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**Intergenerational solidarity strategies – responses to the needs of the elderly
in transnational families**

PhD thesis

Summary

PhD CANDIDATE

VERONICA-IONELA SOMEȘAN (married SAVU)

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR

PROF. MARIA ROTH, PhD

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Summary

Keywords: demographic aging, intergenerational solidarity, elderly needs, elderly care, transnational care, transnational families

The main objective of this paper is to analyse the situation of elderly people from Romanian transnational families in terms of the needs of those with at least one child abroad, the functioning of transnational families, focusing on the elderly and on intergenerational exchanges, the ramifications of caring for the elderly, both in transnational families and in other informal and institutional networks.

The motivation for writing this paper is based on the expansion of the demographic aging process in the European Union, a phenomenon which is already well established in many states, and therefore the research on the needs of the elderly and their care is very much needed. Low birth rates, high life expectancy and massive migration are impacting heavily the structure of the demographic pyramid in Europe. Perhaps an important change brought about by this phenomenon will be the transition to an aging population structure, an evolution which is already obvious in many European countries. Moreover, the aging population will put pressure on health systems and family resources if social measures are being delayed. Thus, the general question that requires real answers is the following: what are the care and support systems for the needs of the elderly population in Romania? This issue is even more important as in 2019, those aged 65 and over had a share of 20.3% in the general European Union population (Eurostat, 2020a).

The main determinant of the aging population are low fertility rates, however, in the case of Romania and other ex-communist countries, if we are to limit ourselves to the Eastern-European space, the massive labour migration of young people deepens this phenomenon and it has other multidimensional consequences at both macro and micro levels (family for example). However, migration is not only the experience of those leaving Romania, but it inevitably touches the lives of other family members, often portrayed in specialized literature as being left behind through labour migration. Although there has been a lot of focus on children, the situation of the elderly has recently begun to attract specialists.

Because labour migration has been so common in Romania in the last three decades, especially after joining the European Union, what Conkova and King (2019) observed with regards to Poland, as a country with a totalitarian regime before 1990, has a strong resonance in our country

as well, namely that there is a culture of emigration precisely through the everyday importance of mobility in people's lives. As it might be expected, the massive labour migration, in most cases, led to changes in family structure, in intergenerational relationships, and thus to a wide spread of transnational families.

This paper follows Bengtson and Roberts' (1991) paradigmatic approach regarding intergenerational solidarity and the model proposed by Szydlik (2016) regarding the factors associated with, or influencing family solidarity. However, intergenerational solidarity is studied in this work in transnational context; therefore, a transnational perspective on the types of care and support is also required (Baldassar and Merla, 2014).

The empiric approach in this paper has been conducted within the project: *"Intergenerational solidarity in the context of labour migration abroad. The situation of the elderly left at home"* funded by UEFISCDI for 2015-2017.

The main research question we defined for this study refers to identifying the needs of the elderly whose sons/daughters have migrated. We also tried to establish the risk factors for loneliness and depression within this population, by showing the differences between emotional and social loneliness. At the same time, taking into account the transnational family context, we sought to answer questions regarding the transnational emotional support received by non-migrant elderly, and also the manner in which this support is redefined at local level, in the proximity of the elderly remaining in the country. We also paid attention to the practical support that the elderly receive during visits from their sons/daughters who have migrated in the context of circulation and supplementation of transnational care.

The paper has nine chapters which discuss theoretical issues as presented in specialised literature related to demographic aging, theories regarding intergenerational relations and aging, the needs of the elderly, transnationalism and transnational families as well as applied studies. Thus, in the first chapter we discuss active aging and aging as an individual process and demographic phenomenon, by presenting and analysing recent theories and data. The European Commission defines healthy aging as a concept which promotes active aging of individuals and gives guidelines for the role of the state in creating opportunities maintaining the labour capacities for the elderly generation (2007: 16). A similar definition is provided by Hansen-Kyle: "healthy ageing is about the process of physically and cognitively slowing down while coping mechanisms intervene to enable an optimal function and participation in all life areas" (2005: 52). We can see

that using the concept of healthy aging does not take into account low-income individuals and families, as well as individuals in resource-limited societies who do not have access to quality nutrition to contribute to healthy aging. Successful aging is an individualistic concept because, as shown in various works (Riley and Riley, 1994; Depp and Jeste, 2006), it does not take into account the fact that changes in people's lives and social structures are interdependent and aging is a social process involving the interaction between human development and dynamic structural changes. Such as the fact that various improvements in the lives of older people are closely related and even dependent on societal interventions and measures, including lifelong education, leisure opportunities, and volunteering opportunities (Deeming, 2009). However, due to current technological, medical and social progress, optimal aging conditions are not created for a good part of the population.

In the second chapter we define the concept of need, we discuss the main types of elderly needs, which are the subject of this paper, i.e. the care and emotional needs of the elderly. In addition, we analyse the welfare state and the social protection at national level with regards to the elderly population. Defining the concept of need involves considering a person's physical, mental, and emotional characteristics that may be affected by demographic and socio-economic circumstances (Vlachantoni et al., 2011). Reviere et al. (1996) believe that need can be seen as a discontinuity between real and ideal conditions that are recognized by community values and at the same time are considered to have potential for change (conditions). We can see a similar approach to the concept of need by Davies (1977), who considers it to be a deficit caused by a level of current well-being and accepted, valued and desired social conditions. The focus of this paper in terms of analysing the needs of the elderly is on the functional ones (we are referring here to the care needs) and on the emotional needs. Care needs or functional needs are closely related to the assessment of basic activities of daily living and instrumental activities of daily living, as well as the assessment of health status and limitations caused by chronic or long-term illnesses. In the present paper, the degree of dependence in carrying out daily activities was evaluated using a question with multiple items, which combines several scales used and validated in the literature. Thus, we used the index of Katz et al. (1970) which refers to basic activities (eating, washing, personal toilet/dressing, etc.); instrumental activities of daily living were assessed using Lawton et al.'s (1969) IADL scale and elements suggested by Decision no. 886 of 2000. This instrument

is being called the national grid for assessing the needs of the elderly, including the criteria for classification in degrees of dependency.

Regarding the measurement of emotional needs, more specifically loneliness, the De Jong Gierveld scale with six items is frequently used in the field of large-scale social research (de Jong Gierveld and van Tilburg, 2006). Loneliness can occur in all age groups, but it is a more common problem in the third age. But aging itself is not responsible for the emergence of feelings of loneliness in this period of life (Aylaz et al., 2012). Among the scales used to assess the experience of depressive symptoms is the seven-item short version of the Center for Epidemiological Studies and Depression (CES-D), the original scale containing 20 items (Radolff, 1977). The scale was developed as a tool to be useful in identifying individuals at risk for clinical depression, not to be used as a diagnostic tool for depression (Hansen and Slagsvold, 2017). Currently, the seven-item scale is the most widely used instrument for measuring depressive symptoms and for estimating prevalence rates of depression in the population (Shafer, 2006).

The third chapter is dedicated to the theoretical perspectives on intergenerational relations and aging, and the fourth chapter discusses transnationalism, the elderly in transnational families and the particularities of the adaptations and innovations in the different types of transnational support, maintaining intergenerational relations at a distance etc.

Thus, in the third chapter we continued the approach of different theoretical perspectives regarding intergenerational relations and aging. We have seen that the theory of social exchange has the quality of bringing to the fore the idea of reciprocity in intergenerational exchanges, especially those between the elderly and children, but also the fact that these exchanges are influenced by the emotional, social or financial resources of each actor involved. We have also mentioned the valuable contributions of the life course perspective to the study of aging and family relationships. Finally, because this work falls within the sphere of intergenerational relations, we explored the theory of intergenerational solidarity, following the different conceptualizations and discussions on the dimensions stated by Bengtson and Roberts (1991). We tried to bring in this paper also the contribution of different studies regarding the factors that matter in the exchange of intergenerational support. Finally, starting from the premise that intergenerational solidarity is a strongly represented current reality and we are by no means facing a break in it, but that in the context of demographic aging and a strong Romanian emigration, the needs of the elderly, whether they are care or emotional needs, and the relationships between migrant parents and children,

require increased attention, hence the importance of transnational support and transnational family ties.

In chapter four, a thorough analysis of the concept of transnationalism, transnational families, transnational support, transnational care strategies, types of transnational intergenerational support according to the studies consulted in the field, as well as the importance of forms of co-presence and transnational visits is carried out. As a general framework, without going into details at this level, the phenomenon of emigration (temporary or permanent) is widespread in Romania, according to recent data, the OECD (2019) estimates that the Romanian diaspora is the fifth largest in the world. In 2015-2016, it was estimated that 3.6 million people born in Romania lived in OECD countries, 54% of them being women. Also, the estimated data of the OECD report (2019) show that in 2015-2016, 17% of the total population born in Romania was outside the country's borders.

The fifth chapter presents data about the research methodology; therefore, we underlie the grounding of the research questions and the actual research questions, data sources, the sampling procedure, the construction of the research instrument. We initially take our point from the studies that state that family solidarity and intergenerational support have not diminished, but have changed their character, the contacts between parents and their children have become more intense, more personal and are maintained over time, so they are stable (Fokkema, ter Bekke and Dykstra, 2008). At the same time, Knodel (2014) believes that families have the ability to adapt to developments and changes that occur and thus end up reinterpreting and renegotiating filial and parental obligations. Following what has been presented and the evidence regarding Romania's characteristic of a regime marked by implicit familialism (Saraceno and Keck, 2010; Mureşan and Hărăguş, 2016), therefore a weak development of social services for the elderly, it is encouraged to explore the needs of the elderly from transnational families and the types of support given to them. The research questions are based on serious and well-documented foundations in the field, and for each research chapter hypotheses derived from the questions and the general purpose of the work were formulated.

Within the project that also allowed the writing of this doctoral thesis, the research method used for this study was the sociological survey, and people aged 60 and over with at least one migrant child represented the unit of analysis. The objective of the project was to analyze the situation of elderly parents whose children have emigrated (at least one) and the way in which

intergenerational support takes place in this transnational context, taking into account the care needs of the elderly. In the construction of the questionnaire, different instruments were consulted that were used in large-scale sociological surveys, with the aim of including in the research instrument as many aspects related to the situation of the elderly and intergenerational support in the context of transnational families. Among the questionnaire models that were the basis for the construction of the research instrument are the following: the questionnaire of the Generations and Gender survey, that of the European Social Survey, the questionnaire used in the German Aging Survey, the questionnaire of the SHARE research, the questionnaire of the Comparative Study on the Situation of the Elderly in Romania (UNFPA), the survey questionnaire Impact of migration on the elderly left at home in Romania (IPIA). Through the questionnaire, it was sought to find out the needs of the elderly (those related to physical health, care needs and emotional needs, but also access to health services) and the broad context of relationships between elderly non-migrant parents and their children who have left the country, but also the forms of support that the elderly person receives and offers to other people in the household or outside it, such as other children left in the country, partner, neighbours, etc.

Chapters six, seven and eight are the most consistent part of the paper, as they discuss the research results. We first cover the descriptive aspects, after which two chapters are dedicated to an extensive analyse of the care needs and practical transnational and local support, the emotional needs, both in term of the transnational and in-country emotional support received by the elderly. We need to mention that in the current paper the perspective on intergenerational relations is that of the elderly.

Thus, the results show that among the factors that increase the chances of the elderly receiving care in terms of carrying out basic daily activities (ADL) and instrumental activities (IADL) are self-perceived poor and very poor health as well as age, as the over 70 population is more exposed. In terms of the effect on daily instrumental activities, the residence environment is also relevant, as the results show that living in urban areas reduces the changes of the respondents having difficulties in carrying out those activities by 40%, compared to residents living in rural areas. Access to utilities such as water, sewage, heating facilitates the existence of more household appliances to help ease tasks such as cleaning, for example, unlike in the rural environment where these conditions are usually lacking. Last but not least, we stress the importance of a social network and the voluntary involvement of the elderly, dimensions of active aging that contribute to

decreasing the chances of needing care. In this sense, through the contributions of the present paper, we can highlight and propose at the level of political decision-makers or local authorities, a more consistent involvement in order to ensure an environment in which the elderly have actual options for leisure activities and volunteering.

If we look at the transnational practical support received by an elderly person during migrant visits, we notice that the needs of elderly parents outweigh the children's opportunities. That is, the geographical distance no longer matters when there are elements of fragility and dependency in the case of the elderly, and the migrants' care is therefore manifested through direct co-presence. Elderly people with difficulties in performing instrumental activities thus receive support from their migrant children in all known and studied forms. Therefore, we see how the care needs are an indicator of migrants' decision to visit their elderly parents to provide support during critical periods. We thus demonstrate that intergenerational relationships are not affected by geographical distance, but rather they are transformed and managed in distinct forms compared to those in local proximity. We also confirm the gendered characteristic of transnational care, as daughters are more likely to visit their mothers to provide care and support in solving medical or legal problems compared to father-son relationships.

We therefore highlighted the contributions of the present paper in demonstrating that both the migrant's opportunities to provide support, the elderly parent's needs, as well as the family structure and the cultural-contextual structure are important in receiving practical support, in the four forms that we have analysed. The results are therefore in agreement with what Baldassar et al. (2007) suggest, namely that there is an association between the need for practical or instrumental support and the needs of the elderly non-migrant parents, respectively the opportunities of the migrant. We also confirm that the model with individual, family and societal level indicators proposed by Szydlik (2016) can also be applied in the analysis of transnational support.

We reiterate that the practical support that the elderly receive most often comes from partners and non-migrant children, therefore we can discuss about this support being delegated from migrant children. We can also note the need for collaboration between family members who are no longer in the country and who have remained in the geographical proximity of the elderly in terms of a possible division of support tasks. The most difficult situations arise when all the children have migrated, because that implies a need for reorganization within the extended family

and the involvement of a support network consisting of neighbours, friends and, if possible, public or private institutions.

An important contribution of the present paper is the analysis of the emotional health of respondents, as well as the emotional support they receive. The feelings of loneliness and depression expressed by the elderly affect all areas of their lives, from family relationships to social and economic dimensions. We have shown that women are more prone to high levels of depression than men. Other categories at such a risk are the elderly with poor health and difficulties in carrying out daily activities, as well as those with present financial needs. On the other hand, average levels of education, taking care of grandchildren or the existence of an active social network are factors that can protect the elderly from loneliness and depression. Feelings of social loneliness are more intense when all the children are abroad and the parent does not receive visits, or they are reduced in frequency.

In terms of statistical significance, the education of the migrant child, the socio-economic status of the parent or the level of financial deprivation, but also the existence of intergenerational exchanges or types of transnational support are factors that outline the emotional types of support that the elderly parent receives. Intergenerational relationships manage to break the barrier of geographical distance, even if the emotional support provided to the elderly undergoes certain transformations and conditioning, as it takes place through technologically mediated contacts, visits or other forms (Baldassar, 2007b). In other words, father-daughter and father-son relationships are less likely to provide emotional support compared to mother-daughter relationships. Last but not least, we saw that the emotional support is also provided through partners, children, relatives, friends and neighbours in the local vicinity. In these cases, we list the parent's level of education, health, loneliness, financial needs and living arrangements as factors associated with receiving emotional support.

On a general level, we can say that the migration of children produces changes in the organization of the support provided to elderly parents and thus we discuss transnational relations and the transnational family. At the same time, as other studies have shown, we reinforce the idea that support and care for the elderly are present and circulate in this transnational space that is formed with the children's departure. As Zimmer et. al. (2014) have shown, migrants do not abandon their elderly parents, and they provide support when needed.

An important, and perhaps singular contribution in domestic research, is the fact that we captured both transnational intergenerational support and the various forms of support that the elderly can have in their proximity, with emphasis on the factors associated with them. Most often, supportive relationships between migrants and family members remaining in the country are studied using qualitative methodology. Our research also uses quantitative methodology to test the associations between different characteristics of those involved and the existence of support needs, as well as the provision of this support, either practical or emotional.

Our analyses on transnational support were focused on a model that includes opportunities, resources of the departed and the needs of the elderly, the elements Zechner (2008) considered to be the necessary basic elements for transnational care (geographical distance, resources and circumstances), and therefore we need to stress the need for certain social policies in this regards. These social policies would probably also be necessary from the perspective of the countries where Romanians emigrate, especially from the point of view of transnational visits with the aim of providing care of those left at home. Then, this transnational practical intergenerational support that we have seen being offered when parents' needs are present should be supplemented by more resources and investments from institutions responsible for the social protection of the elderly. Especially in the Romanian context, where long-term care of the elderly is carried out by informal actors, the burden on family members is real and it comes with great economic, social and even psychological costs.

Finally, we believe this paper has the potential to provide an accurate picture of the needs of elderly people with migrant children and the characteristics of the transnational support and care that elderly parents have, as well as the way to supplement this care through the negotiations between brothers/sisters and other close relatives of the non-migrant parents. However, a research direction that is necessary and completely lacking in the field is given by longitudinal studies that would follow the possible causal relationships between the migration of children and the health of elderly parents (Thapa et. al., 2018), as well as the strategies that they initiate and maintain with the goal of functioning as a transnational family.

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