

Reciprocity in Intergenerational Support: East Asian Societies Studied from a Multilevel Perspective

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1. Aim

These studies on intergenerational support have investigated the amount of resources flowing between parents and children, often focusing on support in a particular direction; reciprocity in such supportive relations is however an unexplored area.

2. Data & Methods

We propose a number of novel measures of reciprocity in intergenerational support. Using data from the 2006 Family Module of East Asian Social Survey, predictors of these reciprocity measures were investigated from the perspective of three prominent theories in the intergenerational support literature, namely exchange theory, hierarchical compensation theory, and social dilution theory. Multi-level analyses were conducted, taking into account cross-national and regional variation.

3. Results

Results indicated that individual characteristics, as well as family characteristics and parental variables predicted reciprocity in intergenerational support. Still, unexplained cross-societal and cross-regional variation remained. While descriptive analyses clearly showed cross-societal differences in norms, these differences could not explain away the cross-societal or cross-regional variation in observed reciprocity. Contrary to expectations, this suggests that not differences in norms, but other factors explain reciprocity in intergenerational support; this warrants further research.

4. Conclusion

Our contributions are two-folded. Theoretically, we focused on two-sided support rather than on a particular direction. Methodologically, we therefore contributed by introducing a measure of reciprocity in supportive relations as the amount of support given in excess over the amount of support received, standardized over the total amount of support given and received in the relation. In addition, we used a multilevel method to control for regional variation. Finally, we investigated cross-society comparison of East Asia (China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan) rather than focusing on individual countries separately.

5. References

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