ABSTRACT

POSTER PRESENTATION

Margarita GEDVILAITĖ-KORDUŠIENĖ, Vytautas Magnus University; Lithuanian Social Research Centre, Lithuania

MIGRATION EFFECTS ON INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN LITHUANIA: PERSPECTIVE OF ELDERLY PARENTS

Keywords: transnational family, intergenerational relationships, elderly care

Even if Lithuania’s emigration rate is among the highest in the European Union, there was no research addressing the effects of adult children migration for elderly parents who stay behind. Lithuania represents a case where a system of formal social care for elderly is rather limited. At the same time, based on GGS survey results, the familial norms that adult children should provide care for elderly parents are rather strong. Within this context the paper aims to reveal the effects of international migration on intergenerational relationships from the perspective of elderly parents who stay behind. In this way the paper aims to reveal how extended family functions in transnational space and what are the networks of care providers for elderly parents when adult children live abroad.

Theoretical approach

Based on transnationalism approach, the family members who stay behind in origin country in various ways are being affected by emigration (Baldassar et al. 2007). From other point of view, family ties in origin country are being maintained across national borders (Antman 2012; Lewitt, Jarowsky 2007). It is often thought that international migration should enhance the financial welfare for migrants who may then remit more to parents at home. At the same time, due to geographical proximity the migrants may be restricted from travelling home and providing personal care for the elderly parent. This raises questions important for social policy: how does migration affect contributions and time assistance to aging parents?

Intergenerational solidarity approach (Bengston et al. 1991) gives some answers what are the conceptual elements which holds family members as a family unit. The model is used in the paper in order to identity what dimensions of intergenerational relationships are being affected by
migrations. The effects on the following dimensions of intergenerational solidarity are being analysed:

**Associational** – frequency and patterns of interaction in various types of activities in which family members engage

**Affectual** – type and degree of positive sentiments held about family members,

**Functional** – degree of helping and exchanges of resources (Bengston et al. 1991).

At the same time, I take into consideration that intergenerational relationships include not only positive aspects but also conflict (Silverstein et al. 1996) or ambivalence (Lüscher, Pillemer 1998, 2004, Connidis, McMullin 2002). Thus the ideas of critical theories (conflict and ambivalence) are essential in the paper to explain the dynamics of intergenerational relationships within transnational space which may enhance various tensions between family members.

**The research hypothesis:** adult children migration has significant impact on the associational, affectual and functional dimensions of intergenerational solidarity.

**Methodology**

The paper is based on few surveys. The analysis of attitudes towards elderly care in Lithuania is based on results of first and second way of Gender and Generations Survey (GGS), conducted in year 2006 (N=10000) and 2009 (N=5748). The field research was conducted by the “Baltic Survey Ltd.”.

The effects of adult children migration are assessed by a national representative survey conducted in year 2013¹. After the Omnibus Survey (N=1013) stratified quota sampling procedures were applied. The sampling unit was the household with elderly parents (60 years and older), who have at least one adult children living abroad at least six month prior to the survey. Sample size was 303 respondents. The field research was conducted by the “Baltic Survey Ltd.”.

The following variables are being used to assess the effects of migration for intergenerational relationships:

- Frequency of contacts (two variables: face to face contacts and via phone, skype)
- The means of communication,
- Financial assistance (provided and received),
- Evaluation of relationships,
- Evaluation of emotional support (provided and received),
- Network of personal care providers

These variables are being compared between the groups of migrant and non-migrant children (living in close and distant proximity in Lithuania). Binary logistic regression was applied to measure the effects of migration for frequent of contacts and good evaluation of relationships with children (dependent variables). The following independent variables were included into the model of logistic regression:

- Characteristics of children: gender, partnership status, education, geographic proximity, financial status
- Characteristics of parents: gender, health status, education, financial situation, living arrangements

**Results**

*Cultural attitudes towards elderly care in Lithuania*

---

¹ The survey conducted as part of Postdoctoral Fellowship, funded by Lithuanian Science Foundation
Based on the results of the Omnibus Survey (N=1013), the attitudes towards children migration when elderly parents in need of care stay behind are very positive. These results are exceptional in the context of other surveys done in Lithuania. For example, GGS revealed very high level of normative solidarity in terms of filial responsibilities. However, in these surveys the questions were not related to migration. It seems that migration is a legitimate excuse to justify lower levels of intergenerational solidarity.

Even if elderly parents also justify children’s migration (based on National representative survey with elderly parents), when we asked what type of personal care would be appropriate for them, the results were contradicting. Most of parents would like to receive personal care from their children in their house or their children’s house. The priorities of care are given for children or other relatives and institutional care is not perceived as desired model of care.

**The effects of migration on intergenerational relationships**

**Associational dimension of solidarity.** Frequency of contacts with the family is often used as an indicator of the strength of intergenerational exchange and of potential support for older people. The biggest proportions of parents have often (everyday or few times a week) face-to-face contacts with children living in Lithuania. Clearly, the distance is limiting the abilities to meet children living abroad and half of parents meet their children once per year or less often. The most popular way of non face-to-face communication is a phone conversation with children living in Lithuania and abroad. Conversations via Skype, however, is a more common practice with children living abroad. Even if some researches (Baldassar et al 2007) argue that modern technologies mean the death of distance, the results on logistic regression show that the odds to have frequent contacts are lower with children living abroad. Geographical proximity is the most important factor predicting the frequent contacts (at least one time per week or more often) with children. Only geographical proximity correctly classifies 70 % of the model (while the other factors - only 7 %). Gender of children does not have significant impact for contacts with father but significantly predicts communication with mother. Very good financial situation of children increases the odds of frequent communication with mothers.

**Affectual dimension of solidarity.** Based on the results of logistic regression, geographical proximity does not have any significant impact on evaluation of relationships. Contrarily, 22% of elderly parents have indicated that relationships with adult migrant children have even improved. Gender of children, financial situation of children and type of settlement of elderly parents are significant predictors of good evaluation of relationships with children. The time adult children spent abroad does not have a significant impact.

**Functional dimension of solidarity.** The differences on received / provided emotional support from/for children in Lithuania and abroad are insignificant. Significant differences were found on financial support. A higher proportion of parents have asked for financial support from children living abroad and also significantly higher proportion of parents received financial support from children living abroad. One third of elderly parents received personal care from non-formal networks. Most of the respondents received personal care from neighbours, friends and grandchildren.

**Conclusions**

It seems that migration of adult children has negative effects for associational solidarity, but does not have any negative impact on associational solidarity. In contrarily, some elderly parents have indicated that relationships with adult migrant children have even improved. This finding raises another question – what are the social practices allowing to maintain close relationships across the borders?

The results on functional dimension of solidarity shows that lower level on associational solidarity with migrant children in a way are compensated with financial support provided for elderly parents.
References


