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Studies on support exchanges in older parent-child dyads have so far not used observational approaches. Rather, they have mostly relied on self-report/questionnaire approaches. However, support exchanges represent a dyadic phenomenon that goes beyond individual perspectives on the quality of support; thus, self-reports offer only a part of the picture and are subject to bias (e.g., memory bias). In contrast, observations are better suited to capture specific support behaviors and allow for studying the dyad “in action.” Our study purpose was to examine mutual support during interactions between older adults and their children, and to investigate the links of support behaviors to relationship quality and health. Fifty dyads living in Switzerland, composed of individuals aged 70 and over and the child involved in their care, participated in a standardized interaction task: The parent described and discussed a personally challenging situation with the child for ten minutes; then roles were reversed. The videotaped interaction was analyzed using the Social Support Behavior Code Adapted for Elders (Meystre et al., submitted). Relationship quality and subjective health were assessed via standardized questionnaires. Various types of support were observed, ranging from positive to negative. Children provided more informational support than parents. Dyads with poor relationship quality showed more informational support. Better participant health was associated with fewer negative behaviors. In sum, observing the dyads in real time offered unique insights into interacting patterns of support among older parents and their children, and enabled us to capture the nature of their relationship above and beyond individual self-reports.

BLOOD THICKER THAN WATER? STEPGAP IN INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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The increasing prevalence of ageing stepfamilies and stepchildren’s potential to act as a source of support for older parents has prompted research about intergenerational cohesion in step-relationships. Previous research has hypothesized a qualitative gap (a step-gap) between step and biological relationships to the advantage of the latter. In this Swedish study we compare emotional closeness between older parents and adult children among parents (aged 66-79) who have had both biological and stepchildren, and children (aged X-Y) who have had both biological and stepparents. Qualitative interviews (n=24) of family histories including a hierarchical convoy model of family relationships were collected and analyzed. Results show that with few exceptions biological relationships are rated as emotionally closer than step-relationships, both by parents and adult children, supporting the step-gap hypothesis. While the older parents tend to deemphasize the importance of blood for their ratings, the adult children often emphasize the importance of blood. The difference is explained by a parental adherence to an ideology of equal treatment of children, while the adult children stress the importance of biology for their identity and belonging.

ARE FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS A PROTECTIVE RESOURCE AMONG ADULTS WITH FUNCTIONAL IMPAIRMENT?

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Health-related declines that affect physical functioning are a common stressor among older adults. Functional impairment can take a toll on older adults’ psychological well-being as it limits one’s capacities to independently carry out meaningful daily activities. The extent to which impairment affects mental health may vary based on the levels of support and strain in one’s personal relationships. Stress buffering perspectives suggest that support mitigates the detrimental psychological consequences of impairment, whereas stress amplification perspectives predict that strain will amplify these consequences. We use data from 2012 and 2016 waves of the Health and Retirement Study (N=3800) to explore: (a) the direct effects of functional limitation on depressive symptoms (CES-D); (b) the extent to which these associations are moderated by spouse, child, other relative, and friend support/strain; and (c) gender and marital status differences therein. Using lagged endogenous regression models, we find that impairment significantly increases depressive symptoms among men and women, and these effects are intensified by marital strain for both married men and women. However, buffering effects are found for women only, such that marital support mitigates against depressive symptoms in the face of current impairment. These results may reflect the gendered nature of marriage, where men with impairment uniformly benefit from marriage although women may experience protective effects of only in highly supportive unions. Results for other strain and support moderators also reveal gender differences, reflecting the distinctive ways that men and women interact with kin and friends over the life course.

IS ME IMPORTANT TO US? ACTOR AND PARTNER EFFECTS OF SELF-ACCEPTANCE ON SPOUSAL SUPPORT

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Marital relationship is influenced by substantial and perceived support exchange. Therefore, it is important to find predictors of support-giving and support-receiving. However, very few studies attempted to do so. As some previous studies reported, individuals’ personality-related characteristics seem to play a significant role in the support exchange within couples. This study aimed to assess the effect of individuals’ self-acceptance on support exchange within older couples. Data of 2,082 heterosexual older couples aged between 50 and 85 in 2006 from the Health and Retirement Study were assessed utilizing an actor-partner inter-dependence model and growth curve model. For the actor effects, both husbands’ and wives’ higher levels of self-acceptance predicted their own perception of the support from a spouse. For the partner effects as well, individuals’ self-acceptance positively predicted their spouse’s perception of the received support. Husbands’ self-acceptance, however, was associated with a decrease in wives’ perceived support. We discuss the possible mechanism with regard to older adults’ self-acceptance and