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Ties between Parents and their Adult Children: A Western European Typology of Late-Life Families¹

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Abstract

Following Reher's (1998) seminal paper on family ties in western Europe, the perspective that family solidarity patterns are divided along the lines of an individualistic north and a familialistic south has dominated the research literature. We challenge this view and address variability in intergenerational family solidarity within and across countries. Using multiple dimensions of intergenerational solidarity drawn from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe, we develop a typology of late-life families which is robust across northern, central and southern regions. The four types are (a) *descending familialism*: living nearby, frequent contact, endorsement of family obligation norms, and primarily help in kind from parents to children, (b) *ascending familialism*: living nearby, frequent contact, endorsement of family obligation norms, and primarily help in kind from children to parents, (c) *supportive at distance*: not living nearby, frequent contact, refutation of family obligation norms, and primarily financial transfers from parents to adult children, (d) *autonomous*: not living nearby, little contact, refutation of family obligation norms, and few support exchanges. The four types are prevalent in each European country, though their distribution differs. Our findings suggest that scholars should move beyond the idea that a particular country is best characterized by a single dominant type of late-life family. Sociodemographic differentials in family type follow predictable patterns, underscoring the validity of the developed typology.

Relationships between Parents and their Adult Children: A Western

European Typology of Late-Life Families

Research on intergenerational solidarity in families is a flourishing field. The impetus lies in the structural and cultural developments affecting families. The extension of life and drop in birth rates have resulted in so-called bean pole families with a relatively large number of vertical ties and comparatively few horizontal ties, while an increase in divorce and re-partnering has resulted in increased complexity of family ties (Bengtson 2001; Hagestad 1998; Matthews and Sun 2006; Seltzer et al. 2005). In Europe, the expansion of welfare state provisions has decreased the economic and practical need for family support (Esping-Andersen 1999), while women's higher labor force participation has introduced new challenges for family caring (Blossfeld 1995; Blossfeld and Huinink 1991; Hakim 2000). Processes of individualization, secularization and emancipation have brought about a shift from economic and instrumental interdependencies to a more affective orientation in families, with a greater emphasis on individual needs and personal happiness (Hareven 1995; Lewis 2001).

It has been common, particularly in public debates but also in a number of scholarly scenarios (e.g. Popenoe 1988, 1993; Waite and Gallagher 2000; Wolfe 1989), to suggest that the structural and cultural changes of the past decades have had negative repercussions for intergenerational family solidarity. Nevertheless, little evidence has been found for the presumed "decline of the family". The majority of Europeans express strong commitments to maintain their function of providing support to family members (e.g. Daatland and Herlofson 2003). High proportions of elderly parents in Europe see a child at least once a week (Hank 2007; Tomassini, et al. 2004a), and the majority of family members are involved in transfers up and down generational lines (Albertini, Kohli, and Vogel 2007; Attias-Donfut, Ogg, and Wolff 2005).

Formal services have not eroded informal support: studies have repeatedly shown that generous welfare state services complement rather than substitute or crowd out family care (Chappell and Blandford 1991; Daatland and Lowenstein 2005; Künemund and Rein 1999; Motel-Klingebiel, Tesch-Römer, and Von Kondratowitz 2005).

Our aim is to portray western European families amid structural and cultural change. We consider differences in intergenerational family solidarity across eleven European countries. The data stem from the first wave of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE). Our approach is novel in two respects. First, we adopt a *multidimensional* perspective on intergenerational solidarity rather than focus on isolated aspects as is commonly done in comparative research on western European families. Second, we address variability in intergenerational solidarity *within* countries rather than assume that a country has one typical pattern of family relationships.

Multidimensional view of intergenerational family solidarity

The intergenerational solidarity model developed by Bengtson and his colleagues (e.g. Bengtson and Roberts 1991; Roberts, Richards, and Bengtson 1991) has served as a source of inspiration for many family researchers. The model distinguishes six solidarity dimensions: affectual (warmth, closeness), associational (frequency of contact, types of shared activities), consensual (agreement on values and beliefs), functional (exchange of resources), normative (familial obligations), and structural (opportunities for interaction). Unfortunately, researchers have rarely considered multiple dimensions of intergenerational family solidarity simultaneously, and insofar they have, their data are from single-country studies (e.g. Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg 1993; Silverstein and Bengtson 1997 for the United States, and Van Gaalen and Dykstra 2006 for the Netherlands, but see Lowenstein 2007 for an exception). Comparative studies of western

European countries have largely focused on one dimension of intergenerational solidarity, such as parent-child contact frequency (Tomassini et al. 2004a), intergenerational coresidence (Tomassini et al. 2004b), norms of family obligation (Daatland and Herlofson 2003) or resource transfers (Albertini, Kohli, and Vogel 2007; Attias-Donfut, Ogg, and Wolff 2005; Höllinger and Haller 1990). Hank's (2007) work on proximity and parent-child contact frequency, and Daatland and Lowenstein's (2005) work on care preferences, proximity, and help from family are examples of studies involving data from several European countries in which sets of dimensions of intergenerational family solidarity have been examined.

In our view, the consideration of multiple dimensions of intergenerational solidarity helps to obtain a nuanced view of intergenerational family relationships. To that end, we address the question of whether different *types* of late-life families can be empirically distinguished, and if so, what their incidence is, and whether their distribution varies within and across European countries. We not only consider multiple domains of intergenerational solidarity, but also make a provision for varying combinations of solidarity dimensions and levels. We explicitly allow for the possibility that high levels on one solidarity dimension do not covary with high levels on another dimension. For example, parents and adult children might interact frequently but not exchange instrumental support because they wish to be self sufficient (Gans and Silverstein 2006).

Variability within countries

Reher's (1998) seminal paper on family ties in western Europe has served as a framework for many comparative studies. "In bold strokes" (p. 204), Reher characterized the center and north of Europe by weak family links, and the Mediterranean by strong family ties. In countries with weak family ties, young adults set up households of their own at a relatively young age, and

provision of care to vulnerable family members is largely accomplished through public and private institutions. In countries with strong family ties, young adults remain in the parent home until they marry, and much of the aid given to the needy and the poor comes from the family. In weak family areas, individualistic values tend to dominate, whereas collectivistic values predominate in strong family contexts. Reher traces the emphasis on the individual and self-reliance in northern Europe to the Reformation, and attributes the overriding importance of kin ties in southern Europe to Catholic and Islamic influences.

Following Reher's work, differences in intergenerational family solidarity patterns in western Europe tend to be described in terms of a north-south gradient. Daatland and Herlofson (2003) report greater support for filial norms in Spain and Israel than in Norway, England, and Germany. In their ranking of countries from most individualistic to most familialistic on the basis of family obligation norms, Kalmijn and Saraceno (2008) report a "North-South element" (p. 492) but also point to the relatively familialistic position of Germany and Austria. Höllinger and Haller (1990) summarize their findings in terms of close kin relations in southern and eastern Europe, and loosened kin ties in northwestern Europe. Hank (2007) shows that the prevalence of coresidence of older parents with their children is lowest in the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, highest in the Mediterranean countries, while intermediate levels are reported for the central region of Europe. The frequency of parent-child contacts exhibits "a similar north-south pattern" (p. 162). Albertini, Kohli and Vogel (2007) report more frequent but less intense transfers of time and money from parents to children in the Nordic than in the Southern European countries, with the Continental European countries being somewhere in the middle. Hank and Buber (2009) report a similar pattern for grandparenting support. In their analyses of help from adult children to parents, Ogg and Renaut (2006) show a north-south gradient in the

proportions providing some kind of support, but the reverse for regular and daily help. Attias-Donfut, Ogg, and Wolff (2005) find “some evidence of the expected north-south European gradient” (p. 171), but interestingly, they also state that the pattern of intergenerational transfers does not neatly follow European regional differences.

Though Reher acknowledged that his “portrayal simplifie[d] a heterogeneous European experience” (p. 212), few researchers have considered within-country variability in family solidarity patterns. As noted earlier, our aim is to identify different types of late-life families. Rather than assume that a specific pattern best characterizes intergenerational family solidarity in a particular country, we focus on variability. We argue that different family types are present in varying proportions in all countries (cf. Douglas 1999; Grendstad 1999).

Discriminating family types

We focus on geographic distance, frequency of contact, norms of family obligation, and support exchange – representing the structural, associational, normative and functional solidarity dimensions in Bengtson’s model. With regard to support exchange, we consider help in kind both up and down family lines, but financial support only down family lines. Previous studies have shown that financial support flows predominantly from parents to children (Albertini, Kohli, and Vogel 2007; Attias-Donfut, Ogg, and Wolff, 2005; Kohli 1999). The literature provides clues as to ways in which the solidarity dimensions might serve to discriminate types of families. Note that we cannot state in advance precisely how many family types will emerge, and what their dominant features will be. Nevertheless, we can draw upon previous work to outline patterns of family support.

Geographic proximity facilitates face-to-face contact (De Jong Gierveld and Fokkema 1998; Grundy and Shelton 2001; Hank 2007; Joseph and Hallman 1998; Lawton, Silverstein, and

Bengtson 1994; Lin and Rogerson 1995; Litwak and Kulis 1987). Face-to-face contact, in turn, increases the likelihood of exchanges of help in kind (Soldo and Hill 1993).² Frequent face-to-face contact not only reduces the costs of giving, but also helps to make support providers aware of the recipient's needs. Exchanges of financial support are less affected by distance because they do not require interaction in person (Litwak and Kulis 1987). Following these considerations, we predict that geographic distance discriminates high-support-in-kind from low-support-in-kind families, but does not differentiate families by level of financial support.

SHARE measures overall parent-child *contact frequency*; face-to-face contact is not distinguished from other forms of contact. Insofar contact frequency pertains to face-to-face contact (which we cannot ascertain), we expect the clustering pattern for contact frequency to be similar to that for geographic distance. Thus we expect to find families with high levels of support in kind which are furthermore characterized by geographic proximity of parents and children and frequent contact, versus those with low levels of support in kind where the distance separating parents and children is greater and contact levels are lower. As noted earlier, financial transfers do not require face-to-face contact (and geographic proximity). We predict that high levels of contact go together with a greater intensity of monetary transfers, and vice versa. By maintaining contact, family members have information about financial needs. Moreover, keeping in touch is a means to reciprocate the receipt of financial support (Rossi and Rossi 1990).

Previous research has shown that a sense of *family obligation* predisposes support behavior. Elderly parents, for example, who feel strongly that family members should help one another, give their children more practical and financial help than parents who had weaker feelings of obligation (Lee, Netzer, and Coward 1994). Among adult children, norms of family obligation are positively associated with parental caregiving (Gans and Silverstein 2006; Klein

Ikkink, Van Tilburg, and Knipscheer 1999; Stein et al. 1998). Of course, actual support exchange might also have an impact on norms of obligation. Drawing on cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957; Münch 1972), we argue that discrepancies between support behavior and perceived norms of obligation create psychological discomfort, which is to be avoided. Thus intensive supportive exchanges are likely to be attributed to a strong sense of duty, whereas not providing support despite strong family norms is likely to result in a downward adjustment of beliefs about the desirability and feasibility of family help in times of need. Whereas there are good reasons to assume strong links between norms of family obligation and support exchanges, there is less reason to expect strong links between norms of family obligation and contact frequency. Norms of family obligation are only one of the motives underlying intergenerational interactions. According to exchange theory (Ekeh 1974; Emerson 1976), parents and children keep in touch either as a repayment for previous services or in expectation of future rewards (e.g., an inheritance). According to attachment theory (e.g., Cicirelli 1991), intergenerational contact is motivated by feelings of affection and closeness. On the basis of the previous considerations, we predict that norms of family obligation discriminate families by level of support regardless of type of support, but not by level of contact frequency.

So far, we have considered links between *support exchange* and the other solidarity dimensions. Now we focus only on support exchange, and more specifically on the direction of intergenerational transfers. In principle, four types of support flows can be distinguished: primarily downward, primarily upward, mutual transfers, and no transfers. The first two types are consistent with an altruism model (Batson 1998), which postulates that people give without expecting anything in return because they care about the other's well-being. Interestingly, they are also consistent with an exchange model (Ekeh 1974; Emerson 1976), which posits that

people transfer their resources in return for having received favors in the past or because they expect to gain in the future from providing help. Mutual transfers are a form of immediate reciprocity: there is little delay between giving and receiving. Note that the exchanges might pertain to different forms of support as, for example, when adult children provide help in kind in exchange for financial support. A situation of no transfers is likely when there are no resources to be exchanged, no needs requiring responses, or when the parent-child relationship is not close enough to warrant exchanges of support (Soldo and Hill 1993).

Data and methods

Data source

The data stem from the second release file of the first wave of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE). This survey took place in 2004 among 27,500 non-institutionalized individuals aged 50 years and over in eleven European countries: Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, and Greece. Computer-assisted personal interviews were conducted. Self-completion questionnaires supplemented these interviews.

Although probability samples were drawn in all participating countries, the survey did not have a uniform sampling design, varying from a simple random selection of households (in the Danish case, for example, from the country's central population register) to rather complicated multistage designs (as, for example, in Greece, where the telephone directory was used as a sampling frame). The weighted average household response rate ranges from 39% in Switzerland to 81% in France (for a thorough description of methodological issues, see Börsch-Supan, Hank, and Jürges 2005; Börsch-Supan and Jürges 2005). The sample sizes also vary.

Belgium has the largest sample size (N = 3,600) and Switzerland has the smallest (N = 960 persons).

We use data from the so-called “family respondent”, who was randomly selected from all individuals in a household aged 50 and over. The analyses are restricted to those who had at least one living child (N = 16,968 cases). We further restricted the analyses to parents who had no children living at home, to avoid having patterns of contact frequency and support exchange confounded with coresidence (N = 11,906). The pooled multinational sample is further reduced to 11,181 due to missing values on the solidarity measures.

Measures of solidarity dimensions

Latent class analysis (LCA) was applied to construct the typology of late-life families (see the next section for details). The input for LCA is a cross-classification table of the scores for each variable in the analysis. It is customary to use dichotomous variables (Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg 1993; Silverstein and Bengtson 1997; Van Gaalen and Dykstra 2006). Though dichotomization implies a loss of information, it ensures having a manageable number of cells in the data matrix. An analysis on the basis of eight dichotomous measures, for example, results in 2^8 or 256 cells. Using all answer categories would produce unacceptably sparse data.

The following solidarity measures were used. *Geographic proximity* was whether the parent had at least one child living within a 5-kilometre radius (0 = no, 1 = yes).³ The *frequency of contact* pertained to whether the parent had more than weekly contact with one or more children either in person, by telephone or mail (0 = no, 1 = yes). The *family obligation norms* variable was based on items assessing opinions on state versus family responsibility for elder care in combination with items assessing opinions on the duty to care for children and grandchildren.⁴ Those with sum scores in the bottom 20% (and thus strongly refuting family

responsibility) were assigned a score of 1 (weak family obligation norms), the others received a score of 0 (= strong family obligation norms). We used a bottom cut-off to take the family-positive bias into account that measures of family obligation norms tend to have (cf. Daatland and Herlofson 2003). With regard to *support exchange*, we constructed the following three dichotomous variables (0 = no, 1 = yes): (a) downward help in kind: whether the parent had provided personal care, practical household help, or help with paperwork to one or more adult children from outside the household or had looked after the grandchildren from outside the household “almost every month” in the past year, (b) upward help in kind: whether one or more of the adult children from outside the household had provided personal care, household help, or help with paperwork “almost every month” to the parent, and (c) downward financial transfers: whether the parent had given any financial or material support amounting to € 250 or more (approximately U.S. \$ 350) to any of the adult children from outside the household in the past twelve months.

Latent class analysis

In LCA one assumes probabilistic rather than deterministic relationships between the latent construct (the concept of interest, in this case solidarity between parents and their adult children) and manifest indicators (the measures actually used) (Hagenaars and Halman 1989; Yamaguchi 2000). A basic assumption of LCA is conditional independence, which means that associations between manifest indicators exist only insofar they measure the same latent construct. LCA has the advantage that the classes of the latent construct are discrete and need not be ordered along a continuum (Clogg 1995). In this study, the classes are typical scoring patterns for the solidarity measures.

We started by computing a latent class model with only a single latent class (no relation between manifest indicators) and added one class after the other, checking for model fit and significance. We used the program Latent GOLD 4.0, developed by Vermunt and Magidson (2005). In addition, we determined the robustness of the latent class model for the various countries included in SHARE by estimating separate latent class models for the three geographic regions: northern Europe (Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Belgium), central Europe (Germany, France, Austria, and Switzerland), and southern Europe (Italy, Spain, and Greece).⁵

Four types of late-life families

Table 1 provides details on the optimal number of types in the LCA, which turned out to be four. The right-hand column shows successive decreases in the size of the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) as the number of types progresses from 1 to 4, and an increase if a fifth type is distinguished. Table 2 provides information on the distinguished family types. When separate latent class models for respondents in northern Europe, central Europe, and southern Europe were estimated, the same general family typology emerged, indicating that it is highly robust across the distinguished geographic regions.

--- Tables 1 and 2 about here ---

As can be seen in the top row of Table 2, 35% of families are of the first type, 25% are of the second, 7% of the third, and 33% are of the fourth type. These percentages are the cumulative probabilities for all families of belonging to the respective types. The coefficients in the columns of types 1 to 4 indicate the probability that a family is characterized by specific dimensions of solidarity, under the condition that the family is of that type. For example, there is a 75% probability that at least one child lives within a radius of five kilometers in Type 1 families, and a 29% probability that parents provide financial support to their children.

A high probability of having a child living within five kilometers is characteristic of Types 1 and 2, but not of Types 3 and 4. The likelihood of more than weekly contact broadly distinguishes the first three family types from the last one: it is high for Types 1, 2 and 3, and low for Type 4. A low probability of endorsing weak family obligation norms is characteristic of Types 1 and 2, but not of 3 and 4. With its high probability that help in kind is provided by parents to their children, Type 1 distinguishes itself from Types 2, 3 and 4. We assign the label “descending familialism” to Type 1 families. “Familialism” in the label emphasizes the endorsement of family obligation norms. The likelihood that adult children provide help in kind to their parents is higher for Type 2 than for any other type, and for that reason we assign the label “ascending familialism” to Type 2 families. The moderate probability that parents have weak family obligation norms and the high probability that they provide financial support to their children makes Type 3 stand out from the others, and we assign them the label “supportive at distance”. Type 4 families are characterized by low probabilities of having a child living nearby, more than weekly contact with at least one child, and support exchange, and a moderate probability of weak family obligation norms. We assign the label “autonomous” to these families.

In sum, the four late-life family types, which are robust across northern, central and southern European regions, are (a) *descending familialism*: living nearby, frequent contact, endorsement of family obligation norms, and primarily help in kind from parents to children, (b) *ascending familialism*: living nearby, frequent contact, endorsement of family obligation norms, and primarily help in kind from children to parents, (c) *supportive at distance*: not living nearby, frequent contact, refutation of family obligation norms, and primarily financial transfers from parents to adult children, (d) *autonomous*: not living nearby, little contact, refutation of family obligation norms, and few support exchanges.

Distribution of family types across western Europe

Table 3 shows the distribution of these four late-life family types by country. Each family type is present in each country, but the distributions vary. The descending familialism type is strongly represented in Belgium, and not strongly represented in Denmark, France, Austria, Switzerland, and Spain. In Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and Greece the representation of the descending familialism type is close to the European average. The ascending familialism type is least strongly represented in Sweden and Denmark, and most strongly represented in Italy, Spain, and Greece. In Austria, the representation of the ascending familialism type is also on the high side. The representation of the ascending familialism type in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France, and Switzerland approximates the European average. The proportion of families in the supportive at distance type is highest in Sweden and Denmark, followed by the Netherlands. The proportion of this late-life family type is lowest in Italy and Spain, and also relatively low in Belgium. Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland, Greece have proportions that resemble the European average.

--- Table 3 about here ---

The proportions in a particular country of descending and ascending familialism types should not be viewed as communicating vessels. Rather, the two types appear to go together. Countries with a high proportion of the descending familialism type also tend to be those with a high proportion of the ascending familialism type. The pattern appears to be one of a high or a low likelihood of intensive intergenerational transfers, regardless of the direction of the transfers. This intensive-transfer pattern finds its mirror in the autonomous type. In France and Switzerland, for example, the proportion of descending and ascending familialism types is on the low side (48% and 52%, respectively), but the proportion of the autonomous type is higher than elsewhere

in Europe (45% in France and 42% in Switzerland). Conversely, the proportion of descending and ascending familialism types is high in Italy (73%), Spain (74%) and Greece (76%), and to a lesser extent in Belgium (67%), but the proportion of the autonomous type is low in these countries (22% in Italy, 24% in Spain, 19% in Greece, and 29% in Belgium). The proportion of the autonomous type in Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Austria is close to the European average.

Sociodemographic differentials in family type

To assess the validity of the typology of families, we examined whether sociodemographic characteristics of parents and adult children, which are known correlates of family solidarity, differentiate family types in theoretically meaningful ways. We looked at indicators of the need for support (e.g., health problems), the availability to provide help (e.g., number of adult children), and the readiness to receive and provide help (e.g., religiosity). For details on operationalization, see Table 1 of the Appendix. Note that the measures of the sociodemographic characteristics of adult children are aggregate indicators. Dummy variables for the eleven countries participating in SHARE were also included. For descriptive information, see Table 4.

--- Table 4 about here ---

We applied multinomial logit regression analysis (Liao 1994), which is an extension of the binary logit model, to determine the associations between family type and sociodemographic characteristics of parents and their offspring. The multinomial logit model (MNL) is appropriate because the categories of the dependent variable (i.e., types of late-life families) are discrete, nominal and unordered. With n categories, the MNL is roughly equivalent to performing $2 * (n - 1)$ binary logistic regressions. In the MNL all the logits are estimated simultaneously, which enforces the logical associations among the parameters and makes a more

efficient use of the data (Long 1997). To interpret the MNLM results, we estimated marginal effects (Liao 1994). The marginal effect gives the change in probability by one unit change in an explanatory variable when all other variables are held constant at sample mean values. For example, the marginal effect for a dummy variable is the difference between being in Category 1 and being in Category 0. Per variable the marginal effects sum up to zero. Results are presented in Table 5.

Previous research has shown that parents who are no longer partnered receive more practical support from their adult children than those who are still together, and this is more strongly so for women than men and for the widowed compared to the divorced (Silverstein, Parrott, and Bengtson 1995; Kalmijn 2007). For that reason we included the interaction term *single after divorce * male* in the analyses. To assess whether the distribution of late-life family types varies by parental gender, one should not only consider the gender main effect but also the interaction effect of divorce and gender. These predictors taken together show that mothers are more likely to be in the descending familialism type of late-life families than fathers, and particularly so for widowed mothers and for those in intact marriages. They also show that mothers, particularly if they are widowed or in intact marriages, are less likely to be in autonomous families than fathers.

Table 5 shows furthermore that the parents aged 70-plus are less likely to be in the descending familialism type and more likely to be in the ascending familialism type than the 50 – 59 year-olds. The aged 60 and over are less likely to be in supportive at distance families than the youngest age group.

To assess differences by marital history, the effects of singlehood, divorce, and the interaction of divorce and gender should be considered together. The findings show that parents

living without a partner are less likely to be involved in the descending familialism type, and more strongly so (a) if they are divorced than if they are widowed, and (b) for fathers than for mothers. The opposite holds for the likelihood of being part of autonomous late-life families: it is greater for single older adults than for those living with a partner, and greatest for divorced fathers. The likelihood of being part of the ascending familialism type differs between the divorced and the widowed: the divorced are less likely, but the widowed are more likely than are those living with a partner to be part of a family involving ascending familialism.

Older parents experiencing health problems are less likely to be in the descending familialism type but more likely to be in the ascending familialism type than are older parents in good health. Parental health status is not associated with the likelihood of being in either supportive at distance or autonomous families.

The likelihood of being part of the descending familialism type does not vary by the household income of the parent. Families involving ascending familialism are less likely, but families involving supportive at distance are more likely among those with higher household incomes than among those with lower incomes. The likelihood of being in families with autonomous parent-child relationships does not vary by household income. The pattern of findings for parents' educational attainment is quite similar to that for parental income, with one exception. The highly educated are more likely to be in the autonomous family type than the lower educated.

The findings show virtually no differences by parental religiosity. The only significant coefficient is for the families of parents who report never to pray: their families are least likely to involve descending familialism.

--- Table 5 about here ---

The middle part of Table 5 shows the associations between family type and sociodemographic characteristics of adult children. Differences by family size involve a contrast between one-child families, and families with two or more children. The likelihood of being part of the descending and ascending familialism types is greater, but the likelihood of being part of supportive at distance families or autonomous families is smaller for parents with two or more children compared to parents of a single child.

Parents of daughters have a greater likelihood of being part of descending familialism families, and a smaller likelihood of being part of autonomous families. The gender composition of the children's network is not associated with the likelihood of being in the ascending familialism type or the supportive at distance type. Parents with children-in-law have a greater likelihood of being part of the descending familialism type, and a smaller likelihood of being part of the supportive at distance type. The pattern of findings for parents of children with paid jobs is similar. Having partnered children and having employed children shows no association with the likelihood of being part of ascending familialism or autonomous families. Divorce in the younger generation makes no difference regarding the distribution of family types. Parents of highly educated children are less likely to be part of the ascending familialism type, but more likely to be part of supportive at distance families. They also have a greater likelihood of being part of autonomous families.

As the bottom part of Table 5 shows, the distribution of late-life family types differs significantly between European countries. Compared to Italy, (a) the likelihood of families of the descending familialism type is greater in Greece and Belgium, but smaller in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland and Spain; (b) the likelihood of families of the ascending type is greater in Spain, but smaller in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands,

Belgium, Germany, France and Switzerland; (c) the likelihood of families of the supportive at distance type is greater in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Austria and Greece, but smaller in Spain; and (d) the likelihood of families of the autonomous type is greater in all countries but Greece, which has a smaller likelihood of having families of the autonomous type.

Discussion and conclusions

A first aim of our study was to contribute to a more nuanced view of intergenerational family relationships by simultaneously considering multiple domains of family solidarity. Analyses revealed four types of late-life families which were robust across northern, central and southern European regions. The *descending* and *ascending familialism* types are characterised by high probabilities of exchanging help in kind from parents to children and from children to parents, respectively, in addition to a high probability of having a child nearby, being in contact more than once a week with at least one of the children, and having strong norms of family obligation. Comparing the characteristics of the descending and ascending familialism types on the one hand and those of the *supportive at distance* type on the other hand, geographic proximity and strong norms of family obligation seem to be important conditions for the exchange of help in kind, but not for the exchange of financial support. The *autonomous* type is characterized by high probabilities of not living nearby, having little contact, refutation of family obligation norms, and few support exchanges. It is interesting that no late-life family type has the characteristics of a high probability of help in kind both upward and downward. Apparently, an immediate reciprocity pattern of support exchange is not characteristic of relationships between parents and their adult children. The exchange of support among parents and adult children more closely resembles a pattern of reciprocity in the long run, akin to Antonucci and Jackson's (1989) social support bank.

A second aim of our study was to contribute to a more nuanced view of cross-national differences in family solidarity by considering the distribution of family types across countries. Findings showed that each type is prevalent in each country, suggesting that scholars need to move beyond the idea that a particular country is best characterized by a single dominant type of late-life family. The degree of representation varies across countries, however. The descending and ascending family types, taken together, are most strongly represented in the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Spain and Greece, and least strongly represented in Sweden, Denmark and Switzerland. The supportive at distance type is most common in Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands, and least common in Belgium, Italy and Spain. The proportion of the autonomous family type is low in the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Spain and Greece, and high in France and Switzerland. Interestingly, the proportion of the autonomous type is not the highest in the countries which are generally viewed as the most de-familialized (Esping-Andersen 1999; Reher 1998): Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands. The distribution of family types across countries clearly does not fit the north-south divide that is commonly suggested. Glaser, Tomassini and Grundy (2004) make a similar observation in their study of formal and informal support for older people in Europe. They show, for example, that Portugal and Greece behave differently than Italy and Spain, and that the Netherlands is more similar to the Nordic countries than to its western European neighbors.

Sociodemographic differentials in family type follow predictable patterns, underscoring the validity of the developed typology. It is important to note that family types are not fixed, but change in response to changes in the lives of parents and children, reflecting different needs, availability and readiness for family solidarity. A first shift might be from supportive at distance to descending familialism when children move from young adulthood (being in school, living as

a single) to middle-age, entering their family-building phase (living with a partner, having children and a paid job). The next shift is from descending familialism (parents being the providers of help in kind) to ascending familialism (parents being the recipients of help in kind) when parents reach the last phase of their life, characterized by increasing health problems and widowhood. Finally, the sociodemographic profile of the autonomous families reveals that especially parental divorce and a high socioeconomic status increase the likelihood of individualism in late-life families. Future data collections in which family members are followed over time should examine changes in family type in connection with life course dynamics.

Data on coresident adult children were excluded from the analyses to avoid confounding patterns of contact frequency and support exchange with sharing the same household. The implication is of course that family types based on coresidence fall by the side. Rates of coresidence are higher in the Mediterranean countries than elsewhere in Europe (Hank 2007; Tomassini et al. 2004b). When interpreting the results, it is important to keep in mind that the identified family types represent a larger portion of families in the Scandinavian and Continental countries than in the Mediterranean countries.

By necessity, our analyses were limited to aggregate measures of adult children. We were unable to use the parent-child dyad as the analytical unit given the lack of information in SHARE on each individual child. As a result, variation among adult children could not be considered. Previous work has shown that parents do not interact with all their children equally often (Kalmijn and Dykstra 2006). Differences between children in terms of the frequency of contact with their parents are greater in large families, divorced families, and when parents have reached an advanced age. Previous work has also shown that adult children make their behavior contingent on their siblings' interactions with their parents (Van Gaalen, Dykstra, and Flap 2008).

For example, children visit their parents less often if they have siblings who are geographically or emotionally closer to their parents than they are themselves. An interesting question for cross-nationally comparative work is whether intra-family variability is greater in individualistic than in familialistic countries.

Only western European countries participated in the first wave of SHARE. The second wave of data collection has two new countries: the Czech Republic and Poland. The Generation and Gender Surveys (GGS), a system of nationally comparative surveys carried out under the auspices of the Population Activities Unit of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, include several central and eastern countries. The new data sets make it possible to expand analyses eastwards. Future work should examine whether the typology of late-life families is also robust in former communist countries, and if so, how and why the distribution of family types varies across these countries.

**TABLE 1 Model fit for the optimal number of classes in the latent class analysis
(N=11,181)**

| Number | df^a | L^{2b} | p-value | BIC^c |
|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| 1 | 57 | 2319.9 | 0.00 | 69735.4 |
| 2 | 50 | 390.6 | 0.00 | 67871.5 |
| 3 | 43 | 106.4 | 0.00 | 67652.5 |
| 4 | 36 | 38.5 | 0.36 | 67649.8 |
| 5 | 29 | 27.9 | 0.52 | 67704.5 |

^a df = Degrees of freedom. ^b L² = Likelihood ratio statistic. ^c BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion.

Source: SHARE – release 2.

TABLE 2 Latent Class Analysis of solidarity among parents aged 50 and older and their non-coresident children (probabilities, N=11,181)

| | Type 1 | Type 2 | Type 3 | Type 4 |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------|
| | Descending familialism | Ascending familialism | Supportive at distance | Autonomous |
| | 35% | 25% | 7% | 33% |
| ≥ 1 child within 5 kilometers | 0.75 ** | 0.86 ** | 0.21 ** | 0.23 ** |
| ≥ 1 child more than weekly contact | 0.96 ** | 0.96 ** | 0.73 ** | 0.46 ** |
| Weak norms of family obligation | 0.08 ** | 0.10 ** | 0.26 ** | 0.15 ** |
| Help in kind given to children ≥ once per month | 0.66 ** | 0.15 * | 0.18 ** | 0.10 ** |
| Help in kind given to parents ≥ once per month | 0.09 ** | 0.30 ** | 0.02 | 0.05 ** |
| Financial support given to children | 0.29 ** | 0.09 ** | 0.91 ** | 0.15 ** |

** $p < 0.001$, * $p < 0.01$.

Source: SHARE – release 2.

TABLE 3 **Distribution of late-life family types by country (weighted %, N=11,181)**

| | Type 1 | Type 2 | Type 3 | Type 4 |
|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| | Descending | Ascending | Supportive at | Autonomous |
| | familialism | familialism | distance | |
| EU-average | 35 | 25 | 7 | 33 |
| Sweden | 34 | 19 | 12 | 35 |
| Denmark | 29 | 21 | 12 | 37 |
| Netherlands | 36 | 28 | 9 | 28 |
| Belgium | 42 | 25 | 5 | 29 |
| Germany | 32 | 26 | 7 | 36 |
| France | 25 | 23 | 7 | 45 |
| Austria | 28 | 32 | 8 | 33 |
| Switzerland | 27 | 25 | 6 | 42 |
| Italy | 37 | 38 | 3 | 22 |
| Spain | 30 | 44 | 1 | 24 |
| Greece | 34 | 42 | 6 | 19 |

Source: SHARE – release 2.

TABLE 4 Descriptive characteristics of parents and adult children (weighted %, N=10,447)

| Characteristics parent | |
|--------------------------------|------|
| Female | 59.8 |
| Age | |
| 50 – 59 | 20.2 |
| 60 – 69 | 32.2 |
| 70+ | 47.6 |
| Marital history | |
| Living with partner | 58.6 |
| Single after widowhood | 32.9 |
| Single after divorce | 8.5 |
| Health problems | 32.0 |
| Educational attainment | |
| Low | 52.0 |
| Intermediate | 32.3 |
| High | 15.7 |
| Religiosity | |
| Prays daily | 26.5 |
| Prays weekly | 15.1 |
| Prays less than weekly | 13.8 |
| Never prays | 44.6 |
| Characteristics adult children | |

Number of children

| | |
|----------------------------------|------|
| 1 child | 25.9 |
| 2 children | 41.4 |
| 3 children | 20.0 |
| ≥ 4 children | 12.7 |
| ≥ 1 daughters | 76.0 |
| ≥ 1 children with partner | 88.9 |
| ≥ 1 children with paid job | 88.5 |
| ≥ 1 children divorced | 11.8 |
| ≥ 1 children with high education | 40.1 |

** $p < 0.001$, * $p < 0.01$.

Source: SHARE – release 2.

TABLE 5 Predictors of the four types of late-life families: marginal effects of multinomial logit regression (N=9,940)

| | Type 1 | Type 2 | Type 3 | Type 4 |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| | Descending | Ascending | Supportive | Autonomous |
| | familialism | familialism | at distance | |
| Characteristics parent | | | | |
| Gender (1 = female) | 0.03 ** | -0.00 | -0.01 | -0.03 * |
| Age (ref = 50 – 59) | | | | |
| 60 – 69 | 0.03 | 0.01 | -0.03 ** | -0.02 |
| 70+ | -0.17 ** | 0.18 ** | -0.05 ** | 0.04 |
| Single (1 = yes) | -0.08 ** | 0.08 | -0.00 | 0.01 |
| Single after divorce (1 = yes) | -0.03 | -0.06 * | -0.01 | 0.10 ** |
| Single after divorce*male | -0.08 ** | -0.05 | 0.01 | 0.12 ** |
| Health problems (1 = yes) | -0.07 ** | 0.09 ** | -0.01 | -0.01 |
| Household income (ref = quartile 1) | | | | |
| Quartile 2 | 0.02 | -0.04 * | 0.01 | 0.02 |
| Quartile 3 | 0.03 | -0.06 ** | 0.04 * | -0.00 |
| Quartile 4 | -0.04 | -0.04 * | 0.04 ** | 0.01 |
| Educational attainment (ref = low) | | | | |

| | Type 1 | Type 2 | Type 3 | Type 4 |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| | Descending | Ascending | Supportive | Autonomous |
| | familialism | familialism | at distance | |
| Intermediate | 0.00 | -0.05 ** | 0.03 ** | 0.02 |
| High | 0.01 | -0.12 ** | 0.06 ** | 0.05 * |
| Religiosity (ref = prays daily) | | | | |
| Prays weekly | -0.03 | 0.01 | 0.02 | -0.00 |
| Prays less than weekly | -0.02 | 0.01 | -0.01 | 0.02 |
| Never prays | -0.04 * | 0.01 | -0.00 | 0.03 |
| Characteristics adult children | | | | |
| Number (ref = 1 child) | | | | |
| 2 children | 0.07 ** | 0.06 ** | -0.01 | -0.13 ** |
| 3 children | 0.09 ** | 0.08 ** | -0.02 * | -0.16 ** |
| ≥ 4 children | 0.06 ** | 0.13 ** | -0.02 * | -0.16 ** |
| ≥ 1 daughters (1 = yes) | 0.05 ** | 0.01 | 0.00 | -0.07 ** |
| ≥ 1 children with partner (1 = yes) | 0.14 ** | -0.06 | -0.03 ** | -0.04 |
| ≥ 1 children with paid job (1 = yes) | 0.06 * | -0.02 | -0.03 ** | -0.02 |
| ≥ 1 children divorced (1 = yes) | 0.01 | -0.01 | 0.00 | -0.01 |

| | Type 1 | Type 2 | Type 3 | Type 4 |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| | Descending | Ascending | Supportive | Autonomous |
| | familialism | familialism | at distance | |
| ≥ 1 children with high education (1=yes) | -0.01 | -0.07 ** | 0.02 * | 0.07 ** |
| Countries (ref = Italy) | | | | |
| Sweden | -0.06 ** | -0.13 ** | 0.06 ** | 0.13 ** |
| Denmark | -0.08 ** | -0.10 ** | 0.05 ** | 0.14 ** |
| Netherlands | -0.04 ** | -0.05 ** | 0.03 ** | 0.06 ** |
| Belgium | 0.04 ** | -0.12 ** | 0.01 | 0.07 ** |
| Germany | -0.07 ** | -0.04 ** | 0.00 | 0.11 ** |
| France | -0.11 ** | -0.11 ** | 0.01 | 0.21 ** |
| Austria | -0.08 ** | -0.01 | 0.02 ** | 0.07 ** |
| Switzerland | -0.13 ** | -0.08 ** | 0.00 | 0.21 ** |
| Spain | -0.03 ** | 0.02 ** | -0.03 ** | 0.04 ** |
| Greece | 0.03 ** | -0.01 | 0.03 ** | -0.05 ** |

** $p < 0.001$, * $p < 0.01$.

Source: SHARE – release 2.

APPENDIX TABLE 1 Operationalization of characteristics of parents and adult children

| Characteristics parent | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Age | Three categories: 50 – 59, 60 – 69, 70 and over |
| Marital history | Three categories: living with a partner, single after widowhood, single after divorce |
| Health problems | 1 = yes if: reports difficulties performing one or more activities of daily living, reports severe limitations in performing usual activities for the past six months at least because of a health problem, or rates general health as poor |
| Household income | Quartile measure: \leq € 13,154 for bottom 25%, \geq € 51,257 for top 25% |
| Educational attainment | Highest educational degree obtained, coded into 1997 International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-97). Three levels: low (pre-primary education, primary education or first stage of basic education, and lower secondary or second stage of basic education), intermediate ((upper) secondary education, and post-secondary non-tertiary education), high (first stage of tertiary education, and second stage of tertiary education) |
| Religiosity | Based on the question “Thinking about the present, about how often do you pray?”. Four categories: prays daily, prays weekly, prays less than weekly, never prays |
| Characteristics adult children | |
| Number of children | Four categories: 1, 2, 3, \geq 4 |

≥ 1 daughters 1 = yes

≥ 1 children with partner 1 = yes

≥ 1 children with paid
job 1 = yes

≥ children divorced 1 = yes

≥ children with high
education 1 = yes

End Notes

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² Contact frequency is sometimes viewed as a form of support in itself given that it meets a social need. It is also an indirect indicator of forms of instrumental support that are too idiosyncratic to measure in large-scale surveys (Kalmijn and Dykstra 2006).

³ During the SHARE interview, respondents listed a maximum of three persons outside the household in response to questions about sources and targets of support. These persons might be family members, neighbors or friends. Information is lacking on support exchange for each adult child individually. That is why we do not use the individual parent-child dyad as unit in our analyses but resort to the aggregate level of all children.

⁴ Three items pertained to government versus family responsibility for elder care. Respondents were asked to rate on a scale running from (1) “totally family” to (5) “totally state” who should bear the responsibility for (a) financial support for older persons who are in need, (b) help with household chores for older persons who are in need such as help with cleaning and washing, and (c) personal care for older persons who are in need such as nursing or help with bathing or dressing. Four items pertained to normative obligations towards children and grandchildren. On a scale running from (1) “strongly agree” to (5) “strongly disagree” respondents rated their level of agreement with the following statements: (a) “parents’ duty is to do their best for their children even at the expense of their own well-being”, (b) “grandparents’ duty is to be there for grandchildren in cases of difficulty (such as divorce of parents or illness)”, (c) “grandparents’ duty is to contribute towards the economic security of grandchildren and their families grandparents”, and (d) “grandparents’ duty is to help grandchildren’s parents in looking after young grandchildren”. The items reflect generalized views, to emphasize cultural values rather than a sense of obligation towards one’s own family. Taken together, the items cover a wide range of support behaviors: parent care and child care; financial assistance and help in kind; and different levels of commitment. The scale is therefore sensitive to a wide range of beliefs about family obligation. Cronbach’s $\alpha = .61$ for the full sample, indicating reasonable internal consistency. For the country samples, Cronbach’s α varied from .45 (France) to .66 (Austria). The family obligation norms were addressed in the SHARE self-completion questionnaire. Missing data of respondents who failed to fill in this questionnaire ($N = 3856$) were substituted by mean values.

⁵ The numbers of respondents per country were too small to warrant separate analyses by country.

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