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Inter- and Intragenerational Exchanges and Subjective Quality of Life of Middle-aged Adults in Poland

Background

Middle age, typically between the late 30s and early 60s, is a pivotal time in a person's life. It's a time of myriad responsibilities, including career demands, raising children and often caring for ageing parents or other family members. This unique juncture often requires a delicate balance between personal aspirations and caring responsibilities.

Care can be provided in a variety of ways, as highlighted by academic classifications of the concept of social support. For example, according to the seminal work of House (1981), social support is the functional content of relationships that can be categorised into four broad types of supportive behaviours or actions:

1. Emotional support includes the provision of empathy, love, trust and care.
2. Instrumental support involves the provision of material help and services that directly assist a person in need.
3. Informational support is the provision of advice, suggestions and information that a person can use to solve problems.
4. Appraisal support involves the provision of information that is useful for self-evaluation - in other words, constructive feedback and reassurance.

In this paper we will focus on two basic types of support, i.e. emotional and instrumental.

Instrumental support, a key component of caregiving, is the tangible assistance provided to care recipients. This includes activities such as financial management, transportation, medication management and daily household tasks. Middle-aged caregivers often find themselves at the forefront of providing instrumental support to ageing parents or spouses who may be facing physical or cognitive challenges. Older adults typically turn to their spouses for support in times of need. When spouses become ill or die, older adults may become increasingly dependent on their adult children (Spitze & Ward, 2000; van Tilburg, 1998).

Emotional support, although less tangible than instrumental support, provides an important part of care, such as love, trust or caring. Some forms of informational support (such as advice) can also be classified as emotional care because it shows affection, devotion and encouragement to the recipient. Emotional support is more common than instrumental support because it is usually priceless and is not as dependent on geographical distance as is instrumental support.

In inter- and intragenerational relationships, receiving and giving different kinds of support to others can be both beneficial and detrimental to the subjective well-being (SWB) of the individuals involved in these exchanges. This is important from the perspective of middle-aged people, especially women, who are the main source of support for others. This issue is very important in a country like Poland, where family members are the main source of support for other people from different generations, and where family is perceived as an important determinant of subjective well-being.

Aim of the analysis and research questions

The aim of our paper is twofold: (1) To identify and compare the inter- and intragenerational exchange of support among middle-aged people in Poland taking into account the type of the relationship (with children, parents, siblings, etc.). (2) To analyse the relationship between the provision/receipt of care and emotional support and the subjective quality of life of middle-aged people.

The research questions are the following:

Q1 Who provides and who receives care and emotional support in Poland?

Q2 Does providing care and emotional support is associated with subjective quality of life and loneliness?

Q3 Does receiving care and emotional support is related to subjective quality of life and loneliness?

Q4 Are there any differences between women and men in these relationships?

Data and analytical strategy

We analyze the data coming from the second wave of Generation and Gender Survey (GGS) carried out in Poland in 2014-2015. For purpose of our study the sample was limited to individuals aged 45-64 at the moment of survey. The final sample included approximately 3,900 observations (1,537 men and 2,343 women). First, we used descriptive methods to describe the intra- and intergenerational exchange of support among people aged 45-64 in Poland. Secondly, we used statistical modelling to determine the relationship between intra- and intergenerational exchange and subjective quality of life. Subjective quality of life was approximated by two variables: subjective well-being and loneliness. Subjective well-being was assessed using the Satisfaction With Life Scale index proposed by Diener et al. (Diener et al. 1985, Diener et al. 1999, Pavot & Diener 1993) with values ranging from 5 to 25. The level of loneliness was based on a short scale for overall, emotional and social loneliness proposed by de

Jong-Gierveld & van Tilburg (1999) and de Jong-Gierveld (2006) with values ranging from 0 (not lonely) to 6 - severely lonely (7 categories). Due to the nature of the dependent variables, we used linear and ordered logistic models. In the models we controlled for personal characteristics: age, sex, education level, marital status, living arrangements, fact of having children, employment status, disability status, place of residence, subjective evaluation of household's financial situation – based on the question whether household is able to make ends meet. The key explanatory variables are based on information on providing and receiving different types of support (personal care and emotional support) as well as the type of the relationship with a person involved in a given exchange.

Results

The preliminary results show that 64% of respondents receive emotional support from someone else, with a slightly higher proportion of respondents aged 45-54 receiving this type of support than those aged 60-64 (Figure 1). Similar proportions of respondents give emotional support to someone else (around 66%), with a similar difference in percentage between the youngest and oldest respondents (around 2%) as in receiving emotional support (around 3%). In terms of instrumental care, almost 1% of respondents receive such care from someone else, over 19% of the sample provide care to their grandchildren and almost 12% provide care to adults. About 25% of respondents aged 60-64 look after grandchildren, compared to 9% of the youngest age group. Moreover, the age group with the highest share of caring for adults is 55-59 year olds, with over 13%. Overall, 1% of respondents are carers, with very small differences in the proportions between age groups.

Figure 2 shows the results for the proportions of people who gave/received care or emotional support through intra- or intergenerational flows by age group. Among middle-aged people (aged 45-64), 75% give care to someone from another generation and only 26% do the same to someone within the same generation. 56% of respondents in this age group provide emotional support to someone from the same generation. At the same time, the majority of them (57%) receive emotional support from someone through intragenerational flow and fewer (43%) through intergenerational flow. Next, the oldest cohort of respondents (+65) receive care mainly through intergenerational flow (70% of them).

The results of the analysis of who supports the respondent and who receives support from the respondent show that the distributions obtained differ depending on which type of support exchange is taken into account. Middle-aged people provided support mainly to their spouse (10%), parents (47%), relatives (13%) and to some extent to friends (12%) (see Table 1). Similarly, those aged 45-64 received instrumental support mainly from their spouse (17%), children (39%) and friends (21%). With regard to emotional support, the results suggest that respondents provided such support mainly to their spouse (24%) and children (31%), friends (22%) and to some extent to siblings (11%). At the same time, they received emotional support from their spouse (26%), children (31%), friends (20%) and to some extent from siblings (11%).

The results of the regression modelling show that, as expected, the exchange of support is important for the subjective quality of life of middle-aged people in Poland. Giving emotional support increases SWB. People who provide emotional support to someone have higher levels of SWB than people who do not admit to doing so. However, such a relationship is only visible for women, not for men. Furthermore, receiving emotional support has no effect on SWB, as it does not reach statistical significance in any of the three versions of the model. Next, receiving care turns out to be negatively correlated with SWB among middle-aged people. This relationship is stronger for women than for men. Caring for children/grandchildren also differentiates the SWB of respondents aged 45-64, although it should be emphasised that this relationship is stronger for women than for men. In general, such carers have higher levels of SWB than people who do not care for their children/grandchildren.

Conclusion

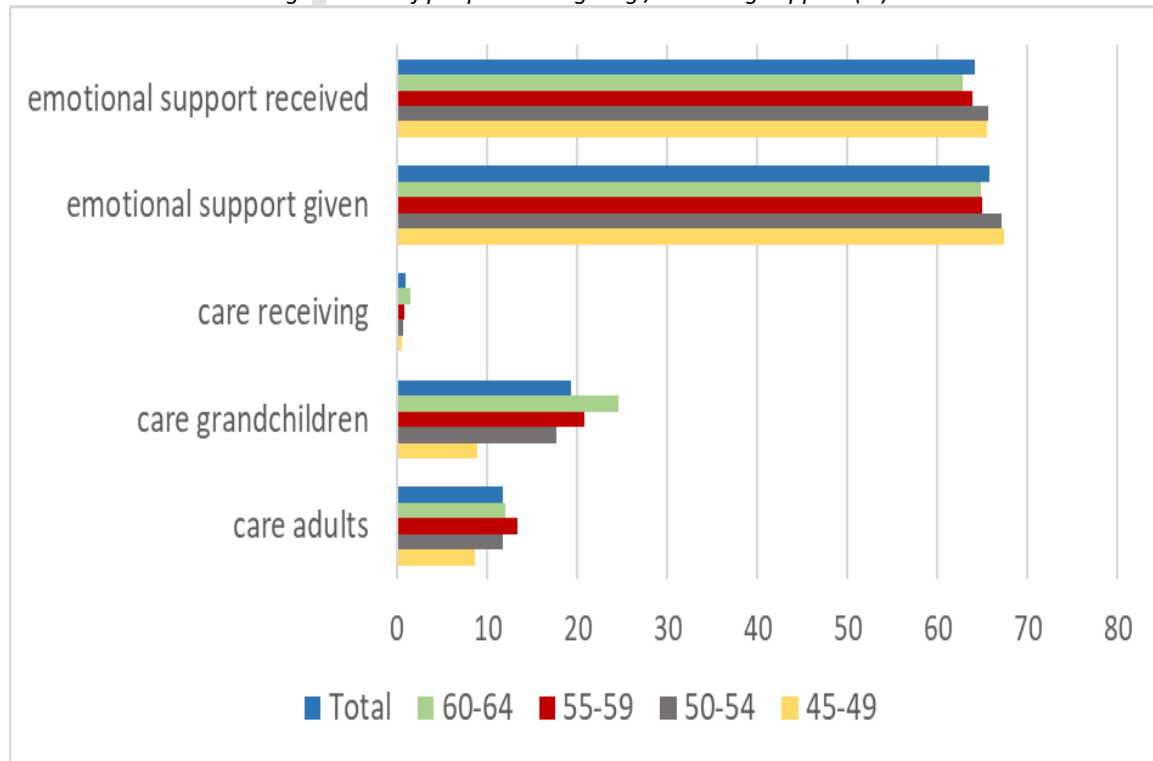
Our results show that the exchange of support among middle-aged people in Poland differs in terms of the type of support. For example, these people provided informal care mainly to a spouse, parents, in-laws, and to some extent to friends, while they received it from a spouse, children, and friends. In contrast, emotional support was exchanged between respondents and their spouse, children, friends and, to some extent, siblings. Our results confirm that the exchange of support is important for the subjective quality of life of middle-aged people in Poland. In particular, caring for grandchildren was positively related to SWB and negatively related to loneliness, while receiving care was negatively related to SWB and positively related to loneliness. Giving emotional support also increased SWB, whereas receiving it had no effect on SWB.

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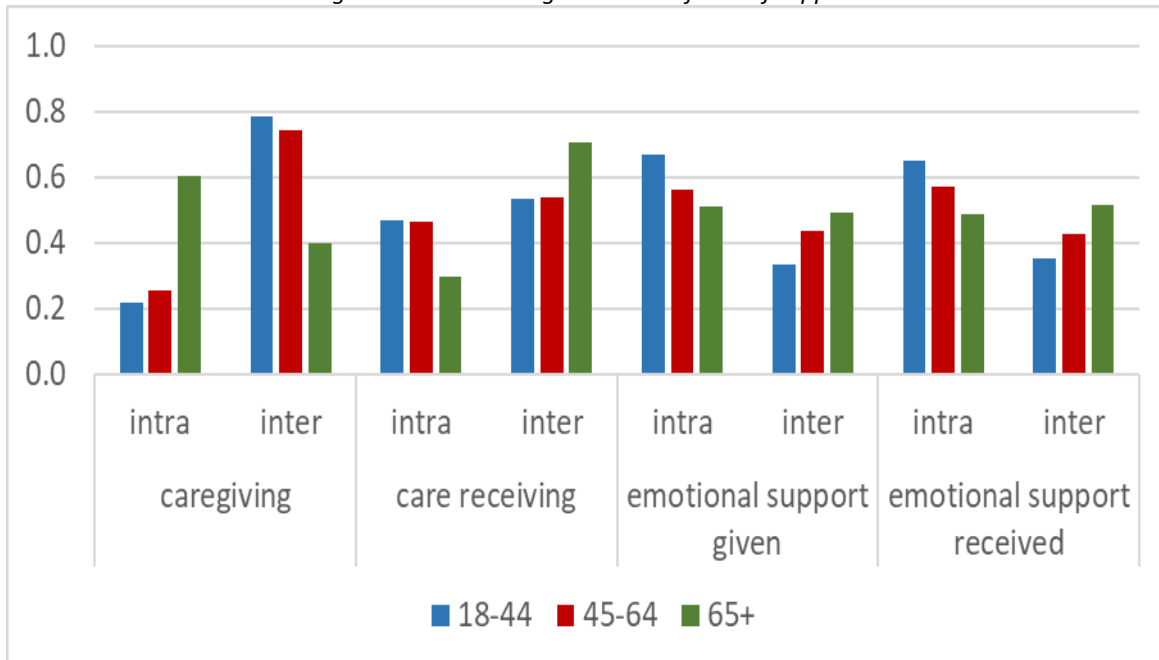
Appendix

Fig. 1 Share of people 45-64 giving / receiving support (%)



Source: own estimations based on the data from 2nd wave of GGS-PL.

Fig. 2 Intra- and intergenerational flows of support



Source: own estimations based on the data from 2nd wave of GGS-PL.

Table 1 Relationships in support exchanges, people 45-64 (% of all indications)

	caregiving	care receiving	emotional support given	emotional support received
spouse/ partner	0.10	0.17	0.24	0.26
mother	0.37	0.07	0.06	0.06
father	0.10	0.01	0.02	0.01
in-laws	0.13	0.02	0.01	0.01
children/spouses of children	0.08	0.39	0.31	0.31
grandparents	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
grandchildren	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00
siblings	0.03	0.09	0.11	0.11
other relatives	0.05	0.02	0.04	0.03
friends and others	0.12	0.21	0.22	0.20

Source: own estimations based on the data from 2nd wave of GGS-PL.

Table 2 Regression results: determinants of subjective well-being and loneliness among middle-aged people in Poland

VARIABLES	Model 1 subjective well-being			Model 2 loneliness		
	total	men	women	total	men	women
Sex (ref. men)						
women	0.22**			-0.17***		
Age groups (ref. 45-64)						
50-54	-0.24	0.17	-0.51**	0.05	-0.06	0.14
55-59	-0.16	0.08	-0.34	0.03	-0.04	0.08
60-64	0.37**	0.55**	0.19	-0.11	-0.09	-0.07
Having children (ref. no)						
yes	0.32**	0.04	0.54***	-0.38***	-0.32***	-0.43***
Living arrangements (ref. alone)						
With a spouse only	0.88**	0.93**	0.84**	-0.66***	-1.17***	-0.43*
With a spouse and other persons	0.86**	0.92**	0.79*	-0.91***	-1.46***	-0.64***
Withput a spouse, but with other persons	-0.59***	-0.59*	-0.59**	-0.16	-0.21	-0.10
Marital status (ref. never married)						
Married/ in cohabitation	0.81**	0.94**	0.61	-0.43**	-0.26	-0.46*
widowed	0.65***	0.52	0.42	-0.45***	-0.33	-0.37**
Divorced/ in separation	-0.74***	-0.69*	-0.89***	0.14	0.49**	0.04
Educational level (ref. primary and lower)						
lower secondary	0.12	0.46**	-0.12	-0.17*	-0.15	-0.15
secondary	0.36**	0.77***	0.14	-0.27***	-0.38**	-0.20*
higher	0.84***	1.06***	0.76***	-0.24**	-0.20	-0.23*
Place of residence (ref. urban)						
rural	0.12	0.16	0.12	-0.05	-0.23**	0.04
Disability status (ref. yes)						
no	0.65***	0.47**	0.68***	-0.20**	-0.16	-0.19*
Employment status (ref. not employed)						
employed	0.60***	0.87***	0.42**	-0.15*	-0.16	-0.12
Subjective financial situation	0.93***	1.04***	0.86***	-0.28***	-0.35***	-0.25***
Care adults (ref. no)						
yes	0.10	-0.10	0.18	-0.01	-0.06	0.01
Care grandchildren (ref. no)						
yes	0.37***	0.45*	0.30*	-0.45***	-0.60***	-0.39***
Care receiving (ref. no)						
yes	-1.84***	-1.17	-2.36***	0.98***	0.64	1.36***
Emotional support provided (ref. no)						
yes	0.64***	0.50*	0.69***	-0.31***	-0.34**	-0.28**
Emotional support received (ref. no)						

yes	-0.28	-0.21	-0.33	-0.03	0.06	-0.07
/cut1				-3.56***	-4.18***	-3.02***
/cut2				-2.82***	-3.49***	-2.23***
/cut3				-2.07***	-2.63***	-1.55***
/cut4				-1.18***	-1.50***	-0.78***
/cut5				-0.53***	-0.86***	-0.11
/cut6				0.14	-0.13	0.54**
Constant	9.38***	8.54***	10.24***			
Observations	3,880	1,537	2,343	3,895	1,543	2,352
R-squared	0.31	0.38	0.27			

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Source: own estimations based on the data from 2nd wave of GGS-PL.