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## **INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY AS VIEWED BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES**

### **Introduction**

Intergenerational solidarity is a phenomenon which cannot be viewed in black and white terms. It is a sensitive theme, and is not linked solely with strictly positive or strictly negative manifestations. V. Bengtson et al. (2002) describe intergenerational solidarity as intergenerational interaction within the family. This concerns feelings, stances and behaviour which can be observed in individual family members across generations. The relationship between two family members can be influenced by interaction between the other members of the family, thus for example the bonds of grandchildren to grandparents are influenced by their relationships with their parents. Intergenerational solidarity can also be defined as solidarity expressed between children and their parents (Williams and Nussbaum in Rabušicová, Kamanová, Pevná, 2011), and the concept of intergenerational solidarity is closely linked with the term intergenerational conflict, the cause of which are mostly prejudices about other generations. However, a negative or problematic role in the issue of intergenerational solidarity need not be played only by prejudices.

The “social contract” which permeates Western societies perceives reciprocity as an important element (Schwarz et al., 2005). Provided intergenerational support may therefore lead to feelings of guilt in the case that the recipient thereof is incapable of returning this in the long term. A sense of injustice may also arise in situations in which the provider of intergenerational support feels that they are providing more over the long term than they are receiving. In extreme cases, the above situation may lead to burn-out syndrome, anxiety or feelings of anger toward the recipient of support. The provided support may bring with it a negative burden also in cases where the provider

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of support has a tendency to intervene in the life of the recipient. In the recipient this may induce feelings of dependency, a loss of self-esteem or a loss of autonomy.

### **Attitudes toward intergenerational solidarity**

The Czech population is ageing and the number of senior citizens is therefore increasing, which in future will mean the necessity of applying an approach of solidarity with regard to older people, as well as an endeavour to prevent intergenerational conflicts. In relationships and communication between generations, solidarity and conflicts arise with varying frequency and intensity.

According to the studies that have been conducted (Bengtson, Lowenstein in Rabušicová, Kamanová, Pevná, 2011), different generations have different attitudes toward intergenerational solidarity. In parents a tendency is manifested to attribute greater emphasis to solidarity and less to intergenerational conflict. In children the opposite applies – they overestimate conflicts, whereas solidarity does not play such an important role for them. This therefore leads to the conclusion that the older generation expends greater effort in maintaining good intergenerational relationships than the younger generation. V. Bengtson (in Pacáková, Trusinová, 2012, p. 45) compiled a six-dimensional model of intergenerational solidarity. The model is divided into the following parts, which form a single whole: emotional solidarity (intimacy and remoteness), solidarity of contacts (integration and isolation), solidarity of concordance (agreement and disagreement), functional solidarity (dependency and independence), normative solidarity (sense of belonging to family and individualism), and structural solidarity (opportunities and barriers).

The stability of social relationships generally rests upon the expectation (Schwarz et al., 2005, pp. 33-38) that the help and support provided to another person will be returned within a commensurate period. This also applies in the case of intergenerational relationships, although within this context the term “support bank” is used. Reciprocity and support between the individual members of a family need not be of the same type, and its course may be layered throughout the whole of life, thus reciprocal support need not be provided within a short time frame. At the same time, a strong feeling of obligation with regard to family values and a close and positive emotional relationship within the family increase intergenerational support.

### **Intergenerational solidarity in European countries in comparison with the Czech Republic**

Normative intergenerational solidarity is not the same in all European countries. Surveys have been conducted within the framework of the EVS – European Values

Study (Petrová, Kafková, 2010, pp. 76-77), the basis of which were questions determining the degree of solidarity of children with their parents. The respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement with statements such as “I agree that we must honour our parents even if their behaviour does not merit this”, or with the assertion that “when a parent is seriously ill or in fragile health, it is above all the obligation of the adult offspring to look after him/her”. The results of the study indicate large differences between countries. Less than 20% of Finns and Danes are convinced of the obligation to provide parents with long-term care if they need it. At the opposite end of the scale in terms of their attitudes were the Portuguese, who were convinced of this obligation in 81% of cases. The population of the Czech Republic expressed agreement with the obligation to care for their parents in 50% of cases. Willingness to honour parents under all circumstances was expressed by 92% of Ukrainians, closely followed by the Maltese, Moldovans and Cypriots. According to this survey, 39% of Danes, 40% of Dutch and 42% of Finns were unconvinced of the need to honour one’s parents even if their behaviour does not merit this. Czechs would honour their parents under all circumstances in 64% of cases according to this survey. The Czech family is willing to provide a family member in need with help, although according to Marcela Petrová Kafková (2010, p. 82) it also expects support from the state (in the form of various institutions which assist with care).

We are therefore closest to the Baltic states and to neighbouring Austria and Germany. By contrast, we differ markedly from the countries of Southern and also Eastern Europe. We thus rank among those countries in which a large role in the care of dependent individuals is played by institutions, and their needs are not met only by the family.

### **Description of research investigation and characteristics of examined group**

The main aim of the research investigation was to determine the stances taken by university students aged 19-25 years with regard to intergenerational solidarity. The aim was not a statistical analysis of data and testing of hypotheses, but rather mapping of whether the respondents were willing to display intergenerational solidarity and the contexts within which they perceived intergenerational solidarity. The actual questionnaire investigation was conducted in the period of 2016 to 2017. The respondents were students of social sciences at the University of Hradec Králové. We were interested in the attitudes of young people who in future will share in the provision of social care with regard to their families. As concerns the aim of the research investigation, we determined the research sample using the technique of “targeted selection” (Disman, 2006). The advantage of this method of selecting the research sample is the high return rate of the questionnaires.

A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed. The sole criterion for selection of the sample of respondents was that the respondent studies a discipline of a social character in an attended course at university. Students from the fields of social work, sociology, pathology, social pedagogy and special education were addressed. Out of a total number of 300 questionnaires, 297 were returned.

Within the framework of the research technique, a questionnaire of our own construction was used. It contained 25 closed questions, with the option of choosing one response or more items according to the type of question posed. The respondents chose the closest response to their opinion and attitude. The average age of the respondents was 22.1 years.

Table 1. Basic statistical data on respondents of research investigation

Sex of respondent	Absolute number	Relative frequency
Men	68	23,00%
Women	229	77%

Source: author's study.

## Analysis of problem

Intergenerational solidarity is represented by bonds within the framework of the family. In the last twenty years the strength of these bonds has been in decline, and at the same time families count on care for senior citizens with the aid of social services. The aim of our research investigation is to determine the contexts within which young people perceive intergenerational solidarity, and whether they are willing to display this solidarity. We will be interested in any differences which may ensue in attitudes between men and women. Within the framework of the research investigation, we determined this information by means of seven questions in the questionnaire.

Statements numbers 11, 14 and 19 in the questionnaire were used to determine the willingness of the respondents to manifest intergenerational solidarity actively. Almost 49% of respondents expressed agreement with the statement "older people deserve our respect under all circumstances" in the form of a response of "agree strongly", and a further 35% of respondents gave a response of "agree rather". None of the young people within the framework of the research investigation chose the answer "don't know". Upon a comparison of attitudes of men and women, differences were found to exist in the responses.

From the percentage expression of the results, it is possible to see that if we count the categories "agree strongly" and "agree rather", in both categories we find agreement within the range of 80-85%. However, women were more likely to express agreement in

Table 2. Statement no. 11: Older people deserve our respect under all circumstances – women

Agreement with statement	Agree strongly	Agree rather	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree rather	Disagree strongly	Don't know	Total
Absolute number	140	60	29	0	0	0	229
Relative frequency	61%	26%	13%	0%	0%	0%	100%

Source: author's study.

Table 3. Statement no. 11: Older people deserve our respect under all circumstances – men

Agreement with statement	Agree strongly	Agree rather	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree rather	Disagree strongly	Don't know	Total
Absolute number	27	28	8	1	3	0	68
Relative frequency	40%	41%	12%	2%	5%	0%	100%

Source: author's study.

the form of “agree strongly”, whereas in men the categories “agree strongly” and “agree rather” were represented almost equally.

Statement no. 14, namely “if a senior citizen in my family needed help (with shopping, accompaniment to the doctor etc.) I would help him/her” produced a result with one of the greatest degrees of uniformity of opinions of the respondents. In completing the questionnaire, the students chose only the options of “agree strongly” 86% and “agree rather” (14%).

An evaluation of the attitudes on this statement indicates that students of social sciences are willing to share in practical assistance for senior citizens. Differences were to be found in the attitudes of men and women, with women choosing the response “agree strongly” more often.

Table 4. Statement no. 14: If a senior citizen in my family needed help (with shopping, accompaniment to the doctor etc.) I would help him/her – women

Agreement with statement	Agree strongly	Agree rather	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree rather	Disagree strongly	Don't know	Total
Absolute number	211	18	0	0	0	0	229
Relative frequency	92%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

Source: author's study.

Table 5. Statement no. 14: If a senior citizen in my family needed help (with shopping, accompaniment to the doctor etc.) I would help him/her – men

Agreement with statement	Agree strongly	Agree rather	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree rather	Disagree strongly	Don't know	Total
Absolute number	55	13	0	0	0	0	68
Relative frequency	81%	19%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

Source: author's study.

On statement no. 19, namely “family is very important, and its members should support one another”, the respondents expressed a similarly pronounced attitude as with the previous statement. Here too, none of the respondents chose any option other than “agree strongly” (87%) or “agree rather” (13%).

Upon a comparison of men and women we found a result in which “agree strongly” was chosen by 84% of men (within the framework of a comparison of men) and almost 90% of women. Attitudes to statements no. 14 and no. 19 are very similar in terms of producing uniformity of opinion, and may indicate that the young people addressed in this research investigation view the family and mutual support within its framework as an important value in life.

We also determined the statements of respondents concerning whether any applicable necessary care for senior citizens should be provided by the state, the family of the senior citizen, or the senior citizen himself/herself. This area was covered by statements no. 7, 8, 15 and 20.

Within the framework of statement no. 7, namely “if an older person is ill, his/her adult offspring must take care of him/her”, the majority of all respondents inclined toward the alternatives “agree strongly” or “agree rather” (total for both options 84%).

Table 6. Statement no. 7: If an older person is ill, his/her adult offspring must take care of him/her – women

Agreement with statement	Agree strongly	Agree rather	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree rather	Disagree strongly	Don't know	Total
Absolute number	124	71	34	0	0	0	229
Relative frequency	54%	31%	15%	0%	0%	0%	100%

Source: author's study.

Table 7. Statement no. 7: If an older person is ill, his/her adult offspring must take care of him/her – men

Agreement with statement	Agree strongly	Agree rather	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree rather	Disagree strongly	Don't know	Total
Absolute number	25	33	6	2	1	1	68
Relative frequency	36%	48%	%	3%	2%	2%	100%

Source: author's study.

None of the women chose the option “disagree rather”, “disagree strongly” or “don't know”, and a total of 54% expressed a view of “agree strongly” with the statement that adult offspring must take care of older people. Men also expressed agreement in their attitudes, although they chose “agree strongly” in only 36% of cases, and in total 7% of men chose the categories of “disagree rather”, “disagree strongly” and “don't know”.

In the case of statement no. 8, namely “people should save for their old age in order not to be financially dependent on their children”, the majority of respondents inclined

towards a position of agreement. The most frequent response (in 43% of cases) was “agree rather”, followed by almost 28% of respondents who chose the option “agree strongly”.

It is clear from table no. 7 that none of the women answered “disagree strongly”, whereas the men chose this option in approximately 3% of cases. Women were more often convinced that people should “rather save” (51%) for their old age, and chose the option “agree strongly” in 15% of cases. Men responded to this question with the stance of “agree strongly” in 36% of cases, and “agree rather” in 38%. Attitudes to this statement may indicate a certain correlation with the attitude toward the previous statement. Men (in contrast with women) more often “rather” than “strongly agree” that support should be provided to senior citizens, and these attitudes are illustrated further by their responses to the statement concerning the appropriateness of saving for old age – men (in contrast with women) had a greater preference for the option of “agree strongly”. Men express a willingness to help, but not as decisively and automatically as women.

Statement no. 15 tests the attitude of respondents regarding care for a dependent senior citizen, specifically whether the state should care for such persons. 38% of all respondents answered “agree rather”, followed by 27% who answered “agree strongly”. A full fifth of respondents chose the option of “neither agree nor disagree”. A total of 65% of all respondents expressed agreement that the state should care for senior citizens. Differences were found between the attitudes of men and women.

Table 8. Statement no. 15: The state should care for dependent senior citizens – women

Agreement with statement	Agree strongly	Agree rather	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree rather	Disagree strongly	Don't know	Total
Absolute number	64	76	60	18	0	11	229
Relative frequency	28%	33%	26%	8%	0%	5%	100%

Source: author's study.

Table 9. Statement no. 15: The state should care for dependent senior citizens – men

Agreement with statement	Agree strongly	Agree rather	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree rather	Disagree strongly	Don't know	Total
Absolute number	18	28	11	3	3	5	68
Relative frequency	26%	41%	16%	5%	5%	7%	100%

Source: author's study.

The difference in the attitudes of men and women can be found in the responses of “agree rather” and “neither agree nor disagree”. Men incline more toward the position that the state should care for dependent senior citizens, whereas women showed a greater preference for the answer “neither agree nor disagree”. Responses to this

statement are all the more interesting within the context of the fact that within the framework of this research investigation, 100% of respondents expressed agreement with the statement “if a senior citizen in my family needed help (with shopping, accompaniment to the doctor etc.) I would help him/her”, and 100% of respondents also expressed agreement with the statement “family is very important, and its members should support one another”.

The last evaluated attitude is statement no. 20, namely “senior citizens deserve the best healthcare paid for by the state”. The respondents most frequently chose the answers “agree rather” (42%), “neither agree nor disagree” (27%) and “agree strongly” (22%). Stances of agreement therefore predominate. This may mean that young people feel solidarity with senior citizens and consider it necessary that quality healthcare is provided for them from public finances, but that the responsibility for caring for senior citizens should be borne by the state.

Table 10. Statement no. 20: Senior citizens deserve the best healthcare paid for by the state – men and women

Agreement with statement	Agree strongly	Agree rather	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree rather	Disagree strongly	Don't know	Total
Absolute number	65	125	80	12	3	12	297
Relative frequency	22%	42%	27%	4%	1%	4%	100%

Source: author's study.

## Discussion

Within the framework of the research investigation, university students of social sciences reflected their awareness of their obligations toward the older members of their family. They perceive the importance of the family and family cohesion, and are willing to manifest intergenerational solidarity. It is interesting that students of social sciences, as ensued from the research investigation, expect that older people during the course of their lives will save money for their old age. They therefore expect a certain degree of independence and autonomy on the part of senior citizens. If a senior citizen becomes dependent, university students of social sciences have a tendency to assume that care for such a person should be provided by the state.

University students of social sciences in attendance study view the family and family cohesion as an important life value within the framework of intergenerational solidarity. This contradicts the frequently presented pronouncement on the crisis of the family and the decline of family solidarity, and indicates that for individuals not only of more advanced age the family remains a fundamental source of help and support (within the Czech environment a high intensity of intergenerational support has been demonstrated for example by Vidovičová, 2008; Rabušic, 2001; Jirásková et al.,



2005). Nevertheless, students of social sciences expect active participation on the part of senior citizens in providing for themselves in old age. If a senior citizen becomes dependent, although the students incline toward the opinion that the family should take care of such persons, at the same time the majority of them express the view that it is the responsibility of the state to provide care within a social and healthcare context.

At present, however, instead of a decline in the significance of intergenerational relationships, an increase in their importance is now being suggested. The reason for this is the considerable instability of the family and the overall diversification of lifestyles. There is also a fundamental influence of the ageing of the population. The increase in the number of senior citizens in society forces us to face the question of whether society can cope with care for these persons. However, a question remains as to whether the present/future family will be willing to take on this responsibility. As a result, it is important to ensure quality university preparation of trained professionals, who will be able to provide this care at a high expert standard.

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### **Intergenerational Solidarity as Viewed by University Students of the Social Sciences**

**Summary:** The article deals with the issue of the significance of intergenerational solidarity. From a demographic perspective, Czech society is ageing considerably, and the theme of care for senior citizens is resonating throughout the social sciences. At present, however, instead of a decline in the significance of intergenerational relationships, an increase in their importance is now being suggested. This theme is highly topical mainly within the context of provision of social care for dependent senior citizens. The aim of the research investigation was not a statistical data analysis or testing of hypotheses, but rather mapping of whether the respondents are willing to display intergenerational solidarity, and the contexts within which they perceive intergenerational solidarity. The actual questionnaire investigation was conducted within the period of 2016 to 2017. The respondents were students of social sciences at the University of Hradec Králové. We focused on the attitudes of young people who in future will share in the provision of social care with regard to senior citizens and their families.

**Keywords:** intergenerational solidarity, social care, undergraduate course, social sciences.

### **Solidarność międzypokoleniowa widziana oczami studentów nauk społecznych**

**Streszczenie:** Artykuł porusza kwestię znaczenia solidarności międzypokoleniowej. Z perspektywy demograficznej społeczeństwo czeskie starzeje się w szybkim tempie, a temat opieki nad osobami starszymi rozbrzmiewa echem w naukach społecznych. Obecnie jednak, zamiast osłabienia znaczenia relacji międzypokoleniowych, zauważa się wzrost ich wartości. Temat ten jest bardzo aktualny głównie w kontekście świadczenia pomocy społecznej osobom starszym wymagającym opieki. Celem badania nie była analiza danych statystycznych ani testowanie hipotez, ale raczej określenie, czy respondenci są skłonni do przejawiania solidarności międzypokoleniowej, oraz wyszczególnienie okoliczności, w których ją postrzegają. Właściwe badanie ankietowe zostało przeprowadzone w okresie od 2016 do 2017 roku. Respondenci byli studentami nauk społecznych na Uniwersytecie w Hradec Králové. Skupiliśmy się na postawach młodych ludzi, którzy w przyszłości będą uczestniczyć w świadczeniu opieki społecznej seniorom i ich rodzinom.

**Słowa kluczowe:** solidarność międzypokoleniowa, opieka społeczna, licencjat, nauki społeczne.