

Intergenerational solidarity in family: Influence of the education level on frequency of contacts

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Abstract. The aim of this study was to research the influence of the adult child's and parent's education level on the frequency of contacts between the adult child and parent, since the frequency of contacts is recognised by the intergenerational solidarity model as one of the factors strengthening the intergenerational solidarity in the family. Influence of the adult child's and parent's education level on time spent on the way to the parent's home, and time spent on the way as a factor promoting frequency of contacts or preventing contacts was studied as well. Participants of the study were 332 adult children aged 18-62, residing in Latvia, and having at least one living parent. Results of the study showed that education of an adult child and a parent affected the frequency of meetings in person, frequency of contacts by phone, and the use of the information technologies. Time spent on the way to the parent's home affected the frequency of meetings in person and of the frequency of contacts by phone.

Key words: frequency of contact; family relations; intergenerational solidarity.

1 Introduction

Management of current communication and information transfer means and technologies in the conditions of globalisation, urbanisation, and migration is an integral part of people's lives today. Today, it is possible to do many things without ever leaving home. Digitalisation, as well as development of means of communication urge residents to self-development in the area of technologies and continuously increase their skills in this area.

However, the use of electronic mass media in the age of information technologies mostly replaces direct contact in person. It can significantly affect social isolation and estrangement of parents, especially those of retirement age. Exchange of information, a true social interaction is especially important in a family because it not only provides an opportunity to spend time with relatives and family, but also share their needs and feel the support. The tradition of maintaining contact between parents and children can be observed throughout their lifetimes, maintaining affection and interaction, promoting, and strengthening the family values, family succession, and strengthening intergenerational solidarity in family.

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The theoretical approach to researching intergenerational solidarity in family was summarised by Bengtson and Roberts in 1991, and this multidimensional construct provides an opportunity to study intergenerational processes in family determining the key elements that can promote or hinder strengthening of intergenerational solidarity in family [1]. When the theory on intergenerational solidarity in family was published, studies on family solidarity became very popular across Europe and world [2-4].

Studies of intergenerational solidarity in family provide an opportunity to examine manifestations of intergenerational relationships in family from various aspects. The main focus of this article will be on such factors as: 1) how time spent to travel to the parent's home is associated with frequency of contacts with the parent, and 2) how the parent's education level is associated with use of personal meetings, phone and information media technologies (Skype, etc.) to communicate with their adult child. The time spent on the way to reach the parent's home on a usual day by using the usual means of transport will be viewed as a factor that may promote or hinder personal meetings and the use of phone or other information technologies. This approach allows us to exclude from the study family members living in the same household.

2 Theoretical framework of intergenerational solidarity in family

Today's global developments in geographical mobility and information technologies often indicates such factors as limited time resources and insufficient skills in usage of current means of communication. In turn, that limits the personal contacts between the family members and negatively affects strengthening of intergenerational solidarity in family.

Studies of intergenerational solidarity in family started in America, considering the aging of residents, urbanisation, and migration of residents. Bengtson and Roberts first suggested a multidimensional model for research in 1991. The model includes such dimensions and manifestations of intergenerational solidarity in family as structural solidarity, associative solidarity, affective solidarity, consensus, normative and functional solidarity in relation to a 'modified extended family' [1]. When researching intergenerational solidarity in family, most scholars emphasise one or several dimensional expressions of intergenerational solidarity with a purpose to identify the influencing factors and threats, as well as manifestations that might affect the interaction between adult children and their parents [4].

Associative solidarity means frequency of interaction and various activities in which family members engage:

1. Frequency of intergenerational interactions (i.e., in person, by phone, by mail)
2. Most frequent types of common activities (i.e., leisure, special events, etc.) [1].

2.1 Geographical distance

Another dimension is the structural solidarity or structure of interaction opportunities. Studies on structural peculiarities of families allow for identification of how social, demographic, economic aspects, the education level, or health condition might affect the geographical distance between the family members.

Structural peculiarities of the family, as well as such social and demographic factors as gender, age, education, family status, busyness, and whether the family has a small child, brothers and sisters, the health condition of family members, and material possibilities of adult children are directly linked to the geographical distance between family members. For instance, education level of an adult child is an important factor determining the distance to other family members, and the university education adds more than 35 kilometres to the

average distance of the place of residence of adult children and their parents, in comparison to a basic level of education [5].

A significant number of scholars state that the geographical distance between children and their parents changes due to various factors. At an early age, children are tended to leave their parents' home sooner and to begin an independent life. As the time passes, parents' health condition may worsen, parents may become lonely, and in force of normative rules, children try to live closer to their parents or together with them to provide functional assistance and emotional support to their parents [5].

Structural solidarity is manifested as a possibility to provide functional assistance and to maintain mutual contacts. These aspects are a necessary precondition for intergenerational solidarity in family and are studied by determining the distance between homes of adult children and their parents. The closer adult children live to their parents, the more likely they are to visit each other and provide functional aid. Researchers note that the optimal distance between an adult child and parent in the meaning of time is up to 30 minutes [1, 6]. When researching intergenerational structural solidarity in family, it is necessary to consider social and demographic data of an adult child (their gender, age, marital status, whether they have siblings, whether they have children, their place of residence), as well as social and economic status (education, busyness) of the adult child and parent.

2.2 Contact

For a long time, personal contact between parents and their adult children was considered an important indicator in intergenerational relationships [7]. Firstly, the personal contact is a significant precondition for maintaining the 'family solidarity', which is defined as mutual care between the family members. Silverstein and Bengtson state that frequent contacts may affect the exchange of emotional support and affect provision of the functional assistance; frequent contacts also help children be informed on their parents' needs [8].

Differences in contact levels, as well as differences in the intergenerational support level are explained from the viewpoint of two mutually complementary theoretical perspectives [1].

The theoretical opinion expresses a statement that people consider losses and advantages of the contact when they decide on how often children and parents should meet. As a significant loss is seen the time spent on the way which could otherwise be used for alternative social contacts, for example, to visit friends. On the other hand, motivation to spend time with family is affection, as well as support received by children and parents from each other during difficulties. The other opinion on intergenerational relationships emphasises norms and values strengthening the family roots. Norms exist in society which state that you should care for your children or parents regardless of whether such care is pleasant and how much it costs [9].

Researcher M. Kalmijn in his study on intergenerational solidarity in family marks the following influencing factors: a) the 'value' of contacts, stating that higher strata of society often have to leave their parents' homes to find appropriate educational institutions and jobs [10], and b) higher strata of society are less based on traditional family norms. Normative provisions in the family, as well as social class and level of education influence frequency of contacts between an adult child and their parent [10].

Frequency of contacts is influenced also by busyness and employment of the adult child. Working time may be significant because it reduces the quantity of free time. Most often it is applicable to working women whose main role was to maintain the family ties, raise their children, and help the parents at home. Frequency of contacts is also influenced

by the woman's marital status because it requires additional duties related to the role of the new wife [11].

Bengtson and Roberts (1991) state that frequent contacts have a direct link to emotional closeness between an adult child and their parent: the closer the emotional tie the more often adult children call their parents and spend their free time with them. However, sociology researchers Lawton, Silverstein, and Bengtson [12] state that 'frequent' does not mean 'high quality' because motives for contacts may be duties towards parents, and duties may create a high level of contact, yet the quality of relationships may be poor. In the case of poor intergenerational relationships in the family, strong family norms may also influence the frequency of contacts. Frequency of contacts is also affected by the geographical distance between the adult child and his or her parent, and it can limit visual contacts regardless of a strong affection [12].

Frequency of contacts between family members is an integral part of intergenerational solidarity in family. When talking on the phone or spending weekends and holidays together, not only information exchange takes place, but adult children can also provide emotional support to their parents and vice versa. A direct contact also manifests the adult child's attention to the parent [13].

To summarise the theoretical part, we can conclude that two manifestations of intergenerational solidarity in family, i.e., structural solidarity and associative solidarity, are important aspects in intergenerational relationships in family. It is necessary to maintain communication with the parent by using all opportunities of personal meetings and by using information technologies. It is an important aspect for strengthening intergenerational solidarity in family.

3 Research method and sample

Data obtained from the research "Intergenerational Solidarity in Family: Manifestations and Influencing Factors" were used; the research took place during the period from 02.06.2019 to 30/01/2020. Research includes data provided by 332 respondents who corresponded to the research selection criterion: Residents of Latvia who have at least one living parent and who do not live in one household with their parent.

To analyse data, the following criteria were used: Pearson's χ^2 , method of non-parametric analysis, descriptive statistics, and Spearman's correlation criterion (Spearman's rho).

The sample consists of the Latvian residents aged from 18 to 62; data is collected by web survey from June 2019 to January 2020.

Data of respondents

Gender of participants: 83% female and 17% male. Respondents aged from 18 to 62; median = 34.7 years, (standard deviations = 11.01).

Distribution of respondents by age shows that 36.4% of respondents are in the age group between 18 and 29; 32.8% - between 30 and 39; 21.7% - between 40 and 49; and 9% - between 50 and 62 years of age. Education level of the respondents is as follows: higher – 62%; secondary – 35%; basic education – 3%. A child in the family: 67.5% – have a child/children; and 13.9% – do not have a child/children. Occupation of the respondents is: working full-time – 51.8%; working part-time – 7.8%; homemakers – 3.6%; students – 10.2%; studying and working – 18.1%; unemployed – 0.6%; other choice – 7.8%.

Characterisation of a parent of an adult child

Parents: retired 40.1% of respondents; not retired – 40.1%. Average age for a parent who is retired is 72.7 years; for a parent who is not retired – 52.7 years. Education level of a parent is the following: higher – 36%; secondary – 54%, basic education – 10%.

It should be noted that the sampling is not representative. Composition of the sampling influences the obtained results and limits the degree of generalisation.

4 Results

In the first part of our research, we examined how long it takes adult to travel to their parents' home depending on their level of education, as well, how long it takes adult children to reach their parents' home based on various levels of parent's education (see Table1). We excluded from the research those pairs of adult children and their parents who live in the same household.

Table 1. Level of education of an adult child and their parent, and the time spent travelling to the parent's home by using usual means of transport on a usual day (%).

Time spent travelling	Education level of the adult child			Education level of the parent		
	Higher (n = 206)	Secondary (n = 118)	Basic (n = 8)	Higher (n = 120)	Secondary (n = 180)	Basic (n = 32)
Up to 10 minutes	24	27	25	30	24	13
10 minutes to 30 minutes	23	19	25	22	23	12
30 minutes to 1 hour	16	10	25	17	12	13
1 hour to 3 hours	19	19	0	11	22	25
3 hours and more	18	25	25	20	18	38

Analysis of the education level of an adult child and time spent travelling to the parent's home by using usual means of transport on a usual day showed that 27% of adult children with secondary education need up to 10 minutes to get to their parent's home. 24% of adult children with higher education and 25% of adult children with basic education also need up to 10 minutes to visit their parents in person. Analysis of the time spent on the way to the parent's home from the viewpoint of parents revealed that 30% of parents with higher education are able to meet their adult children more often since travel to the parents' home takes up to 10 minutes. However, the results showed that for 38% of parents with basic education the time spent to reach the parent's home takes 3 hours and longer, which significantly limits the possibility of personal meetings with their adult children.

The results showed that association between the adult child's education level and time spent on the way to the parent's home is not present ($\chi^2 = 7.276, p = 0.507$). However, there are associations between the parent's education level and time spent on the way to the parent's home ($\chi^2 = 15.951, p = 0.043$). Based on obtained data, one can conclude that adult children need less time to reach their parent's home if the parent has acquired higher education; the most time to reach the parent's home is spent to visit a parent with a basic education. In the context of the intergenerational solidarity in family, it means that adult children try to live closer to a parent with higher education than a parent with basic education.

In the next step, frequency of communication between an adult child and their parent was examined where communication was expressed as: 1) frequency of personal meetings; 2) the use of phone and frequency of calls; 3) the use of electronic means of communications and information technologies (Skype, etc.) and its frequency.

Table 2. Frequency of personal meetings between an adult child and their parent, by level of education (%).

Frequency of personal meetings	Education level of the adult child				Education level of the parent			
	Higher (n = 206)	Secondary (n = 118)	Basic (n = 8)	Frequency of communication (N = 332)	Higher (n = 120)	Secondary (n = 180)	Basic (n = 32)	Frequency of communication (N = 332)
Very seldom/ not at all	5	5	0	5	3	6	6	5
A few times a year	6	29	25	15	13	13	25	15
Approximately once per month	22	5	0	16	10	18	25	16
A few times a month	18	14	0	16	18	14	13	16
Approximately once per week	16	19	0	16	12	19	19	16
A few times a week	22	22	75	24	30	22	6	24
Every day and more often	12	7	0	10	13	8	6	10

Results of study show that only 24% of respondents meet their parents several times a week, approximately 16% of respondents meet their parents from once per week to once per month, and only 10% of respondents meet their parents every day. Of respondents with basic education 75% remarked that they meet their parents several times a week but only 22% with higher and secondary education do so. If results of study on frequency of personal meetings is examined from the position of parents' level of education, it can be found that 30% of parents with higher education, 22% with secondary education, and 6% of basic education meet their children in person several times a week (see Table 2). It can also be noted that approximately 25% of parents with basic education meet their adult children comparably less often – from one time a month to several times a year.

Results of analysis performed on frequency of phone use in communication with parents and education level of adult children showed that 40% of respondents use phone as means of communication with their parents every day and more often, 36% of respondents use phone several times per week, and 9% communicate with their parent by phone approximately once a week.

Table 3. The use of phone between an adult child and their parent, and the education level of the adult child and their parent (%).

Frequency of communication by Phone	Education level of the adult child				Education level of the parent			
	Higher (n = 206)	Secondary (n = 118)	Basic (n = 8)	Frequency of communication (N = 332)	Higher (n = 120)	Secondary (n = 180)	Basic (n = 32)	Frequency of communication (N = 332)
Very seldom/ not at all	1/41	5/27	0/0	2/35	3/25	1/37	6/63	2/35
A few times a year	4/11	0/3	0/0	2/8	2/7	3/9	0/6	2/8
Approximately once per month	5/3	2/2	0/0	4/2	3/0	3/4	6/0	4/2

A few times a month	8/ 5	3/ 7	0/ 0	6/ 5	8/ 7	4/ 6	6/ 0	6/ 5
Approximately once per week	10/ 8	9/ 7	0/ 0	9/ 7	8/ 8	9/ 7	13/ 6	9/ 7
A few times a week	33/ 18	42/ 37	25/ 75	36/ 26	28/ 30	40/ 24	44/ 19	36/ 26
Every day and more often	40/ 16	39/ 17	75/ 25	40/ 16	47/ 23	39/ 13	25/ 6	40/ 16

The results showed that 75% of adult children with basic education, 40% with higher education, and 39% with secondary education communicate with their parents by phone often or ‘every day and more often’. At the same time 47% of parents with higher education communicate with their children each day and more often, while communication ‘every day and more often’ with their parents can be observed in 39% of parents with secondary education and 25% of parents with basic education (see Table 3).

The analysis of frequency of communication by means of information technologies showed that 16% of adult children use information technologies to connect with their parents every day and more often. 26% use information technologies several times a week, 8% use it several times a year, and most – 35% of respondents – stated that they use information technologies very seldom or do not use information technologies at all for communication with their parents (see Table 3).

It can be noted that associations exist between the education level of adult children and frequency of use of information technologies to communicate with their parents ($p < 0.001$). Approximately 75% of adult children with basic education communicate with their parents by using information technologies several times a week, while 18% adult children with higher education contact their parents the same way and with the same frequency or several times per week. Results also showed that associations exist between the education level of parents and frequency of use of information technologies to communicate with their adult children ($p = 0.005$). It was noted that approximately 65% of parents with basic education use information technologies to contact their adult children very seldom or not at all, while 30% of parents with higher education use information technologies to contact their adult children several times a week.

By using results obtained during the study, mean indicators (M) and standard deviation (SD) of time to the parent’s home were calculated for adult children and parents, based on education level of the adult children and their parents. Options of answers were coded from 1 to 5, where 1 = ‘Up to 10 minutes’; 2 = ‘From 10 minutes to 30 minutes’; 3 = ‘From 30 minutes to 1 hour’; 4 = ‘From 1 hour to 3 hours’; 5 = ‘3 hours and more’. Frequency of personal contacts, phone calls and use of information technologies were coded from 1 to 7, where 1 = ‘very seldom/ not at all’; 2 = ‘a few times a year’; 3 = ‘approximately once per month’; 4 = ‘a few times a month’; 5 = ‘approximately once per week’; 6 = ‘a few times a week’; 7 = ‘every day and more often’. Mean indicator (M) and standard deviation (SD) of frequency of contacts between adult children and their parents were calculated, considering the education level of adult children and their parents.

The obtained results showed that on average adult children do not distance themselves from their parents far away, and the time necessary to travel to the parent’s home on a usual day by using usual means of transport takes from 10 minutes to one hour ($M = 2.87$; $SD = 1.49$). Personal meetings between an adult child and their parent on average take place from once a week to several times a month ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.74$). Frequency of phone calls on average ranges from a few times a week to one time a week ($M = 5.87$, $SD = 1.43$). Communication by using information technologies (Skype and others) on average takes place from once per month to a few times per month ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 2.46$). To calculate a connection between the education level of an adult child and their parent in relation to frequency of contact (personal meetings, contact by phone and use of information

technologies), we calculated Spearman’s correlation coefficient. Our results show that frequency of personal meetings of adult children and their parents is linked to the distance to the parent’s home, which we express as the time used to travel to the parent’s home on a usual day by using usual means of transport. The less time is required for an adult child to get to the parent’s home, the more often they meet ($r_s = -0.734$, ($p < 0.001$)). Contact by phone between adult children and parents are also interconnected with the distance to the parent’s home; the more time is required to travel to the parent’s home, the less phone calls are made ($r_s = -0.346$, ($p < 0.001$)) (see. Table 4).

Table 4. Correlation between frequency of communication, education level and time spent to travel to parents’ home (Bivariate Correlation).

		Education level of the adult child	Education level of the parent	Time spent travelling	Face to face contact	Phone	Other information technologies (Skype, etc.)
Education level of the adult child	Correlation Coefficient	1	.195**	0.035	-0.084	0.073	.207**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	0.529	0.126	0.183	<.001
Education level of the parent	Correlation Coefficient	.195**	1	.133*	-.174**	-0.081	-.228**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		0.016	0.001	0.143	<.001
Time spent travelling	Correlation Coefficient	0.035	.133*	1	-.734**	-.346*	-0.096
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.529	0.016		<.001	<.001	0.081

Notes: $N = 332$; ** $p < 0.001$; * $p < 0.05$.

Analysis did not show a correlation between frequency of contacts in person or by phone and education of adult children; however, the use of information technologies showed existence of correlation between this use of IT and various education levels of adult children; adult children with basic education use information technologies to contact their parents more often, ($r_s = 0.207$, $p < 0.001$). We assume that adult children with basic education possibly represent the younger generation for whom the use of information technologies for communication does not prove difficult. Correlation between the use of information technologies and the education level of parents was also discovered, ($r_s = -0.228$ $p < 0.001$); adult children more often use information technologies with parents who have acquired higher level of education.

Results showed that there is a correlation, even if not distinct ($r_s = -0.174$), between frequency of personal meetings with adult child and education level of parent ($p = 0.001$); more frequent personal meetings take place with a parent who has acquired higher level of education.

Results obtained during the study show that the education level of adult children and education level of parents are linked to frequency of contacts between members of family, and it is one of the most frequent factors in the context of intergenerational solidarity in family.

5 Conclusions

1. Basing on the model of intergenerational solidarity in family (Roberts and Bengtson, 1991), we studied associative solidarity in family between an adult child and their parent. It manifested as personal meetings, frequency of use of contact by phone and information technologies (Skype, etc.), as well as time spent on the way to the parent's home on a usual day by using a usual means of transport, in the context of education level of adult child and parent.
2. Education level of an adult child is not associated with the distance from the parent's home which we studied as time spent on the way, in this case.
3. Time spent on the way to the parents' home is a factor which on a significant level is interconnected with frequency of personal meetings and use of phone to communicate with parents; most often adult children who live closer meet their parents and call them on phone more often.
4. The research results show that frequency of use of information technologies to communicate with parents is linked to the education level of adult children and parents because the higher level of education of parents, the more often their adult children use information technologies to communicate.
5. Contacts and communication between adult children and their parents is an integral part of intergenerational relationships promoting strengthening of intergenerational solidarity in family. In further studies it is necessary to use representative sampling taking into consideration of age of adult children and parents to be able to identify age groups in need of learning skills in use of information technologies for communication which form a good resource of communication between family members today, regardless of distance between these family members.

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