.

The likelihood of children receiving financial support when considering the total number of surviving ageing parents or in-laws is progressively reduced as we introduce child (Model 2) and respondent (Model 3) characteristics, with odds losing their statistical significance. Conversely, in the case of children receiving emotional support, this explanatory factor gains statistical significance and increased magnitude once both child and respondent characteristics have been added. Hence, the greater the number of surviving grandparents, the greater the likelihood of the child receiving emotional support (Model 3, odds ratio of 1.93).

SUMMARY

The aim of our paper was to establish whether introducing the attributes of an ascending generation into our analysis would influence the likelihood of a mid-life parent engaging in the manifestation of functional solidarity towards a focal child. In short, our findings indicate that having grandparents whose relationship with their own offspring is characterised by a strong element of emotional support is likely to enhance the grandchildren's chances of benefiting from all dimensions of support provided by their own mid-life parents. The fact that children are more likely to benefit from help with daily activities like meal preparation, gardening or housework if their own grandparents also receive either the same sorts of help, reinforces our earlier interpretation of the odds ratios presented in Table 3. Rather than proving to be conflicting for the mid-life respondent, the two generational groups' receipt of this type of help seems to be mutually reinforcing (Set II).

If our interpretative assumptions are correct, then having a grandmother as opposed to a grandfather does not reduce a child's likelihood of receiving financial help from their own parents as a consequence of financial resources having been channelled towards an older female generation. Rather, it is the interplay of both demographic-driven factors – longer life expectancies for grandmothers than grandfathers – and life course factors - the progressive financial independence of children from parental support as they become young adults – which explain the depressing effect that parental gender has upon children receiving money from their own parents.

Our results do not clearly suggest that a greater number of elderly members in a kin network, necessarily represents a 'drain' on the mid-life respondents resources, at least not those of an emotional nature.

CONCLUSIONS

Policy and research concerns have focused on the mid-life period as one of potential conflict of interest with other generations, but the international body of literature informing this debate is divided in its conclusions. One core of literature clearly supports concerns that at mid-life individuals *will* find themselves at the centre of competing demands for multi-generational support, due to the increased likelihood of survival into old age of their own parents (Miller, 1981), and of protracted periods of young adults' reliance on parental resources (White, 1994; White and Rogers, 1997; White and Lacy, 1997; OFCE, 2000). As a consequence, they are likely to encounter stress (Lang and Brody, 1983) role overload (Schlesinger and Raphael, 1993) or financial hardship (Pool, 1992). Countering these concerns are suggestions that there is no conclusive empirical evidence to support the notion of the 'middle' generation as 'sandwiched' between competing demands, nor that multigenerational transactions are necessarily conflictual in nature (Hagestad, 2000; Loomis and Bloom, op. cit).

Our preliminary empirical investigations certainly present evidence that the mid-life individual is engaged in providing help to *both* younger and older generations. Whether or not this places them in a position of conflict is however, less evident. Multivariate results suggest that rather than compromising the mid-life parent's ability to provide help to their own children, the support needs of the older generation seem to enhance these parent-child transactions. Giving emotional support to their own parents, for example seems to increase the mid-lifer's ability to give all types of support to their own children. Providing their parents with help in daily tasks also seems to benefit the younger generation in the same way. On balance, this suggests that the mid-life individual is at the nexus of complementary rather than competing multi-generational demands.

This interpretation is to some extent reflected in other findings drawn from the same survey. O'Driscoll (2000, op. cit) for example,⁶ found no clear evidence to support the idea that a mid-life individual with greater responsibility for providing care and support to other family members would experience more conflict between job and family or more psychological strain (op. cit. : 108). Loomis and Booth (1995) in the USA, provide results from a longitudinal study of married individuals which suggest that engaging in multi-generational caregiving does not have a significant effect on the well-being of adult children who ensure this type of help. Dykstra (1997) reporting on twelve European countries finds that only a minority (10% or less) of men and women aged between 45 and 54 find that they have overlapping care responsibilities for their children and older people.

Despite the demographic shifts in the timing of family formation outlined above, the mid-life parent's engagement in providing help to a younger generation appears very much as a response to the life course needs of children experiencing the transition from adolescence to adulthood – a need for continued emotional support and direct financial assistance, despite having left the parental household. Other results from the same survey support this interpretation. Previous findings examining the determinants of functional solidarity in the context of mid-life respondent and child dyads only (Hillcoat-Nallétamby and Dharmalingam, op. cit) show that the older a child, the less likely they are to benefit from emotional or direct financial assistance from their parents. Other findings on the family work nexus (O'Driscoll, 2000: op. cit) show that the reported provision of support to children decreased with increasing parental age, again suggesting a progressive decline in the responsibility taken by parents at later mid-life. To our knowledge, there is no other New Zealand research

⁶ This analysis was completed for participants who were employed and who completed both the telephone and mailback interview or questionnaire.

focusing on family transactions during the mid-life period with which to compare these findings. McPherson's (1999) study of the nature of family support focuses on a range of age groups, is based largely on New Zealanders of European ethnic identity and is not representative of the total population. This said, she also finds the youngest age groups in her sample to be the most likely to receive help overall from family members, particularly financial help (McPherson, 2000). Data from the USA (Lawton, Silverstein and Bengtson, 1994) indicate that younger adult children are more likely than older adult children to receive help⁷ from their parents.

At the other end of the life course spectrum, the help provided by the mid-life respondent to their ageing parents also suggests a response to age-based needs – perhaps due to progressively limited physical mobility (lack of transport or physical disability), the older generation require more help with daily tasks. Drawing on the 1996 Census for New Zealand, Davey (1998) concludes that despite being called the 'sandwich generations', few New Zealanders aged 40-59 care for elderly people at home or elsewhere. Data indicate that caring for people in other households (apart from children) ranked the third most important type of voluntary activity for women.

In sum, our preliminary findings do not clearly support the notion that at mid-life, an individual in the roles of both parent and adult child, is caught between the competing demands of both generational groups. Their capacity to respond to their adult child's needs seems, if anything, to be enhanced by the functional solidarity needs of their own ageing parents. We must however add to this preliminary conclusion, a few notes of caution. We have used data which reflect only the mid-life respondent's perceptions of the type and amount of help they offer to others. We have not looked in any detail at the flow of help they may receive, although some initial exploratory analysis not presented here suggests that they receive minimal support from either of the two generations studied here. Third, we are dealing with cross-sectional data which do not give a picture of the long-term nature of these transactions. Finally, our data provide no direct qualitative insight into whether the mid-life respondents themselves perceive their situation in relation to the younger and older members of their kinship group as one of conflict and competing needs. All of these points however, provide the basis for further research design and investigation.

⁷ In this case hands on assistance with errands, repairs, babysitting, etc., as reported from the adult child's perspective.

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