



Supplemental Materials



**Expert Symposium
Generations United Global Conference
Washington, DC
July 25, 2023**



**United
Nations**

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

**generations
united**

Because we're stronger together®

**Changing Demographics Can Result in Strengthening Families
Expert Symposium
Generations United Global Conference
July 2023 Washington, DC**

Tuesday 25 July 2023 – 10:00-16:00 EDT
Hilton SW Wharf - Washington, DC

Background:

In 1948 the United Nations declared “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state.” May 2024 will mark the 30th Observance of the International Year of the Family (IYF+30). In preparation, Generations United, in cooperation with the Division of Inclusive Social Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, will organize an expert symposium at the 22nd Generations United Global Intergenerational Conference in July 2023. The symposium will focus on demographic change, one of the mega trends recommended by the United Nations Secretary General for the preparations of this Anniversary.

Invited academic experts, lived experience experts, non-governmental organizations (NGO) representatives, UN dignitaries, and a limited number of conference attendees will convene to discuss the roles of older adults in supporting children and families in the United States and some regions of the world. It will highlight social policies and evidence-based practices that encourage and support intergenerational solidarity and older adult engagement in families, based on selected UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Aims of the Workshop:

- Bring together experts, including those with lived experience, to determine shared goals and policy recommendations to support intergenerational solidarity in light of demographic changes.
- Identify recommendations to strengthen intergenerational solidarity, given increased longevity and the changing roles of older adults in families, including intergenerational and multigenerational families.
- Issue a report including the background papers and recommendations from the symposium to be published to the Generations United and United Nations websites as a substantial contribution to the preparations for the 30th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family.
- Support connections among transnational Civil Society Organizations and independent experts to strengthen productive engagement towards equitable intergenerational policies at the United Nations level.

Major support for the “Funding for the Changing Demographics Can Result in Strengthening Families” symposium at the 2023 Generations United global conference is provided by the Doris Duke Foundation.

Time	Session
9:30am	Arrival. Coffee, tea, and light refreshments will be provided.
10:00am	<p>Welcome Donna Butts, <i>Executive Director, Generations United</i> Renata Kaczmarek, <i>UN Focal Point on Family</i></p> <p>Lived Experience Expert Story Victoria Gray, <i>GRAND Voices Lived Experience Expert, Generations United</i></p>
10:25am	<p>PANEL 1 Bridging Generations: Promoting Inclusiveness to Support Families</p> <p>Overviews from a global perspective on thematic content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intergenerational Solidarity: Debunking Generational Conflict - Communication among generations: Exchange of knowledge, values and skills - Role of older persons in promoting economic security across generations: transfers of time, money, and other resources - Evolving families in response to evolving societies: promising practices and policy changes that support kinship across generations <p><i>Sustainable Development Goals Addressed:</i> SDG 3 (promote health and well-being) SDG 8 (promote economic growth) SDG 16 (promote peaceful and inclusive societies)</p> <p>Moderator and Opening Remarks: Ignacio Socias, <i>Director, International Federation for Family Development</i></p> <p>Panelists: Dr. Merril Silverstein, <i>Marjorie Cantor Chair in Aging Studies, Syracuse University</i> Dr. Bahira Trask, <i>Professor and Chair, Department of Human Development and Family Sciences, University of Delaware</i> Dr. Kristin Bodiford, <i>Faculty, School of Social Work, Dominican University</i> Mr. Namara Arthur Araali, <i>Director of Health Nest Uganda (in absentia)</i></p> <p>INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION</p>
11:20am	COFFEE & TEA BREAK
11:35am	<p>PANEL 2 The Promise of Changing Demographics – Good Practices to Strengthen Families</p> <p>Overviews of trends and cross-cutting themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Solidarity between Generations in a changing society - Role of older persons in paid and unpaid childcare and supporting education - Family strengthening policies such as child welfare and child tax credits - Housing and multigenerational living as a green solution in climate change discussions <p><i>Sustainable Development Goals Addressed:</i> SDG 1 (ending poverty) SDG 4 (equitable education)</p>

	<p>SDG 11 (Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable)</p> <p>Moderator and Opening Remarks: José Alejandro Vázquez, <i>International Federation for Family Development, Representative to the UN</i></p> <p>Panelists: Dr. Noah Webster, <i>Associate Research Scientist, Life Course Development Program, University of Michigan</i> Dr. Leng Leng Thang, <i>Associate Professor of Japanese Studies, co-director of the Next Age Institute, National University of Singapore</i> JooYeun Chang, <i>Program Director for Child Well-being, Doris Duke Foundation</i></p> <p>INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION</p>
12:45pm	LUNCH (1 st Floor, room TBD)
1:40pm	<p>Introduction to Grandfamilies – Fostering Intergenerational Solidarity through Relative Caregivers (United States) Ana Beltran, <i>Director of the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center, Generations United</i></p>
1:50pm	<p>PANEL 3 Lived Experience Expert Perspectives</p> <p>Moderator and Opening Remarks: Robyn Wind, <i>GRAND Voices Support Coordinator, Generations United</i></p> <p>Panelists: Keith Lowhorne, <i>GRAND Voices Lived Experience Expert</i> AnnaMarie White, <i>GRAND Voices Lived Experience Expert</i> Abby Nelson, <i>Youth Voices Lived Experience Expert</i> Terrance Owens, <i>Youth Voices Lived Experience Expert</i></p> <p>INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION</p>
2:35pm	COFFEE & TEA BREAK
2:45pm	<p>POLICY RECOMMENDATION DISCUSSIONS Independent experts and speakers will discuss policy recommendations and priorities for inclusion in the report to the UN based on background papers and the day's discussions.</p> <p>Moderator: Donna Butts, <i>Executive Director, Generations United</i></p>
3:30pm	<p>REFLECTIONS Each expert offers up to 2-minute reflection.</p>
3:50pm	<p>Closing remarks – The Road Ahead Renata Kaczmarska, <i>UN Focal Point on Family</i></p>
4:00pm	Close



United Nations

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

generations united

Because we're stronger together®

BIONOTES OF PARTICIPANTS

Expert speakers are listed in order of appearance in the agenda.



Donna Butts

Executive Director, Generations United

Donna Butts is the Executive Director of Generations United, a position she has held since 1997. Generations United's mission is to improve the lives of children, youth and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies and programs for the enduring benefit of all. Previously she served in leadership positions at several youth serving organizations including the YWCA, National 4-H Council, and Covenant House.

An internationally known speaker, author and advocate, Butts frequently addresses intergenerational connections, grandparents raising grandchildren and policies effective across the lifespan. She has served on five United Nations expert panels on intergenerational and family issues. She served as a delegate to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging and attended the 2015 conference. Her commentary has appeared in, among others, the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Christian Science Monitor and the Wall Street Journal. She has been interviewed on national radio and television including the TODAY Show, National Public Radio and ABC News.

Butts is a graduate of Stanford University's Executive Program for Nonprofit Leaders. She was recognized three years in a row by *The Nonprofit Times* as one of the Top 50 most powerful and influential nonprofit executives in the US. In 2015 she was named one of the Top 50 Influencers in Aging by *Next Avenue*. Under her leadership, Generations United received the 2015 Eisner Prize for Intergenerational Excellence. In 2017 she was honored by the International Federation for Family Development. Butts is a member of the National Academy of Social Insurance.

Renata Kaczmarska

UN Focal Point on Family

Renata Kaczmarska is the Social Affairs Officer and the Focal Point on Family in the Division for Inclusive Social Development in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs at the United Nations Secretariat in New York. In this capacity, she acts as a spokesperson on family issues for the United Nations Secretariat. She prepares publications and drafts UN reports on a variety of subjects relating to families and organizes international and regional expert group meetings on family policy issues, observances of the International Day of Families and other events to raise awareness of the importance of family policies for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and targets. She is currently engaged in the preparations for the 30th anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2024. She holds a Master of Science Degree in Social Sciences and Bachelor of Arts in Political Science as well as United Nations Studies Graduate Diploma.



Ms. Victoria Gray

Generations United GRAND Voice

Ms. Victoria Gray serves as a Generations United GRAND Voice for the state of Arizona. Victoria became inspired to advocate on behalf of grandfamilies after discovering firsthand the difficulties that they face. Gray and her husband have raised seven grandchildren, some of whom have severe special needs.

The Grays became a grandfamily in 1992, when Victoria and her husband Gentry were notified that their newborn granddaughter was placed into the state’s foster care system. Six months later, her baby brother came to them at two days old. Victoria was told the only way they could keep him was to become licensed foster parents and so they did. Eventually Victoria and Gentry cared for 41 children through foster care, emergency receiving and respite services from 1994 until 2007. Then in December 2007, five more grandchildren were placed with them and their challenges multiplied as well. In 2009, Victoria joined the Arizona Grandparent Ambassadors (AZGA) and used her voice to help other families on this journey. She wanted to help make legislative changes on how people perceive kinship and grandfamilies. Through her work with the Ambassadors, Victoria was instrumental in the passage of a 2016 Arizona bill that allowed grandfamilies to access TANF. She also serves as a Steering Committee Member with the Arizona Grandparent Ambassadors; serves on Duet’s Grandparent’s Dream Team and Advisory Team and is a member of the Arizona Kinship Coalition. In 2017 Victoria received the Brookdale Foundation Grandfamilies Award from Generations United. In 2019 she received a special commendation from the first lady of Arizona for her work helping kinship families. The following year, Victoria received the Casey Excellence for Children Kinship Caregiver Award for the breadth of her work supporting kinship families. Victoria continues to work for the betterment of grandfamilies and is an inspiration to her colleagues in the Ambassadors program, the GRAND network, and grandfamilies throughout Arizona.

Ignacio Socias

Director, International Federation for Family Development

Ignacio Socias is the Director of International Relations of the International Federation for Family Development. He holds a PhD in Law, has been CEO of the Grupo de Comunicación Dynamia and Bisel de Comunicación in Spain and has published different books and articles about educational, social and historical topics. He has been visiting professor at more than 12 universities in Europe, America and Asia. On the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family (2014), he promoted the Civil Society Declaration, joined by 27 international entities and 542 representatives of 285 civil society organizations, as well as officials, academics and others. He has also promoted the global project 'The SDGs and families', with the participation of experts from the five continents and the support of UNICEF and UN-DESA. In addition, he has promoted the global project 'Inclusive Cities for Sustainable Families'. He has also represented IFFD in the European Commission project 'FamiliesAndSocieties' (2013-2017), the largest research carried out in Europe on family issues, and has participated in different high-level events on the family at the European Parliament, the Committee of Regions and the Economic and Social Committee.

**Dr. Merrill Silverstein**

Marjorie Cantor Chair in Aging Studies, Syracuse University

Dr. Merrill Silverstein is inaugural holder of the Marjorie Cantor Chair in Aging Studies at Syracuse University in the Maxwell School's Department of Sociology and in Falk College's Department of Human Development and Family Science. He received a doctorate in sociology from Columbia University. Published in over 150 research publications, he has focused on aging in the context of family life, with an emphasis on life course and international perspectives. He serves as principal investigator of the Longitudinal Study of Generations and has had projects in China, Sweden, the Netherlands and Israel. He is a Brookdale Fellow and Fulbright Senior Scholar and between 2010-2014 served as editor-in-chief of the Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences.

Dr. Bahira Sherif Trask

Professor and Chair, Department of Human Development and Family Sciences, University of Delaware

Dr. Bahira Sherif Trask is Professor and Chair of Human Development and Family Sciences at the University of Delaware. She holds a B.A. in Political Science with a concentration in International Relations from Yale University and a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Pennsylvania. Her research focuses on globalization, women’s employment and family change in Western and non-Western countries, and she presents regularly on these topics at international forums. Dr. Trask has authored and edited a number of books including *Women, Work, and Globalization: Challenges and Opportunities* (Routledge, 2014), *Globalization and Families: Accelerated Systemic Social Change*, (Springer, 2010) and *Cultural Diversity and Families* (Sage, 2007). Much of Dr. Trask’s scholarship has been informed through participation with a number of international, national and community-based research projects that focus on diversity, gender and work, and strengthening and supporting low-income families.



Dr. Kristin Bodiford

Senior Fellow, Generations United and Representative to the United Nations’ Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSC)

Dr. Kristin Bodiford brings experience and knowledge working with systems, communities, organizations, groups, teams, and individuals addressing opportunities for learning, innovation, and transformation. Kristin is a Senior Director of Research and Innovation Solutions for Equity at Premier Inc. Applied Sciences.

Kristin serves as a Generations United Senior Fellow and as a representative to the United Nations’ Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSC) for Generations United. She also serves as faculty at Dominican University School of Social Work where she designed and teaches a course for students to collaborate in community action research with older persons in Uganda and served as a principal investigator for a national study: *Improving the Health of Older Persons in Uganda*.

She was formerly a Health Advisor with HelpAge USA developing global health to support the work of HelpAge International. In this work, she led teams to improve the health of over 50,000 older persons and their families in low- and middle-income countries. She also provided training and technical assistance in Kibaha, Tanzania to strengthen intergenerational and family-centered community-based responses to improve health across the life course.

Kristin holds a Ph.D. from Tilburg University and an MBA from University of California, Davis.

Mr. Namara Arthur Araali

Director of Health Nest Uganda

Mr. Namara Arthur Araali is a Gerontologist and Director of Health Nest Uganda, which works for and with older persons in Uganda. He is a member of the National Council for Older Persons, where he chairs the Research and Documentation Committee, which is responsible for documenting issues affecting older persons and to advise stakeholders. He is a Scientist B with Medical Research Council Uganda Unit. His research interests include non-communicable diseases, assessment of the health system in Uganda to manage dementia, healthy aging, intergenerational linkages, and strengthening community care systems. He obtained his master's degree in gerontology from Southampton University in the United Kingdom and his Bachelor of Arts degree in community-based development from Nkumba University in Uganda.



José Alejandro Vázquez

International Federation for Family Development, Representative to the UN

As the United Nations representative of the International Federation for Family Development, Alex opens the line of communication between Member States, the Academia, the UN-System, families and various Civil Society actors to highlight a family perspective and child protection scope in the design of various social policy recommendations. With a PhD in Political Thought and Development, Alex brings a substantial contribution to the global discussion and a practical engagement among stakeholders. He has been an invited expert to several Expert Group Meeting organized by the United Nations on Families, Parenting and Youth Transitions at the UN Headquarters in New York, European Union in Brussels and other international venues. Alex has been the project manager of comprehensive evidence-based Global Report on Families, Family Policies and the Sustainable Development Goals in partnership with UNICEF. Now, he manages a global project "Inclusive Cities and Sustainable Families", gathering policy recommendations from almost 200 hundred territories in 3 continents in support of the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Looking forward to 2024 he is coordinating, together with other transnational non-governmental organizations, the Preparations of the 30th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

Alex has been a visiting scholar of the European Institute of Columbia University in the City of New York and holds a M.A. in Government and Culture of the Organizations at the Enterprise and Humanism

Institute of the University of Navarra, Spain. He is also the co-chair of the Non-Governmental Organization Committee on the United Nations Children's Fund as the entity officially mandated to represent civil society and interact with UNICEF's Executive Board. He is contributing with UNICEF to launch and raise awareness the Parenting Month initiative to support parents around globe for better parenting and children care. Alex has advocated for work-family balance, shared responsibility at home and parenting education programmes and support at various United Nations Conferences.

JooYeun Chang

Program Director for Child Well-being, Doris Duke Foundation

JooYeun Chang is the program director for Child Well-being. In this capacity, she oversees the program's grantmaking to promote children's healthy development and protect them from abuse and neglect. Prior to joining the Doris Duke Foundation, Chang served as acting assistant secretary and principal deputy assistant secretary for the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), where she was the top federal official overseeing the implementation of national child welfare policy. She also led the State of Michigan's child welfare system as executive director of the state's Children's Services Agency, developing a new comprehensive child welfare technology system, anti-racism initiatives, place-based prevention pilots and a front-end redesign of the child protective service system to reduce racial bias in decision making. Prior to her work in the Michigan state government, Chang was a managing director at Casey Family Programs, where she spearheaded work to identify, develop and disseminate information about the most promising practices in child welfare. Chang earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from North Carolina State University and a Juris Doctorate from the University of Miami School of Law.



Dr. Noah J. Webster

Associate Research Scientist, Life Course Development Program, University of Michigan

Dr. Noah J. Webster received his Ph.D. in Sociology from Case Western Reserve University with specializations in Medical Sociology and Research Methods. Dr. Webster's research focuses on the bidirectional influences of health and social relationships and the role of the lived environment in shaping social relations. His work has examined these topics across developmental contexts using representative survey data from the U.S., Europe, and the Middle East. He is principal investigator of multiple sponsored research projects focused on translating knowledge from these research areas to develop

interventions designed to promote health-related behaviors through social resources in communities with fewer economic resources.

Dr. Leng Leng Thang

Associate Professor of Japanese Studies, co-director of the Next Age Institute National University of Singapore

Dr. Leng Leng Thang is a socio-cultural anthropologist with research interest in ageing, intergenerational approaches and relationships, family and migration with a focus on Asia, especially Japan and Singapore. She publishes widely in her areas of expertise and is passionate about ways to connect the generations. Among her recent works is a co-edited volume with Matt Kaplan, Mariano Sanchez and Jaco Hoffman titled “Intergenerational Contact Zones” (2020). She is former co-editor-in-chief of the Journal of Intergenerational Relationships. She is also active in community services, serving as President of the board of Fei Yue Family Service in Singapore, and President of Singapore Gerontological Society, among others. She is Associate Professor at the Department of Japanese Studies, also co-Director of the Next Age Institute, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore. She serves as co-lead of the Purposeful Longevity workstream of the newly launched Health District long term project in Singapore which is the first district-level living-lab pilot in Queenstown to promote a model of health and active community for all ages.



Ana Beltran

Director of the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center, Generations United

Ana Beltran is an attorney and the Director of the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center at Generations United. Ana is a national expert on Grandfamilies, authoring several Generations United publications on the subject and publishing articles in various publications and academic journals. Ana has spoken extensively about relatives raising children at national, state, and local conferences. As someone who was raised in part by her grandmother, Ana has a personal

commitment to the families.

Ms. Robyn Wind

GRAND Voices Support Coordinator, Generations United

As Generations United's GRAND Voices Support Coordinator, Robyn provides coordination and support to the organization's national network of grandfamily caregivers as they inform Generation United's work and the grandfamilies field to improve policy and practice. Prior to joining Generations United, Robyn has worked for nearly 15 years in Indian Child Welfare, primarily in foster care leadership. She served for several years as the Chair of the Oklahoma Indian Child Welfare Association's Substitute Care Committee. Additionally, Robyn has been a GRAND Voice for the state of Oklahoma for several years and is a caregiver for her grandchild and mother. She lives in Oklahoma and holds tribal citizenship with the Muscogee (Creek) Nation.



Mr. Keith Lowhorne

Generations United GRAND Voice

Mr. Keith Lowhorne serves as a Generations United GRAND Voice for the state of Alabama. For years, Keith and his wife Edie watched their two grandsons struggle with parents who were suffering with substance use issues. After three years and their granddaughter Harper being born exposed to substances, the children came to the attention of the child welfare system. There was no question as to whether Keith and Edie would take the kids, but it changed their lives instantly.

They have received no help throughout their journey to adopt their grandchildren and have struggled raising three young children at their ages.

Around the same time their grandchildren came into their care, Keith retired after 43 years in the broadcast news business. He has made it his mission to come out of retirement to help other grandparents through navigating the system. Keith is on the Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parents Association Board of Directors. He routinely meets with Alabama legislators and congressional aides and discuss bills that are making their way through Congress. Recently, Keith and Edie have welcomed an additional three grandchildren into their home.

Ms. AnnaMarie White

Generations United GRAND Voice

Ms. AnnaMarie White serves as a Generations United GRAND Voice for the state of Montana. AnnaMarie and her husband are raising their three granddaughters due to their mother's mental health and substance use issues. AnnaMarie discovered that there are very few resources for grandparents raising grandchildren in Montana. Through her local Grandparents Raising Grandchildren group and the Montana Kinship Navigator, AnnaMarie found the education and peer support she was in need of and eventually became a facilitator for both programs.



AnnaMarie seeks tangible outcomes for kinship care providers. She serves as a Board member for both the Missoula and Ravalli County Foster Care Review Boards. AnnaMarie serves on the Child Protection Teams for Mineral and Missoula Counties, as well as the Healthy Counties Initiative for Mineral County. For many years AnnaMarie has been serving her community as an Indian Child Welfare Act Qualified Expert Witness.



Ms. Abby Nelson

Generations United Young Kinship Leaders

Ms. Abby Nelson serves as a Generations United Kinship Youth Leader for the state of Tennessee, currently residing in Memphis. Abby was raised by grandparents after being taken away from her biological parents in the 6th grade. She was raised in a household filled with drugs, domestic violence and abuse. Her grandparents took her out of that toxic environment and raised her. Abby recently graduated from Christian Brothers University with a degree in Elementary Education and is embarking on a career as a 2nd grade teacher. She firmly attributes her grandparents for saving her life and supporting her to the path she is currently taking.

Abby serves as an AmeriCorps Member as a TAY (Transitional Age Youth) Peer Resource Navigator with iFoster to support youth and young adults aging out of foster care. She is an active advocate for foster children, grandfamilies, and Youth Villages. She and her fiancé, Tanner, have three cats - Elton, Bilbo, and Jojo.

Mr. Terrance Owens

Generations United Young Kinship Leaders

Mr. Terrance Owens serves as a Generations United Young Kinship Leader for the state of California. Terrance is a former foster youth who lived many years of his childhood couch surfing and hotel hopping with his mother and sister before being placed with his grandmother, Victoria Vasquez, as his legal guardian at the age of 14.



While Terrance and his sister were able to utilize the academic and financial resources the county had to offer, his grandmother found herself with little, if any, help to balance taking care of herself as she took care of her grandchildren.

Terrance witnessed his grandmother, who despite her resourcefulness and zeal to see her grandchildren succeed & break the cycle of generational trauma, struggled to receive sufficient support for her grandchildren and herself.

Prioritizing the needs of her grandchildren, she succumbed to burnout, a condition Terrance believes grandparents raising grandkids face. Terrance is resolved to bring awareness to this reality so that, together, we can all help create an environment that fosters grandparents fostering their grandchildren.

Today, Terrance serves as an AmeriCorps Member as a TAY (Transitional Age Youth) Peer Resource Navigator with iFoster helping foster youth and young adults transition as close to smoothly as they can into adulthood.



Ignacio Socias Piarnau
International Federation for Family Development

Changing Demographics Can Result in Strengthening Families

Expert Symposium

Generations United Global Conference

Panel 1 - Changing Demographics Can Result in Strengthening Families

25 July 2023 Washington, DC

Demographic shifts, such as changes in population composition, age distribution, and cultural diversity, can have several positive impacts on families.¹ As demographics change, families often become more diverse in terms of age and generational composition. This diversity can lead to increased intergenerational support within families, as different generations come together to provide care, share resources, and offer guidance. For example, in multigenerational households, older adults can provide wisdom and support to younger family members, while younger generations can assist older adults with daily tasks or technology-related matters.

Changing demographics also often result in increased cultural diversity within families.² This diversity can enrich family dynamics by fostering cultural exchange and promoting understanding among family members. Different cultural backgrounds and traditions can be celebrated, creating an environment of respect, tolerance, and learning.

With changing demographics, families may have access to larger social networks and support systems. Increased cultural diversity can lead to connections with individuals from various backgrounds, providing opportunities for social interaction, mutual assistance, and the sharing of experiences and knowledge. These expanded networks can strengthen family bonds and provide additional resources and support during challenging times.³

Changing demographics require families to adapt to new circumstances and embrace diversity.⁴ This adaptability fosters resilience within families, as they learn to navigate and appreciate different perspectives, values, and traditions. Families that can effectively adapt to changing demographics tend to develop stronger bonds and have a higher capacity to overcome challenges.

By embracing changing demographics and fostering stronger family connections, families can experience improved overall well-being. The diversity of experiences and perspectives within families can lead

¹ Seltzer J.A., *Family Change and Changing Family Demography*, Demography (2019).

² Pearce L.D., Hayward G.M., Chassin L., Curran P.J., *The Increasing Diversity and Complexity of Family Structures for Adolescents*, Journal of Adolescent Research (2018).

³ Varda D.M., Talmi A., *Social Connectedness in Family Social Support Networks: Strengthening Systems of Care for Children with Special Health Care Needs*. EGEMS - Washington, DC (2018).

⁴ European Commission, *Report on the Impact of Demographic Change in Europe* (2020).

to greater emotional support, a sense of belonging, and a richer family life. This, in turn, can contribute to better mental health, increased happiness, and overall family satisfaction.⁵

Debunking generational conflict

While each generation may have unique experiences and perspectives, they also share common goals and concerns. Issues like economic stability, access to healthcare, quality education, and environmental sustainability affect people of all ages. By recognizing these shared interests, generations can come together to address these challenges collectively.⁶

Generations are interdependent, relying on each other for various forms of support. Older generations contribute their knowledge, wisdom, and experience, while younger generations bring fresh ideas, innovation, and energy. Recognizing and valuing these contributions fosters collaboration and cooperation between generations.

Intergenerational solidarity contributes to the overall social and economic well-being of society. Cooperation between generations can lead to better policies, resource allocation, and social programs that benefit everyone. For example, investing in education benefits younger generations, while ensuring adequate retirement benefits and healthcare support for the older generations.

Emphasizing lifelong learning helps bridge the generation gap and encourages knowledge-sharing between older and younger individuals. Older generations can pass down valuable skills, traditions, and cultural heritage, while younger generations can provide insights into emerging technologies and trends. This exchange of knowledge benefits society as a whole.

Generational conflict often arises from stereotypes and generalizations. Debunking these stereotypes involves recognizing that individuals within each generation are diverse and have unique experiences and perspectives. Avoiding broad generalizations helps foster understanding and appreciation for the diversity within each age group.

Governments and institutions can play a crucial role in promoting intergenerational solidarity through policy solutions. These may include initiatives that encourage mentorship programs, intergenerational community activities, intergenerational housing, and policies that support economic opportunities for all generations.

Intergenerational solidarity offers numerous benefits to individuals and society as a whole. Promoting understanding, respect, and collaboration across generations helps debunk the notion of generational conflict and creates a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Communication among generations: Exchange of knowledge, values, and skills

Communication among generations is essential for the exchange of knowledge, values, and skills, fostering mutual understanding and intergenerational solidarity. It allows different age groups to learn from one another, bridging the generation gap and creating a more cohesive society.

Each generation possesses unique knowledge and experiences gained from their respective eras. Effective communication provides a platform for sharing this knowledge across generations. Older generations can pass down historical and cultural insights, wisdom, and practical skills to younger generations.

⁵ Bar-Tur L., *Fostering Well-Being in the Elderly: Translating Theories on Positive Aging to Practical Approaches*, *Frontiers in Medicine* (2021).

⁶ Rudolph, C.W., Rauvola, R.S., Costanza, D.P. et al, *Generations and Generational Differences: Debunking Myths in Organizational Science and Practice and Paving New Paths Forward*, *Journal of Business and Psychology* (2021).

Meanwhile, younger generations can share their understanding of technology, current trends, and contemporary issues. This exchange enriches the collective knowledge of society and helps avoid the loss of valuable information.

Communication enables the sharing of values, beliefs, and perspectives between generations. Different generations often have distinct cultural, social, and moral values shaped by their respective historical contexts. By engaging in open and respectful dialogue, individuals from different age groups can better understand and appreciate each other's values. This understanding promotes empathy and cooperation, allowing for the blending of traditional and modern perspectives and the development of shared values that transcend generational boundaries.

Communication serves as a platform for transferring skills from one generation to the next. Older generations have accumulated expertise and practical skills throughout their lives. By actively engaging with younger generations, they can pass on these skills and offer guidance in various domains such as craftsmanship, trades, arts, and life skills. In return, younger generations can share their technological proficiency, digital literacy, and emerging skill sets, empowering older generations to adapt and learn in a rapidly changing world.

Communication facilitates intergenerational learning, where knowledge and skills are exchanged reciprocally. While older generations impart their wisdom and experience, they can also learn from the fresh perspectives and innovative ideas of younger generations. This dynamic learning process creates a positive feedback loop, benefiting individuals of all ages and enhancing personal growth, adaptability, and creativity.

Communication builds stronger bonds and relationships among generations. It fosters mutual respect, understanding, and appreciation, reducing misunderstandings and conflicts between generations. Regular dialogue between generations cultivates a sense of belonging and connectivity, reinforcing the notion that all age groups contribute to the overall well-being of society.

Efficient communication channels, both formal and informal, such as family interactions, community programs, mentorship initiatives, and intergenerational activities, play a crucial role in facilitating the exchange of knowledge, values, and skills among generations. By embracing open and respectful communication, societies can harness the collective wisdom, experiences, and talents of all age groups, creating a harmonious and inclusive environment.

Role of older persons in promoting economic security across generations: transfers of time, money, and other resources

The role of older individuals in promoting economic security across generations involves the transfer of time, money, and other resources.⁷ Their contributions help support younger generations and ensure their well-being.

Older individuals often provide financial support to younger generations, such as their adult children or grandchildren. This can come in the form of financial assistance for education, down payments for homes, or contributions toward starting a business. These transfers of money help alleviate financial burdens and promote economic stability among younger individuals and families.

They may pass on wealth and assets to younger generations through inheritances. This transfer of resources, including property, investments, or businesses, can provide a significant economic boost and support the financial security of younger family members. Inheritance can help younger generations access opportunities, build wealth, and achieve their economic goals.

⁷ National Research Council (US) Panel on a Research Agenda and New Data for an Aging World, *Preparing for an Aging World: The Case for Cross-National Research* (2001).

Many of them receive social security or pension benefits, which serve as a source of income during retirement. These benefits not only support the economic security of older individuals but also contribute to the overall stability of their families. By having a reliable income stream, older individuals can assist in meeting the financial needs of their dependents and help ensure their economic well-being.

They often provide housing and accommodation to younger generations within their families.⁸ This can range from living in multi-generational households to offering affordable or subsidized housing options. Sharing housing and resources reduces living costs and provides younger individuals and families with a stable and affordable living arrangement, enhancing their economic security.

Older individuals frequently contribute their time and caregiving support to younger family members. They may assist with childcare, enabling parents to pursue employment or educational opportunities. By taking on caregiving responsibilities, older individuals reduce the financial burden of childcare and allow younger generations to focus on their careers or personal growth.

Older individuals possess a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience gained over their lifetime.⁹ They can offer guidance, mentorship, and advice to younger individuals entering the workforce or starting businesses. Sharing their expertise and providing mentorship helps younger generations make informed decisions, navigate challenges, and improve their economic prospects.

Older individuals often actively engage in volunteer work and community activities. Their contributions help strengthen social and economic support networks, benefiting individuals of all generations. By volunteering their time and skills, older individuals contribute to the overall well-being of their communities, fostering economic security and resilience.

Evolving families in response to evolving societies: promising practices and policy changes that support kinship across generations

As societies evolve, family structures and dynamics change, necessitating promising practices and policy changes that support kinship across generations.¹⁰ Recognizing and adapting to these evolving families is crucial for ensuring their well-being.

Policies that promote flexible work arrangements, such as remote work, flexible hours, and job sharing, can support intergenerational families.¹¹ This allows individuals to balance their work responsibilities with caregiving responsibilities, including caring for children or aging parents. By accommodating the needs of kinship caregivers, these policies enable them to actively participate in the labor force while maintaining family connections.

Implementing comprehensive paid family leave policies provides individuals with the opportunity to take time off work to care for family members without sacrificing their income or job security. Paid family leave can support intergenerational families by allowing them to allocate time for caregiving and maintaining family bonds without financial strain.

Accessible and affordable childcare options are essential for intergenerational families.¹² Policies that prioritize high-quality, affordable childcare services, including subsidies or tax credits, can help alleviate

⁸ Kerbler B., Kolar B., *Housing for Younger and Older Populations*, Older Populations (2018).

⁹ Rucic N., *Intergenerational learning and knowledge transfer – challenges and opportunities*, The Learning Organization (2017).

¹⁰ Connolly M., *A kinship care literature review*, Social Work Now (2003).

¹¹ Butts D., Thang L.L., Hatton Yeo, A., *Policies and Programmes Supporting Intergenerational Relations*, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2012).

¹² Stanford Center on Longevity, *Hidden in Plain Sight: How Intergenerational Relationships Can Transform Our Future* (2016).

the financial burden of childcare for both older adults caring for grandchildren and younger parents. This support enables intergenerational families to balance work and caregiving responsibilities effectively.

Promoting intergenerational housing options, such as co-housing or shared living arrangements, can facilitate kinship across generations. These housing models provide opportunities for older adults to live with their adult children and grandchildren or share living spaces with other families. Intergenerational housing fosters mutual support, reduces isolation, and promotes intergenerational bonding.

Developing comprehensive caregiver support programs that offer resources, respite care, counseling services, and educational programs can alleviate the physical, emotional, and financial challenges faced by kinship caregivers. These programs recognize the importance of supporting individuals who take on caregiving responsibilities for family members across generations.

Implementing intergenerational programs and services that facilitate interactions between different age groups can strengthen family ties and support kinship across generations. Examples include intergenerational daycare centers, mentoring programs, and community initiatives that encourage older adults to engage with younger generations. These programs foster meaningful relationships, promote mutual understanding, and address social isolation.

Ensuring older adults have access to financial support and benefits, such as retirement pensions, healthcare coverage, and social security, is vital for supporting kinship across generations. Adequate financial resources provide stability for older adults and enable them to contribute to the well-being of their families.

Providing educational opportunities and training programs for older adults can enhance their skills, employability, and economic independence. This allows them to contribute to their families' financial security and share their knowledge and expertise with younger generations.

Promising practices and policy changes that support kinship across generations recognize the diversity of family structures and the vital role intergenerational relationships play in societal well-being. By implementing these measures, societies can create environments that foster intergenerational connections, resilience, and the overall flourishing of families.

Intergenerational Solidarity and its Continued Relevance in Contemporary Older Families

Merril Silverstein, Ph.D.

Syracuse University

**Presented at *Changing Demographics Can Result in Strengthening Families Symposium*
Generations United Global Conference
July 2023 Washington, DC**

Introduction

The purpose of this background paper reviews the paradigm of intergenerational solidarity and discusses its continued relevance in understanding opportunities and challenges facing older adults as a result of changing family structures, the continued importance of grandparents, and adaptive family responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. We argue that intergenerational solidarity produces benefits to older individuals, their family members, and society in ways that are multiplicative given the interdependence of family members across generations.

We begin this report with an overview of the solidarity paradigm, then focus on three social trends that present challenges and opportunities for the maintenance of vital intergenerational ties in later life, and finally conclude with several policy considerations for building family strength across generations. The social trends of interest are the following:

- The emergence of the “mature sandwich generation” in which older grandparents have surviving parents in four generation families
- The relevance of grandparents as conveyers of pro-social elder-friendly norms to their grandchildren
- The use of digital technology by older adults for maintaining intergenerational contact during COVID social distancing and beyond

What is intergenerational solidarity?

Intergenerational solidarity in families has received a substantial amount of attention over the last few decades. Solidarity is arguably the dominant model for organizing theoretical and empirical work on the structure and dynamics of intergenerational relationships in adulthood. As much a measurement tool as a conceptual paradigm, intergenerational solidarity is the gold-standard used and adapted by the fields of family science and family gerontology to represent cohesion, as well as friction, in multigenerational families. In this report we take into consideration micro- or family level manifestations of solidarity and the macro-context of solidarity in terms of social change.

The solidarity paradigm provides a systematic scheme and universal conceptual language to organize the multiple ways that family members are interconnected. Drawing in part from the concept of social solidarity and models of interpersonal attraction, Bengtson and colleagues developed a “periodic table” for codifying the connective links between generations in the family--a model that became known as the *intergenerational solidarity paradigm* (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Roberts, Richards, & Bengtson, 1991).

The solidarity paradigm is built on the following six dimensions of intergenerational relationships, each assessing the strength of intergenerational ties (Roberts, Richards, & Bengtson, 1991):

- *Affectual solidarity*: emotional closeness
- *Associational solidarity*: frequency of interaction

- *Structural solidarity*: geographic proximity
- *Consensual solidarity*: perceived and actual agreement in values, beliefs, opinions
- *Normative solidarity*: responsibility or obligation to assist another generation.
- *Functional solidarity*: material, instrumental, and social support received or provided.

As much a theory as a framework, the solidarity paradigm serves as a meta-model model for theory development and hypothesis testing. For instance, research suggests that maintaining solidarity is an important contributor to the well-being of family members in all generations (e.g., Hammarström, 2005; Merz, Consedine, Schulze, & Schuengel, 2009; Silverstein, Parrott, & Bengtson, 1995; Silverstein, Conroy, Wang, Giarrusso, & Bengtson, 2002). Applying the model of intergenerational solidarity to grandparent-grandchild relationships, Wood & Liossis (2007) found that fulfilling normative role expectations about grandparenting had positive consequences for the maintenance of intimacy in these relations. Conversely, having distant or conflictual intergenerational relationships is associated with deleterious outcomes such as greater depression and distress, increased health difficulties, and earlier mortality (e.g., Koropecj-Cox, 2002; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1991).

In the remainder of this report, we discuss how older adults provide support to other generations (functional solidarity), transmit their values to grandchildren (consensual solidarity), and use technology to maintain contact with their adult children (associational solidarity).

The “mature” sandwich generation and older adults as providers

Much applied research studying intergenerational family solidarity has focused on functional solidarity as it represents a public function of family life with relevance to formal care systems and often requires substantial time and sometimes cost investments in other generations. Demographic change in families due to delayed parenthood and increased longevity, implies that older adults increasingly find themselves demographically sandwiched between aging parents and adult offspring often with children of their own (Železná, 2018), thereby increasing demands for support and care from this “mature” middle generation. Estimates suggest that about a third to almost half of individuals over fifty are so generationally sandwiched (Friedman et al., 2017; Herlofson and Brandt, 2020). For some, demographic sandwiching transitions into social sandwiching whereby the sandwiched individual simultaneously provides various types of assistance to parents and adult children (Albertini et al., 2022). Such assistance may include a variety of services, such as housekeeping, looking after grandchildren, personal care, running errands and dealing with a range of bureaucracies (Silverstein et al., 2020; Turgeman-Lupo et al., 2020; Vlachantoni et al., 2020). Intergenerational assistance may also include financial support and co-residence with other adult generations.

While intergenerational support provided by the sandwich generation reflects norms and positive values of family solidarity (Grundy and Henretta, 2006; Pyke and Bengtson, 1996), its positioning as mid-layer in a multi-generational structure may also be a source of competing demands and potential role conflict (Liu et al., 2020; Wiemers and Bianchi 2015) with deleterious consequences. The notion that family support providers can be overextended was well expressed by Linda George, “...our greatest risk is that family members will not place limits

on solidarity such that their own wellbeing can be sustained” (George, 1986, p. 90). To the extent that this is the case, the demands placed on socially sandwiched older adults may impair their wellbeing as they try to navigate between demands simultaneously placed upon them by older and younger generations.

Earlier research on individuals sandwiched between older parents and young children characterized those in this family position, particularly women, as being at a structural disadvantage, leading to increased stress and negative health outcomes (Duxbury and Dole, 2013; Hammer and Neal, 2008). Most attention on the sandwich generation has focused on the strain connected with providing support to older parents while raising young minor children (Brody 2003; Riley and Bowen 2005; Häusler et al. 2018). However, the prevalence of grandparents with surviving parents who potentially need support and care has expanded rapidly with the aging of the population. Further, adult children are increasingly in need of support from their parents due to delays in the transition to adulthood, challenges of an unsteady labor market, and the growth of dual income households in need of childcare.

The implications of mature sandwiching for psychological well-being of older Europeans were studied in recent research by Albertini, Lewin-Epstein Tur-Sinai, and Silverstein using data from 63,585 individuals age 50+ in 20 European nations (Study of Aging and Health in Europe). Almost 20% of the sample had at least one living parent and an adult child, demonstrating that mature sandwiching is a common family structure. Results of longitudinal analyses showed that entering a condition of social sandwiching—i.e., adopting multiple support roles inclusive of the provision of household and personal assistance, money, housing, and childcare to other generations—had a negative effect on the mental health of older women but not older men. That the negative impact was experienced more among older women than older men is perhaps not surprising given that intensive caregiving is often allocated to female family members. Moreover, the negative impact predominantly came from the transition to social sandwiching in weaker welfare states of continental, southern and eastern Europe compared to the stronger welfare states of the Nordic countries where social programs are relatively generous (see Figure 1 for impact of social sandwiching on depression). These results have relevance to public policy debates and development in the U.S. and other nations in considering programs to alleviate caregiver burden and enabling families to thrive.

Grandparents influencing the family eldercare norms of grandchildren through religion.

Individuals develop their beliefs, attitudes, and values within the context of family relationships (Gecas 1990; Peterson and Rollins 1987), Parents serve as the most influential source of core social values in their children (Brownell 2016; Gecas 1990; Herzog 2020). Children learn from parents the moral norms and principles by which individuals conform to role expectations required to maintain good standing within their social environments (Gecas 1990; Shaffer and Brody 1981).

Grandparents are also important agents of influence as scholars have highlighted the important roles that grandparents play in the development of their grandchildren. While grandparents indirectly influence their grandchildren through the their grandchildren’s parents, they also directly influence grandchildren by maintaining active practical, recreational, and emotional

connections as well as sharing family history and culture (Silverstein and Bengtson 2018). Given increases in life expectancy over past decades, grandparents are living longer, resulting in an increase in the time they have to interact with grandchildren, which now extends well into their adult years (Bengtson, Putney, and Harris 2013). Research has shown that grandparents commonly provide emotional and financial support to their grandchildren, engage in shared activities with them, and socialize them to values both secular and religious (Bengtson et al. 2013; Michałek-Kwiecień 2020; Mueller and Elder 2003; Silverstein and Marenco 2001).

Values emanating from religious sources generally reinforce positive norms of filial obligation and respect for older individuals, which usually prescribe that younger generations provide assistance and care for older family members (Chatters and Taylor 2005; Ellison and Xu 2015; Hwang, Cheng, et al. 2021; King, Ledwell, and Pearce-Morris 2013; Silverstein, Conroy, and Gans 2012). Religious teachings often promote messages of patience, tolerance, and unconditional love, which become localized as obligation for vulnerable family members (Pearce and Axinn 1998).

Many religious belief systems promote positive norms of filial obligation, which usually entails younger generations providing assistance and care for their elders (Chatters and Taylor 2005; Ellison and Xu 2015; Hwang, Cheng, et al. 2021; King, Ledwell, and Pearce-Morris 2013; Silverstein, Conroy, and Gans 2012). Individuals who maintained strong religiosity from early adulthood to midlife report tended to express stronger norms of familism over the life course (Hwang, Cheng, et al. 2023; Hwang, Kim, et al. 2023; King et al. 2013). These studies show that religious beliefs and practices reinforce family ties across generations (Hwang, Yoon, et al. 2021). Internalized feelings of filial duty obligate children to care for their older parents and these obligations appear to be transmitted from parents to children (Silverstein et al. 2012). As both religious orientations and filial obligation to care for older parents are interdependent and intergenerationally transmitted (Silverstein et al. 2012), the role of grandparents in the formation of religious commitment and filial norms of grandchildren is compelling since grandparents often serve as religious touchstones for families and because their older ages may sensitize grandchildren to the needs of older individuals (Bennett and Einolf 2017; Chatters and Taylor 2005).

Putting together the importance of grandparents in the family and the role of intergenerational religious transmission in shaping altruistic eldercare norms, we used the Longitudinal Study of Generations to examine the pathways by which baby-boom grandparents influence elder-care norms of their adolescent and young adult grandchildren (n=215) (measured as responsibility that adult children should have for older parents in six areas of assistance). The mechanisms of influence are through (1) the transmission of religiosity from grandparents to grandchildren as measured by religious intensity and religious service attendance in each generation, (2) the establishment of emotionally close relationships with grandparents from the point of view of grandchildren, and (3) the formation of generalized altruistic values in grandchildren, as measured by the obligation to help those in need as a social good. Figure 2 describes the results of a path analysis linking these domains: religiosity was transmitted from grandparents to grandchildren which strengthened filial elder-care values of grandchildren through stronger

emotional connection to grandparents and greater altruistic tendencies. Thus, grandparents exerted an elder-friendly influence on their grandchildren by instilling empathy in a personal way by fostering stronger relationships with grandchildren and in a general way by forging compassionate concern for less fortunate individuals. Religious transmission is an important mechanism—though likely not the only mechanism—by which this process of transmission occurs. Overall, these results speak to the enduring influence of grandparents on the values of grandchildren into adulthood—an influence which might go unnoticed had both generations not simultaneously been considered.

Digital solidarity as an emergent solidarity construct

Recent research extending the solidarity paradigm has focused on digital solidarity as a novel subdimension of associational solidarity, focusing on various digital forms of communication between generations. This scholarly attention coincides with the widespread use of smartphones, the internet, and video apps. For example, in 2021, 73% of adults ages 50-64 and 45% of adults ages 65 and older reported using social media sites (Pew Research Center, 2021). Digital communication has known impacts on other dimensions of solidarity, for example facilitating in-person contact and helping behavior in intergenerational relationships (Fingerman et al., 2020). Further, parents and adult children can exchange expressive support promptly by virtue of the immediacy of digital communication (Taipale, 2019). The advance of communication technology is linked to increased frequency of interaction with family members of another generation (Peng et al., 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided the opportunity to examine virtual communication during a period characterized by physical and social isolation of older adults (Peng & Roth, 2022). Indeed, a byproduct of social distancing measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic was the reduction in physical contact and social support, with adverse effects on older adults' mental health (Luykx et al., 2020). Because older adults have higher risk of COVID-19 infections and face the possibility of severe illness (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019), they tended to reduce their face-to-face social contact with others (Freedman, Hu, & Kasper, 2021).

However, digital communication had the potential to play a vital role in allowing older family members to stay connected and feel supported during this distancing period. Digital technologies provided various options for intergenerational communication that required no physical contact, less time investment, and lower or no cost, such as FaceTime, Messenger, and Skype (Antonucci et al., 2017). About half of older adults increased digital communication (i.e., video calls, instant messages, and social media) during COVID lockdowns (Arpino et al., 2021). Thus, digital communication enabled older parents who lacked direct interaction with their adult children to otherwise remain connected.

To examine whether digital solidarity substitutes for other measures of associational solidarity, we analyzed intergenerational associational solidarity in the 2022 survey of The Longitudinal Study of Generations. We focused on 580 in the baby-boom generation who averaged 69 years of age and their relationships with 1,210 adult children. Using measures of frequency of in-person, telephone, text, email, and social media contact with children, we found robust use of digital communication with 60% using email, 40% using social media, and 40% using video chat to stay

in touch (see Figure 3). We examined use of digital forms of communication in relation to an assessment of the quality of communication with each child as measured by the following question: *How is communication between you and this child – exchanging ideas or talking about things that really concern you – at this point in your life?* (assessed on a six-point scale ranging from not at all good to extremely good). We then examined how digital forms of communication might compensate for lower in-person contact in terms of assessed communication quality. The patterns show an improvement in assessed communication quality for all four forms of digital communication (texting, emailing, social media, and video chat) among parents with less in-person contact with children (see Figure 4). These results indicate that digital contact can substitute for face-to-face communication with children by allowing continued social exchanges and discussions of concerns important to both generations.

Taken as a whole, evidence suggests that digital solidarity functions as an independent and meaningful sub-dimension of associational solidarity, one which likely grew in importance during the COVID-19 pandemic and is expected to accelerate as the pace of technology adoption advances the older population and digital technology becomes a regular feature of life in more recent cohorts of older adults.

Conclusion and policy considerations

The disparate studies described above relied on the solidarity framework to examine how older adults are connected to family members in other generations by providing multi-generational support, influencing fundamental values of their grandchildren, and adapting styles of intergenerational communication to changing contingencies.

In our analysis of European data, results suggest that policies in the form of cash payment, respite care, or in-home assistance would not only benefit the well-being of sandwiched older family support providers but would likely benefit all generations by allowing this pivot generation the resources needed to better assist younger and older generations. For example, grandparents receiving assistance with parent-care would be able to invest more time and money in younger generations including providing care and nurturing their grandchildren. Thus, the issue of elder-friendly policies should not be viewed simply as an old-age benefit but as a *family-systems benefit* that strengthens all forms of intergenerational solidarity.

In terms of digital communication, our research shows that the future of intergenerational connections is likely to be digital, particularly when older adults live at a distance from their adult children and grandchildren or are otherwise prevented from seeing each other very often. Spurred and accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, digital solidarity will likely continue to complement and, in many cases, replace more traditional forms of contact between generations. Policies that narrow the digital divide by providing training and elder-friendly digital devices to assist family members remain involved with each other would build solidarity, reinforce the ability to serve the health and social needs of oldest-old parents and strengthen the positive influence that older family members have on younger generations. Older adults who may be prone to suffering from loneliness will be among the chief beneficiaries of policies such as computer and digital literacy training that enhance intergenerational communication. In other research, we have shown that use of digital communication improves the mental health of both

older parents and their adult children, suggesting a multigenerational benefit in the use of technology (Hwang, Fu, Brown, & Silverstein). Thus, it is important to emphasize that younger generations also benefit from being connected to older generations, a point further demonstrated by our finding that grandparents increase empathy and instill pro-social values in their grandchildren.

A general conclusion from the findings reported here are that policies that support older adults are also family-friendly policies—the benefits from which are leveraged and multiplied through the family system by interdependence between generations. As such, families are conduits for distributing resources in ways that should give us pause before thinking of beneficiaries of public initiatives—from income support to digital training—in purely age-specific ways. Although population aging is often depicted in apocalyptic terms, our research reminds us that older adults provide highly valued service to their families and ought to be supported not only for moral reasons but also because well-functioning families in which older adults are supportive members strengthen the social fabric of a humane and cohesive society.

Figure 1. Change in Depressive Symptoms Following Transition to Social Sandwiching of Older Adults in Five Welfare Regimes

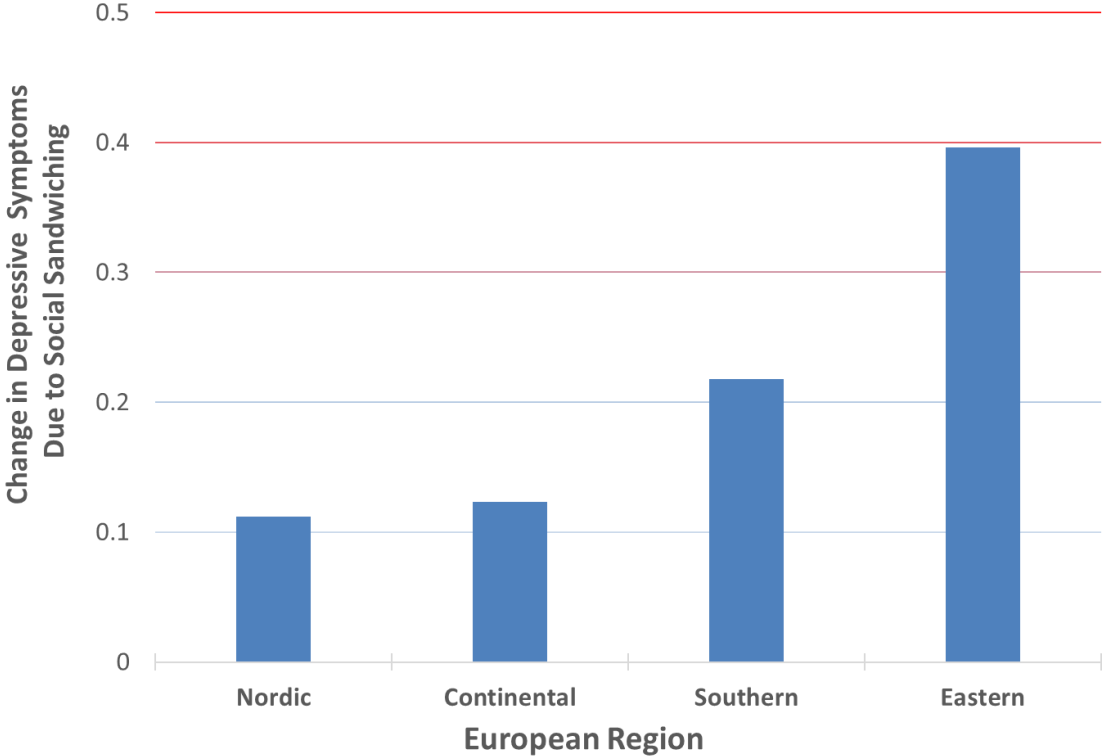
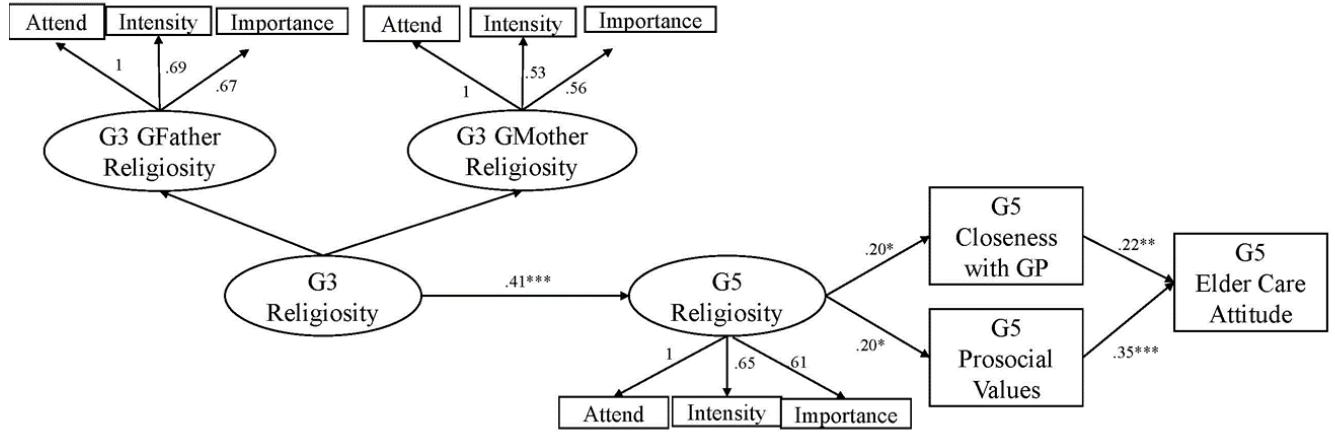


Figure 2. An Empirical Model of Grandparents' Influence on Grandchildren's Family Elder-Care Attitudes

Transmission of Religiosity and Grandchildren's Elder Care Attitude



RMSEA = .06
 CFI/TLI = .98/.97
 *** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$
 Standardized coefficients were reported.

The significant indirect path is G5's religiosity positively predicted their elder care attitude through an increase in their prosocial values (I. E. = .07, $p < .05$).

Figure 3: Percent of Intergenerational Contact by Type of Communication Among G3s in LSOG (2022)

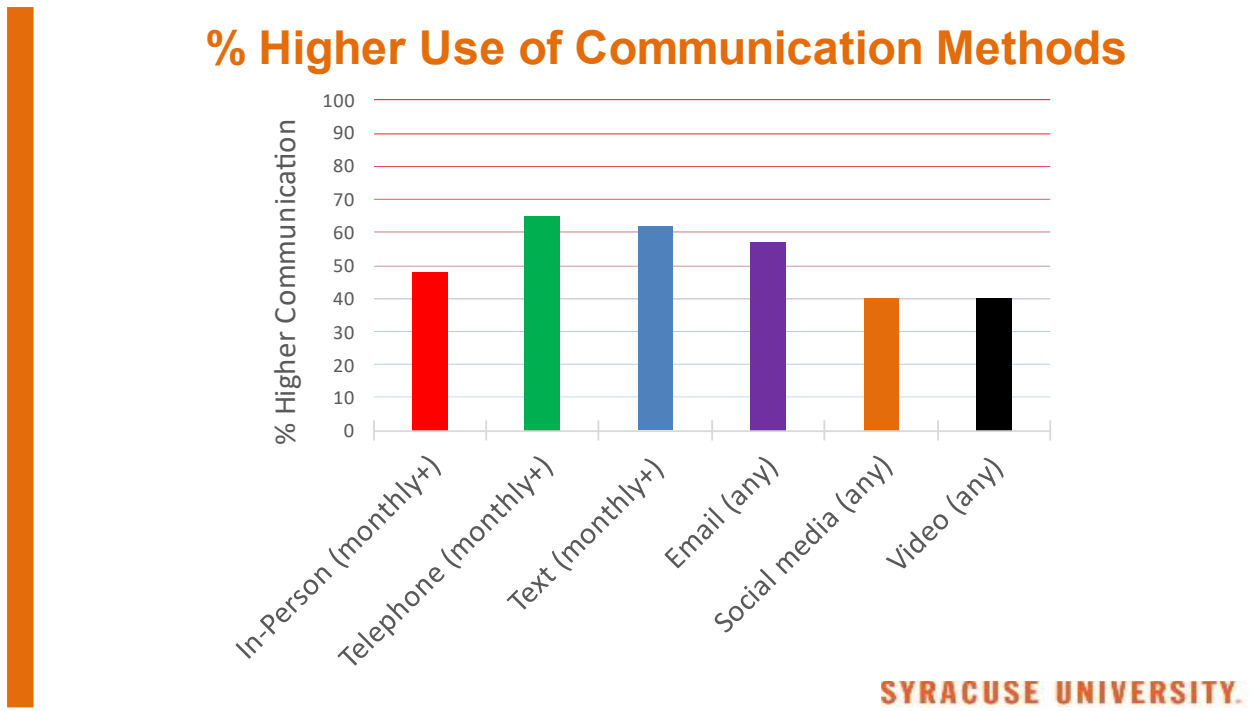
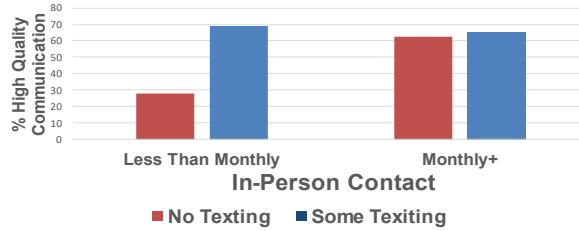


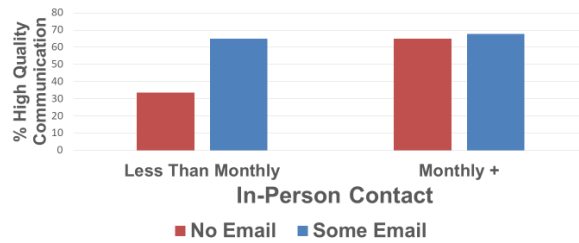
Figure 4. Probabilities of High Quality Communication with Adult Children for Four Types of Digital Communication by Level of In-Person Contact in LSOG G3 (2022)

Compensatory Impact of Texting with Children on Quality of Communication



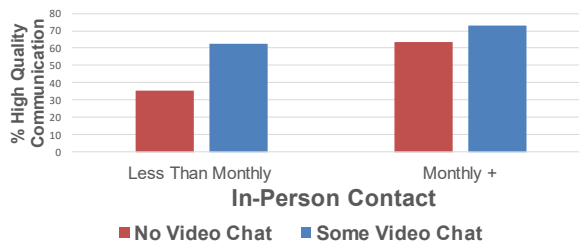
SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY.

Compensatory Impact of Emailing with Children on Quality of Communication



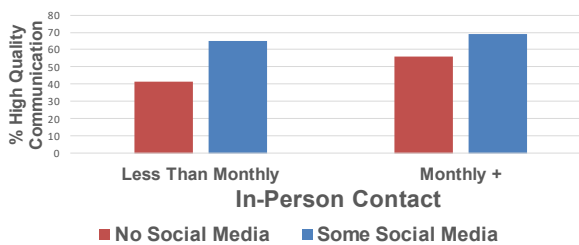
SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY.

Compensatory Impact of Video Contact with Children on Quality of Communication



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY.

Compensatory Impact of Social Media Contact with Children on Quality of Communication



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY.

Demographic Changes, Intergenerational Solidarity, & Families

Bahira S. Trask, Ph.D.
Professor & Chair
HDFS, University of Delaware
bstrask@udel.edu

Paper to be presented at the Expert Group Meeting on: *Changing Demographics Can Result in Strengthening Families*. Generations United Global Conference Tuesday 25 July 2023
Washington, DC; Hilton SW Wharf - Washington, DC

Demographic Changes, Intergenerational Solidarity, & Families

Bahira S. Trask, Ph.D.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries a variety of global demographic trends have accompanied ideological and structural changes with respect to families. These intersecting phenomena are profoundly important for younger as well as older people as they are part of these transformations and concurrently, they influence these changes. Importantly, these are not the only changes taking place. As we are aware, we are also witnessing the rapid evolution of communication technologies, the incorporation of most countries into a global market economy, and the weakening of state supports for social welfare programs. All of these phenomena are intersecting in a complex manner with social and family life. For some, close intimate relationships are weakening with family and related obligations and duties becoming less important, but for others the reverse is true. Especially in situations where state support is lessening, there is a greater reliance by individuals on intimate relationships and the emotional and economic supports they provide. But even in highly individualized cultures, research indicates that family and family relationships remain a crucial foundation in younger and older individual's lives (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015; Pew, 2015).

Understanding these social transformations and the roles and relationships of individuals and families within them, is critical in order to ensure the sustainability of our world. Most importantly, it is imperative that we focus on intergenerational communication and solidarity in order to create peaceful, productive, and thriving societies. To accomplish this, we need to ensure that our policies and programs specifically bring together the different generations in mutually beneficial, positive relationships. Through creating understanding and shared goals, we can promote intergenerational solidarity in families, communities, regions, and the world.

The Importance of Demographic Changes

Some of the most dramatic and long-term changes affecting families and societies in the future are associated with demographic changes related to declining fertility rates and the aging of many human populations. Overall, the global fertility rate has fallen from 3.2 births per woman in 1990 to 2.5 in 2019 and it is expected to decrease even more to 2.2 in 2050 (UN Population, 2019). Currently, about half of all people around the world live in a place where fertility is below 2.1 births per woman over a lifetime. For instance, in almost half of all OECD countries, there are no children in the household anymore (OECD, 2011; UN Population, 2019). Overall however, the global population is growing with great variations in fertility between regions.

According to United Nations population predictions, the world's population is projected to increase from 7.8 billion in 2020 to 8.5 billion in 2030, and to 9.7 billion in 2050. Much of this growth is occurring in some of the poorest regions in the world especially in sub-Saharan Africa where the population is expected to double by 2050 (UN Population, 2019). Oceania excluding Australia/New Zealand and North Africa and Western Asia are expected to grow by about 56%

and 46% respectively. Population growth in these low-income regions contributes to the challenges of eradicating poverty and implementing many if not all of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. On a more positive note, there is a “demographic dividend” associated with increased population growth as the working-age population is growing in those areas. Concurrently however, as the population is substantially increasing in low-income regions, the populations of high-income countries in Europe and North America are projected to increase by only two percent and in East and South-East Asia by three percent. The Latin American countries and the Caribbean are projected to grow by about 18 percent and Central and Southern Asia by 25 percent (UN Population, 2019).

The lowered fertility of so many societies is a result of various factors that come together in differing ways depending on context. Empirical research indicates that with a general shift towards greater gender equity, the growing importance of self-realization for individuals, and greater freedom of choice and opportunities, women in many regions, are increasingly deciding not to have children. Specifically, the difficulty in reconciling work and family responsibilities is associated with lowered fertility, in high-income contexts (Chin, Lee, Son & Sung, 2012). In poorer environments, children increase family vulnerability to poverty. The financial burden of children combined with a lack of adequate child care options force parents, and often specifically women out of gainful employment (Keck & Saraceno, 2013). When families face the prospect of reduced income coupled with increased care needs, the decision to limit fertility is heightened.

Fertility Is Impacting the Age Structure of Populations

A defining characteristic of many contemporary societies has been the historical transformation from societies with low life expectancies and high birth rates to ones with high life expectancies and low birth rates. While this has not occurred uniformly across the world, this shift has been transformational. The most significant impact of the transition to high life expectancies and low birth rates is a long-term transformation of the age structure. Across the world all regions have experienced significant increases in life expectancy since 1950. As life expectancy at birth improves, increased survival at older ages also explains the growing proportion of overall improvement in longevity.

Global statistics indicate that life expectancy at birth has increased from 64.2 years in 1990 to 72.6 years in 2020 and is expected to increase further to 77.1 years in 2050. According to United Nations predictions by 2050, one in six people in the world will be above the age 65 (16%), up from one in 11 in 2019 (9%) (UN Population, 2019). Many factors have contributed to this societal trend. Technological and medical advances have led to increases in lifespan, while simultaneously there has been a reduction in fertility (UN DSEA, 2019). Additionally, educational efforts have fostered lifestyle and health improvements, increasing longevity in many populations that are already trending older (Tessier, DeWolf & Momose, 2023). However, as with regional variations in fertility, major differences exist between regions with respect to longevity. Life expectancy at birth in the least developed countries is approximately 7.4 years behind the global average, a fact that can be explained in part due to continuing high child and

maternal mortality. Moreover, other societal problems such as violence, wars, epidemics, and the continuing effects of HIV contribute to earlier deaths in these areas (UN Population, 2019).

In contrast, predictive models indicate that by 2050 one in four persons living in Europe and Northern America will be over the age of 65. In fact, a milestone in human history was achieved in 2018: for the first time ever, there were more individuals 65 and over than there were children under the age of five. The highest point of the age spectrum is also growing: the 143 million individuals 80 years or over is expected to triple, from 143 million in 2019 to 426 million in 2050 (UN Population, 2019).

Increased longevity is related to gender: life expectancy at birth is estimated to rise globally by about 14.2 years for women and 13.4 years for men (UN Women, 2019). Because women live longer, they make up the greater part of the global population of the elderly. For instance, women aged 60 or older made up 54 percent of the older population in 2017 (UN Women, 2019). This phenomenon is accompanied by the little acknowledged issue that women still bear the bulk of caretaking responsibilities over their life span, leading older women to have more economic, health, and social risk factors.

The changing age structures portend to have serious implications for societies and for families. From a macro perspective the potential support ratio of working age individuals aged 25 – 64 to those who are over 65 is decreasing rapidly. The lowest ratio is currently found in Japan at 1.8. 29 other countries most of which are in Europe and the Caribbean, have support ratios that are below three, and 48 countries (primarily high-income countries in North America, Europe and East Asia) are expected to have support ratios under two by 2050 (UN Population, 2019).

The decrease in support ratios could be disastrous for many societies as it places enormous strains on the labor market as well as increasing care responsibilities for families and social protection plans. Health care systems and retirement funds and programs for the elderly will be stretched in many places far beyond what they are currently slated to support. Without enough individuals in the labor market to generate income, it is difficult to predict how these programs will be supported. These demographic transformations need to be acknowledged and addressed in policies and program in order to ensure that we do not pit generations against each other in the marketplace, as well as the intimate sphere of families.

Demographic Changes and Effects on Families

Around the world, most children continue to live and be raised in family settings. However, today's young people are being raised in a wide variety of family types – especially, in high-income Western countries. According to UN Women (2019), households composed of a couple with children account for approximately 38.4 percent of all households world-wide (UN Women, 2019). The structures of these households may vary and be composed of married partners, cohabiting adults, or re-partnered couples. In non-Western countries families are often composed of nuclear and extended family members, making up about 26.6 percent of all

households. Concurrently, lone-partner households are estimated to come in at about 7.5 percent (UN Women, 2019). Most commonly, lone-partner families are headed by women (about 84.3 percent) who have children, are working, and may also be caring for other close relatives. These female-headed households with children are often financially vulnerable and may even be stigmatized and discriminated against depending on social and cultural context (Cherlin, 2020; UN Women, 2019).

In the close sphere of families, the decline in fertility rates and the increasing longevity of the elderly will have profound implications. As fewer children are born, families and societies tend to invest more in each child. Formal educational systems continue to increase in importance and families, when they can, are more likely to devote increased resources to each of their children. This is a global phenomenon, specifically in non-agrarian settings (Chi & Qian, 2016). A growing global emphasis on investment in a small number of children rather than larger families, portends a potentially serious crisis of care in the near future.

For individuals who choose not to have children, care in late adulthood may also become an increased concern. As the number of elderly increases, and a growing number are less connected with family members due to changing cultural norms around filial duty, childlessness, divorce, separation or remarriage, the need for professional elder care is projected to increase. This phenomenon is also connected to a global expansion of the number of women in the paid labor force whose capabilities to provide care is diminishing. For instance, in China, an increased number of young adults have left their villages seeking work in urban areas consigning “left-behind children” to be cared for by the elderly. However, the increased burden on the elderly who are also expected to be more productive with respect to agrarian outputs, has incited a policy debate about expanding health and educational services and improving infrastructures such as better roads in order to facilitate involving whole households in family decisions that impact their well-being (Chang, Dong, & MacPhail, 2011).

In high-income countries, changing demographics have led to the political and economic focus shifting to the economic and health care implications of aging populations. In the United States, and many European and Asian high-income countries in particular, concern with caretaking and an aging labor force have dominated political debates. However, very little scholarly or political attention has been paid to the consequences of population aging for social relationships. In other words, how are individuals of varying ages going to interact with one another in families and in the larger society, and whose interests will be represented in social policies and financial arrangements (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2007). Of critical importance to young people and elderly alike, is the looming question of whose interests are represented and may dominate in social policies and budgetary priorities now and in the future. This issue has serious consequences for all: given looming budgetary constraints that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, will young people be able to access the educational opportunities and skills building that they need in order to be viable in the future? Or will states prioritize the needs of elder persons as a crisis of care in particular expands on the horizon (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2007; Uccheddu & Ricci, 2023).

Demographics and Intergenerational Solidarity

In order to address these looming demographic issues, a limited number of studies are focusing on the concept of intergenerational solidarity and strengthening the relationships between generations within families and broader communities. Intergenerational solidarity is most often seen as a goal onto itself. For instance, the OECD (2011) suggested that,

“...when generations have a positive view of one another or there is consensus between generations on the way forward. It is also a means to an end: a mechanism for supporting mutually beneficial exchanges, both monetary and non-monetary, between generations (p.1).

The concept of intergenerational solidarity implies bi-directionality. Instead of pitting generations against each other in a competition for resources, intergenerational solidarity highlights that each generation benefits from this relationship. Interestingly, some very recent scholarship indicates that intergenerational solidarity within families may actually be increasing in certain places due to financial stressors on young people. As youth employment is more vulnerable under volatile economic conditions, they become more reliant on their parents for financial support (Fingerman & Birditt, 2020). A growing number of young people need family financial support in order to enter the next phases of their lives, such as for educational investments, and / or buying or renting their own homes. Without these supports it becomes very difficult for young people to enter stable long-term relationships and start their own families (Gulbrandsen & Sandlie, 2015). Also, the growing popularity of multi-generational living arrangements in the West, is another sign that family solidarity is not necessarily weakening as is so often suggested by the media and in the academic literature (Pew, 2018). As states retract social supports, and as housing prices grow exponentially, the importance of family membership and family support is only expanding (Fingerman & Birditt, 2020).

However, as Gulbrandsen and Sandlie (2015) suggested, these arrangements while promoting family solidarity, may at times also work against intergenerational solidarity on a larger level. They stated that,

“This may have implications not only for family solidarity as such, how the family distributes its resources among and assures the wellbeing of its members, but also for the broader issues of social policy, social inequality, and social integration” (p. 79).

Private intergenerational transfers can lead to increased social inequality, and the family support that individuals receive is becoming an ever-stronger contributing factor to accessing life opportunities. Family solidarity is thus achieved at the price of greater divides within societies. This creates the complex situation where on one societal level (within families) intergenerational solidarity is strengthening and on another societal level, generations and economic groups are actually pitted against each other. This conundrum again highlights the importance of incorporating family as an analytic concept in our scholarship that focuses on economic, political, and social relationships.

To add to this complexity, we are also faced with a context where in many societies today, the strengthening of intergenerational family solidarity co-exists with increased family dissolution due to separation and divorce (Fingerman & Birditt, 2020). From a scholarly and policy perspective, family dissolution has become the primary focus and of greater academic concern. However, this emphasis provides us with a limited perspective on the varying social forces influencing families. Instead, of just emphasizing family dissolution in our work, we also need to examine which factors lead to and / or promote increased family solidarity including opportunities for the integration, interdependence, and reciprocity of youth and the elderly.

Globalization, Youth Trajectories, and Intergenerational Solidarity

All of the trends discussed above intersect in complex ways. Changes in family life, demographics, and globalizing processes are influencing the trajectory of young people's lives. Their life course, which used to have clearly demarcated stages in most cultures around the world, has been drastically altered and is now extremely uncertain. Generally speaking, contemporary social life is increasingly characterized by uncertainty and volatility caused in large part by globalization. The sequential order to life that used to be taken for granted by young people has been upended.

While acknowledging some variation, adolescents in the past could expect to finish a certain amount of schooling, find life sustaining employment, and begin their own families at a relatively young age. For the most part both well-to-do and poorer young people followed this predictable trajectory. Globalization, however, has altered the traditional life course (Trask, 2010; Turner, 2014). Today, job markets are constantly changing and having to learn new skills is becoming a lifetime undertaking. The majority of youth realize that whatever schooling and / or training they may access, this will in all likelihood not be enough to sustain permanent employment over the course of their lives. This makes them hesitant about forming permanent partnerships and taking on the responsibility of caring for children. Simultaneously, life's necessities are becoming increasingly expensive, and for many unattainable. For instance, housing, a fundamental human right, is increasingly, in many parts of the world, beyond the reach of the average middle-class citizen (Gulbrandsen & Sandlie, 2015). Young people are thus, faced with uncertain economic and familial prospects, while constantly being reminded through social media in particular, that there are others who live what looks from outside to be enviably easy and materially rich lives (Azevedo & Ponte, 2020).

Globalization has disrupted the social, political, and economic environments that we are familiar with. As was discussed above, less than fifty years ago, young people the world over could predict most of their life course: that they would finish school, attain employment and financial stability, marry and begin family life, and achieve economic and social independence (Shanahan, 2000). However as Kennelly, Poyntz and Ugor (2009) stated,

“In contrast, “for young people today, the job market is less predictable, and training is a matter of constant retooling for the market's shifting demands” Moreover, even such “retooling”

and the accumulation of different certifications cannot guarantee jobs and meaningful social futures for vast segments of contemporary youth” (p. 257).

Globalization has transformed the lives of many, but especially the potential future lives of younger generations. As Kennelly, Poyntz and Ugor pointed out, “Globalization is thus held answerable for the unpredictability of young people’s lives because it entails sweeping socioeconomic changes that fracture the project of futurity—youth (2009, p. 257). However, young people are also active agents and at a point in their lives where they can reshape themselves and take advantage of the opportunities that global processes may present. We, thus, need to put into place the programs and policies that will help them build on their talents and grow their capabilities. This includes having them interact in a consistent and positive manner with older generations. We also need to harness the forces of globalization for good and achieve as Kennelly et al (2009) stated “new social spaces.” Young people are the ones who are at the forefront of creating these new spaces. We need to empower them and allow them the access to the tools they need to achieve this goal.

We currently have a twenty-first century situation where the link between globalization and youth development creates a disturbing, unpredictable future that characterizes the lives of today’s young people. That said, however, we should not view young people as the victims of a run-away global culture. We need to always be mindful and acknowledge every individual’s agency and understand that young people themselves are also always adapting to - and influencing the global changes that are sweeping around us.

Empirical evidence indicates that families continue to function as a source of resilience for youth, and that the extent to which families mitigate risk factors plays a crucial role in developmental outcomes (Bogenschneider & Corbett, 2010). Despite some claims that environmental and peer influences are stronger influences on adolescent development, research indicates that parents provide material and social capital for their children, act as buffers between their children and harmful environmental influences, and continue throughout a child’s life course to influence its emotional, physical, and social well-being. This crucial relationship is basic to understanding any aspect of young people’s lives in combination with contextual factors such as regionality and access to economic and educational resources.

Families create and raise the next generation of citizens and productive workers, raise caring and committed citizens, make efficient investments to reach societal goals, and provide an effective way of promoting positive child and youth development (Bogenschneider & Corbett, 2010). Empirical, longitudinal studies illustrate that when families are supported through appropriate policies, societies benefit through having a caring, committed group of citizens. A focus on young people around the world, thus, requires us to be mindful of their family and community contexts.

The sustainability of our planet is dependent in large part on the next generation – how it is being raised, what options these young people will have and which challenges they will confront. It is this new generation that will live with the effects of changes to legal frameworks,

climate change and environmental deterioration, and the accompanying risks to well-being and housing shortages (Heckman, 2006). How youth are supported in their healthy development is a critical aspect of attaining the Sustainable Development Goals. Raising well-adjusted adolescents who are aware of their capabilities and able to access opportunities is key to strengthening families and to the future of our world. Family sustainability, maintaining and strengthening relationships between family members, and creating a sense of unity, is foundational to societies and intergenerational solidarity, and to creating a more peaceful, equitable world.

Concluding Thoughts

This overview indicates that a primary challenge for our world is to develop programs and policies that support individuals and families who live under highly diverse conditions, and yet are faced with rapid changes in every aspect of their lives. Technology in particular is creating new opportunities, and simultaneous transformations, that are emerging at lightning speed. Yet, empirical research on these trends, and appropriate programs and policies that support individuals and families, tends to lag behind. Thus, we do not always understand how families interact with the complex, varying shifts in their environments (Fingerman & Birditt, 2020). In most places, family policies and programs were developed at a time when families looked less complex than they do today. There is a critical need for appropriate programs and policies that are responsive to key social and family conditions under various dynamic conditions. What we can currently say, however, is that as families have changed, they have not declined in importance. For instance, longer life spans have translated into an increase in the relevance of multi-generational bonds (Fingerman & Birditt, 2020). These bonds provide an important resource for families as they allow for increased family and intergenerational solidarity if appropriate supports are in place. Moreover, lessening state support for social services in many parts of the world is creating an environment in which families are more, not less important to the health and well-being of individuals, especially children, the terminally ill, individuals with disabilities, and the elderly (Trask, 2010; Trask, 2014). We have certainly witnessed this during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Responsive programs and policies that strengthen and support families reduce the risks that are brought about by crises as well as demographic shifts (Tessier, DeWulf, & Moose, 2023).

The demographic changes discussed above are slow moving, tied to societal values, and thus are unlikely to change radically over the next several decades. The concept of cultural lag portends that it takes an extensive amount of time for new understandings of long-standing institutions to occur (Ogburn, 1957). Thus, it is unlikely that we will see major shifts in attitudes towards long-term relationships and marriage, gender equity, fertility, caretaking, separation and divorce, and other family related phenomena. In addition, as an increasing number of individuals and families migrate within and between countries, multicultural aging issues will become a greater concern in societies across the world. This is a significant new development because it affects policies that are being developed to support societies with growing elderly populations. "One size fits all" policy and programming solutions for supporting families and enhancing intergenerational policies are thus not effective options.

A systemic perspective that highlights how various factors and trends intersect and interact with one another is key to creating intergenerational solidarity. This systemic approach needs to be at the top of states' agendas in order to accomplish the 2030 Agenda and ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals are met and the generations more united. We know that strengthening family supports leads to improvements in the social and economic capital of individuals and concurrently, the well-being of individuals and communities. It is only through such a coordinated response that we can achieve stronger relationships and intergenerational solidarity world-wide, and assist individuals from *all* generations in realizing their rights, capabilities, and full potential.

Recommendations:

- Facilitate and emphasize data collection. Data constraints limit policy makers in designing and modifying appropriate programs and policies that can support diverse households and families. Research teams need to formulate methods that encompass both qualitative and quantitative measures that take into consideration gender specific criteria and cultural variations.
- Develop a greater understanding of the role of financial transfers in families including but not limited to assistance with housing and education
- Develop a greater understanding of the *positive* role of caregiving and emotional support between generations in families
- Encourage and disseminate research on *well-functioning* families, ie. Not just family dissolution and family “problems”
- Relate various levels of research, ie. scholarship on families with economic and political contexts;
- Examine the concepts of intra and intergenerational justice: policies that may support families (for instance parental benefits) may also lead to intragenerational injustice (cuts in social security);
- Increase investments in quality early care, as the ability to reconcile labor force participation and childbearing leads to increased fertility for low fertility settings
- Highlight and implement policies that recognize specific gender inequities that make girls and women more economically vulnerable with respect to caretaking and divorce specifically
- Increase investments in youth education and training to enable young people to enter the labor force and to start their own households – this will assist in promoting positive attitudes
- Invest and disseminate information about best practice examples of multigenerational households in varying cultural contexts
- Encourage state supported tax incentives for multi-generational households including health benefits and housing and care supplements
- Expand family life education, including around relationship maintenance and communication, conflict resolution, parenting, and issues of gender equity
- Promote intergenerational solidarity through programs and policies that bring together individuals of different ages but with common goals

- Use the media, including social media, to promote cultural sharing between the generations and the positive outcomes of intergenerational solidarity

References

- Azevedo, C. & Ponte, C. (2020). Intergenerational solidarity or intergenerational gap? How elderly people experience ICT within their family context. *Observatorio Journal*, 14, 16 – 35. <https://doi.org/10.15847/obsOBS14320201587>
- Bogenschneider, K. & Corbett, T. J. (2010). *Evidence-based policymaking: Insights from policy-minded researchers and research-minded policymakers* New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Chang, H., Dong, X.Y., & MacPhail, F. (2011). Labor migration and time use patterns of the left-behind children and elderly in rural China. *World Development*, 20, 1- 12.
doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2011.05.021
- Cherlin, A. (2020). Degrees of change: An assessment of the deinstitutionalization of marriage thesis. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82, 62 – 80.
- Chi, W. & Qian, X. (2016). Human capital investment in children: An empirical study of household child education expenditure in china, 2007 and 2011. *China Economic Review*, 37, 52 – 65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chieco.2015.11.008>
- Chin, M., Lee, J., Lee, S., Son, S. & Sung, M. (2012). Family policy in South Korea: Development, current status, and challenges. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 21, 53 – 64.
- Esping-Andersen, G. & Billari, F. (2015). Re-theorizing family demographics. *Population and Development Review*, 41, 1-31. DOI: 10.1111/j.1728-4457.2015.00024.x
- Fingerman, K. & Birditt, K. (2020). A decade of research on intergenerational ties: Technological, economic, political and demographic changes. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82, 383 – 403. Doi:10.1111/jomf.12604.
- Gulbrandsen, L. & Sandlie, H. (2015). Housing market and family relations in a welfare state. *Critical Housing Analysis*, 2, 74 – 81.
- Hagestad, G. & Uhlenberg, P. (2007). The impact of demographic changes on relations between age groups and generations: A comparative perspective. In. *Social Structures: Demographic Changes and the Well-Being of Older Persons*. Ed. Warner Schale, K & Uhlenberg, P.

- Keck, W. & Saraceno, C. (2013). The impact of different social-policy frameworks on social inequalities among women in the European Union: The labour-market participation of mothers. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 20, 297 -328. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxt005>
- Kennelly, J., Poyntz, S., & Ugor, P. (2009). Special issue introduction: Youth, cultural politics, and new social spaces in an era of globalization. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 31, 255 – 269. DOI:[10.1080/10714410903132824](https://doi.org/10.1080/10714410903132824)
- OECD. (2011). *The Future of Families to 2030. Projections, Policy Challenges and Policy Options. A Synthesis Report*. International Futures Programme.
- OECD. (2011). Paying for the Past, Providing for the Future: Intergenerational Solidarity. www.oecd.org/social/ministerial
- Ogburn, W. F. (1957). Cultural lag as theory. *Sociology and Social Research*, 41, 167–174.
- Pew Research. (2015). <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/1-the-american-family-today/> Retrieved on June 1, 2023.
- Shanahan, M. (2000). Pathways to adulthood in changing societies: Variability and mechanisms in the life course perspective. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 667 – 692.
- Tessier, L., DeWulf, N. & Moose, Y. (2023). Long-term care in the context of population ageing: A rights-based approach to universal coverage. International Labor Organization, Working Papers. <https://www.ilo.org/legacy/english/intserv/working-papers/wp082/index.html>
- Trask, B.S. (2010). *Globalization and families: Accelerated systemic social change*. Springer: New York.
- Trask, B.S. (2014). *Women, work and globalization: Challenges and opportunities*. Routledge: New York.
- Turner, J. (2014). Being young in the age of globalization: A look at recent literature on neoliberalism's effects on youth. *Social Justice*, 41, 8 – 22. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24871272>.
- Uccheddu, D. & Ricci, (2023). Intergenerational Ties and COVID-19 Contagion: A Study on European Adults Aged 50 Years and Older Using SHARE Data. *Journal of Gerontology*. 78(4):749-763. doi: 10.1093/geronb/gbac196.
- UN Population. (2019). United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_10KeyFindings.pdf

UN Women. (2019). *Progress of the World's Women 2019 - 2020: Families in a Changing World*.
United Nations. New York. progress.unwomen.org

The Role of Older Persons in Uganda

Dr. Kristin Bodiford, *Faculty, School of Social Work, Dominican University*

Mr. Namara Arthur Araali, *Director of Health Nest Uganda*

The United Nations defines a society for all ages as one that *“enables the generations to invest in one another and share in the fruits of that investment, guided by the twin principles of reciprocity and equity”* (United Nations 1999).

In this paper, we will explore the changing demographics in Uganda with a specific focus on the roles of older persons in families. We will share examples of how civil society, policy makers, older persons, and youth can promote intergenerational solidarity, enhancing communication among generations to exchange knowledge, values, and skills.

Uganda’s changing demographics

Seventy-eight percent of Uganda’s population is under the age of thirty (UNDP 2021). As Uganda is a young country, most of its resources go to younger people. Although the government of Uganda has made investing in young people one of its fundamental social obligations, Uganda’s fast-growing population is of concern because it is not matched with the country’s ability to create jobs. Over 90% of the youth are in the informal sector (primarily agriculture) with 68% of young men and 83% of young women either self-employed or unpaid family workers (World Bank 2019).

By 2050, the number of older persons in sub-Saharan Africa is projected to more than triple (UN 2016). Older persons in Uganda make a critical contribution to the younger generation, engaging in work and providing care for multigenerational families. Sixty-three percent of orphans in Uganda are under the care of older persons. Between one-fifth and one-

third of older women are living in skipped generation households, composed solely of grandparents and grandchildren (UN 2011: 8). In a recent report on the State of Older Persons in Uganda (2020), the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development recognized the immense contributions of older persons to “the creation of wealth, support and care for orphans and other vulnerable children, create cohesion and resolve conflict in their communities and guard traditions and cultural values which are passed on from generation to generation”. Thirty percent of children in skipped generation households also assume care responsibilities for older persons.

Mama Jane’s grandchildren help bring in water, firewood, and do chores around the house. Other older persons, like Cossey, watch after Jane.



Photo 2: Photo courtesy of HENU

Cossey is also a grandmother and a community volunteer. She visits Jane to monitor her blood pressure. Sometimes Jane has challenges given her difficulty walking and limited income getting to the hospital to pick up her medications.

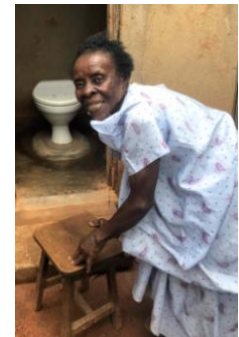


Photo 1: Photograph by the author.

When this happens, Cossey will mobilize money from the Older Persons Group to pay for a boda-boda motorcycle taxi to take Jane to the hospital.

Poverty is high among older persons. The likelihood of being very poor increases for older persons living in a skipped generation household. To compound poverty, banks don’t lend to older persons in Uganda as they are considered risky borrowers. This situation puts older persons as a vulnerable group. This can lead to challenges maintaining adequate housing, sanitation, and clean drinking water. Skipped generation households face particular challenges maintaining the health and well-being of all family members (MGLSD 2020).

Contributions of older persons in their families and communities

Uganda has promulgated laws that protect and organize older persons. The National Council for Older Persons was established by the National Council of Older Persons Act in 2013. The Council's role is to guide, monitor and advise stakeholders on the implementation of programmes for older persons. While this provides an important platform for advocacy, older persons are not waiting for everything to be done at the macro policy level. At a micro level older persons are taking up issues facing their families and communities. We can see from the example set by Cossey, it is critical to engage and support the strengths of older people. When we view older persons primarily in terms of their vulnerabilities, we miss out on the tremendous contributions that older people are making and can make in society (Kiyota 2018). Older persons play a critical role in developing community-based responses to address not only their health and well-being, but also the health and well-being of their families and communities. A shift in thinking about older people as vulnerable to a recognition of the strengths and resources that older people contribute to society is an economic and social imperative.

Health Nest Uganda (HENU) is a non-governmental organization that has been working with this group of people who have not been targeted for any interventions in Uganda. Taking a strengths-based approach, rather than saying: "What can someone do for us?" older people are saying "What can we do for ourselves?". As they come together in associations of Older Persons Groups, members contribute small amounts of money to do activities collectively as a group. The Older Persons Groups are acting from their strengths, coming together, helping to manage loneliness, learning, and taking action together. Older Persons Groups work together

so that grandparents are able to have small vegetable gardens. They talk about nutrition and good hygiene at home. Most of the older people in these associations in Entebbe now have a vegetable garden from where they get food for their families.

The communities HENU is working with are moving towards sustainability. Any support that is given, is put into the community and the community owns it and runs it, supplementing what the community is already doing for themselves. By using their own resources and connections they are starting and running their own projects. These Older Persons Groups from Entebbe are also helping other communities to do the same. HENU hopes to upscale this change throughout the country.

Intergenerational solidarity

HENU also recognized the importance of engaging the strengths of youth alongside older persons in their families and communities. A focus on intergenerational relationships recognizes the interdependence of generations to support healthy families and societies where people are able to make contributions across the life course (Butts, Thang, and Yeo 2014). The African Union (2012: 5) recognizes that a focus on intergenerational solidarity, “reflected by the provision of reciprocal care, support and exchange of material and non-material resources between younger and older family members, will help re-strengthen what has been a key function of families in Africa.”

Stimulating and strengthening intergenerational cooperation helps people develop a sense of responsibility for each other and promote intergenerational relationships where youth appreciate older persons and older persons appreciate youth, each supporting each other and helping each other (Araali & Bodiford, 2018). HENU facilitates income generating activities to

promote a partnership between older persons and the youth as they work as a team to fight poverty. Together older persons and youth share information, collaborate, support, and build up one another. This approach also supports young people to develop their skills and contribute to their families and communities.

The roles of social institutions and civil society supports for intergenerational and multigenerational families

The National Council for Older Persons Research and Documentation Committee is currently developing National Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing as a way of promoting intergenerational connectivity for state and non-state actors. This will ensure that from policy formulation to implementation all generations work together and are included.

An example of how Uganda is mainstreaming ageing for intergenerational connectivity is bringing younger and older people together to discuss challenges the generations face. For example, every year on the 14th of June in recognition of the World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD), the National Council for Older Persons holds a dialogue between younger and older persons to discuss abuse older persons face in their communities and how this abuse can be prevented. HENU is also promoting intergenerational dialogue to restore respect and protection for all generations. HENU brings older persons and the young people together to learn about each other's challenges and opportunities and how to create synergies. During the time of COVID, HENU stimulated dialogue between youth and older persons focusing on food security. As a result, households started backyard gardening to boost their food security level. During this time, HENU started a WhatsApp group which became a popular platform for

exchange of information regarding the pandemic between generations. It registered over 200 members both old and young. Facts about COVID-19 and vaccinations were exchanged.

Recently, the Older Persons Groups put in place a savings scheme to pool resources to fund inputs for intergenerational income-generating activities. Revolving savings funds support income-generating projects which present opportunities for youth and older persons to discuss and plan together on how they can liberate themselves from poverty sustainably. Revolving savings funds offer a tool to spread risk among members “drawing upon sub-Saharan African traditions of shared support and kinship networks” (National Research Council 2006). One example of income generating activities is an intergenerational tailoring project. The HENU team identified older persons who have a wide experience in tailoring and the young people who require these skills. In the tailoring project older persons will be training the younger ones in tailoring skills. The hope is to cement their relationships and promote intergenerational learning and skill exchange.

Like many other grandmothers, Rehema is responsible for the needs of her grandchildren. Rehema is a leader with the Older Persons Group. She actively advocates for the role of grandmothers to improve the health of her family and community. Rehema has a dream for an intergenerational school she calls “Pamoja” which means together in Swahili, where elders can support young people who have not been able to continue their secondary school education to learn how to make and market traditional crafts.



Photo 3: Photo courtesy of HelpAge International

We all have a role to play in supporting intergenerational solidarity.

In Uganda, there is a focus on developing effective policy organized around the decentralized provision of family and community-based responses. The Uganda Report on the Implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (Baryayebwa 2010) focuses on areas such as economic empowerment of older persons and strengthening formal and informal community supports in efforts to support quality of life and well-being of older persons. Policy makers can support policies for the health and quality of life for multigenerational families.

- **Recognize multigenerational and extended families** as the foundation for an inclusive society and a resource for sustainable development (Makiwane & Kaunda 2018).
- **Promote intergenerational solidarity** through programs and policies that bring together and build on strengths of the different generations to address community-identified issues.
- **Support social protection policies** and old age pensions that allow grandparents to better care for their grandchildren (Hillblom 2016; Mugisha et al. 2013).
- **Invest in revolving savings funds.** The government of Uganda has put in place a Social Enterprise Grant to provide grants to older persons in groups to start enterprises to enhance household incomes. The grants will support older persons to meet basic needs and enable them look after their grandchildren, live a decent life with dignity, and keep them active in the money economy.
- **Strengthen healthcare systems for older persons** to prevent and manage non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Rising rates of chronic diseases such as hypertension and diabetes are not being adequately addressed by the health system and are increasing burdens on families, often forcing families into or keeping them in poverty due to

healthcare costs or ill-health. In addition, NCDs reduce quality of life and can make it a challenge for people to function and contribute to society and their families.

- **Scale up intergenerational strategies and engagement of multigenerational families** to promote healthy behaviours, attitudes and practices.
- **Develop research in the well-being and quality of life of older persons** in multigenerational families recognizing and building on culturally appropriate family and community practices, including:
 - Strategies to meet basic needs (safe shelter and nutritious food).
 - Support for continued education of grandchildren.
 - Protection of rights of older persons and prevention of elder abuse and neglect.

The work of civil society, such as HENU, demonstrates the important role of organizations in supporting the participation and action of youth and older persons in development and in co-creating ways to address the issues they face in their lives and communities.

When youth and older persons are actively participating and influencing all levels of the decision-making process, they move from the periphery to being integrated in policymaking and programs. In Uganda, both generations are advocating to be heard, to be supported, and to contribute to the development of their country. Engaging and mobilizing the strengths of youth and older persons is an inclusive process that strengthens intergenerational solidarity and supports the well-being of intergenerational and multigenerational families.

Appendix A: Demographic Background

Despite population ageing, high birth rates mean Uganda remains one of the world's youngest and most rapidly growing countries. Forty seven percent of the population is under 15 years old. Fifty percent are between the ages 15-64 and 2 percent are 65 years and over (estimated over 1.1 million older persons with 57 percent female). The median age is 15 years (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, n.d.). It is projected that over 60 percent of the world population aged sixty and older lives in developing countries and is expected to increase to over 70 percent by 2030 and 80 percent by 2050 (UN 2015: 9; Velkoff and Kowal 2006). In Africa, the older population is projected to grow from 64 million in 2015 to 220 million by 2050 (UN 2015: 10). Between 2015 and 2050 the number of older persons in sub-Saharan Africa is projected to more than triple, with a growth rate for the 2040s that is projected to be faster than any other region since 1950. (UN 2016). There is a youth dependency ratio of 85.1 and an elderly dependency ratio of 3.2 with a potential support ratio of 31.7 (2021 est.).¹ Many of the older people in Uganda provide critical support to children and youth.

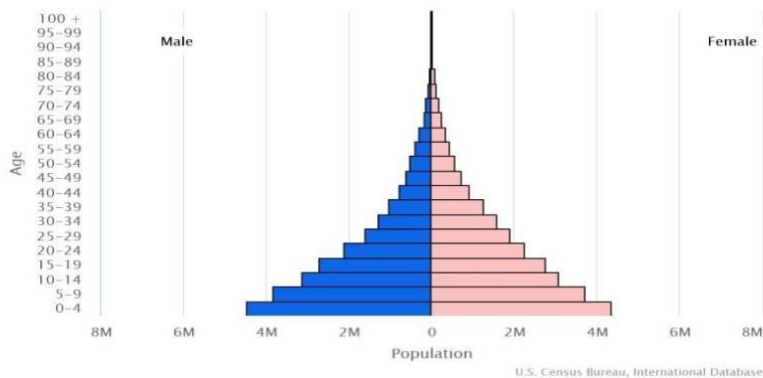


Figure 1: Population Pyramid of Uganda (CIA World Factbook 2023)

¹ Dependency ratios contrast the ratio of youths (ages 0-14) and the elderly (ages 65+) to the number of those in the working-age group (ages 15-64). The potential support ratio is the number of working-age people (ages 15-64) per one elderly person (ages 65+). As a population ages, the potential support ratio tends to fall, meaning there are fewer potential workers to support the elderly. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/dependency-ratios>

References

- African Union. 2004. *Plan of Action on the Family in Africa*. Addis Ababa: African Union.
- Araali, N. A., & Bodiford, K. (2020). Youth and Older Persons as Agents for Change: Creating an Inclusive and Age-Friendly Society for All. In P. Stafford (Ed.), *The global age-friendly community movement: A critical appraisal*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Baryayebwa, Herbert. 2010. Uganda Report on the Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.
- Butts, Donna, Leng Leng Thang, and Alan Hatton Yeo. 2013. *Policies and Programmes Supporting Intergenerational Relations*. Accessed 4 July 2023. http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/docs/BP_INTERGENERATIONALSOLIDARITY.pdf.
- CIA World Factbook (2023). Accessed 4 July 2023. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/uganda/#people-and-society>
- Hillblom, M. (2016) Factors affecting older Ugandan women's self-perceived health—A qualitative study. Department of Public Health and Caring Sciences. Uppsala University
- Kiyota, E. (2020). Ibasho Café: Giving Elders a Role to Play in Making Communities More Resilient. In P. Stafford (Ed.), *The global age-friendly community movement: A critical appraisal*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (2020), The State of Older Persons in Uganda Situational analysis report by the Republic of Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. Accessed 4 July 2023. <https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ESP-OP-Study-Final-12-Oct.pdf>
- Mugisha, J., Scholten, F., Owilla, S., Naidoo, N., Seeley, J., Chatterji, S., Kowal, P. & Boerma, T. (2013) Caregiving responsibilities and burden among older people by HIV status and other determinants in Uganda. *AIDS Care*, 25(11), 1341-8
- Makiwane, M.B., & Kaunda, C.J. (2018). Families and inclusive societies in Africa. Paper presented at the Observance of the 2018 International Day of Families, United Nations, New York, 15-16 May

National Research Council (U.S.) Committee on Population. 2006. *Aging in Sub-Saharan Africa: Recommendation for Furthering Research*. Edited by B. Cohen and J. Menken. Washington, DC: National Academies Press. Accessed 4 July 2023. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK20293/?report=classic>.

Population Reference Bureau. 2009. *2009 World Population Data Sheet*. Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau. Accessed 4 July 2023. https://assets.prb.org/pdf09/09wpds_eng.pdf.

Uganda Bureau of Statistics (nd). Accessed 4 July 2023 <https://www.ubos.org/uganda-profile/>

United Nations

———. 1999. Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). *Raising Awareness: The Society for All Ages*. Accessed 4 July 2023.

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/ageing/resources/international-year-of-older-persons-1999/operational-framework/raising-awareness-the-society-for-all-ages.html>

———. 2011. Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). *Current Status of the Social Situation, Well-Being, Participation in Development and Rights of Older Persons Worldwide*, United Nations. Accessed 4 July 2023.

<https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing/documents/publications/current-status-older-persons.pdf>.

———. 2015. Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). *World Population Ageing*. Accessed 4 July 2023.

http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2015_Report.pdf

———. 2016. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Population Division. *Population Facts. Sub-Saharan Africa's growing population of older people*. Accessed 4 July 2023.

http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/popfacts/PopFacts_2016-1.pdf

———. 2021. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNDP Initiatives for Youth in Uganda. Accessed 4 July 2023. <https://www.undp.org/uganda/publications/undp-initiatives-youth-uganda>

Velkoff, Victoria A., and Paul R. Kowal. 2006. "Aging in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Changing Demography of the Region." In *Aging in Sub-Saharan Africa: Recommendation for Furthering Research*, ed. B. Cohen and J. A. Menken. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

World Bank (2019), Youth Employment Policy Note. Accessed 4 July 2023
<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/969961589175110707/pdf/Youth-Employment-Policy-Note.pdf>



International Federation
for Family Development

José Alejandro Vázquez

International Federation for Family Development

Trends, Opportunities and Good Practices on Family Strengthening and Older Persons

Expert Symposium – Generations United Global Conference

25 July 2023 Washington, DC

This paper examines the trends, opportunities, and good practices for enhancing the family unit and the role of older persons in the face of demographic challenges. The trends discussed in this paper are based on United Nations documents, while the opportunities and good practices are drawn from civil society activities that aim to promote a family perspective in the design, implementation, and evaluation of social policies.

The objective of this paper is to critically assess the ways in which civil society, academia, and policymakers can contribute valuable recommendations to global challenges from a local perspective, incorporating exemplary practices.

Global Trends

Global trends are often addressed within the context of the United Nations, which serves as a conducive platform for developing initiatives and advocacy strategies to mitigate the adverse impacts on families, particularly older persons. Demographic shifts, in particular, have a significant impact on the family unit and the role of older persons in society. These trends are discussed in two primary sources: the United Nations General Assembly Resolutions on the "Follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing" and the "Follow-up to the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond," which has been revised as "Preparations for and observance of the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family" since 2021.

Each of these United Nations resolutions annually calls upon the Secretary-General to submit comprehensive reports analyzing various issues affecting families and older persons. These reports offer crucial recommendations to enhance social development, alleviate poverty, and foster intergenerational solidarity¹.

For example, the Secretary-General's Report on the Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing, published in late 2020, addressed population aging and the future implications for work. The report highlighted the profound changes our world is

¹ World Summit on Social Development, www.undocs.org/A/CONF.166/9

undergoing due to globalization, new technologies, rising global inequality, demographic shifts, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic. It emphasized the unprecedented scale and speed of these developments and their far-reaching impact on societies, economic structures, and individuals across all age groups². The report stressed the importance of seizing this moment to unlock new potential and develop credible responses to advance well-being, inclusion, equality, economic prosperity, and environmental sustainability³.

Similarly, the United Nations resolution on the family called upon relevant stakeholders to support research and awareness-raising activities at the national, regional, and international levels regarding specific megatrends. These megatrends include the impact of technological advancements, demographic changes, urbanization, migration, and climate change on families, with the goal of harnessing their positive effects and mitigating their negative impacts.⁴

Among the reports, the influence of new technologies on the family unit⁵ and older persons⁶ has been a topic of focus in 2021 and 2022. The recommendations from the Secretary-General's report, titled "Roadmap for digital cooperation: implementation of the recommendations of the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation"⁷, were incorporated in both reports. In 2022, the reports delved into the perspectives of families⁸ and older persons' on urbanization and international migration, exploring the interconnections between rural development, migration, and urbanization⁹. Demographic shifts were only analyzed from the perspective of older persons, recognizing the growing complexity of the future of work and the need for adaptability and resilience in the population.¹⁰

Overall, this paper aims to provide valuable insights into the trends, opportunities, and good practices related to strengthening the family unit and the role of older persons in the face of demographic challenges. By drawing on United Nations documents and civil society activities, it contributes to the broader discourse on global challenges, offering localized perspectives and exemplary practices.

Opportunities to advocate for better family and older persons responsive policies

² Report of the Secretary-General on the Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing, www.undocs.org/A/75/218, 7.

³ ILO, Work for a Brighter Future: Global Commission on the Future of Work (Geneva, 2019).

⁴ United Nations Resolution on the Preparations for and observance of the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, www.undocs.org/A/C.3/76/L.18/Rev.1

⁵ Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the objectives of the International Year of the Family and its follow-up processes, www.undocs.org/A/77/61

⁶ Report of the Secretary-General on the Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing, www.undocs.org/A/77/134

⁷ Roadmap for digital cooperation: implementation of the recommendations of the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation", www.undocs.org/A/74/82

⁸ Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the objectives of the International Year of the Family and its follow-up processes, www.undocs.org/A/78/61

⁹ Report of the Secretary-General on the Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing, www.undocs.org/A/77/134, Figure 1.

¹⁰ ILO, Work for a Brighter Future: Global Commission on the Future of Work.

The topic of Demographic Shifts has yet to be addressed in the existing reports on family issues, presenting a valuable opportunity for stakeholders to contribute their recommendations for effectively addressing the challenges associated with this trend. In this context, research, good practices, and innovative perspectives focused on family and older persons can play a significant role in shaping these recommendations.

One effective approach to enrich the discussion and develop recommendations in collaboration with the United Nations System, academia, and other stakeholders is through global or regional expert group meetings and local symposiums. These platforms offer an in-depth understanding of specific themes, regions, or local contexts, bringing together subject matter experts who can provide evidence-based recommendations to policymakers¹¹.

Additionally, partnerships with civil society organizations can amplify the voice of families and their members, advocating for support at the grassroots level and addressing the realities on the ground. For example, the Civil Society Declaration for the Thirtieth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family highlights the importance of addressing demographic shifts by fostering healthy and active aging, promoting intergenerational solidarity, and meeting the needs of vulnerable elderly individuals. It emphasizes the need for quality and affordable community-based and institutional care services in situations where the family is unable to provide them. Furthermore, the declaration aims to raise awareness about the crucial role of grandparents within the family structure and the value that older persons bring to society as a whole.¹²

Good practices on families and older persons

The identification and analysis of good practices serve as vital illustrations of how social interventions and activities can generate impactful outcomes and act as catalysts for the development of better and innovative policies. Across various trends and cross-cutting themes, the following provides an overview of noteworthy practices:

Solidarity between Generations

Regarding solidarity between generations in a changing society, the Veneto Region in Italy has demonstrated a range of good practices. In the context of the Voluntary National Reviews presented annually at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)¹³ The Veneto Region has made significant contributions to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its sustainable development goals, particularly in relation to aging-related policies. Within the framework of the

¹¹ Expert Group Meeting on “Megatrends and Families: Focus on Digital Technologies, Migration and Urbanization”, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/2022egms/migration-urbanization.html>

¹² Civil Society Declaration for the 30th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family (IYF+30), <https://familyperspective.org/2023/02/23/civil-society-declaration-30th-anniversary-of-the-international-year-of-the-family/>

¹³ Report for Italy for the fourth review and appraisal cycle of the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its regional implementation strategy (MIPAA/RIS), 2018-2022, <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/mipaa20-report-italy.pdf>

National Strategy for Sustainable Development, the region has implemented several key tools, including:

The "2019–2021 Pact for Health" initiative, which aims to standardize part-time specialist training and theoretical and practical training activities offered by university specialization schools. This pact ensures the timely recruitment of National Health Service (NHS) personnel and facilitates the necessary turnover for service continuity. Additionally, it entails a review of the training system for medical specialists, enhancing their role within regional health facilities. Moreover, the contents of the regional course for specific training in general medicine have been revised to reflect the changing health and social scenarios, reaffirming the vital role of general practitioners in preventing and combating chronic diseases. Furthermore, this initiative promotes the development of relevant professional skills among nursing, midwifery, technical, rehabilitation, and prevention professions, as well as social services.

The "National Care Services Program for Children and Non-self-sufficient Elderly People," managed by the Ministry of the Interior as the Managing Authority. Approved in 2015 and extended in 2019, this program encompasses four regions in southern Italy and provides funding for integrated home care services, home care services, and actions aimed at covering the operating expenses of single access points to services. It particularly focuses on supporting older individuals and contributes to enhancing their well-being and independence through various care provisions¹⁴.

These exemplary practices from the Veneto Region illustrate effective approaches in fostering intergenerational solidarity and addressing the needs of older persons within a comprehensive framework of sustainable development.

Role of older persons in paid and unpaid childcare and supporting education

The International Federation for Family Development (IFFD) is a non-governmental, independent, and non-profit federation that is dedicated to supporting families through comprehensive training programs. Operating in 68 countries across all five continents, IFFD collaborates with an extensive network of volunteers, making it the largest international civil society organization focused on family development.

In recent years, IFFD has introduced new initiatives specifically designed to engage with youth and their family formation projects, as well as to address the crucial role of grandparents in caregiving and parenting. The programs tailored for grandparents cover a diverse range of topics that are explored within the context of the extended family and the involvement of grandparents. These topics include the characteristics of active grandparents, young grandparents, and the dynamics between grandparents and grandchildren. The programs also delve into understanding the framework for child development, how grandparents can establish

¹⁴ Dipartimento per le Politiche della Famiglia, INRCA (2021), Raccomandazioni per l'adozione di politiche in materia di invecchiamento attivo, Progetto "Coordinamento nazionale partecipato multilivello delle politiche sull'invecchiamento attivo", Work Package 2 – Task 2, April, <https://famiglia.governo.it/media/2329/raccomandazioni-per-ladozione-di-politiche-in-materia-di-invecchiamento-attivo.pdf>

better connections with their grandchildren, and the specific aspects of age and behavior during the second stage of childhood (9 to 12 years old).

IFFD courses strive to be culturally adaptable, ensuring that discussions are relevant to parents and grandparents in specific regions and locations. Consequently, one of the most challenging topics for course moderators is navigating discussions on how inter-generational relationships involving grandparents may be influenced by global or local stereotypes, particularly when dealing with older children, teenagers, or children who seek refuge in the family home. Throughout these courses, grandparents make progress in enhancing their communication skills, clarifying their roles within the family and society, passing down values and fostering a humanistic approach, understanding their educational role as grandparents, and managing both happiness and grief within the family context¹⁵.

Family strengthening policies such as child welfare and child tax credits

Unicef has recently introduced an initiative titled "Family-friendly policies" with the assertion that in order for societies and economies to prosper, countries and businesses must support workers as individuals with families and as parents. This support should be facilitated through the implementation of family-friendly policies, which aim to assist individuals in their role of carrying and raising children from pregnancy to the school-age years. Family-friendly policies encompass a range of measures that aim to create a balance between work and family life, typically encompassing three essential resources for parents and caregivers of young children: time, finances, and services. By making mutual investments in this critical phase of human life, involving families, businesses, and the State, the groundwork is laid for children's educational success, adults' professional achievements, the ability of families to overcome poverty, and the promotion of lifelong health.

The initiative emphasizes that family-friendly policies should be developed as a comprehensive and well-rounded package that encompasses time-related, service-related, and finance-related policies, rather than solely focusing on one aspect. To effectively advance family-friendly policies, the collaboration of four key actors is crucial, each representing a corner of a diamond: the State, businesses, families, and communities. This collaborative effort involves various entities such as civil society organizations, international organizations, trade unions, community-based organizations, the non-profit sector, and informal networks. Together, these actors play a vital role in promoting and implementing family-friendly policies to foster supportive environments for individuals and families¹⁶.

Furthermore, it has been brought to attention by Generations United that in the United States, approximately 2.7 million children reside in grandfamilies or kinship families. These families consist of grandparents, other adult family members, or close family friends who are responsible for raising the children without the presence of parents in the household. The State of Grandfamilies Report emphasizes that the ongoing pandemic has prompted the development of innovative approaches to establish responsive systems that provide support for grandfamilies.

¹⁵ International Federation for Family Development. Family Enrichment: Grandparents, <https://iffd.org/grandparents/>

¹⁶ UNICEF. Family-friendly policies. Redesigning the workplace of the future. Policy Brief. <https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/UNICEF-policy-brief-family-friendly-policies-2019.pdf>

The report puts forward several key recommendations for reform, including the utilization of virtual platforms, increased involvement of kin caregivers, enhanced engagement of youth, and birth parents.

The report highlights the significant role played by coalitions such as Family Voices United in amplifying the voices of various civil society actors. Additionally, it emphasizes that effective and timely responses to the pandemic have been more prevalent in regions where robust kinship navigator programs are in place. These programs serve as vital intermediaries, bridging the gap between different systems and ensuring that caregivers and children are connected to the necessary services and support they require¹⁷.

Housing and multigenerational living as a green solution in climate change

The global challenges of population aging and housing affordability have generated interest in alternative housing options. Multigenerational housing settings, where households of different ages live together to foster community and support, have gained traction. Policymakers, particularly in Germany, are exploring ways to support these intentional multigenerational communities. Germany's Wohnen Für (Mehr)Generationen pilot program successfully backed 30 innovative housing projects nationwide, demonstrating a commitment to address the housing needs of diverse generations.¹⁸

Both the United States and Germany encounter challenges regarding affordable housing, accessibility for older adults and people with disabilities, support for younger adults and parents of small children, and concerns about isolation and loneliness. Consequently, communities are seeking innovative solutions to accommodate and support diverse populations through multigenerational housing. While multigenerational living traditionally involved extended family members, there is a growing trend of unrelated individuals from different generations sharing homes to address housing costs and combat loneliness.

The United States lacks a dedicated federal program for creating and supporting multigenerational or shared housing. However, Germany offers an intriguing model to examine. Germany has a longstanding tradition of shared and multigenerational housing, and its federal government has provided funding for numerous demonstration projects over the past two decades to intentionally develop such housing options.¹⁹

Conclusions

¹⁷ Generation United. State of Grandfamilies 2020, <https://www.gu.org/app/uploads/2020/10/2020-Grandfamilies-Report-Web.pdf>

¹⁸ *Multi-generation houses bring young and old together.* <https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/life/society-integration/multi-generation-houses-bring-young-and-old-together>

¹⁹ German Marshall Fund. *Bridging Health, Housing, and Generations: What the United States Might Learn from Germany's Intentional Multigenerational Housing Demonstrations.* <https://www.gmfus.org/news/bridging-health-housing-and-generations-what-united-states-might-learn-germanys-intentional>

To develop a comprehensive advocacy strategy, it is imperative to stay abreast of the latest trends in forecasting, leadership, skill-building, preparedness, and growth. These factors are essential for effective policy development. As we approach the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and encounter ongoing megatrends, upcoming opportunities will arise to engage in global discussions on family and older persons policies.

Sharing successful practices plays a pivotal role in policy development by facilitating the analysis of their objectives, scope, and consistency over time. This process enables policymakers to refine the design, implementation, and evaluation of social policies. By examining good practices, valuable insights are gained, contributing to continuous improvement in supporting families and older persons.

Recommendations

Promoting civil society partnerships enables a broader perspective and a more influential and organized voice to achieve better impact and support. This entails several key actions:

1. Foster healthy and active aging, promote intergenerational solidarity, and address the needs of vulnerable elderly individuals.
2. Establish quality and affordable community-based and institutional care services for situations where families are unable to provide care.
3. Increase awareness of the crucial role of grandparents in the family structure and the value that older individuals bring to society as a whole.
4. Provide long-term tools for coordinating, analyzing, planning, and monitoring active aging policies to ensure the full integration and participation of older people in society.
5. Facilitate caregivers' access to comprehensive information, including guidance on caring for specific diseases affecting older individuals. This can be achieved through dedicated digital platforms or by enhancing existing ones to offer training and information on disease management to caregivers.
6. Recognize the rights of caregivers and the important role they play, aiming to address inequalities, including health disparities, with a gender-focused approach. Establish a social network to facilitate communication between families and public/private services, while providing fundamental training for family caregivers.
7. Encourage the development of supportive care relationships within various cohabitation contexts, with services and resources that allow older people and caregivers to balance caregiving responsibilities with their personal life goals within the community, workplace, or other domains of active aging.
8. Foster positive and reciprocal intergenerational dialogue, promoting a perspective that encompasses the entire life cycle.

Introduction

Intergenerational relations are impacted by multiple and interrelated factors. The purpose of this paper is to consider four salient factors that play a role in shaping and fostering relationships across generations including: a person's broader set of social relations, environmental context (e.g., neighborhood age composition and resources, climate, and housing), roles (e.g., volunteering), and new communication technologies (e.g., texting, zoom). These factors were chosen given multiple demographic trends and cross-cutting themes including, population aging, climate change, and proliferation of internet communication technologies. The paper concludes with recommendations concerning the aforementioned factors and their intersections.

This paper acknowledges and considers that intergenerational relations occur both within and outside the family context, with each having potentially overlapping and distinct facilitators as well as outcomes. Second, understanding factors and outcomes of intergenerational relations requires appreciating, respecting, and incorporating the unique perspectives and experiences of each generation involved. This paper focuses on intergenerational relations from the perspective and experience of older adults.

1) Intergenerational relations within the context of a broader set of social relations.

The Convoy Model of Social Relations (Kahn and Antonucci, 1980; Antonucci, Birditt, and Ajrouch, 2011) is a useful theoretical framework for understanding a person's broad set of social relationships, how they change over the lifespan as well as their facilitators and outcomes. The term convoy is conceptualized as a person's social network, comprised of people who surround an individual, protect and socialize, shape and change the individual, their health and well-being across the life course. Who makes up a person's convoy is a subjective phenomenon and there has been shown to be considerable variability. Convoys can also be described in terms of their structural characteristics, (e.g., size, frequency of contact, geographic proximity, years known, composition) as well as quality of relationships within (e.g., positive and negative). Composition describes the relationships within the convoy (e.g., proportion of network comprised of family members or grandchildren) as well as describes other dimensions that help characterize who is in a convoy or social network (e.g., average age of entire network or specific types of network members). Antonucci, Ajrouch and Webster (2019) in a study comparing age composition of social networks across two cohorts of older adults over 25 years found that older adults' social networks were on average older in 2005 compared to 1980. This could signal declining intergenerational relations, but more likely is driven by longer life expectancies. Follow-up examination of the questions examined among more recent cohorts is needed.

The Convoy Model and its related measurement tool, the Hierarchical Mapping Technique (Antonucci, 1986), enables not only examination of a broad set of social relations, but provides a framework and scientific tools to quantify and examine antecedents and outcomes of intergenerational relations. The model also allows for distinguishing the degree of emotional closeness among a person's network members, organized into the inner (closest relationships or strongest ties), middle, and outer circles (least close or weak ties) (Fuller, Ajrouch, and Antonucci, 2020). Antonucci and Akiyama (1987) demonstrated that among adults age 75 and older the average age of their middle circle was significantly younger than among those less than age 75. They suggested this could be driven by inclusion of more grandchildren in the

middle circles among the older age group compared to younger age groups. Data used in this study were collected in 1980, which suggests the need for a reexamination of the prevalence and proportion of grandchildren in older adults' social networks among more recent cohorts of older adults. Doing so could help determine if feelings of closeness about grandchildren has remained stable, has increased or decreased over time. In a more recent study of adults age 50 and older in four countries (Lebanon, Mexico, Japan, and the United States) cross-national consistency was found in feelings of closeness toward children, as children were more likely to be nominated in the inner compared to outer circle in all countries (Ajrouch et al., 2018).

Intergenerational relationships between older adults and adult children can affect the health of older adults in unexpected ways. For example, having more negative relationship quality with an adult child (e.g., they get on nerves, make too many demands) has been linked with living longer (Antonucci, Birditt, and Webster, 2010). A possible explanation is adult children may encourage their parent to engage in health-related behaviors (e.g., diet, exercise), which may be interpreted negatively or as a minor irritation, but also translates into better health. This example highlights the power of intergenerational relations (in this case between parents and adult children) for facilitating the health and longevity of older adults. Similar examinations are needed focused on the unique role of relationship quality with grandchildren. For example, might health behavior suggestions and information from grandchildren be perceived more positively than from adult children and thus have both positive physical and mental health impacts?

Another recent study found that among older adults in Lebanon having more close family was linked with better functional health (i.e., able to live on own with less difficulty), where as having more less close relationships was linked with fewer depressive symptoms (Webster et al., 2015). Huxhold and colleagues (2020) similarly found that weaker/less close ties are linked with greater positive affect over time among older adults. Given these findings there is potential for weaker ties to play a role in helping to prevent or delay cognitive decline. Together these studies highlight that different relationships have different roles to play in helping older adults maintain and optimize their health and well-being. They also show that intergenerational relationships do not occur in a vacuum. Older adults have multiple and simultaneous relationship roles, e.g., grandparent, parent, aunt/uncle, friend, co-worker. Extended family relationships and non-family ties, while for many are viewed as less close, may be a critical resource to both facilitate and help older adults maximally benefit from close intergenerational family relations. For example, weaker family and non-family ties may help older adults maintain their cognitive health necessary to support and engage with grandchildren. In addition, friends may be sources of information and guidance about activities and ways to engage grandchildren. Therefore, interventions and programs are needed to help older adults both maintain and develop diverse types of social relationships. Doing so can help facilitate more intergenerational relations and solidarity.

2) The role of environmental context in facilitating intergenerational relation.

The environments that older adults live in and spend time play an important role in shaping their intergenerational relations. The environment one lives in encompasses multiple components including the natural environment (e.g., amount of greenspace nearby, weather), built environment (e.g., housing, sidewalks, stores, parks), and social environments (e.g., demographic composition of neighborhood). These components can also intersect to create unique forms of advantage and disadvantage as it relates to opportunities to engage in intergenerational relations. In an expansion of the Convoy Model, Webster and colleagues (2019) proposed that environmental context is a specific situational characteristic that can

facilitate the development of social ties through environmental resources (e.g., parks, stores). There has been acknowledgement that the role of the environment has received less attention than other factors in the intergenerational relations literature (Kaplan et al., 2020).

In terms of neighborhood social composition, Webster and colleagues (2019) found that older adults living in neighborhoods with a greater proportion of younger people (less than age 18) report having a smaller number of close ties. This suggests that older adults living around younger people may have difficulty or limited opportunities to engage with younger people and develop close lasting relationships. Similarly, and at the intersection of the built and social environments, Moore and colleagues (2009) found that older adults who live in neighborhoods with a younger age composition were less likely to use nearby parks. While older adults living in neighborhoods with younger people provides opportunity for intergenerational relations, it appears they may not occur naturally. Azevedo (2020) discusses the need to move beyond creation of parks to intentional creation of intergenerational contact zones. These include spaces that allow people of multiple generations ‘to meet, interact, build relationships (e.g., trust, friendships), and if desired work together to address issues of local concern’ (Kaplan et al., 2020). Doing so can help move from an approach of creating spaces where we hope people of multiple generations might meet, to places where we know they will. Involving perspectives of multiple generations in the design and location of these spaces can help with these goals.

Climate is another aspect of the environment that may affect intergenerational relations. For example, as climate change is accelerating extreme weather events (e.g., droughts, fires, flooding, heat waves) are becoming increasingly common. Older adults are at increased risk of stress and negative health effects from such events (Filiberto et al., 2009). As a result, older adults may be less likely to use outside neighborhood resources (e.g., parks) or outdoor intergenerational contact zones and therefore have reduced opportunity for intergenerational contact. Additionally, climate change, one of the most pressing societal issues of our time presents both opportunities and challenges for intergenerational relations and solidarity. In terms of challenges, climate change could lead to intergenerational tension whereby younger generations blame or hold responsible older generations for the current state of the climate as well as previous inaction to address the issue (Roy & Ayalon). Ayalon and colleagues (2022) have advocated for an intergenerational approach to addressing climate change. They argue it provides a common and pressing problem that could benefit from older and younger generations working together to address.

The housing environment is a key spatial context that older adults spent a lot of time, which can both be a barrier and opportunity to facilitating intergenerational relationships. A common approach to meeting the housing needs of older adults is to live in spaces segregated from other age groups. Cases in point are retirement communities or communities that have a minimum age requirement. This is motivated in part by age-related declines in functional abilities, which may require or encourage a move from an existing place. For example, an older adult having difficulty in safely moving around a multi-story house may choose to move from an age diverse neighborhood to a more age homogenous neighborhood that has single story housing. While this move may benefit the older adult in one area, ability to live longer independently, prevent falls, etc., it may also put in place barriers to intergenerational interactions. Solutions are needed that allow housing to meet the physical, functional and social needs of older adults, while simultaneously not presenting barriers to intergenerational interactions. Multigenerational co-housing is one possible solution to this problem for those who might prefer such an environment.

3) Roles and intergenerational relations – spotlight on volunteering.

Older adults engage in multiple roles, one of which is volunteering. Opportunities for volunteering have increased in part driven by longer life expectancies. In a recent study, Webster and colleagues (2021) report that volunteering at moderate levels of volunteering (~2-3 hour per week) can be beneficial for older adults' mental health. Additionally they report that among those who experience a decrease in their social network proportion of non-family members, moderate volunteering is linked with better self-report health. In contrast, among those who experience an increase in the proportion of family in their social network, volunteering was found to have no association with self-rated health. This implicates the potential role of intergenerational family relations in determining who benefits from volunteering in later life.

A decline in non-family relationships may result from both a loss of age similar friendships, but also the addition of new family members such as grandchildren. Given that social networks on average consist of a majority of family members, social network change that is characterized by decreasing non-family members or vice versa increasing family members is often viewed negatively given common links with functional dependency and worse health (Doubova et al., 2010; Fiori et al., 2006). It appears that among this group in particular, volunteering can have positive health benefits.

In discussing these findings, Webster and colleagues call for a reframing of how social networks with a decreasing proportion of non-family members are viewed. They call for viewing increasing proportion of family in one's network as a potential resource when considering how volunteering may benefit health. Specifically, they indicate that family may help serve as an important pathway through which older adults learn about and engage in volunteering, for example by suggesting to do volunteering or alerting them of specific volunteering opportunities. They may also engage in the volunteering activity together and as a result strengthen their relationship.

Climate change, a cross-cutting theme addressed earlier in this paper is another instance whereby volunteering can intersect with intergenerational relations. Increasing opportunities are available for older adults to engage in climate change-related volunteerism (e.g., Retirees in Services to the Environment; Pillemer et al. 2017). Little work has been done on a wide spread scale though to create climate change related volunteering opportunities that include an intergenerational component. Applying the Experience Corps Model (Fried, 2020), where older adults volunteer in schools to the design of climate change volunteer activities can have that intended effect. This could result in simultaneously fostering intergenerational contacts and solidarity while helping to reduce potential for conflict around this issue.

4) New communication technologies and impact on intergenerational relations.

Increased urbanization and globalization has resulted in many younger family members living less geographically proximate to aging parents (Carr, 2019). This likely also extends to increased distance between grandparents and grandchildren in many parts of the world. Concurrent with these trends are increased internet access and the proliferation of new communication technologies (e.g., texting, social media, face-time, zoom). Antonucci and colleagues (2017) argue that while older adults are demographically less likely to adopt and use new communication technologies, they may be motivated to do so in order to stay in contact with children and grandchildren. Similarly, Gubernskaya and Treas (2016) found that in countries with a greater number of cell phone subscriptions there is also greater contact between mothers and adult children, especially daughters. Hurme, Westerback and Quadrello

(2010) have documented that while face-to-face contact is still the most common means of contact between grandchildren and grandparents, other means of communication (e.g., texting, emailing) are increasing.

Newer communication technologies allow older adults to bridge geographic barriers and stay in contact with grandchildren through sharing of experiences (e.g., sharing photos on Facebook or shared e-photo albums). These shared experiences can help maintain and even strengthen relationships from a distance. There is also potential for negative outcomes as noted by Antonucci and colleagues (2017) resulting from proliferation of these new communication technologies. For example, more technologically proficient family members may get frustrated with those less proficient members, leading to increases in negative relationship quality (e.g., getting on nerves). Also, younger family members may get annoyed or embarrassed when older family members publicly post or comment virtually on things not deemed to be socially acceptable within a generation. Additionally, there are well-documented income disparities in who has internet access and access to new communication technologies. Therefore, proliferation of these technologies may not benefit all equally in terms of their impact on intergenerational relationships unless the income divide is properly addressed.

Recommendations

- Ensure that intergenerational policies and programming acknowledge and incorporate the broader set of relationships older adults need for maintaining and further enhancing their health and well-being.
- Invest financial support in longitudinal research and secondary analysis of existing data sources (e.g., the Health and Retirement Study) to document and better understand the changing presence and role of grandchildren within the social networks of older adults as well as facilitators and outcomes.
- Develop programs and resources to help older adults develop and maintain relationships with non-family members in their proximate communities and virtually. Doing so can help older adults maintain and maximally benefit from intergenerational family relationships.
- Develop health promotion campaigns and programs that promote intergenerational sharing of health-related information and engagement in activities and behaviors enjoyed by multiple generations.
- Develop programs and platforms for older adults to share information, knowledge and experiences regarding their intergenerational relationships. Such programs could be in-person and/or virtual. Doing so can have the simultaneous benefit of enhancing older adults' weaker/friendship ties and provide them with critical information and resources to strengthen their close intergenerational family ties.
- Engage both older and younger community members to co-create intergenerational contact zones to ensure the spaces are designed to meet the specific needs as well as preferences of all generations.
- Create flexible housing options that allow older and younger generations to live in close proximity. For example housing designs that allow for redesign and adjustment to meet age-specific preferences and needs.

- Repurpose unused resources (e.g., malls) to create indoor intergenerational contact zones to mitigate the potential negative impacts of climate change on intergenerational relations.
- Provide incentives for the creation of neighborhood pull resources (i.e., things in neighborhoods that encourage older adults to get out of their homes and walk around their neighborhood) to increase the likelihood of intergenerational contact. These could include for example front yard gardens, shared min-libraries, and art installations.
- Invest in developing and promoting intergenerational volunteering activities focused on climate change. This could include for example, older adults presenting about climate change impacts in schools, and younger adults working to install rain gardens for older residents.
- Provide universal internet access in lower income housing communities to provide lower income older adults opportunities to benefit from new communication technologies. Additionally provide support for purchasing necessary devices such as smart phones and tablets. Such a program was implemented in New York City in lower income housing communities for older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic.

References

- Ajrouch, K. J., Fuller, H. R., Akiyama, H., & Antonucci, T. C. (2018). Convoys of social relations in cross-national context. *The Gerontologist*, 58(3), 488-499.
- Antonucci, T.C. (1986). Hierarchical Mapping Technique. *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging*, 10, 10-12.
- Antonucci, T. C., Ajrouch, K. J., & Manalel, J. A. (2017). Social relations and technology: Continuity, context, and change. *Innovation in aging*, 1(3), igx029.
- Antonucci, T.C., Ajrouch, K.J., & Webster, N.J. (2019). Convoys of Social Relations: Cohort Similarities and Differences over 25 years. *Psychology and Aging*, 34(8), 1158-1169.
- Antonucci, T. C., & Akiyama, H. (1987). Social networks in adult life and a preliminary examination of the convoy model. *Journal of gerontology*, 42(5), 519-527.
- Antonucci, T.C., Birditt, K.S., & Ajrouch, K. (2011). Convoys of social relations: Past, present, and future. In K.L. Fingerman, J. Smith, & C. Berg (Eds.), *Handbook of life-span development (pp.161-182)*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Antonucci, T. C., Birditt, K. S., & Webster, N. J. (2010). Social relations and mortality: A more nuanced approach. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 15(5), 649-659.
- Ayalon, L., Roy, S., Aloni, O., & Keating, N. (2023). A scoping review of research on older people and intergenerational relations in the context of climate change. *The gerontologist*, 63(5), 945-958.

- Azevedo, C. (2020). Urban Public Parks. *Intergenerational Contact Zones: Place-based Strategies for Promoting Social Inclusion and Belonging*, editors M. Kaplan, LL Thang, M. Sánchez, and J. Hoffman (pp.86-96) (London: Routledge).
- Carr, D. (2019). Aging alone? Intergenerational perspectives on social integration and isolation. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 74(8), 1391-1393.
- Doubova (Dubova), S. V., Pérez-Cuevas, R., Espinosa-Alarcón, P., & Flores-Hernández, S. (2010). Social network types and functional dependency in older adults in Mexico. *BMC Public Health*, 10(1), 104.
- Filiberto, D., Wethington, E., Pillemer, K., Wells, N., Wysocki, M., & Parise, J. T. (2009). Older people and climate change: Vulnerability and health effects. *Generations*, 33(4), 19-25.
- Fiori, K. L., Antonucci, T. C., & Cortina, K. S. (2006). Social Network Typologies and Mental Health Among Older Adults. *The Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 61(1), 25–32.
- Fried, L. P. (2020). Designing a new social infrastructure to combat loneliness in aging adults. *Generations*, 44(3), 1-12.
- Fuller, H. R., Ajrouch, K. J., & Antonucci, T. C. (2020). The convoy model and later-life family relationships. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 12(2), 126-146.
- Gubernskaya, Z., & Treas, J. (2016). Call home? Mobile phones and contacts with mother in 24 countries. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 78, 1237–1249.
- Hurme, H., Westerback, S., & Quadrello, T. (2010). Traditional and new forms of contact between grandparents and grandchildren. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 8, 264–280.
- Huxhold, O., Fiori, K. L., Webster, N. J., & Antonucci, T. C. (2020). The strength of weaker ties: An underexplored resource for maintaining emotional well-being in later life. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 75(7), 1433-1442.
- Kahn, R.L., & Antonucci, T.C. (1980). Convoys over the life course: Attachment, roles, and social support. In P.B. Baltes, & O. Brim (Eds.), *Life-span development and behavior (Vol. 3)*. New York: Academic Press.
- Kaplan, M., Thang, L. L., Sánchez, M., & Hoffman, J. (Eds.). (2020). *Intergenerational contact zones: Place-based strategies for promoting social inclusion and belonging*. Routledge.
- Moore, S., Gauvin, L., Daniel, M., Kestens, Y., Bockenholt, U., Dubé, L., & Richard, L. (2010). Associations among park use, age, social participation, and neighborhood age composition in Montreal. *Leisure Sciences*, 32(4), 318-336.
- Pillemer, K., Wells, N. M., Meador, R. H., Schultz, L., Henderson Jr, C. R., & Cope, M. T. (2017). Engaging older adults in environmental volunteerism: the retirees in service to the environment program. *The Gerontologist*, 57(2), 367-375.

Roy, S., & Ayalon, L. (2022). Intergenerational Relations in the Climate Movement: Bridging the Gap toward a Common Goal. *Intergenerational journal of environmental research and public health*, 20(1), 233.

Webster, N. J., Ajrouch, K. J., & Antonucci, T. C. (2021). Volunteering and health: The role of social network change. *Social Science & Medicine*, 285, 114274.

Webster, N. J., Ajrouch, K. J., & Antonucci, T. C. (2019). Links between neighborhood context and access to social capital in later life. *Innovation in Aging*, 3(Suppl 1), S63.

Webster, N.J., Ajrouch, K.J., Wan, W.H., & Antonucci, T.C. (2017). Environmental context and social relationships: A relational perspective on health disparities. In A.S. Dick & U. Muller (Eds.), *Advancing Developmental Science: Philosophy, Theory, and Method* (pp.210-221). New York: Psychology Press.

Webster, N. J., Antonucci, T. C., Ajrouch, K. J., & Abdulrahim, S. (2015). Social networks and health among older adults in Lebanon: The mediating role of support and trust. *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 70(1), 155-166.

BACKGROUND PAPER

Promoting intergenerational bonding in the family and community: The case of Singapore

Leng Leng THANG, National University of Singapore

Introduction

In the recent decades, there has been more awareness to promote intergenerational solidarity with the growing sense of urgency particularly felt in rapidly aging urbanized societies increasingly confronted with the undesirable consequences of age-segregation, such as age discrimination, age-based conflicts, social isolation and cultural disconnect that negatively impact well-being, social cohesion and the vision towards an age-inclusive society. In Asian societies that are experiencing rapid demographic aging, concerns with the decline in “filial piety” and familism/familism principles underpinning intergenerational support have led to state and community efforts to reinforce filial values, promote the respect of older persons, and introducing intergenerational programs to counter social isolation and ageism through generational connections (Murayama et.al., 2013; Thang, 2019; Li et.al., 2019). This paper focuses on the city-state of Singapore as a case study to understand its experience in promoting intergenerational support and bonding in the family and community. In the following, I begin with a brief overview of the demographic and policy aspects to provide a background characterizing Singapore’s experience. This is followed with discussion on some of the state and community efforts in promoting intergenerational support and bonding within the context. The paper will conclude with recommendations to better support the family and community efforts in enhancing intergenerational solidarity.

Background

Singapore is today one of the fastest aging society in the world. With a consistently low fertility rate coupled with rising life expectancy and the *coming of age* of a large cohort of baby boomers to post-age 65, the proportion of senior citizens (aged 65 and above) has increased rapidly since 2000¹, from 11.1% in 2012 to 18.4% in 2022. Singapore will become a super-aged society in 2026, by 2030, senior citizens are expected to comprise about 23.8% of the population (NPTD et.al., 2022).

Such a rapid aging trend arouses concerns around the capacity of the society in providing care and support for the older population. This is further challenged by the shrinking size of average resident households, which has fallen from 4.87 in 1980 to 3.22 in 2020². Over the last decade, three-generation households have declined in proportion from 11.3% in 2010 to 9.8% in 2020. Although nuclear households (two generation couple-based) remains the most common form of living arrangement, it has also declined from 49.2 per cent to 42.9 per cent in the same period, while one-person households increased from 12.2 percent to 16 percent (MSF, 2022). Among older-persons only households, couple-only households have risen from 27.8% in 2011 to 31% in 2021, and one person-only older households from 17.6% to 20.2% in the same period (DOS, 2022). The shift reflects an increase in singlehood and widowhood among the older population. Moreover, baby

boomers who will form the bulk of the post-65 population are expected to be healthier, more affluent and better educated (CAI, 2006), with growing preference for independent living to enjoy personal freedom. Nonetheless, the risk of social isolation could prevail particularly among those living alone and negatively impact on one's life and health expectancies (Malhotra et.al., 2021). The opportunities for frequent social connections with family and friends thus become more pertinent to the well-being of older persons in the landscape of changing household structure.

In Singapore, the government has long recognized the importance of strong families, where pro-family policies and programs are implemented with the aim of strengthening families and their capacity to care for family members. With "Family as basic unit of society" formulated as one of the five shared values in Singapore's social compact³, Singaporeans are generally socialized on the family as the bedrock of society, as reflected in their high regards on family as a strong pillar of support. In a 2016 survey on family bonds conducted by the Families for Life Council⁴, 92 percent of respondents listed family as their top most priority, ahead of personal health and financial stability (Kok, 2016). In the 2019 Social Attitudes of Singaporeans (SAS) survey, 93% of Singaporeans aged 15 years old and above reported that they have close-knit families (MSF, 2022).

In social policies relating to the support and care of older persons, family is indeed expected as a strong pillar of support under the guiding principles of "Many Helping Hands" approach. While one is expected to be self-reliant, the family assumes as the first line of care when required, "with the community as the second line of support to enable families in their care-giving role. The role of the State is to provide a framework that enables the individual, the family and the community to play their part." (Inter-Ministerial Committee on the Ageing Population, 1999:37). Such an approach has raised concerns on the burden families would face in eldercare (Mehta, 2006; Rozario and Rosetti, 2012). In response to the concerns, there have been expanded support for the individuals and families in need, including to designate the Agency of Integrated Care as the agency to coordinate and support the delivery of aged care services since 2018 (AIC, Thang and Suen, 2018).

The ideology of family as the first line of support for its older members undergirds efforts to promote intergenerational support and bonding in Singapore families. In the Inter-Ministerial Committee workgroup on cohesion and conflict in an aging society, which aims to "propose policy measures to strengthen our social fabric and intergenerational cohesion" (IMC, 1999:172), policy recommendations centre on suggestions to promote extended family ties and reciprocity. These include the following: "[T]he teaching of family values in school textbooks should also include illustrations of grandparents as an integral part of the family structure," giving family-based concessions based on extended family status at government-controlled recreational facilities, and giving additional incentives to public housing applicants who choose to stay in close proximity to their grandparents (as well as parents). The final point under "promoting extended family ties" in the report reiterates the objective that the measures will not "merely enhance intergenerational interaction or lessen intergenerational conflict. It will also help to reinforce the role of the family in supporting senior citizens and expand the resource base of the family to do so. This will help families support their older members and lessen the conflict between the rich and the poor" (IMC, 1999:177-178).

In the recent years, more policy attention has emerged to promote intergenerational solidarity in the community. In the 2015 Action Plan for Successful Aging, under the key theme “Kampong (village) for all Ages”, there was plans for the co-location of childcare and eldercare services in new HDB housing developments to promote intergenerational harmony. The refreshed 2023 Acton Plan for Successful Aging anchored on 3 C’s – Care, Contribution and Connectedness to help Singaporeans live life to the fullest further expanded efforts to strengthen intergenerational bonds in the family and the community under the ‘Connection’ theme. Community initiatives include more discussion of age-related themes in school subjects and creating more opportunities for intergenerational engagements, such as through the common language of sports, and promoting mentoring by seniors to students (MOH, 2023). These initiatives, while resonate with the 1999 Inter-Ministerial Committee, adopts the approach of older persons as social capital that could contribute and play active roles in intergenerational interaction.

The following two sections will discuss efforts to strengthen intergenerational support and bonding in the family and the community respectively. Anecdotally, young people have often shared that engagements with seniors in the community provoke their interest to interact more with their own grandparents, suggesting that community engagement as an impact on strengthening the family intergenerational experience.

Family housing policy to promote intergenerational support and bonding

Housing and Development Board (HDB), the public housing agency in Singapore plays a crucial role in encouraging and enabling close proximity or co-residence between the generations through various housing incentives schemes. The policy idea of leveraging on housing schemes to promote intergenerational support is not uncommon, as can be glimpsed through examples such as Hong Kong Housing Authority’s Harmonious Families Priority Scheme for public rental housing, and “paired units” scheme (implemented briefly in the 1970s) for close proximity living in public housing in Japan (Kose and Nakaoji, 1988). Singapore is unique for the fact that majority of the population (80%) live in public housing, and it is common for young married couples to purchase their first home from HDB. As such, the incentive schemes have wider impact on the population compared with other societies.

The various housing incentives may come in the form of cash grant and/or priority allocation for applicants who wish to live together or near their married children/parents (see hdb.gov.sg). The proximity housing grant under Married Child Priority Scheme (MCPS) started with the objective of benefiting married children/parents who are purchasing new flats (apartments) to live together or close to each other, with first priority given to co-residence. In 2015, a new flexible proximity housing grant was launched for parents and adult children who purchase resale (second-hand) flats to live with or near each other. With changing demographics and family structure, the proximity housing grant further expanded to include singles who purchase resale flats near their parents from 2018. From August 2015 to end 2018, the grant scheme has attracted 20,400 household applications, of which 83% were families and 17% singles, they made up 28 percent of total resale applications during the period (Liu 2019).

In 2018, changes were also made to the proximity condition, expanding it from 2km or same housing estate to within 4km. With the desire for more extended families to live together, the grant amount is adjusted to a higher level (from S\$20,000 to S\$30,000) for

families and singles (from S\$10,000 to S\$15,000) opting to purchase new flats to live together.

Among the variety of flat types on sale in public housing is the so-called 3Gen flats first launched in 2013 to house multi-generation families under one roof. The unit comes with four bedrooms, of which 2 are ensuite suitable for grandparents and parents. There are close to 2000 units of 3Gen flats by end 2016, with encouraging take up rate although they came with stricter resale conditions (Au-yong 2018).

In the case where both parents and married child wish to apply for new flats in the same precinct, they can make a joint application through the Multi-Generation Priority Scheme (MGPS) and choose their flats together. There is also the Senior Priority Scheme (SPS) where those applying to buy the new 2-room flexi flat can apply to either move within the same town (or within 4 km of existing property) or to move near their parents/married children. The Flexi term in such flat types refer to flexible lease of between 15 and 45 years eligible for options when the applicant is at least 55 years old, in comparison the usual lease tenure of a purchase public flat is 99 years.

Encouraged by favorable housing policy for the family, it is not uncommon for adult children and their older parents to choose to live together or close to each other, especially when they already enjoy good relationships. According to the HDB Sample Household Survey (SHS) conducted every five years, more residents aged 65 years and above have chosen to live near their married children, from 37.8% in 2013 to 44.1% in 2018 (MSF, 2022). Living close by has increased frequency of doing activities together, such as having meals together, going on outings and exchanging suggestions/advice about personal problems. Such a form of close proximity living resembles a modified extended family arrangement. Besides enabling adult children and grandchildren to care for aged parents who need support, with the norm in dual working families, grandparents living close by are often instrumental in caring for their grandchildren.

About one-third of older persons (age 55 and above) are shown to be looking after grandchildren (Kang et.al. 2013: 27) in Singapore. Grandparents, especially grandmothers may help with infant care (sometimes together with hired domestic help) and are responsible for the before and after school care of institution-going grandchildren while their parents work full-time. With busy work schedule, some young parents opt to become “weekend parents”. Although they may see their children everyday after work at their parents’ place, the children sleep over at their grandparents’ home during the working week. The state supports the role of grandparents as caregivers through the grandparent caregiver tax relief of S\$3000 where working mothers can claim.

Besides childcare, grandparents living together or separately may also help with household chores like cleaning, laundry and cooking. More importantly, grandparents show awareness of the roles they play in value transmission to the young, although grandparents agree on the need to avoid crossing into the boundary of parenting when it comes to discipline (Thang et al. 2011). In a qualitative study of 19 grandparents in Singapore, all of them prefer to live independently but nearby, even though they acknowledge the potential benefits of living together. Besides the desire for privacy, they also believe that living separately could help avoid conflicts and friction while giving their children the space to bring up their own families (Sreeja and Dommaraju, 2023).

Grandparents’ extensive support may seem invisible, but they are paramount in supporting young couples to balance career and family as well as benefiting the development of grandchildren, replacing the inadequacy of the busy parents (Quah 2015). There is often

significant reduction of grandchildren's interaction with grandparents once they start schooling, but as Quah notes, "the principles and values children absorb from the older generation in early childhood tend to strengthen their sense of identity." (ibid. 104). Studies have also shown that grandchildren who were cared for by their grandparents when young tend to feel closer with their grandparents, contributing towards the fostering of closer intergenerational bonding (Thang and Mehta 2020).

Intergenerational initiatives in the community⁵

National efforts to promote intergenerational bonding through intergenerational initiatives began in 2002 with the setting up of the taskforce to promote grandparenting and intergenerational bonding by Ministry of Community Development (the present Ministry of Social and Family Development). Formed in concurrence with IMC 1999 report on promoting intergenerational cohesion, in the four years of the taskforce's existence, the taskforce has played instrumental role in raising awareness of the needs and benefits of promoting intergenerational bonding in the family and community. This includes advocating for the setting up of Grandparents' Day to recognize the contributions of grandparents in the family; encouraging students to organize intergenerational projects through a Gen3 Fund Inter-School Competition in 2005, provided funding to promote intergenerational activities in the community and awards to recognize the program efforts among social service and non-profit organizations' in promoting intergenerational bonding.

In 2005, the taskforce was restructured and renamed as "G-Connect: Strengthening the intergenerational bond" to appeal to the wider younger generations. There were also heightened interest among the children and aging services as they led initiatives to promote intergenerational programs in the community. However, the dedicated efforts to promote intergenerational cohesion was soon diverged with the forming of two new councils, one to promote and strengthen families named the National Family Council (NFC) (which was renamed as Families for Life in 2014) in 2006, and the other to promote active aging named Council for Third Age (C3A) in 2007. Funding for intergenerational initiatives became available largely under the new Golden Opportunities Fund (GO! Fund) managed by C3A, where NFC's efforts to strengthen the families included grandparents.

C3A promotes lifelong learning, senior volunteerism and positive aging opportunities. It has been running the intergenerational learning program (ILP) since 2011, which pairs students with seniors in various forms of learning, such as teaching seniors how to use smartphones and the internet. The successful program has made positive impact on the generations' perceptions of each other (Council for Third Age, 2012). More recently, C3A started a podcast series called Generations Connect! Promoting better intergenerational understanding as the old and young come together to share their views.⁶

NFC, and later Families for Life (FFL) also play active roles in strengthening intergenerational bonds between grandparents and grandchildren. In the 2023 Action Plan for Successful Aging, FFL has laid out concrete plans to help children learn family values and respect towards their grandparents in fun engaging games and campaign to pay tribute to grandparents. There are also grandparenting seminars and various strengthening families program available at family service centers to better equip grandparents with their roles in the family (MOH, 2023).

Although state efforts to promote intergenerational bonding and programs started in early 2000s, ground-up program efforts to promote intergenerational bonding in the community

have in fact begun as early as the 1980s. The two notable pioneers of shared sites in Singapore are the Ayer Rajah Day Care Centre in operation since 1986 offering child care and day services for older persons, and the Tampines 3-in-1 Family Center set up since 1995 where childcare, after school care and day care service for older persons are purposefully co-located within close proximity to enhance intergenerational contacts (Fong-Chong, 2003). RSVP (Retired Seniors Volunteer Program), a voluntary organization promoting senior volunteerism set up in late 1990s is known for their long-run mentoring program to latchkey children after school. The program was featured in the 2023 Action Plan for Successful Aging where seniors benefit from active contribution of their life experiences. (MOH, 2023) Since 1978, Ministry of Education has established community engagement programs in schools (now called “Values in Action”), where service learning engagements with older persons in the community and institutions are common forms of intergenerational initiatives. Besides these better-known initiatives, there are also various smaller, community-based intergenerational programs which may be ad-hoc and less structured, such as festive visits of children from childcare center to a day care center for older persons.

Since the mid-2010s, there have been more innovative ground-up efforts to promote intergenerational bonding in the community. After the success of a year-long pilot intergenerational program in 2016 (Lim et.al., 2019), in 2017, the child care and eldercare services under National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) social enterprises creatively developed a 3-tier intergeneration programming model to enable all their child care and eldercare centers to engage in intergenerational programs on different desired intensity levels. The model is characterized by weaving a structured intergenerational program into the childcare curriculum and eldercare daily activities for the advanced tier. The thoughtful programming and specially designed activities go beyond just bringing the two generations together, it aims to enable learning, fun and meaningful interactions that will bring purpose for older persons and inculcate good values to the children (Goy, 2017).

In the same year, the new premise of the 39 year-old St. Joseph’s Home was launched, and widely reported in the news for being the first nursing home in Singapore to turn age-integrated by including a childcare center on its new premise. Despite disruptions during COVID-19, the staff were committed in developing opportunities for intergenerational interaction with a focus on forming quality intergenerational relationships (Yeh et.al., 2022). The St-John’s- St. Margaret’s (SJSJ) Village is another new shared site completed in mid-2021. It is the first purpose-built shared site in Singapore comprising nursing home, senior care center, childcare and infant center, medical, nursing care, respite and home-based care for older persons⁷. The efforts to link the old and young could be challenging, especially in Singapore where language divide when some seniors do not speak English – the common language for the young - which hinder communication. Moreover, parents could be apprehensive about letting their children interact with older persons. In shared sites, lack of relevant staff training and logistics issues may impact the sustainability of intergenerational programs (Yeh et.al., 2022; Shannon and Lee, 2023) while at the same time, shared/co-locations are unique in offering proximate opportunity for intergenerational bonding and have great potential in contributing towards the building of community for all ages .

Since the 2015 plan to co-locate services for the old and young to promote intergenerational connections, 13 senior care centres are said to have co-located with childcare centres by end 2021 (MOH, 2023). The first of such co-locations set up in 2018 is situated in Kampung Admiralty, a new public housing development which has received much limelight for being

the first public housing “retirement village” in the nation. The “vertical village” includes two blocks of 100 studio apartments for older persons set in close proximity to amenities, healthcare and social activity hubs (Azzali et.al., 2022).

Compared with the initial stagnation after the establishment of two co-location sites in the 1980s and 1990s, the current new wave of interest in expanding co-locating/shared site spaces has benefited from more wide-ranging support and motivation towards optimizing service integration for all generations. It also signals new direction towards more integrated forms of services as a strategy in Singapore solutions to promote aging-in-place and achieve intergenerational solidarity through the building of a community for all ages.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In 2012 – the year where the baby boomers first turned 65 years old, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong was asked if he would like to have done anything differently since becoming prime minister in 2004. He said he would have paid greater attention to the challenges of an aging society in his premiership. “It's always been sort of there in the public discourse, but not something we have succeeded in bringing to the forefront of people's attention, to say: ‘look if we don't do something, in 20 years' time, the population is going to have an average age, say 60, and this is going to be a retirement home and not a vibrant city.’”(Mathews and Leong, 2014, c.f. Chan, 2012).

Although the runway is short for Singapore confronted with a fast speed of aging, the attention on strengthening intergenerational bonds in the family and community conceived as part of the aging policy plan is not new. Moving forward, more baby boomers are expected to be engaged and play active social roles in building relationships with the young through learning, caring and playing together in both the family and community contexts. At the same time, it is important to ensure inclusiveness, where all generations and people of different abilities are supported when they need care and support.

The following are a list of recommendations put forward for discussion.

1. Policymakers should adopt an intergenerational lens to ensure that policy decisions are made based on considerations of how it enhances intergenerational relationships and bonding.
2. Bring awareness to the importance of family and intergenerational bonding through annual events and celebrations, such as intergenerational week and family week/year. For example, 2022 was the Year of Celebrating SG Family in Singapore
3. Include life-course understanding and ways to set up intergenerational programs in the trainings for child care and elder care workers so as to encourage them to formulate intergenerational activities in their respective work settings.
4. Institutions for older persons (such as nursing home, retirement home etc) should have a children’s playground on site to enable neighbourhood children and children visiting their relatives in the institutions to spend more time on the ground of services for older persons.
5. Encourage the building of shared sites by providing guidelines to enable space sharing across age groups.

References

- Agency for Integrated Care (AIC). (n.d). Homepage. Retrieved from <https://www.aic.sg/#>
- Au-yong, R. (2018). Larger 3Gen HDB flats for multi-generation families popular, with 8 in 10 units booked. *The Straits Times*, February 14.
- Azzali, S., Yew, A. S. Y., Wong, C., & Chaiechi, T. (2022). Silver cities: planning for an ageing population in Singapore. An urban planning policy case study of Kampung Admiralty. *Archnet-IJAR: International Journal of Architectural Research*, 16(2), 281-306.
- Chan, R. (2012). PM wishes he had stressed population woes sooner. *The Straits Times*, 29 November.
- Committee on Ageing Issues (CAI). (2006). Report on the ageing population. Singapore: Ministry of Social and Family Development.
- Council for Third Age (2012) An Intergenerational Learning Program in Singapore, *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 10:1, 86-92.
- Department of Statistics (DOS) of Singapore (2022). Population trends 2022. Singapore. Accessible at [population2022.pdf](#)
- Fong-Chong, A. (2008). Tampines 3-in-1 Family Centre, Singapore. In *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 1(1), 169-171.
- Goy, P. (2017). Inter-generational program launched to spur interaction between children and the elderly. *The Straits Times*, March 27.
- Inter-Ministerial Committee on the Ageing Population. (1999) Report on the Ageing Population, Singapore: Ministry of Community Development and Sports.
- Kang, S.H., Tan, E.S. and Yap, M.T. (2013). National Survey of Senior Citizens 2011. Institute of Policy Studies Report, University of Singapore.
- Kok, X.H. (2016). "Survey finds that family is the top priority for Singaporeans." *The Straits Times*, 18 May.
- Kose, S. & Nakaohji, M. (1988) "Development of a design guideline of dwellings for the aging society - a Japanese perspective", *Proceedings of CIB 89, Theme I Vol. I*, pp. 77-86.
- Li, Q., Kaplan, M., & Thang, L. L. (2019). Intergenerational programs and practices in China: Results based on a web search method. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 18(1), 1-16.
- Lim, C.C.L., Low, C.L.T, S,B.H., Thang, L.L. And Thian, A.L. Generativity: Establishing and Nurturing the Next Generation. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships* . 17(3):368-379. 2019
- Liu, V., 2019, More than 20,000 households have benefited from Proximity Housing Grant: HDB. *The Straits Times*, 8 February.

- Malhotra R, Tareque MI, Saito Y, Ma S, Chiu C-T, Chan A. Loneliness and health expectancy among older adults: A longitudinal population-based study. *J Am Geriatr Soc.* 2021;1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.17343>
- Mehta, K.K. (2006). A critical review of Singapore's policies aimed at supporting families caring for older members. In *Journal of Aging & Social Policy*, 18(3-4), 43-57.
- Ministry of Health. (2023). *Living life to the fullest: 2023 Action Plan for Successful Aging*. Singapore.
- Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) (2022). *Families and households in Singapore, 2010-2020*. Singapore. Accessible at <https://www.msf.gov.sg/docs/default-source/research-data/families-and-households-in-singapore-2010-2020.pdf>
- Murayama, Y., Takeuchi, R., Ohba, H., Yasunaga, M., Kuraoka, M., Nonaka, K., & Fujiwara, Y. (2013). Social concern and the present state of intergenerational programs. An analysis of newspaper articles and a survey of organizations. [*Nihon Koshu Eisei Zasshi*] *Japanese Journal of Public Health*, 60(3), 138-145.
- National Population and Talent Division (NPTD), Strategy Group, Prime Minister's Office Singapore, Department of Statistics, Ministry of Home Affairs Immigration & Checkpoints Authority, Ministry of Manpower. (2022). *Population in brief 2022*. Singapore. Accessible at <https://www.population.gov.sg/files/media-centre/publications/Population-in-brief-2022.pdf>
- Quah, S., 2005, *Home and Kin: Family in Asia*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic.
- Rozario, P.A., & Rosetti, A.L. (2012). "Many Helping Hands": A review and analysis of long-term care policies, programs, and practices in Singapore. In *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 55(7), 641-658.
- Shannon E. Jarrott & Kathy Lee (2023) *Shared Site Intergenerational Programs: A National Profile*, *Journal of Aging & Social Policy*, 35:3, 393-410.
- Sreeja, N. & Dommaraju, P. (2023). Grandparenting and intergenerational solidarity in Singapore. *Journal of Population and Social Studies*, 31, 271-285.
- Thang, L.L., Mehta, K., Usui, T. and Tsuruwaka, M. (2011). Being a Good Grandparent: Roles and Expectations in Intergenerational Relationships in Japan and Singapore. *Marriage and Family Review* 47(8): 548-570. 2011.
- Thang, L.L. (2011). Promoting intergenerational understanding between the young and old: the case of Singapore. UN Report of the Expert Group Meeting in Qatar, March 2011. Accessible at http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/docs/egm11/EGM_Expert_Paper_Theng_Leng_Leng.pdf
- Thang, L.L. (2019). "Socio-cultural aspects: Family and filial support". In *Ageing in Asia Contemporary trends and policy issues*. K.H. Phua, L.G. Goh and M. T. Yap (eds.). Singapore: World Scientific. 2019.

Thang, .L. and Mehta, K. “Teach me to be filial: Intergenerational care in Singapore families.” In *Beyond Filial Piety: Rethinking Aging and Caregiving in Contemporary East Asian Societies*. J. Shea, K. Moore and H. Zhang (eds.). New York: Berghahn. 2020.

Yeh, I. L., Wong, S. Y. X., Safaruan, L. S. B., Kang, Y. Q., Wong, M. S., & Wilson, I. M. (2022). Development and Implementation of an Intergenerational Bonding Program in a Co-Located Model: A Case Study in Singapore. *Social Sciences*, 11(12), 557.

¹ In 2022, Singapore population totalled 5.64 million, including citizen (3.55m), permanent residents (0.52m) and non-residents (1.56m) (NPTD et.al. 2022, p.5)

² Singapore residents by age group, ethnic group and sex, end June, annual.

<https://www.tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg/publicfacing/createDataTable.action?refId=14911>

³ The other four shared values are: Nation before community and society above self, Community support and respect for individuals, Consensus, not conflict, Racial and religious harmony.

file:///C:/Users/jpstll/Downloads/Social-Compact-Summary31234866-98a1-4131-912c-91937aae7eea.pdf

⁴ The Families for Life Council (FFL) is a people-led movement to build strong and resilient families, working in partnership with government agencies, community partners and corporates. FFL led the efforts when 2022 was dedicated by the Ministry of Social and Family Development as the Year of Celebrating SG Families (YCF) to recognise the importance of families. <https://familiesforlife.sg/family-365plus/Pages/default.aspx>

⁵ Discussion on intergenerational initiatives and developments before 2010 is adopted from Thang (2011).

⁶ The podcast series is a collaboration with Vintage Radio.sg and can be accessed through

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJVJf0k73MA&list=PLeZf-hYnj1dSjtVaqv8gPgm_x_qwBhyVf3

⁷ See SJSN Nursing Home, <https://www.samh.org.sg/st-andrews-nursing-home/#sjsn>



Grandfamilies – Fostering Intergenerational Solidarity Through Relative Caregivers (United States)

*Ana Beltran, J.D., Director, Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network:
A National Technical Assistance Center, Generations United*

At least 2.5 million children in the United States are being raised by grandparents, other extended family members, or close family friends, with no parents in the home.¹ This collective group of caregivers can be referred to as “relative caregivers,” because although many are not related to the children by blood, marriage, or adoption, they are relatives in the sense that they are part of the child’s culture, tribe, and/or community. That intergenerational, familial, and cultural solidarity between children and their caregivers is fundamental to the strengths of these families. Decades of research shows that these children thrive due to this solidarity, and the relatives help children buffer the effects of trauma caused by the situation leading their parents to be unable to parent them.²

An array of parental causal factors creates these “grandfamilies” or “kinship families.” The parents may be struggling with substance use disorders, deceased, incarcerated, deported, living in another state or country for a job, or too severely disabled to manage caregiving.³ These parental issues touch every socioeconomic level, race, ethnicity, and geographic area in the United States, and consequently these families are diverse. However, Black and Indigenous children are overrepresented in grandfamilies.⁴ The overrepresentation is likely a result of both communities’ cultural strengths of intergenerational caregiving, and also of institutional racism and implicit biases against these peoples and their shared parenting models.⁵

U.S. Census Bureau data on grandfamilies is limited, and we cannot definitively say that there has been an increase in grandfamilies in recent years. However, data does show that with each drug epidemic in the U.S., parent-child separation at the U.S. Southern border, and the COVID-19 pandemic, we have noted increased reliance on relative caregivers. The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) is often the clearest data source identifying these increases over time. AFCARS is a national database to which states submit their child welfare data. Because it is not self-reported data like that of the Census Bureau, the data is more reliable and can note trends. While only a small fraction of children raised by relatives are involved with the child welfare system – there are eighteen children raised by relatives outside of child welfare for every one child in child welfare with relatives – that system relies heavily on relatives to care for children in its legal custody.⁶ AFCARS shows that during the last decade there has been a ten-percentage point increase in the number of children in the child welfare system who are placed with relatives, and now 35 percent of all children in foster care are with

relatives.⁷ The child welfare system places children with relatives more than ever before for an array of reasons, including the periodic increases in children entering foster care due to epidemics, pandemics, and family separation policies, along with a shortage of non-related foster parents.

Grandfamilies' Strengths

One of the positive reasons we are seeing more children placed with relatives is due to a growing acknowledgement of decades of research showing the children fare better when placed with relatives than with non-relatives. This research is also why there has been a preference in federal law for placing children with relatives for almost thirty years, and why all states have a variation of this type of preference.⁸

The research proves that there are many benefits to placing children with relatives, rather than with caregivers who do not know them, their culture, or their roots.⁹ Children in foster care with relatives have more stable and safe childhoods than children in foster care with non-relatives, with a greater likelihood of having a permanent home. They experience fewer school changes, have better behavioral and mental health outcomes, and report that they “always felt loved.” They keep their connections to their siblings, their family and community, and their cultural identity. Moreover, children in foster care with relatives are less likely to re-enter the foster care system after returning to their birth parents. If returning to their parents is not possible, relatives tend to be willing to adopt or become permanent guardians. About 34 percent of all children adopted from foster care are adopted by relatives, and 12 percent of children who exit foster care exit into guardianships.¹⁰

On top of the many benefits to children, caregivers report that they gain from their role, as well, often citing an increased sense of purpose. Birth parents may also value that their children remain connected to family and friends.¹¹

Grandfamilies' Challenges

Grandfamilies also face an array of challenges, including two that are fundamentally different than those faced by parent-headed families. Parents have automatic legal rights and responsibilities for their children under the U.S. Constitution, while relative caregivers do not. Moreover, these caregivers did not plan or expect to raise these children. They often step up to raise children at a moment's notice – sometimes in the middle of the night. The parents may not have signed a legal document conferring rights and responsibilities for the child to the caregiver, and the child welfare system may not be involved. So, a grandmother, uncle, godmother, or other caregiver is left to try to legally consent to health care for the child, obtain authority over educational decisions, and include the child on their private health insurance or get them public coverage through Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program. The solution is often to try to obtain a legal relationship – but that takes time and money. Courts are involved. Notice must be provided to both parents, with weeks given to respond.

Even with a legal relationship, the practical issues can be overwhelming, including how to pay for food for a mouth one did not plan or expect to feed and where to create a bedroom when the caregiver may be retired and living in a studio apartment or in adult-only senior housing.

To complicate these challenges, because of the concept of federalism rooted in the U.S. Constitution, each state has unique authority to create its own laws governing temporary and permanent legal relationships. State authority extends to the power to tax its residents and operate its own governmental agencies.

Among those agencies, each state has its own child welfare agency with the power to remove children from their parents and place them with other relatives or with non-related foster parents. While over a third of all children in child welfare custody in the United States are placed with relatives, the manner in which each agency operates and treats relative caregivers is dramatically different. Some license and support all relatives serving as foster parents, while most rely on relatives to provide care without giving the families monthly financial support. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled over 40 years ago that relatives serving as foster parents must be supported at the same level as non-relative foster parents, but only if the relatives are licensed by a state according to its own standards.¹² Those standards, the federal government has said, must be the same for relatives and non-relatives.¹³ Consequently, relatives are asked to fit into a licensing scheme not designed for them. Relatives get a child placed with them by the state before pursuing licensure and are asked to care for the child before any monthly financial support begins. Also, because the licensing process is typically complicated, lengthy, and includes standards that have more to do with socioeconomic bias and litigation than with child safety, many relatives do not think they can become licensed, are not encouraged and helped to become licensed, or are actively discouraged from pursuing licensure. The impact of federal laws and policies is that most states do not license many relatives and children in their care do not receive monthly foster care maintenance payments, unlike all children in the care of non-relative foster parents.

U.S. Social Institutions in Silos

Although the U.S. has federal and state government agencies supporting families in at least 50 different ways, one challenge is fairly uniform: government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often operate in silos that limit their ability to support the families. For example, child welfare often does not know that there are programs within aging that can help the families, and vice versa. And aging and child welfare are just two types of systems. There are many others in the United States, including disability, education, housing, and nutrition, all of which are important to the families. These agencies and NGOs may not identify the caregivers as part of “grandfamilies” or “kinship families” or use those terms. Consequently, they may not know to connect the families to other supports, like a kinship navigator program.

Promising Programs, Practices, and Policies

Kinship Navigator Programs

Starting in the 1990s, states and communities began developing innovative programs known as “kinship navigator programs.” The basis for these programs is the acknowledgment that systems impacting the families are in silos. These programs are designed to help caregivers connect with services and supports for them and the children they raise, and they have been proven to have many positive outcomes. Early research showed that they promote safety for caregivers and children; children have higher rates of obtaining legally permanent homes through guardianship and reunification with parents; and the families have improved well-being, with results showing that kinship navigator programs are successful at ameliorating the needs of grandfamilies.¹⁴

Federal Cross-System Collaboration and Technical Assistance Center

The U.S. Congress and the Administration for Community Living (ACL) in the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services saw similar challenges and responded accordingly. In 2018, Congress passed a law calling for the creation of an Advisory Council on Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (SGRG), whose members consisted of representatives from relevant federal agencies, relative caregivers, and subject matter experts.¹⁵ Their work resulted in an initial Report to Congress and a joint National Caregiving Strategy to Support Family Caregivers, created in partnership with the Recognize, Assist, Include, Support, and Engage (RAISE) Family Caregiving Advisory Council. Each Council is in the process of renewing with new members to take action implementing the Strategy.

In 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act appropriated \$10 million over five years for the first-ever national technical assistance center on grandfamilies and kinship families.¹⁶ After a competitive process through ACL, Generations United was awarded the cooperative agreement to help state government agencies and NGOs better serve the families. The new technical assistance center is focused on supporting state and tribal government systems and NGOs, and elevating promising state practices and programs, so that all families receive more and better support. Among the most promising programs and practices are those that connect the many systems impacting the families so they can work together with and on behalf of the families.

Statewide Kinship Working Groups

In addition to the federal Advisory Council, cross-system work is also happening at the state level. Washington’s Kinship Advisory Group was pivotal in the development of its kinship navigator program and continues to bring agency leads, caregivers, and state legislators together to make change for the families. The model of working statewide and bringing key stakeholders together has resulted in significant reforms for grandfamilies in Massachusetts, Colorado, and other states as well.

Recommendations

There are many lessons learned over the recent decades of innovations that can be leveraged to continue to make progress so that children and caregivers in grandfamilies are well supported.

A fundamental, overall strategy for creating responsive and supportive services at all levels of government and by NGOs is to **include relative caregivers in the initial design and implementation of programs, policies, and services that impact them**. This includes hiring and training them to provide services and support to their caregiver peers.

Among other key recommendations for governments and NGOs:

- **Collect and analyze data on all grandfamilies.** In the United States, the Census Bureau collects data on grandparents who self-identify as responsible for grandchildren, and similar data for their grandchildren. While both data sets include broad racial and ethnic breakdowns, they do not include racial and ethnic breakdowns within categories such as poverty and disability. This information is critical to informing services and supports and identifying racial disparities. Similar demographic data is needed for other relatives, such as aunts and uncles, and the children they raise.
- **Create kinship advisory councils and designate funding** for their management. Ensure that councils include relative caregivers, government agency staff, subject matter experts, and policymakers.
- **Consider refundable tax credits or subsidies for relative caregivers.** In the United States, policymakers and advocates are exploring the concept of a refundable Relative Caregiver Tax Credit. Refundability means that if the credit exceeds an individual's tax liability, the credit is paid as a refund. This allows caregivers who do not make enough income to owe taxes to benefit from the support. In the United States, supporting relative caregivers through tax credits, rather than welfare programs like TANF, has several advantages. Like all federal tax credits in the U.S., such a credit would not be considered income and thereby would not jeopardize any means-tested public benefits that the family receives. A tax credit has the further advantage of not requiring a separate application process, which can be lengthy and intrusive.

In addition to the Relative Caregiver Tax Credit, consider tax credits or subsidies to support relative caregivers who obtain court-ordered legal custody or adoption, thereby encouraging these families to become legally permanent. Adoption, in the United States, is frequently the only way for children to be included in their caregiver's private health insurance and is the only way for children to access their caregiver's veteran's benefits.

- **Allow for commonsense foster care licensing standards for relative foster family homes that are different from those used for non-relative foster family homes.** Different standards acknowledge the strengths of caregivers who know the children, their families, their culture, and their communities.
- **Enact laws governing legal relationships and viable, temporary alternatives that are responsive to the needs of grandfamilies.** For example, in the United States, state educational and health care consent laws allow caregivers to complete a form without court involvement that allows them to legally consent to school services and health care on behalf of the children they raise.¹⁷
- **Promote kinship navigator programs serving all grandfamilies,** regardless of child welfare involvement, which help connect caregivers and children to services and supports.

Conclusion

“...most people go to grandma’s house and get spoiled but for me it was the only safe place I had...getting to live with grandma was like ‘going to grandma’s house’ all the time. I had more love there than anywhere else in my life.”

- Chad Dingle, raised by his grandmother, Joan Dingle

Millions of young adults like Chad are thriving due to the care of their relatives. The love of family has supported these youth through the trauma of parental separation and has kept them connected to their roots. Generations United and its partners will continue to support all the Chads and Joans throughout the U.S. and will celebrate them as part of the Thirtieth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2024 (IYF+30).

¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center. “Children in kinship care in the United States.” 2020-2022. <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/10455-children-in-kinship-care?loc=1&loct=1#detailed/1/any/false/2479/any/20160,20161>.

² Generations United. “Children Thrive in Grandfamilies.” May 2023. <https://www.gu.org/app/uploads/2023/05/23-Children-Thrive-in-Grandfamilies.pdf>

³ Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center. “Kinship/Grandfamilies: Strengths & Challenges.” December 2022. <https://www.gksnetwork.org/resources/grandfamilies-kinship-families-strengths-challenges/>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See www.gksnetwork.org/kinship-data/ for an explanation of this data calculation.

⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau. “The AFCARS report, Preliminary FY 2008 Estimates (No. 18).” June 2011. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/afcars-report-18> and “The AFCARS report, Preliminary FY 2021 Estimates (No. 29).” November 2022. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/afcars-report-29>

⁸ Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. 1997. 42 U.S.C. 671(a)(19); and grandfamilies.org. “Kinship Foster Care and Licensing.” 2023.

<https://www.grandfamilies.org/Topics/Kinship-Foster-Care-Licensing>

⁹ Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center. “Kinship/Grandfamilies: Strengths & Challenges.” December 2022. <https://www.gksnetwork.org/resources/grandfamilies-kinship-families-strengths-challenges/>

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau. “The AFCARS report, Preliminary FY 2021 Estimates (No. 29).” November 2022. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/afcars-report-29>

¹¹ Hartwell-Walker, Marie. “Challenges and Benefits for Grandparent Caregivers.” 2015. Psych Central.

<http://psychcentral.com/lib/challenges-and-benefits-for-grandparent-caregivers>

¹² *Youakim v. Miller*, 440 U.S. 125, 99 S.Ct. 957, 59 L.Ed. 2d 194 (1979).

<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/425/231/>

¹³ 45 C.F.R. 1355.20. <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-45/subtitle-B/chapter-XIII/subchapter-G/part-1355/section-1355.20>

¹⁴ James Bell Associates. “Family Connection Discretionary Grants 2009-Funded Grantees Cross-Site Evaluation Report – Final.” 2013.

[https://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/Documents/FFPSA/Family%20Connections%20Cross-Site%20Discretionary%20Grants%20\(2013\).pdf?ver=QdydKQipUtpc2r6w0xgUAQ%3d%3d](https://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/Documents/FFPSA/Family%20Connections%20Cross-Site%20Discretionary%20Grants%20(2013).pdf?ver=QdydKQipUtpc2r6w0xgUAQ%3d%3d)

¹⁵ Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act. 2018. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/1091/text>.

¹⁶ American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1319/text>.

¹⁷ Generations United. “Educational and Health Care Consent Laws: Ensure that children in grandfamilies can access fundamental services.” 2014. <https://www.gu.org/app/uploads/2018/05/Grandfamilies-Report-State-Educational-and-Health-Care-Consent-Laws-Brief.pdf>

Changing Demographics Can Result in Strengthening Families Symposium
Generations United Global Conference
25 July 2023 Washington DC

Protecting Intergenerational Solidarity in Families and Communities *
Donna M. Butts, Executive Director
Generations United

“Nobody has ever before asked the nuclear family to live all by itself in a box the way we do...with no relatives, no support, we’ve put it in an impossible situation.” Margaret Mead

Families are the foundation of our communities and global society. The bookend generations, our young and old, hold civil society together. Generations have always been, and will continue to be, interdependent to survive and thrive. Strong connections across generations can lead to solving the most persistent development challenges such as poverty, inequality, and social exclusion.

Throughout our lives, we receive and give care while collecting, managing, and passing on resources and stories. Such a social compact between generations not only ensures a higher level of basic survival but also contributes to the ability of human beings to flourish and make rich contributions at every age. Families and communities invest in the next generation, convinced that this is how society progresses. It is expected that they will reciprocate and be better prepared to care for those who are younger and older, while advancing the well-being of societies. The circle of life completes and continues carrying us forward.

Throughout their lives, people in all cultures maintain close relationships with members of their families. This remains true even as the definition of ‘family’ rapidly expands around the globe. Many factors influence this change, including growing numbers of blended and cohabiting families, unmarried couples, single heads of households and childless couples, as well as changing views on same-sex marriage. Today it’s not unusual for families to include great grandparents and great aunts and uncles and even great greats, because people are living longer.

Older adults, related or not, have always played a significant, but often overlooked, role in supporting families. This so-called ‘grandparent advantage’ – the ability to recycle human knowledge, understanding, culture and experience – benefits future generations and is essential to creating strong, healthy families. The grandparent advantage manifests itself in many ways. It can be thought of as a continuum measured by the degree to which grandparents are involved in family life. This can range from older adults who may have occasional contact with children and youth to those that provide some childcare and/or financial assistance or those that provide a home and full-time care, acting as parents in skipped-generation households. The grandparent advantage also illustrates the reciprocity that is intrinsic to intergenerational programs that connect unrelated older and younger generations.

Policies, programs, and services that keep generations apart ignore what research and practice demonstrate over and over again—mixing generations is beneficial at every age (Generations United, 2021). With the number of older adults increasing around the globe, we have an incredible opportunity to strengthen communities and

families through intergenerational solutions that eliminate age segregation and help change the discourse about aging from burden to benefit.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

As mentioned in other papers, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in the number of grandfamilies. In 2022, a US Senate Special Committee on Aging hearing drew attention to 140,000 “COVID orphans” in the care of relatives (Senate Special Committee on Aging, 2022).

In addition to the increase in skipped-generation households, the number of multigenerational households in the US, those consisting of three or more generations, grew significantly during the pandemic as families were forced to re-evaluate how to care for themselves and their loved ones. While the trend toward multigenerational living began decades earlier, a survey conducted in January 2021 by Harris Poll on behalf of Generations United found an estimated 26 percent of all Americans are now living in a multigenerational household (Generations United, 2021).

In Family Matters: Multigenerational Living is on the Rise and Here to Stay, Generations United reported that families cited numerous benefits from living together including caregiving, enhancing bonds between family members, and improving finances. The survey found among those living in a multigenerational household, nearly 6 in 10 (57 percent) say they started or were continuing to live together because of the COVID-19 pandemic and more than 7 in 10 (72 percent) said they planned to continue doing so long-term. The study confirmed that while families may come together because of need, they often stay together by choice. Even more striking, an astonishing 98 percent of the families said their multigenerational family functioned successfully. Still policies and stigma continue to push against a trend that is here to stay.

Beyond families, the pandemic, resulted in additional societal challenges and that can be addressed, at least in part, through intergenerational solutions.

Reported learning loss among students who were forced into remote learning is a major setback that will take years to address. Globally, students lost out on about 35% of a normal school years’ worth of learning. Other studies found two decades worth of progress in math and reading among 9 years olds was wiped out and 8th grade math scores declined in 49 of 50 states. Experts are calling for “high dosage tutoring” to help compensate for the loss (Washington Post, 2023). Intergenerational tutoring programs draw on the resource of older adults in communities. They have been proven effective. One shared site in Oklahoma estimates the children in their pre-k and kindergarten classes graduate to first grade with reading levels one to two grades above other first graders because of Grand Readers an intergenerational reading program (Generations United and the Eisner Foundation, 2019).

Loneliness and social isolation surfaced as serious issues that impact younger and older generations more than other ages. In May 2023, the United States Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy, released a new Surgeon General Advisory, *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation*, calling attention to the public health crisis of loneliness, isolation, and lack of connection in our country. The physical health consequences of poor or insufficient connection include a 29 percent increased risk of heart disease, a 32 percent increased risk of stroke, and a 50 percent increased risk of developing dementia for older adults. Additionally, lacking social connection increases risk of premature death by more than 60 percent. Loneliness and isolation increase the risk for individuals to develop mental health challenges in their lives (Office of the Surgeon General, 2023).

In the report the Surgeon General proposes A National Strategy to Advance Social Connection. Several of the pillars cited, can be advanced using an intentional integrational lens.

Role of Intergenerational Programs

Intergenerational programs are defined as programs, policies, and practices that increase cooperation, interaction, and exchange between people of different generations, allowing them to share their talents and resources, and support each other in relationships that benefit both the individuals and their community (Generations United, 2010).

Intergenerational programs play an important role in promoting intergenerational solidarity in families and should be encouraged and supported. Dr. Leng Leng Thang found intergenerational programs provide a platform for developing positive relationships across generations and strengthen the quality of ties between family members. A study in Europe found that younger people engaged in intergenerational programs showed more interest in the older members of their own families.

Intergenerational programs vary around the US and the globe and generally fall into four categories - young serving old such as programs where young people teach older people how to use their cell phones and other technology, perform home safety inspections and household chores or help elder immigrants study for their citizenship exams; Old serving young such as tutoring in schools, mentoring teen mothers or providing safe passage for children walking to school; young and old serving together such as intergenerational orchestras, programs where young help older Meals on Wheels drivers delivery meals to home bound seniors, identify and address environmental concerns, or teaching math and science together to younger children; and intergenerational shared sites such as an adult day care co-located with a child care center, a high school and senior center in the same building, or an after school program located at a senior housing development.

These programs have been proven to save dollars while making sense. All are developed with intension and respect for reciprocity and the strengths of each generation. All require us to use an intergenerational lens or frame and not think of generations in isolation. (Butts, 2013)

Use of Space and Place

Intergenerational facilities use space to encourage interaction across generations. Intergenerational shared sites provide an ideal blueprint for attacking age segregation and supporting all generations in families. A study by Virginia Tech University also found that these centers save dollars while making sense. Only one center or park needs to be maintained and is less costly to run because of shared staff and infrastructure.

The Best of Both Worlds: A Closer Look at Creating Spaces That Connect Young and Old encourages development of indoor and outdoor space as safe meeting places for young and old. (Generations United and The Eisner Foundation, 2019). It directly supports the United Nations Strategic Development Goal (SDG) 11 which includes “access to safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.”

Intergenerational shared sites are also reflected in the Surgeon General’s six pillars to combat loneliness and social isolation. It includes a call to Strengthen Social Infrastructure that points out connections are influenced by physical elements in a community such as parks, libraries, and other community spaces. It calls on communities to design environments to establish and scale community connection programs and invest in bringing people

together. A new guide published by the American Planning Association provides a roadmap to do just this (Katz & Kaplan, 2023).

In closing, the late Dr. Mary Catherine Bateson once said, we are living longer but thinking shorter. Our elders have a responsibility to be the champions of the next generations. The importance of their roles has been demonstrated time and again by the "grandparent advantage." Intergenerational solidarity is essential to healthy families and civil societies. Considering our changing demographics, going forward we need to adjust existing policies, programs, and services and adopt new ones to intentionally strengthen relationships among generations.

Overarching Policy Recommendation

Encourage governments to make age integration a core value and consider an all-generations approach to developing policies designed to reinforce intergenerational solidarity. Simple questions such as whether all generations are being viewed as assets can provide standards to evaluate whether a proposed policy is family friendly. Generations United suggests four principles to judge policies by:

- make lifetime well-being for all the highest priority
- consider the impact of every action on each generation
- unite rather than divide the generations for the greatest social and financial impact
- recognize and support every generation's ability to contribute to the well-being of their families and communities (Generations United, 2023)

Recommendations

Review existing policies from an intergenerational perspective to ensure that they support family-based approaches and do not isolate individual members such as children or the growing population of older adults.

At a national level, consider establishing a Ministry or Ombudsperson for Intergenerational solidarity to protect all generations and build new alliances between those who work on their behalf to build inclusive societies and support families and communities.

Broaden family policy to encompass ageing policy and integrate not only the needs but also the strengths of each generation. At the same time, expand ageing policy to include family and family supports.

Use the 30th International Year of the Family to call on countries to promote intergenerational dialogues and mutual understanding. Properly planned these can increase understanding and raise awareness of the importance of family for the well-being of societies.

Strengthen or create social protection and antipoverty programs such as pensions, social security, conditional cash transfers, subsidized guardianships, and dependent care credits.

Address barriers such as those found in financing and zoning that inhibit growth in the number of multigenerational families and increase incentives to establish such households.

Encourage leaders at all levels of government and civil society to adopt an age integrated approach to community and urban planning and commit dollars to support the effort.

Improve supports and services for caregivers by developing family caregiver support programs, lifespan respite care and financial supports such as refundable tax credits, stipends, housing allowances and others. Initiate or improve family leave policies.

Endnotes

Generations United. (2021). Making the Case for Intergenerational Programs.

<https://www.gu.org/app/uploads/2021/03/2021-MakingTheCase-WEB.pdf>

United States Senate Special Committee on Aging. (2022). Strengthening Support for Grandfamilies during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond <https://www.aging.senate.gov/hearings/strengthening-support-for-grandfamilies-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-beyond>

Generations United. (2021). Family Matters: Multigenerational Living is on the Rise and Here to Stay.

<https://www.gu.org/explore-our-topics/multigenerational-households/>

Washington Post. 2023. A solution to covid learning loss.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/05/05/covid-learning-loss-tutoring/>

Generations United and the Eisner Foundation. (2019). The Best of Both Worlds: A Closer Look at Creating Spaces That Connect Young and Old. <https://www.gu.org/app/uploads/2019/06/Intergenerational-Report-BestofBothWorlds.pdf>

Office of the Surgeon General. (2023). New Surgeon General Advisory Raises Alarm About Devastating Impact of Loneliness Isolation United States. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/05/03/new-surgeon-general-advisory-raises-alarm-about-devastating-impact-epidemic-loneliness-isolation-united-states.html> & <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

Generations United. (2010). <https://www.gu.org/projects/program-certification/>

Butts, Donna. (2013) Remarks at the United Nations - Advancing Intergenerational Solidarity - International Day of Families. <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/docs/IDF2013DONNABUTTS.pdf>

Katz, I. and Kaplan, M.S. (2023). Intergenerational Community Planning, American Planning Association.

<https://www.gu.org/resources/intergenerational-community-planning/>

Generations United. (2023). Generations United Policy Priorities for the 118th Congress.

<https://www.gu.org/app/uploads/2023/02/GU-118th-PPA-Final-PDF.pdf>

* This paper draws primarily from the Generations United reports cited above and previous papers written for United Nations Expert Group Meetings and observances

Butts, Donna M., Thang, Leng Leng, & Hatton Yeo, Alan. (2012). Background paper on Policies and Programmes Supporting Intergenerational Relations.

Butts, Donna M., (2015). Systemic Mainstreaming of the family across the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Butts, Donna M. (2018). Intergenerational sites: new trends in urban planning, global trends, and good practices from the US and beyond.