

The intergenerational relationship patterns between aging parents and their adult children

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ABSTRACT

Background: Older parent-child relations and their impact on the elderly's lives are of importance; thus, the present study aimed to investigate the patterns of the intergenerational relationships between aging parents and their adult children. **Methods:** The current cross-sectional study was conducted on 463 elderly men and women, aged ≥ 60 years who were residing in Tehran City, Iran. The study participants were selected using the stratified cluster sampling method. The Bai's (2017) 13-item Intergenerational Relationship Quality Scale for Aging Parents (IRQS-AP) was used to evaluate the patterns of intergenerational relationships among the study subjects. The obtained data were analyzed in SPSS. The significance level of the tests was set at $P \geq 0.05$. The logistic regression model was employed to investigate the factors related to the patterns of intergenerational relationships. **Results:** The mean \pm SD age of the explored aging parents was 67.93 ± 7.0 years. Besides, the mean \pm SD number of children in the study participants was 3.55 ± 1.80 . The mean \pm SD scores of solidarity (structural, associational, consensual, affectual, functional, and normative) and conflict were measured to be (58.95 ± 17.55) and (64.10 ± 20.92) , respectively. Furthermore, the mean \pm SD score of the ambivalence pattern was calculated as (51.46 ± 21.61) . The mean score of conflict was higher than those of solidarity and ambivalence. Additionally, the mean score of consensual-normative solidarity was higher than those of other dimensions of solidarity. The obtained data suggested a significant difference between age and the patterns of intergenerational relationships ($p \leq 0.05$). Moreover, the mean scores of solidarity and conflict in the examined female elderly and their adult children were higher than those of their male counterparts and their adult children; however, the mean score of ambivalence in the male elderly and their adult children was higher than that in their female counterparts. Logistic regression analysis results indicated that aging parents who were literate (OR = 1.5), those who lived alone (OR = 1.2), and those who assessed their general health status as good (OR = 4), reported high levels of solidarity with their adult children. **Conclusion:** The present research results demonstrated that the level of conflict between aging parents and their adult children exceeded the solidarity level, indicating the intergenerational gap. Therefore, the necessary implications should be adopted to promote intergenerational relationships within the family by providing family counseling. Further research is recommended to consider the essential role of predictive factors, such as age, gender, educational level, occupational status, living arrangements, health status, and socioeconomic status of aging parents concerning the intergenerational relationships between aging parents and their adult children.

Keywords: Affectual closeness, aging parents, ambivalence, consensual-normative solidarity, intergenerational solidarity, structural-associational solidarity

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Introduction

Considering the declined fertility rates, the frequency of intra- and intergenerational relationships has decreased, compared to the

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past. Moreover, in recent decades, generational differences were precisely observed in various forms of interactions between society and the family. In the present society, such a generational difference, as well as the difference between parents and children concerning life patterns, can be considered as a conflict.^[1]

The younger generations no longer define themselves respecting the norms of the past. Accordingly, they seek novel patterns of life. Such normative differences are the main source of irregularities in intergenerational communication between children and aging parents.^[2,3]

The family evolution in recent decades has exposed families to serious challenges. The complications may question the traditional family structure; subsequently, this condition might impair adult children's relationships with their aging parents and reduce their support from the family. Furthermore, such challenges between aging parents and their adult children are even exacerbated due to caring for aging parents. However, the children-parents relationship is of great value and provides favorable outcomes, such as improving self-esteem, quality of life, and wellbeing for both, especially the aging parents.^[4-8]

Contemporary sociologists, especially Bengtson, have developed the theory of intergenerational solidarity, i.e., a comprehensive scheme for describing sentiments, behaviors, and attitudes between aging parents and their adult children. The theory of solidarity also attempts to provide a valid explanation for the long-term ties between parents and children and why family relations require solidarity. The 6 dimensions of solidarity that can be distinguished in intergenerational family relations are as follows: affectual (positive sentiments and feelings), functional (resource and support exchange), structural (interaction opportunities), consensual (attitude and value agreement), normative (commitment to familial obligations), and associational (interaction & activity frequency and type) (10). In the united states reported that the intergenerational solidarity dimensions aim to maintain the relationship between aging parents and their adult children, and their quality and form may change over time. They also addressed the tensions in intergenerational solidarity within the family; if aging parents require high levels of support, these tensions become more pronounced.^[9,10]

Adult children experience feelings of ambivalence, indicating that they lose their independence if helping their parents too much; however, if they protect their independence, parents will lack their support. Additionally, elder parents feel pressured, leading to intergenerational solidarity-conflict and ambivalence paradigms; consequently, the negative aspects of intergenerational relationships are manifested.^[11-13]

Bangston and Oyama (2007) evaluated the structure of intergenerational relationships between aging parents and their children in the United States. They concluded that the solidarity between generations is changing; however, the solidarity

continues not only in the family but also in the society and policies.

Shapiro (2004) explored the intergenerational relationships between aging parents and their adult children. Their obtained data indicated that the parents might adopt very different viewpoints about their relationship type with their adult children. Furthermore, several factors, such as gender, age, the marital status of aging parents, and the geographic proximity of aging parents and their adult children may enhance solidarity between aging parents and their adult children.^[14,15] In Vietnam, Quang Thai Trinh (2020) also found that high socioeconomic status, health status, and being married in both aging parents living in rural and urban areas could improve solidarity between them and their adult children.^[16]

According to the 2016 national census data, approximately 9.3% of Iranians were aged over 60 years. Moreover, this rate is projected to grow by 30% over the next 4 decades. There exist significant differences in the relationship type between aging parents and their adult children. Furthermore, intergenerational conflict is on the rise in developing countries. If a family member, such as the elderly, has behavioral-psychological problems, its traces can be traced back to family relationships. In many cases, the behaviors of a family member, such as the elderly, stem directly from the family relationships. As a result, more studies are needed to treat intergenerational problems by family physicians.

Additionally, Iranian studies on the type and structure of relationships between aging parents and their adult children from the perspective of aging parents are scarce; therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the patterns of the intergenerational relationships between aging parents and their adult children.

Participants and Methods

This cross-sectional study included the second phase of a larger study to explore the relationship between aging parents and their adult children in Iran. This study was approved by the following ethics code: IR.USWR.REC.1398.046. The study population consisted of all female and male elderly aged ≥ 60 years. The study sample included 463 elderly residing in Tehran City, Iran, in 2020 who were selected by the stratified cluster sampling method. For this purpose, the districts of Tehran were classified into 5 area-level advantages, including low, middle to low, middle, middle to high, and high. Then, one district from each area and two neighborhoods from each district were randomly selected.^[17]

The trained interviewers visited the neighborhood and explained the research objectives to the study population. Furthermore, the written informed consent form was obtained from the subjects who met the inclusion criteria of the study. The study participants were requested to complete Bai's (2017) 13-item Intergenerational Relationship Quality Scale for Aging Parents (IRQS-AP). Besides, to select the children of the aging parents to participate in the

research, their adult children's names were separately recorded. Next, the names were randomly selected and the examined aging parents were requested to complete the questionnaire concerning the selected child.

The following instruments were applied in this study to collect the necessary data:

Demographic information questionnaire: This scale was completed by the explored aging parents. This tool provided some data on gender (1 = male; 2 = female), age groups (1 = 60-75; 2 = 76-85; 3 = ≥ 86 years), marital status (1 = married; 2 = widowed; 3 = divorced or separated), educational level (0 = illiterate; 1 = elementary education; 2 = middle and high school education; 3 = high school diploma; 4 = university degree), occupational status (1 = employed; 2 = housewife; 3 = retired; 4 = disabled), living status (1 = living alone; 2 = living with a partner; 3 = living without a partner), self-rated health status assessed by the examined aging parents (1 = very poor or poor; 2 = fair; 3 = good or excellent), and socioeconomic status (0 = 0-4, 1 = 4-6, 2 = 7-9, 3 = >10).

Bai's (2017) 13-item Intergenerational Relationship Quality Scale for Aging Parents (IRQS-AP): The IRQS-AP was developed by Bai (2013). It contains 13 items based on the solidarity model, i.e., used to measure the 6 dimensions of intergenerational solidarity (affectual, structural, functional, associational, reciprocal, and normative), and conflict. Bai's (2017) 13-item IRQS-AP was used to measure the study participants' relationships with each of their adult children. Unlike other tools, i.e., one-dimensional, this scale simultaneously measures all dimensions of solidarity, conflict, and ambivalence. The IRQS-AP assesses the intergenerational relationships between aging parents and their adult children. Each item is scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 to 5, i.e., named based on each dimension of solidarity and conflict; the scores range between 13 and 65. The higher the score in aging parents, the higher the quality of their relationship with their adult children.^[18] This study examined the structural validity of the Persian version of this scale using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and convergence approaches. The relevant results indicated that Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) presented a good fit and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was equal to 0.77 for the total scale.

The obtained data were analyzed in SPSS. Descriptive statistics (e.g., frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were used to assess the demographic characteristics of the research participants. Logistic regression modeling was applied to predict the determinants of intergenerational solidarity patterns. The explored dependent variables included the patterns of solidarity, conflict, and ambivalence, and the independent variables included demographic characteristics. To assess the logistic regression model fit, the predictor variables in a block were entered in a single step.

Results

Of the total 463 study participants, 50.6% were male. The mean \pm SD age of the examined aging parents was $67.86 \pm --$ years and the mean \pm SD age of their adult children was $35.78 \pm --$ years. The average number of children per household was measured as 3.55. Moreover, 56% of the explored adult children were male. The majority of the studied aging parents (71.2%) and their adult children (57.1%) were married. Approximately, 11.2% of the evaluated aging parents were illiterate; however, about half of their adult children (43.6%) had an associate's degree or a BA. Furthermore, 99.6% of the examined aging parents were unemployed, 37.8% were retired, 6.7% had a part-time job, and 7.3% were disabled. Eventually, 48.6% of the studied adult children had a full-time job and 5.6% of them were unemployed [Table 1].

To examine the structure of the intergenerational relationships between the explored aging parents and their adult children (from the perspective of the aging parents), the patterns of intergenerational relationships were standardized on a scale between 0 and 100 according to Formula 1. They were assessed using the One-Sample t-test based on the standard number 50 (the median).

Formula 1:

$$\text{St. Score} = \frac{\text{row score} - \text{Min score}}{\text{Max score} - \text{Min score}} \times 100$$

The present research results revealed that the total scores of solidarity as well as the dimensions of solidarity and conflict were significantly higher than the standard number 50 ($p < 0.0001$). The mean score of conflict was higher than that of solidarity (mean = 58.95) and ambivalence (mean = 51.46) ($p = 0.13$). Besides, the consensual-normative solidarity value was measured as 58.51, suggesting the highest mean score. The mean scores of structural-associational solidarity and affectual closeness were computed to be 57.14 and 57.51, respectively [Table 2]. Furthermore, the mean scores of solidarity and conflict in the examined female elderly and their adult children were higher than those of their male counterparts; however, the mean score of ambivalence in the explored male elderly and their adult children was higher than that of the female elderly and their adult children. Additionally, the mean scores of consensual-normative solidarity and structural-associational solidarity, and affectual closeness were higher in the female elderly, compared to their male counterparts [Table 2].

Furthermore, the relationship between the demographic characteristics of the examined aging parents and the patterns of intergenerational relationships of solidarity, conflict, and ambivalence was assessed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The relevant results indicated that the aging parents who were employed, those with high socioeconomic status, those

Table 1: The demographic characteristics of the study participants

The demographic characteristics of the aging parents	<i>n</i>	%	The demographic characteristics of the selected adult children	<i>n</i>	%
Gender			Age groups, y		
Female	230	49.4	<30 years	159	34.1
			30-39	163	35
			40-49	94	20.2
			50-59	40	8.4
Male	236	50.6	≥60	7	1.5
Age groups, y			Marital status		
74-60	389	83.5	Married	266	57.1
75-84	65	13.9	Widowed or divorced	200	42.91
85 or over	12	2.6	Educational level		
Marital status			Illiterate	4	0.9
Married	332	71.2	Literate	5	1.1
Widowed or divorced	133	28.54	Elementary or middle-school education	42	9.01
Educational level			High school education/high school diploma	113	22.24
Illiterate	52	11.2	University education	301	64.59
Primary education	55	11.9	Theological education	2	0.4
Secondary education	89	19.09	Occupational status		
High School diploma	165	35.40	Employed	281	60.30
Higher education	81	43.6	Retired, disabled, or unemployed	42	9.01
Theological education	2	0.4	Housewife	91	19.5
Occupational status			University student	11.2	53
Employed	77	16.52			
Retired, disabled, or unemployed	210	45.6			
Housewife	177	38.5			

Table 2: Intergenerational relationship patterns based on standard score among the study participants

Intergenerational relationship patterns	Standard score (range: 0-100)		The one-sample t-test results		Standard score (range: 0-100)		<i>P</i>
	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	Female Mean	Male Mean	
Solidarity	58.95	17.55	72.49	0.001	60.37	56.69	0.02
Factor 1: Consensual-Normative solidarity	58.51	22.5	58.89	0.001	60.54	56.53	0.05
Factor 2: Structural-Associational solidarity	57.14	26.2	46.97	0.001	58.26	56.6	0.36
Factor 3: Affectual closeness	57.51	18.45	67.28	0.001	59.60	55.47	0.016
Factor 4: Conflict	64.10	20.92	66.146	0.001	66.88	61.40	0.005
Factor 5: Ambivalence	51.46	21.61	51.42	0.13	48.45	54.45	0.003

who lived without a partner, their child, or family members, and those who assessed their general health status as poor manifested greater solidarity with their adult children, compared with other groups ($p \leq 0.05$) [Table 3]. The collected findings also demonstrated that the older aging parents, those who were widowed, those who were housewives, and those who assessed their general health status as fair presented higher conflict with their adult children, compared with the other groups ($p \leq 0.05$) [Table 3].

Furthermore, the aging parents who were disabled and housewives indicated the highest ambivalence in their relationship with their adult children ($p \leq 0.05$).

To predict changes in the patterns of intergenerational relationships of solidarity, conflict, and ambivalence, the

demographic characteristics of the explored aging parents were entered into a two-dimensional logistic regression model. Moreover, the independent variables with a $P \leq 0.2$ were selected to simultaneously enter into the multiple logistic regression model.

The obtained findings indicated that the level of solidarity with their adult children was 1.5 times greater in the literate aging parents, compared to those with a university degree (reference group) (OR = 5). Additionally, solidarity with the adult children was 1.2 times greater in the aging parents who lived alone and without a partner or their children, compared to those who lived without a partner but lived with one of their children or family members (reference group) (OR = 1.2).

Moreover, solidarity with their adult children was 4 times greater among the aging parents who reported their general health status

Table 3: ANOVA data concerning the standard score of intergenerational relationship patterns by the demographic variables of the examined aging parents

Characteristic	Categories	Solidarity		Conflict		Ambivalence	
		Mean±SD	F	Mean±SD	F	Mean±SD	F
Age groups, y	60-75	59.23±17.37	1.21*	64.8±20.78	1.46*	51.49±21.75	1.41*
	76-85	55.18±17.21		65.55±22.09		51.2±21.64	
	≥86	52.77		75		46.61	
Marital status	Married	58.83±17.52	1.04	64.43±20.9	3.76*	51.50±21.94	1.34*
	Widowed	58.70±17.19		65.77±20.05		50.4±21.44	
	Divorced	53.17±17.19		52.38±19.56		58.46±15.41	
Educational level	Illiterate	56.35±16.71	1.05	68.42±20.67	1.72*	43.44±23.30	2.23*
	Literate	56.22		64.81±20.67		51.81±21.25	
	Elementary or middle-school education	59.12±15.78		64.41±18.78		51.19±22.28	
	High school diploma	59.88±16.31		62.50±20.25		53.64±21.31	
Occupational status	University education	59.81±19.90		61.19±20.82		52.57±20.54	
	Employed	63.09±16.99	4.16*	61.58±20.14	4.66*	53.51±22.6	6.73
	Housewife	60.02±17.18		68.03±21.4		47.34±22.27	
	Retired	55.65±17.86		36.21±20.53		52.19±20.13	
Socioeconomic status	Disabled	57.15±14.99		55.39±19.66		64.42±19.63	
	Low	61.48±17.60	2.51*	62.20±21.17	1.08	52.80±22.83	0.98
	Moderate	57.19±17.43		65.28±21.85		49.87±22.37	
	Good	57.1±17.01		63.90±19.64		52.65±20.41	
Living status	Very good	65.38±16.84		71.79±13.14		45.14±17.12	
	Living alone	52.25±16.56	7.11*	65.56±21.80	1.90*	48.80±21.16	1.63*
	Living with a partner	58.82±17.18		64.61±20.86		51.63±21.17	
General health status (assessed by the aging parents)	Living without a partner	59.16±18.92		59.45±19.67		59.09±20.25	
	Very poor or poor	50.84±18.36	10.91*	59.25±19.88	2.34*	53.60±18.50	0.52
	Fair	57.64±15.52		66.21±20.81		50.41±22.15	
	Good	63.71±17.08		64.38±20.72		52.05±22.49	

as good, compared to their counterparts who assessed it as poor (OR = 4) [Table 4]. Additionally, the level of conflict with their adult children was 5.4 times greater in the aging parents with a high school diploma (OR = 5.4), 4.5 times greater in those who were literate (OR = 4.5), 2.7 times greater among those who were illiterate (OR = 2.7), and 3.3 times greater in those with secondary education (OR = 3.3), compared with the aging parents with university education (reference group). The collected results also indicated that the level of conflict with their adult children was 1.8 times greater among the aging parents who were employed (OR = 1.8) (0.63, 13.41), 4.5 times greater among those who were housewives (1.14, 25.71) (OR = 4.5), and 8.4 times greater in the retired individuals (OR = 8.4), compared to their counterparts with disabilities (reference group) [Table 4]. Moreover, ambivalence with their adult children was 1.2 times greater among the aging parents who were illiterate, compared to those with university education (OR = 1.2). Furthermore, the level of ambivalence with their adult children was 1.7 and 2.1 times greater among the aging subjects who were moderate and high in terms of socioeconomic status, respectively, compared to those who reported a very high socioeconomic status (reference group) (OR = 1.7) (OR = 2.1) [Table 4].

Discussion

Older parent-child relations and their impact on the elderly's lives are of significance. The current study investigated the

intergenerational relationship patterns between aging parents and their adult children. Accordingly, the present study data indicated that more than half of the examined aging parents manifested solidarity with their adult children.

Silverstein *et al.*^[19] (1998) demonstrated that despite numerous industrial and cultural changes throughout history and the altered intergenerational relationship patterns between aging parents and their adult children, more than half of aging parents reported high levels of solidarity with their adult children. This finding was consistent with those of our study. Shapiro (2004) stated that aging parents presented very different viewpoints about solidarity; they reported high levels of solidarity with their adult children. However, adult children further discussed their contact with their aging parents.^[20]

Bangston reported that the intergenerational solidarity dimensions aim to maintain the relationship between aging parents and their adult children; their quality and form may change over time. Additionally, family relations require solidarity. Besides, several studies highlighted that despite intergenerational conflict and ambivalence levels, there exists solidarity.^[21,22]

The present study findings indicated that the mean score of conflict was higher than that of other intergenerational relationship patterns. Furthermore, >50% of the examined aging parents reported

Table 4: The fit indices data of the multiple logistic regression model for intergenerational solidarity in the examined aging parents with their adult children

Characteristic	Categories	Solidarity			
		B	OR	P	95%CI
Educational level	Illiterate	-0.34	0.48	0.11	0.26 & 1.87
	Literate	-0.48	1.55	0.21	0.28 & 1.31
	Elementary or middle-school education	0.05	0.01	0.9	0.45 & 2.39
	High school diploma	0.39	1.28	0.25	0.74 & 2.94
	University education (reference group)				
Occupational status	Employed	0.52	0.92	0.33	0.57 & 4.98
	Housewife	0.15	0.10	0.74	0.46 & 2.87
	Retired	-0.49	1.08	0.29	0.23 & 1.55
	Disabled (reference group)				
Living status	Living alone	-0.48	1.23	0.26	0.26 & 1.44
	Living with a partner	0.41	0.38	0.53	0.40 & 5.72
	Living without a partner (reference group)	0.60	4	0.04	1.01 & 3.32
General health status (assessed by the aging parents)	Good	0.60	4	0.04	1.01 & 3.32
	Poor (reference group)				
Characteristic	Categories	Conflict			
		B	OR	P	95%CI
Gender	Male	-0.30	0.32	0.56	0.2 & 2
	Female (reference group)				
Educational level	Illiterate	1.07	2.73	0.09	0.82 & 10.48
	Literate	1.69	4.52	0.03	1.14 & 25.71
	Elementary or middle-school education	1.09	3.31	0.06	0.92 & 9.77
	High school diploma	1.23	5.43	0.02	1.21 & 9.62
	University education (reference group)				
Occupational status	Employed	1.06	1.88	0.17	0.63 & 13.41
	Housewife	1.69	4.52	0.03	1.14 & 25.71
	Retired	2.21	8.46	0.00	2.06 & 40.84
	Disabled (reference group)				
Characteristic	Categories	Ambivalence			
		B	OR	P	95%CI
Educational level	Illiterate	-0.71	10.29	0.25	0.14 & 1.67
	Literate	0.03	1.03	0.89	0.60 & 1.77
	Elementary or middle-school education	0.01	1.01	0.81	0.54 & 1.88
	High School diploma	0.24	1.27	0.67	0.75 & 2.15
	University education (reference group)				
Socioeconomic status	Low	0.88	0.55	0.45	0.23 & 24.73
	Moderate	1.52	1.72	0.18	0.47 & 44.32
	Good	1.70	2.13	0.14	0.55 & 54.39
	Very good (reference group)				

high levels of conflict with their adult children. In line with our study, Silverstain *et al.* (2010) found high levels of solidarity in the relationship between aging parents and their adult children; however, older parent-adult child conflict was observed in some areas of life, such as the relationship type with friends, habits, lifestyles, values, political beliefs, job choice, educational level, and housing status.

In general, Bangston's theory refers to the tensions in solidarity between family generations. It links conflict with tensions and disagreements between family members; if aging parents necessitate a high level of support, these tensions become more pronounced. Besides, communication between adult children, who seek independence and solidarity with their aging parents is complicated.^[23,24]

The tendency of Iranian adult children to modern values and sense of identity crisis due to the separation of the younger generation from the older one has increased over time. As the generation gap continues to grow, the improper management of acculturation processes and the reproduction of cultural values for children through the government and media, generational conflicts, and future generational differences will jeopardize the development of society.^[25]

Moreover, investigating the intergenerational relationship pattern of ambivalence between aging parents and their adult children suggested that about half of the examined aging parents reported ambivalence with their adult children, which can occur for numerous reasons and requires further investigation.

Our results are consistent with those of Pillemer *et al.* (2002), suggesting that disabilities due to old age and caring for aging parents from their adult children and impacting children's independence, generates a feeling of tension and solidarity, recognized as ambivalence.^[2] In contrast to the present study, Steinbach (2008) demonstrated that aging parents reported low levels of ambivalence with their adult children which might be due to several factors, such as age, gender, and the health status of aging parents. Furthermore, the age and gender of aging parents were the main factors affecting the intergenerational relationship patterns. Our results revealed that the mean score of solidarity in elderly women was higher than that in their male counterparts. In this regard, Shapiro (2004) introduced the gender of aging parents among the major characteristics influencing the intergenerational relationship patterns. Moreover, the mean score of solidarity of elderly women with their adult children was higher than that of the elderly men, which might be due to females' roles in caring for children and stronger mother-child communication. The present study data also indicated that the female elderly reported higher levels of conflict with their adult children, compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, the explored male elderly reported higher levels of ambivalence with their adult children, compared to their female counterparts. In contrast to our results, Pillemer *et al.* (2002) stated that female elderly reported high levels of ambivalence with their adult children, including daughters, compared to the male elderly. This finding can be attributed to women's emotional need for their children, leading to intergenerational ambivalence.^[2] In this regard, Steinbach (2008) found that despite high solidarity levels between the elderly women and their adult children, they reported greater ambivalence with their adult children, compared to the senior men, which might be explained by the higher mother-child communication. In Iran, stronger mother-child communication may cause high levels of conflict between them. Moreover, according to the children's viewpoints, fathers present high ambivalence levels, i.e., due to less frequent father-child communication. Regarding other factors affecting intergenerational relationship patterns, the obtained data indicated that aging parents who were employed, those who lived without a partner and with one of their children or family members, those who had a high socioeconomic status, and those who assessed their general health status as good, reported high levels of solidarity with their adult children.

In this regard, Takagi and Silverstein (2011) found that married children with relatively affluent parents tended to live with them in parent-headed households; married children with parents who were in relatively poor health or widowed tended to live with them in child-headed households. Furthermore, less-educated married children tended to live in the households of their higher-income parents, suggesting that parents may be purchasing traditional arrangements with less-affluent children. Therefore, poor health and economic status may reduce solidarity levels between aging parents and their adult children, leading to the development of ambivalence between them.^[26,27]

Silverstein *et al.* (2010) argued that mothers' presence in the family, the good health status of aging parents, and their financial independence might play an essential role in developing solidarity among family members. Contrary to our results, Silverstein *et al.* (2010) documented that a limitation of intergenerational studies is that aging parents tend to develop desirable relationships with their children.^[28-30]

Regarding the pattern of intergenerational conflict, the present study data highlighted those aging parents who were widowed, those who were housewives, and those who assessed their general health status as moderate or low, reported higher levels of conflict with their adult children, compared to the other groups. In line with our results, Clarke (2009) in the United States suggested that developing conflict between aging parents and their adult children does not justify the lack of solidarity between them. This is because conflicts existed between them in numerous cases. In some other cases, they reported high levels of solidarity with each other.^[31]

Furthermore, the present study findings indicated that housewives or disabled aging parents reported the highest level of ambivalence with their children. In this regard, Steinbach (2008) reflected that aging parents expect their children to assist them when necessary, like in illness. This condition can contribute to determining the levels of conflict and solidarity between aging parents and their adult children. The development of conflict and solidarity between aging parents and their adult children can lead to the generation of ambivalence between them.^[32]

In contrast to our results, Guo *et al.*^[33] (2013) outlined the gender of aging parents among the main characteristics affecting the pattern of intergenerational ambivalence between aging parents and their adult children. In western countries, higher levels of ambivalence were observed between elderly women and their adult children. In Eastern countries, like China, elderly men reported higher levels of ambivalence with their adult children, including sons, which might be due to the high expectations of elderly fathers from their sons.

In line with the obtained data, several studies in Iran reported significant differences between young, middle-aged, and older adults concerning value preferences which may be due to the developing conditions in Iran.^[34,35]

Given the objectives of the present study, aging parents were interviewed and no interview was conducted with their adult children, i.e., a study limitation. The study was also conducted on the urban-living elderly; therefore, future similar studies are recommended to explore the rural-residing elderly.

Conclusion

Considering the importance of the type of relationship between aging parents and their adult children, the literature suggests that the patterns of intergenerational relationships between aging

parents and their adult children are the major characteristics affecting most aspects of aging parents' lives. The present study results indicated that the level of conflict between aging parents and their adult children was greater than that of the solidarity level, reflecting the intergenerational gap. Therefore, the necessary implications should be adopted to promote intergenerational family relationships by providing family counseling. Furthermore, several factors, such as age, gender, educational level, occupational status, living status, health status, and socioeconomic status of aging parents were the most essential characteristics affecting the patterns of intergenerational relationships between aging parents and their adult children. Further research is required to investigate intergenerational relationships in this respect. For example, Families should first be examined by various studies to identify behavioral problems in the elderly and treat them with the help of family physicians. Family physicians try to break down inflexible intergenerational patterns that cause discomfort within relationships. Additionally, the political and cultural situations of the countries should be considered to achieve better conclusions. To understand the ecological conditions, government structure, economic development, cultural values of a country, and their impacts on the intergenerational relationship between aging parents and their adult children should be explored.

Therefore, it is recommended that further studies be conducted on a larger sample size in this regard.

The key points

Older parent-child relations and their impact on the elderly's lives are of importance.

The theory of solidarity also attempts to provide a valid explanation for the long-term ties between parents and children and why family relations require solidarity. The six dimensions of solidarity that can be distinguished in intergenerational family relations are as follows: affectual (positive sentiments and feelings), functional (resource and support exchange), structural (interaction opportunities), consensual (attitude and value agreement), normative (commitment to familial obligations), and associational (interaction and activity frequency and type).

The present research results demonstrated that the level of conflict between aging parents and their adult children exceeded the solidarity level, indicating the intergenerational gap. Therefore, the necessary implications should be adopted to promote intergenerational relationships within the family by providing family counseling. Further research is recommended to consider the essential role of predictive factors, such as age, gender, educational level, occupational status, living arrangements, health status, and socioeconomic status of aging parents concerning the intergenerational relationships between aging parents and their adult children.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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