

Functional Solidarity between Grandparents and Grandchildren
in Germany

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Abstract

This paper, which includes an extended discussion of the emergence of research into grandparenting in Germany, presents evidence from the German Ageing Survey on patterns of intergenerational support between grandparents and their grandchildren in Germany, and how they have changed since the mid 1990s. The findings are compared with data on support patterns between the target population and their adult children. The analysis also considers the impact of age and changes over time. The main conclusion of the paper is that the likelihood of financial transfers to grandchildren was higher in 2002 than six years earlier. There is, furthermore, a greater imbalance in the grandparent-grandchild relationship than in the parent-adult child relationship. It is suggested that financial and instrumental support patterns between grandparents and grandchildren are best explained using the intergenerational stake hypothesis, whereas the intergenerational solidarity hypothesis is better suited to explain support patterns in the parent-child relationship.

Introduction

In contrast to popular belief, the widespread experience of grandparenthood is quite a recent phenomenon. In the past, intergenerational relations extending across three generations were very rare and usually lasted only for a short time (Hareven 2001; Lauterbach 1995a). Today, three-generation family networks are the norm (Harper 2005; Hoff 2006a). Grandparenthood has become a role inseparably linked to old age that is seen as continuation of the family cycle (Hoff and Tesch-Römer 2007). Most people become grandmothers or grandfathers, see their grandchildren grow up, eventually forming a family of their own. Quite a few live to see their great-grandchildren growing up as well. Bengtson (2001) suggests that grandparents will play an increasingly important role in multi-generational families. The combined effects of rising life expectancy (longer lifetime spent with grandchildren) and falling fertility (fewer grandchildren) may have the unintended side effect of fit and wealthy grandparents competing for the attention of fewer grandchildren (Uhlenberg 2005).

This paper will use data from the German Ageing Survey to explore change and continuity of intergenerational support relations between grandparents and grandchildren in Germany between the mid 1990s and early 2000s. Research hypotheses are derived from two theoretical frameworks originally developed to explain intergenerational relationships between neighbouring generations: the concept of 'intergenerational solidarity' (Bengtson and Roberts 1991) and the 'intergenerational stake hypothesis' (Giarrusso, Stallings and Bengtson 1995). Responses to the German Ageing Survey are analysed with a view to elucidating

mutual support patterns between grandparents and grandchildren. Functional aspects of the grandparent-grandchild relationship are compared with those of the parent-child relationship. The impact of grandparents' age on the relationship, as well as more specific aspects of the support pattern, are explored.

The emergence of grandparenthood research in Germany

In Germany, the sociological research interest in grandparenthood is still quite recent. This lack of interest is astonishing, given that never before have there been as many grandparents and grandchildren. Today, most Germans can expect to become grandparents at some stage and to spend more life years as grandparents than ever before. This is mainly the result of increasing life expectancies over the past 50 years. Thus, German men who were born in 2004 can expect to become 76.5 years old – women 82.1 years (Eurostat 2006). Another factor that contributed to more time available for grandparent-grandchild relationship is the compression of morbidity (Fries 1980). As a consequence, many grandparents play an active part in the lives of their grandchildren.

But other demographic trends counteract the likelihood of becoming a grandparent. Thus, total fertility rates in Germany have fallen from 2.37 in 1960 to 1.36 in 2004 (Eurostat 2006). An increasing trend towards postponement of births is a major causal factor for this development. At an age of 28 (East) or 29 years (West) German women are today 4-5 years older when having their first child than in the early 1980s (Engstler and Menning 2003). As a consequence of this development, the distance between generations is increasing. A rising propensity to childlessness reduces the chances of becoming a grandparent in the first place. But even those who become grandparents will have fewer grandchildren. Declining fertility rates contribute to the narrowing ("*Verschmälerung*") (Hörl and Kytir 1998) of generations and the emergence of 'bean-pole' shaped family networks (Bengtson, Rosenthal and Burton 1990). Individuals will thus grow old having more vertical than horizontal linkages in the family, which means that they will also spend longer time in linking the generations within a family network (Harper 2005).

As with US researchers in the 1960s and 1970s, German gerontologists and family researchers focused primarily on what these changes would mean for

intergenerational relations in general, thereby merely touching the grandparent theme without really focusing on it (see, for example, Bertram 1996, Bien 1994b, Fookan 1999, Kohli, Künemund, Motel and Szydlik 2000, Lauterbach 1995a, Lauterbach and Klein 1997, Schütze 1997, Wagner and Schütze 1998, Wagner, Schütze and Lang 1996).

The relationship between ageing *parents* and their adult children has, in the meantime, served as the focus object of a great deal of research, looking at relationship characteristics, such as reported closeness, contact frequency, and geographical proximity (e.g. Kohli, Künemund, Motel and Szydlik 2000, Lauterbach and Pillemer 1996, Szydlik 1995, 1997, 2000) or the provision and receipt of social support and informal transfers (Alt 1994, Künemund and Hollstein 2000, Marbach 1994b, 1997, Motel-Klingebiel 2000, Motel and Szydlik 1999, Motel and Spieß 1995).

The grandparent-grandchild relationship has not enjoyed the same attention. The first German publications available on the issue were practical guidebooks for grandparents; and the first academic sources dealing with grandparent-grandchildren-relations came from practitioner-oriented backgrounds, namely social work and applied family sociology/family therapy. A related – though more recent – theme originates in legal studies and concerns the legal position of grandparents (e.g. Helmstaedter 1996, Leurs 2003). This research is mainly motivated by questions of grandparents' access to their grandchildren following divorce/separation of their children. Others published articles on the same theme in a context of wider intergenerational relations (e.g. Marbach 1998, Templeton and Bauerreiss 1994).

The notion of 'intergenerational learning' has motivated others again to focus on the grandparent-grandchild relationship (e.g. Krappmann 1997, Lange and Lauterbach 1998, Lüscher and Liegle 2003). Krappmann (1997) emphasises the role grandparents play in the socialisation of their grandchildren. Lüscher & Liegle (2003) argue that this specific aspect of the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is mutual, i.e. while grandparents pass on historical knowledge to their grandchildren; they teach their grandparents the use of modern technology (mobiles, computers, VCR, etc.) in turn.

The grandparent role was also discussed as an important aspect of later life in the context of what ageing means for individual and society (e.g. Thiersch 1999). For example, it was asked if the meaning of grandparenthood had changed for the birth-cohorts who only recently became grandparents. Eisenreich (1998) suggested that these younger cohorts may become 'new grandparents' who have different attitudes, norms and values and thus have a different, 'new' relationship to their grandchildren.

At the same time feminist researchers were beginning to contribute their own new insights into the gendered experience of grandparenthood (e.g. Herlyn and Kistner 1997, Herlyn, Kistner, Langer-Schulz, Lehmann and Wächter 1998, Herlyn and Lehmann 1998, Kremer 2001). How did women react to grandmotherhood? Older women generally attach a great of importance to this role; and they are frequently in touch with their grandchildren – a sixth reported to be in touch with their grandchildren on a daily basis, a quarter at least several times per week (Herlyn, Kistner, Langer-Schulz, Lehmann and Wächter 1998). They also look after their grandchildren more frequently than do grandfathers (Bien 1994b, Herlyn, Kistner, Langer-Schulz, Lehmann and Wächter 1998).

The beginnings of a more systematic social-gerontological research body on grandparenthood can be located in the mid/late 1990s, with Wolfgang Lauterbach's work being particularly influential in this respect. Data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) was used to show that the grandparents of about 80 per cent of 10-14 years old grandchildren lived within an hour travel distance (Lange and Lauterbach 1998); and that geographical proximity and contact frequency largely determine the quality of the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren (Lauterbach 2002, Lange and Lauterbach 1998, 1997). Geographical proximity is indeed the best predictor of a high contact frequency (Wagner and Settersten 1994), increasing only increases contact frequency but also the provision of informal support (Marbach 1994). Clearly, if grandparents and grandchildren live nearby, they have far more and more diverse opportunities for mutual contact and interaction. Nor are grandparents the only active partners in forging links between the generations. Lange & Lauterbach (1997) suggest that grandchildren themselves play an equally important role. This present paper will add new knowledge to the developing body of research

on grandparent-grandchild relationships, with a specific focus on functional aspects of the relationship.

Grandparents as family supporters

The functional aspect of the grandparent-grandchild relationship was first explored by German researchers examining the role played by grandparents in managing family crises, such as divorce/separation or unemployment of their children (Fabian 1994; Fthenakis 1998). Educational sociologists have taken a similar perspective, focusing on childcare provision by grandparents at times of family crises (Sommer-Himmel 2001). A study on informal support mobilisation strategies of lone mothers, who are arguably more in need of grandparental support than two-parent families, found that German grandparents can play a vital role in providing emergency childcare to their grandchildren (Hoff 2006b).

Although research such as this is all quite recent in Germany, functional aspects of the grandparent-grandchild relationship have been a recurring theme in American family sociology for more than 60 years (Szinovacz 1998). Already one of the first studies on grandparenthood stressed the supporting role of grandmothers as ‘rescuers’ of families (von Hentig 1946) – a theme that re-emerged during the 1970s and 1980s in the wake of rising numbers of divorces, ‘out-of-wedlock’ births, and lone mothers (e.g. Cherlin and Furstenberg 1986; Kivett 1985). In the more recent past, the supportive function of grandparents has remained high on the research agenda in the United States (see, for example, Baydar and Brooks-Gunn 1998; Silverstein, Giarrusso and Bengtson 1998). Bass and Caro (1996) estimated that American grandparents provided childcare services worth \$ 17-29 billion annually. Cooney and Smith (1996) examined the impact of parental divorce on functional solidarity between grandparents and their adult grandchildren – but did not find any association. British researchers also have studied grandparenting in divorced families (Ferguson 2004), in support of lone parents (Harper et al. 2004), and in reconstituted families (Dimmock et al. 2004). It seems that maternal grandmothers attempt to preserve frequent contact with grandchildren, whereas paternal grandparents tend to maintain only limited contact, a conclusion confirmed by a French study, which further emphasises the resulting higher support propensity by the maternal line (Gauthier 2002).

Custodial grandparenting is another hotly debated issue. According to Harper (2005), some 3.7 million grandparents are currently helping to raise 3.9 million children in the United States. Although many custodial grandmothers find their role rewarding (Pruchno 1999), and researchers have tended to depict intergenerational transfers by grandparents as expression of altruism and self-sacrifice (Silverstein 2006), it has to be remembered that grandparents who assume parenting roles often do so at great cost to their material, physical, and mental well-being (Minkler et al. 2000).

The introduction of large-scale, population-based surveys addressing intergenerational transfers in the United States during the 1990s contributed to an emerging research interest in *transfers* between grandparents and grandchildren (Kronebusch and Schlesinger 1994), which is the focus of this present paper. These improvements in the data and the methodologies available for researching supportive relations between grandparents and grandchildren were accompanied by the application of theoretical concepts originally developed to explain supportive behaviour between neighbouring generations to the grandparent-grandchild relationship.

Hypothesising intergenerational support in the grandparent-grandchild and parent-child relationships

Intergenerational solidarity hypothesis

Vern L. Bengtson developed the intergenerational solidarity construct as a way of conceptualising patterns of solidarity between parents and their adult children during the life course (for the beginnings of his solidarity model see Bengtson 1975; Bengtson, Olander and Haddad 1976; Bengtson and Schrader 1982). Although Bengtson and colleagues recognised the multidimensional nature of the intergenerational solidarity construct, it has become even more multi-faceted over the course of time. Bengtson and Roberts (1991) augmented the construct to incorporate another three dimensions – associational, affectional, and consensual solidarity – in response to criticism of the gaps left in original three dimensions of normative, functional and structural solidarity (cf. Atkinson, Kivett and Campbell 1986; Roberts and Bengtson 1990). The idea of intergenerational solidarity has since become very influential, inspiring numerous empirical studies on intergenerational family relations worldwide (see, for example, Attias-Donfut 2003; Bawin-Legros and Stassen 2002; Kohli et al. 2000; the authors in Lowenstein and Ogg 2003).

Most relevant for this present analysis research is the functional solidarity dimension, which is intended to reflect the extent of resource sharing and (mutual) support provision in regard to various support types, including financial/material, instrumental, emotional, or cognitive support. It takes into account both objective (e.g. frequency of support) and subjective aspects (e.g. perception of support received). Silverstein, Giarrusso and Bengtson (1998) used this notion to analyse grandparent-grandchild relations, highlighting various types of grandparents' support to *young* grandchildren in particular, including childcare, custodial care, emotional, financial, and instrumental support. It was apparent also however that grandparents received expressive and instrumental support from adult grandchildren. What we can call the first research hypothesis on *functional* solidarity reflects this mutuality of support provision between grandparents and grandchildren:

(H1) Functional solidarity hypothesis → Mutuality of resource sharing and support provision is an essential precondition of functional solidarity. If the intergenerational solidarity model applies to grandparent-grandchild relationships, there must be empirical evidence of give and take of support between grandparents and grandchildren.

Intergenerational stake hypothesis

Although the intergenerational solidarity construct explains the mutual nature of supportive relations between older and younger people, it does not indicate *how much* they provide for one another. The intergenerational stake hypothesis (Giarrusso, Stallings and Bengtson 1995) offers some elucidation on this matter. It reflects the empirical finding that older parents consistently report higher levels of closeness and consensus in their relationships with their (adult) children than their children do in regard to the same relationship. In other words, each generation has a different 'stake' in their relationship with the other. Whereas parents tend to be more concerned with family continuity and preserving close relationships within their families, children tend to be mostly concerned with defending their individual uniqueness and retaining their autonomy and independence. As a consequence, parents tend to overstate intergenerational solidarity and to underestimate intergenerational conflict. In contrast, children tend to *show* less commitment to intergenerational solidarity and to overstate conflicts.

The intergenerational stake hypothesis has been confirmed in a number of studies (e.g. Caldwell, Antonucci and Jackson 1998; Crosnoe and Elder Jr. 2002; Harwood 2001). Giarrusso et al. (2001), however, paint a more diversified picture of the validity of the intergenerational stake hypothesis. They found that the intergenerational stake phenomenon is particularly prevalent in Euro-American grandparents' relationships with granddaughters, but far less so in their relationship to grandsons. Moreover, they discovered significant ethnic variance: Mexican grandsons showed greater affection for their grandfathers than these did in turn. Since the population studied in the German Ageing Survey is ethnically homogeneous however, the intergenerational stake hypothesis is highly relevant to the present research:

(H2) Intergenerational stake hypothesis → If the 'intergenerational stake hypothesis' applies to the functional relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, the proportion of grandparents providing support to their grandchildren will be higher than that of grandchildren providing help to their grandparents.

Age and changing needs hypotheses

Research evidence on the effect of grandparents and grandchildren's *age* on the relationship (e.g. Hodgson 1998; Roberto and Stroes 1995; Silverstein and Long 1998) suggests an alternative hypothesis for explaining varying degrees of intergenerational support provision/receipt. Relationships between *adult* grandchildren and their grandparents are different from those between *young* grandchildren and their grandparents. As long as grandchildren are young, it is the grandparents who provide support. A typical example of grandparental support to young children is childcare, though one may argue that the support goes to the parents rather than the grandchild. Grandparents tend to live closer to younger grandchildren and have more frequent contact with them (Silverstein and Marengo 2001).

When grandchildren reach adulthood, their grandparents tend to *need* more support than previously, and they themselves now have the capacity to *give* more support. As a consequence, the relationship becomes far more support oriented (Ross et al. 2002). Langer (1990) found that the majority of relationships between *adult* grandchildren and their grandparents were imbalanced at the grandchildren's expense. Remarkably, she reported that the grandparents in her study perceived a relationship as reciprocal

when they received more than they gave. On the other hand, grandparents continued to provide support – though more likely financial support (Silverstein and Marengo 2001).

This age-related argument effectively contradicts the intergenerational stake hypothesis for support relations between *adult* grandchildren and their grandparents and points instead in the direction of the ‘support bank’ hypothesis (Antonucci 1990). This hypothesis is referring to the parent-child relationship and proposes that investments in children at earlier stages of their lives are withdrawn later in life when parents require support. Hence, a third and a fourth hypothesis are formulated:

(H3) Age differentiation hypothesis → Mutual support patterns of financial and instrumental support between grandparents and grandchildren vary with age.

(H4) Changing needs/capacity hypothesis → The intergenerational stake hypothesis does not apply to support relations between *adult* grandchildren and their *very old* grandparents. Here, support patterns are needs based i.e. grandchildren provide more support based on their greater support capacity and the greater need of grandparents for support. In operational terms, very old grandparents will be defined as those aged 80 years and older.

Methodological research design

The analysis was for the present paper carried out using first and second wave of the German Ageing Survey (*Alterssurvey*) – data collection was in 1996 and 2002 respectively. The survey, which was commissioned by the German government (Federal Ministry for Families, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth), focuses on individuals in their ‘second half of life’ (*zweite Lebenshälfte*) i.e. the middle-aged and old-aged population in Germany (Hoff et al. 2003). The survey was established to provide a database for the research community, policy actors, and the interested public to gain a comprehensive understanding of what ageing means in contemporary German society. Data was collected on employment history; income, property, and assets; housing; intergenerational relations and social support; productive activities, social networks and social integration; well-being and individual health (for the instruments used see Dittmann-Kohli et al. 1997; Tesch-Römer et al. 2002).

The German Ageing Survey 2002 consists of nationally representative samples of the German population aged 40-85 years (in the longitudinal sample 2002 46-91 years) living in private households. The survey contains three separate samples: (1) the *panel* sample for longitudinal analyses; (2) the *baseline* and *replication* samples for cross-cohort analyses; and (3) the *migrant* sample for comparative analysis between elders with and without German passport (*see Appendix 1 figure2*) (for more details see Hoff et al. 2003; Engstler and Wurm 2006).

In the first wave in 1996 4,838 people aged 40-85 were interviewed. The initial ambition to create a longitudinal dataset was realised in the second wave (2002) when 1,524 of the original participants now aged 46-91 years were re-interviewed. This relatively small number is due to the fact that only 2,873 of the baseline sample declared their willingness to take part in the second phase, combined with the common effects of panel mortality, in particular in the oldest age groups (for an analysis of non-response rates see Engstler and Wurm 2006). For the purpose of cross-cohort analyses a replication sample of 3,084 individuals aged 40-85 was created, thereby replicating the sampling strategy used in the baseline sample 1996. The third – the non-German sample – is an innovation in German gerontology. For the first time a nationwide sample (n = 586) of older non-Germans was collected. Thus, the survey takes into account the specific circumstances of the ‘guest worker’ generation that has reached retirement age by now and is ageing even more rapidly than the German population (a first overview of differences between the older non-German and German population can be found in Baykara-Krumme and Hoff 2006).

Although a mere five per cent of the German 40-85 year olds in the German Ageing Survey have living grandparents, 44 per cent reported having grandchildren (Hoff 2006a). The percentage of grandparents in the German population aged 40-85 years increased since 1996 – from 41.6 to 44.0 per cent. As a consequence of the data structure, grandparent-grandchild relationships are looked at from the grandparent perspective only in this article. This is an obvious limitation of a database that focuses on the older generations. Ideally, this analysis should be complemented with an equivalent one on grandchildren’s views of their relationship with grandparents.

Patterns of intergenerational support between grandparents and their grandchildren and children respectively

The concern that population ageing will overburden familial support networks is a frequently recurring theme in public debate in Germany. Implicitly, older people are pictured as passive help recipients – growing numbers of older people are thus translated into an increasing number of needy individuals. The stereotype persists despite the fact that the older generations continue to support the younger generations within their families. A number of publications based on the first wave of the German Ageing Survey showed that the older generations give far more support than they receive in turn (e.g. Kohli et al. 2000; Künemund, Motel-Klingebiel and Kohli 2005; Motel-Klingebiel 2000; Szydlik 2000).

In what follows, results for the first and second waves of the German Ageing Survey are compared to investigate change and continuity in support relations between (i) grandparents and grandchildren (ii) the older generation and their children (i.e. the middle generation) since the mid 1990s. The analysis is limited to the four oldest age cohorts in the sample since they already passed the transition to grandparenthood – i.e. German grandparents aged 62-85 years. The focus is on support provision/receipt of financial vs. instrumental support since adult children were found to reciprocate financial transfers with instrumental assistance (Kohli et al. 2000).

To measure provision/receipt of informal financial transfers the interviewees were asked the following questions: “Many people make gifts of money or gifts in kind, or support others financially. These could be, for example, parents, children, grandchildren, or other relatives, but also friends or acquaintances. How is this in your case? In the past 12 months, did you give money or large presents to anyone, or did you support anyone financially on a regular basis? And the other way round: did you receive gifts of money or large gifts in kind or did anyone support you financially on a regular basis over the past 12 months?” [Author’s translation]

Although the question implies the opportunity of providing/receiving regular financial support, this is not a common occurrence. Regular financial transfers are rare exceptions; one-off support is the rule. Only six per cent of the grandparents aged 62-85 years in 2002 who supported others financially at all reported having given money

to their grandchildren on a regular basis – but 17.5 per cent of them did so to their children. In contrast, one-off financial gifts to grandchildren are common practice and clearly the most frequently occurring type of private financial transfers. As many as 90 per cent of the grandparents who provided financial support in this age group had given money to their grandchildren, compared with 83 per cent who gave money to their children. 23 per cent made large presents to their grandchildren – 20 per cent did the same to their children. This applies unequivocally to men and women, as well as to East Germans and West Germans. Some provided several types of financial transfers, while others reported just one occasion. A limitation of the data is, however, that it cannot be quantified with respect to *how often* throughout the previous year each type was provided, and what amount was provided *each* time.

Instrumental support was measured in a similar way by asking for help provided by individuals living outside the interviewee's household: "Apart from caring activities already mentioned and other activities that you carry out as part of your job: within the past 12 months, did you help anyone who does not live in your household with the chores, e.g. with cleaning, small repairs, or shopping? And how is it the other way round: within the past 12 months, did anyone who does not live in your household help you with the chores, e.g. with cleaning, small repairs, or shopping?" [Author's translation] But unlike in the case of financial transfers, and contrary to the wording of the question above, the German Ageing Survey did not separately enquire about different types of instrumental support.

Figures 2 and 3 display mutual support patterns in regard to financial and instrumental support of the grandparent generation with their grandchildren, as well as with their children – but not between grandchildren and children. The Research Group on Aging and the Life Course (FALL) at the Free University of Berlin first used arrow models to visualise intergenerational transfer flows based on the German Ageing Survey (see, for example, Kohli et al. 2000). However, the arrow model used in figures 2-5 (*see Appendix 1*) displays arrows in varying strength depicting the proportion that provided support. The first figure 2 is based on the 1996 baseline sample; figure 3 presents the findings for the 2002 replication sample. In both cases only respondents who are grandparents *and* who are 62-85 years old were considered.

Figure 2 reflects the familiar support pattern between parents and their adult children by the mid 1990s: older Germans support their children mainly by means of financial transfers – their children reciprocate through instrumental assistance. Secondly, it shows that German grandparents make financial contributions to improve their children *and* grandchildren's economic circumstances. More than a third of German grandparents aged 62-85 years provided financial support to others. Thereby, children are far more likely to be recipients of financial support than grandchildren: more than a quarter provided financial support to their children on at least one occasion over the past year, compared with 12 per cent who did the same to their grandchildren. Thirdly, figure 2 also demonstrates that this mutual support relationship is not equally balanced. Although the younger generations reciprocate financial transfers with instrumental assistance, they are far less likely to do so than they receive support: 19 per cent of children and a mere four per cent of grandchildren helped the interviewed grandparents on at least one occasion over the past year. This result indicates the validity of the intergenerational stake hypothesis. The mutuality of transfers in the parent-child relationship confirms the functional solidarity hypothesis; too few grandparents reported having received instrumental assistance from their grandchildren to confirm the validity of the functional solidarity hypothesis for that relationship. The counter flows (financial transfers from the younger generations to the grandparents and instrumental helps from the grandparents to the younger generations) are insignificant (dotted lines depict less than one per cent). Does the picture change when we compare this with 2002 ((*see Appendix 1 figure 3*)?)

Overall, the support pattern identified in figure 2 also persisted in 2002. Older Germans are still more likely to support their children financially than they receive instrumental support in turn (23 vs. 17 per cent). Also, a greater proportion of them transfer financial assistance to their children than to their grandchildren. However, if we compare the 2002 and the 1996 findings we see a significant shift in the proportion of those who provided financial transfers over the past year – seemingly away from children (minus three per cent) toward grandchildren (plus five per cent). Of course, support given to grandchildren also helps their parents. Nevertheless, this shift is a remarkable change within a rather short time.

The impact of grandparental age on intergenerational support patterns

At this point, it is important to recall the age effect hypotheses H3 and H4. It was proposed that grandparental and/or grandchildren's age may account for varying degrees of intergenerational support provision/receipt. A limitation of the German Ageing Survey is that it does not measure grandchildren's age. Hence, the subsequent analysis solely takes into consideration the grandparent's age. The analysis of the 1996 baseline sample on which figure 2 is based is repeated in figure 4 (*see Appendix I*), this time differentiating four cohorts of grandparents aged 62-67, 68-73, 74-79, and 80-85 years old. Since age effects may be confounded with cohort effects it is important also to keep in mind their years of birth: 1929-34, 1923-28, 1917-22, and 1911-16.

Grandparental financial transfers to grandchildren were most common in the oldest age group – 17 per cent reported having given financial gifts to their grandchildren. Only half as many of the 62-67 years old provided financial support to their grandchildren. In comparison, there was not much variance in the likelihood of financial transfers to children across the four cohorts. But the proportion of grandparents who gave to children was significantly higher than that for grandchildren across all age groups. There is, however, a striking difference in the *timing* of the financial support provision toward grandchildren and children respectively. Financial transfers to children were most likely in the two younger age cohorts. In contrast, financial support to grandchildren was clearly more common in the older age cohorts. It remains unclear to what extent this is indeed an age effect or confounded with a cohort effect. Part of the explanation might be that the oldest old have on average more grandchildren than younger cohorts. The age-differentiation hypothesis however is clearly confirmed.

Receipt of instrumental assistance from children, however, is largely age dependent and obviously needs based, thus confirming the fourth hypothesis. Instrumental support is most likely to be given to the 80-85 years olds, where there is the greatest need. In this age group, the likelihood of instrumental helps provided by children even exceeds that of financial transfers in the other direction. Evidence for the validity of both the functional solidarity hypothesis and the changing needs/capacity hypothesis was found in the parent-child relationship. The intergenerational stake hypothesis is

falsified for the oldest olds relationship with their children who are more likely to provide instrumental assistance than to receive financial transfers.

The grandparent-grandchild relationship, however, remains imbalanced at the grandparents' expense across all age groups. Grandparents are far more likely to give financial support to their grandchildren than to receive instrumental assistance from them in turn. In fact, they hardly get any instrumental assistance from grandchildren at all. This finding supports the validity and dominance of the intergenerational stake hypothesis for grandparent-grandchild relationships. How do things change when we differentiate the 2002 findings by age? Figure 5 (*see Appendix I*) gives an overview.

Compared to the 1996 overall picture, we noted a greater percentage of financial transfers going to grandchildren in 2002. The age-differentiated perspective identifies the three younger cohorts as those 'responsible' for a greater likelihood of financial transfers to grandchildren, while there is not much change in the oldest cohort in this regard. On the other hand, it is the 80-85 years olds who are mainly responsible for the drop in financial transfers to children in comparison to 1996 (minus eight per cent). The remarkable consequence is that children and grandchildren of the oldest cohort are equally likely to get financial support in 2002.

How are these changes to be interpreted? They may signal a period effect that suggests different support attitudes owing to a changed social environment. One may speculate that the increasingly intense public debate on pension reform in Germany during the late 1990s and at the turn of the millennium may have resulted in a more cautious approach by the oldest old who are arguably more vulnerable to changes in their economic circumstances toward their finances. But first we need to consider the likelihood of cohort effects. Three of the four cohorts looked at in 1996 are still part of the sample in 2002 – those born in 1917-22 (80-85 in 2002), 1923-28 (74-79) and 1929-34 (68-73); new are those born 1935-40 (62-67). If a particular support pattern was rooted in the life experience of a specific cohort – let's say, those born 1929-34 – a pattern similar to that of the 62-67 years olds in 1996 should be found among the 68-73 years olds in 2002.

This is, however, not the case. Whereas only eight per cent of this cohort had reported financial transfers to grandchildren in 1996 when they were 62-67 years old, more than a fifth made financial gifts to their grandchildren in 2002 when they were 68-73 years old. Similar differences can be found when following the other two 1996 cohorts into 2002. Hence, cohort effects do not appear to be the main explanatory force here. Age effects, possibly confounded with period effects, are more likely to account for these differences.

The occurrence of support *exchange* in intergenerational relations

Figures 2-5 give the impression that intergenerational support follows an exchange pattern, albeit being slightly imbalanced at the expense of the older generation. But is this really the case? In fact, all these figures show is that the older generation provides mainly financial support to both their children and grandchildren and that their children assist their parents with instrumental help. Next, we will test if intergenerational support between grandparents and grandchildren is indeed following an *exchange* pattern, again based on the cross-cohort perspective using baseline 1996 and replication 2002 samples. The analysis was done using an index variable, in which each logical combination of financial/instrumental support provision by grandparents vs. grandchildren was assigned a value, thereby differentiating provision/non-provision in 1996 and 2002. Thus, a variable with 16 parameter values was created, ranging from the extreme ends of bilateral (grandparents *and* grandchildren) financial *and* instrumental support provision to no support provision at all by either side.

The vast majority of the grandparents aged 62-85 in the 2002 replication sample indicated neither having provided financial/instrumental support to grandchildren, nor having received any such support from them. Most of those who did provide support to their grandchildren transferred financial support only – without receiving anything in turn. Exchange of financial and instrumental support between grandparents and grandchildren was practically non-existent – a mere ten cases of those who provided/received anything at all *exchanged* support.

Support exchange is slightly more common between parents and their adult children. Nearly a fifth of the grandparents aged 62-85 exchanged financial and instrumental

transfers with their adult children. But sole provision of financial support by the older generation without receiving anything in turn is again the dominant picture. On the other hand, about a quarter received instrumental assistance from their children without giving any support in turn. Genuine exchange at dyadic level is far less likely than the snapshot pictures in figures 2-5 suggest.

Financial transfers to children and grandchildren compared

A significant shift in the proportion of grandparents making financial transfers toward grandchildren, seemingly at the expense of children, occurred between 1996 and 2002. Hence, we will compare financial transfers towards grandchildren and children in a little bit more detail in this section. We will begin with looking at estimated amounts of financial support before we turn our attention to individual changes based on longitudinal analyses.

Amounts of financial transfers

The survey respondents were asked to indicate the amount of money they had given to others over the past 12 months. Interviewers presented them a list of categories beginning with ‘A – less than € 250’, ‘B - € 250-500’ ranging to ‘G – more than € 10,000’. For analytic purposes, these variables were transformed into metric format by assigning each category the mean amount – for example, by translating category ‘B - € 250-500’ into a numerical value of € 375.

The responses show that financial support to children did not falter despite of slightly reduced support likelihood. The older generations in Germany provide far more financial support to their children than to their grandchildren. In 2002, each grandparent aged 62-85 years who provided any financial support at all gave an estimated € 1,250 to her/his grandchildren – but nearly three times more (€ 3,500) to his/her children. It is however noteworthy that overall financial support to the younger generations in 2002 was lower than in 1996. Six years earlier, the grandparents in the same age category had provided a larger amount of financial support to both their children *and* their grandchildren. Generally, grandfathers transferred more money, which reflects their higher pensions and savings as a result of higher earnings throughout their professional career.

Longitudinal perspectives on financial transfers

A main result of the previous analyses was that German grandparents aged 62-85 years were more likely to support their grandchildren in 2002 than six years earlier. The increasing support likelihood towards grandchildren was particularly pronounced in the younger cohorts, whereas a reduced support propensity toward children was most evident in the oldest cohort. It is important to note that all findings discussed so far make statements about *groups* of older people and do not allow conclusions to be drawn about *individual* behaviour. It may well be that those who in 2002 gave support to grandchildren are not the same as those who did not give support to their children. In a first step, we explore if grandparents gave money exclusively to their children, to their grandchildren, or to both of them.

It is not possible to observe change of individual behaviour over time on the basis of two independent samples, as the 1996 baseline and 2002 replication samples are. Therefore, these findings were replicated using the longitudinal sample of the German Ageing Survey. The panel sample of the German Ageing Survey confirms that the proportion of the then 62-85 year old grandparents who provided financial support exclusively to their grandchildren rose from a fifth in 1996 to a third in 2002 when they were 68-91 years old. Over the same period, the share of those who gave money only to their children had fallen from more than 60 per cent to slightly more than 40 per cent.

The respondents considered for this analysis were aged 62-85 years in 1996. Six years later, when they were 68-91 years old, they had on average more grandchildren, which would at least partly explain the higher percentage making financial transfers to grandchildren. Furthermore, grandchildren were now older and had developed a greater need for financial assistance. Table 1 (*see Appendix 2*) offers a more detailed picture on changes between 1996 and 2002. The combination of four logical properties (financial support to neither children nor grandchildren, to children only, to grandchildren only, to both children and grandchildren) in the first and second wave resulted in 16 possible attributes.

While the comparison between figures 2 and 3 seems to suggest that German grandparents shift a considerable proportion of their financial support away from their

children toward their grandchildren, the longitudinal analysis does not confirm this impression. A mere ten grandparents in the selected age group reported exclusive financial transfers to their grandchildren in 2002, while they had done the same to their children in 1996. Similarly, the percentage of those who used to give money only to their children in 1996 and were giving to *both* children and grandchildren in 2002 was rather low (6.5 per cent). However, a significant proportion of those who did not provide financial support at all in 1996 had given money to their grandchildren, and not to their children, in 2002 (12.6 per cent). Most importantly, however, more than a fifth of those who had given money to their children in 1996 did not make any financial transfers to children or grandchildren six years later. All in all the reduction in financial support toward children was more pronounced than that toward grandchildren. An age effect seems to be the most likely explanation, given that the youngest respondents were now 68 years old and the oldest were well into the ‘fourth age’.

Conclusions: Changing the balance of intergenerational support?

In 2002, nearly a fifth of the 62-85 years old grandparents provided financial support to their grandchildren, compared with almost a quarter that did the same to their children. The present study shows a remarkable shift in the likelihood of financial transfers away from adult children towards grandchildren between 1996 and 2002. Compared to 1996, the proportion of grandparents that reported financial transfers to grandchildren over the past year increased by five per cent, whereas the equivalent to children decreased by three per cent.

This result was based on a comparison of baseline sample 1996 and its replication in 2002. A longitudinal analysis of the panel sample 1996 and 2002 found an increasing share of 62-85 years old grandparents that gave financial support solely to grandchildren (and not to their children) and a decreasing share that gave exclusively to children (and not to grandchildren). Nevertheless, adult children are still more likely to be recipients of financial transfers than grandchildren. Moreover, the amount of financial transfers to children tends to be almost three times higher than those to grandchildren. When grandparents support their grandchildren financially, one-off transfers are the rule. Only very few provide regular financial support.

As the age differentiation hypothesis states, provision/receipt of financial and instrumental transfers is highly likely to vary with age of grandparents. Hence, the analysis was repeated controlling for age of the grandparent. This analysis showed that the above-mentioned shift in intergenerational support patterns is manifest in all cohorts of grandparents. While a higher likelihood of financial transfers to grandchildren was reported in all but the oldest cohort, the oldest cohort witnessed a considerable drop in the likelihood to provide their children with financial assistance.

The fourth hypothesis – the ‘changing needs/capacity hypothesis’ – was expected to be particularly relevant for very old grandparents aged 80 years and older, especially in respect to instrumental assistance. The hypothesis is based on the idea that older grandparents would need more support than younger ones, due to frailness and multi-morbidity. Adult grandchildren however would have a greater support capacity, not least in regard to instrumental help. In contrast to adult children, only very few grandchildren reciprocated financial transfers by means of instrumental assistance in 1996 and 2002. Thus, the ‘greater needs/capacity hypothesis’ is falsified for the grandparent-grandchild relationship – but there is clear evidence of its validity for the parent-child relationship.

Finally, and this is in line with previous research on the functional aspect of intergenerational relations, it seems that these relationships are imbalanced at the older generations’ expense. The support relationship of grandparents with their grandchildren is even more imbalanced than that with their children. The 62-85 years old German grandparents were generally more likely to support their grandchildren and children than vice versa. This outcome confirms the overall validity of the ‘intergenerational stake hypothesis’ – with one exception: The proposed alternative relationship of the ‘greater needs/capacity hypothesis’ with the ‘intergenerational stake hypothesis’ for very old (defined as 80-85 years old) grandparents was confirmed for the parent-child relationship. Here – and only here – was the support propensity by a younger generation (to provide instrumental assistance) greater than that of the older generation (to transfer financial support).

The grandparent-grandchild relationship, however, is not characterised by mutual support provision. A considerable extent of financial support, both in terms of support

propensity and the amount of provided support, does not result in reciprocal instrumental support provision by grandchildren – not even toward the oldest old. The resulting main conclusion is: Whereas supportive behaviour in the parent-child relationship is governed by the principle of intergenerational (functional) solidarity, the grandparent-grandchild relationship is guided by the intergenerational stake hypothesis – and *not* by intergenerational (functional) solidarity.

And what for the future? Demographic and family change will have an impact on future family structures as well. The prospect of a ‘beanpole family’ (Bengtson, Rosenthal & Burton 1990) will result in fewer grandchildren. On the other hand, rising life expectancies will further increase the number of years people spend in either grandchild or grandparent role. Thus, the prospect of four – in stepfamilies possibly even more – healthy grandparents competing for the attention of just one grandchild is no longer science fiction. This shift in financial transfer propensity towards grandchildren may signal changing attitudes towards grandchildren who will become even more precious in future. Future research on change and continuity of intergenerational norms, values and attitudes could help to validate this claim.

There were a number of limitations of the dataset used to realise this research, which future research would need to address to cross-validate the results. This article focused on two specific support types – financial and instrumental support. The incorporation of other support dimensions, such as emotional support, cognitive support, or childcare could help to provide a more complete picture of the grandparent-grandchild relationship. A major shortcoming resulted from the nature of the data: All national ageing surveys face the dilemma of wanting to collect as much information as possible but being constrained in doing so. There is an obvious trade-off between a maximum of data collected and a certain amount of time a researcher may impose on interview respondents. Studies focusing specifically on the grandparent-grandchild relationship would provide much better data for analysing mutual support relations between grandparents and grandchildren. Ideally, such studies would incorporate all sides of the grandparent-grandchild dyad or the grandparent-child-grandchild triad.

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Appendix 1 Figures 1-5

Figure 1: Methodological design of the German Ageing Survey

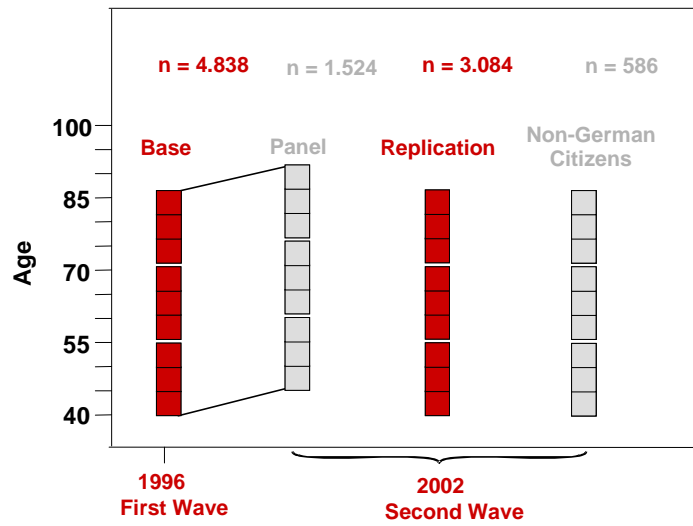
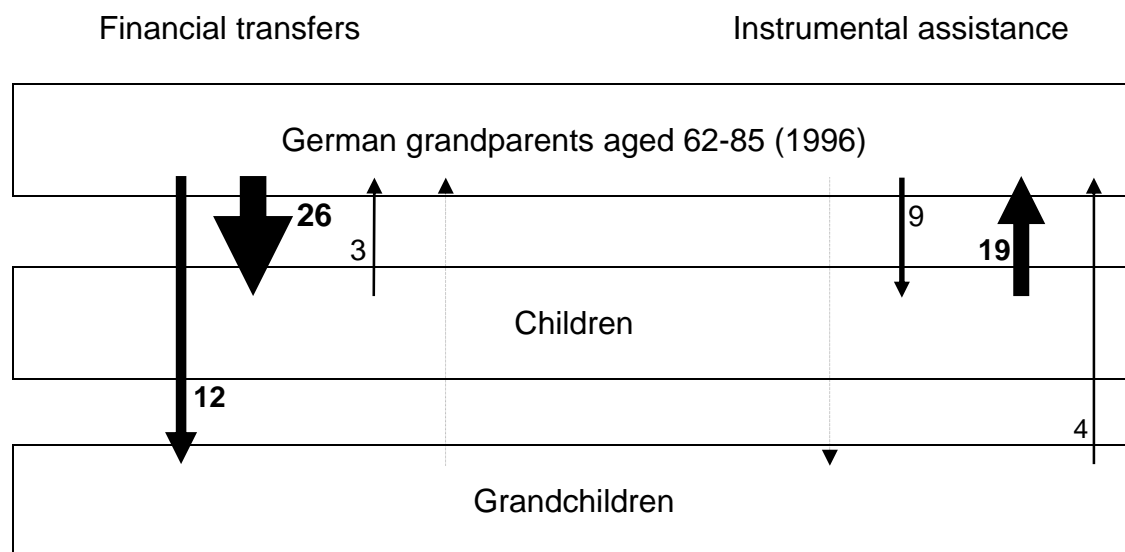
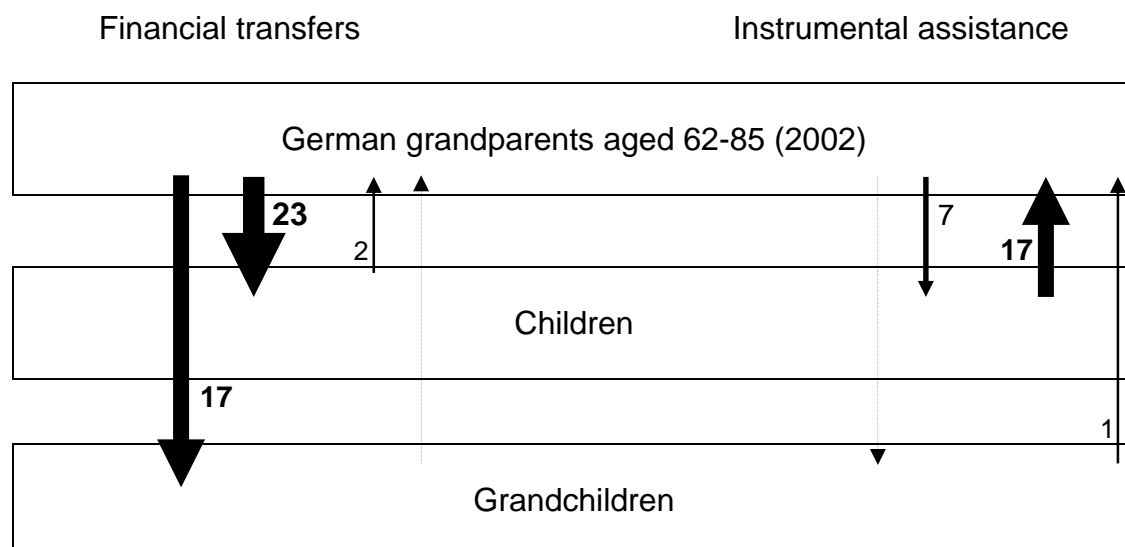


Figure 2: Intergenerational support patterns 1996 (percentages, rounded)



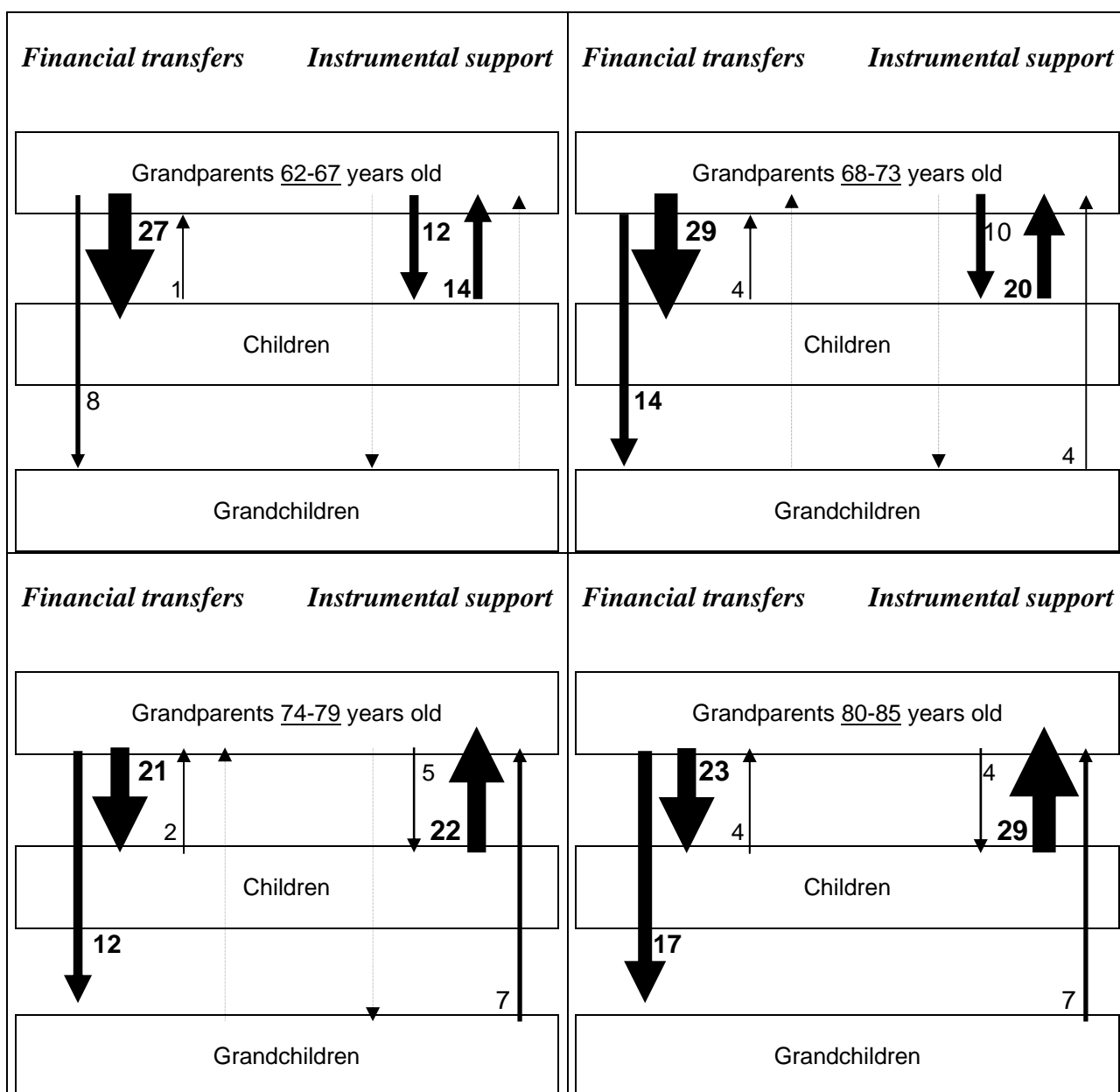
Source: German Ageing Survey, baseline sample 1996 with all respondents aged 62-85 who are grandparents (n = 1,586); weighted data. A thin line indicates provision/receipt of financial transfers / instrumental assistance by less than one per cent of the grandparents aged 62-85 years.

Figure 3: Intergenerational support patterns 2002 (percentages, rounded)



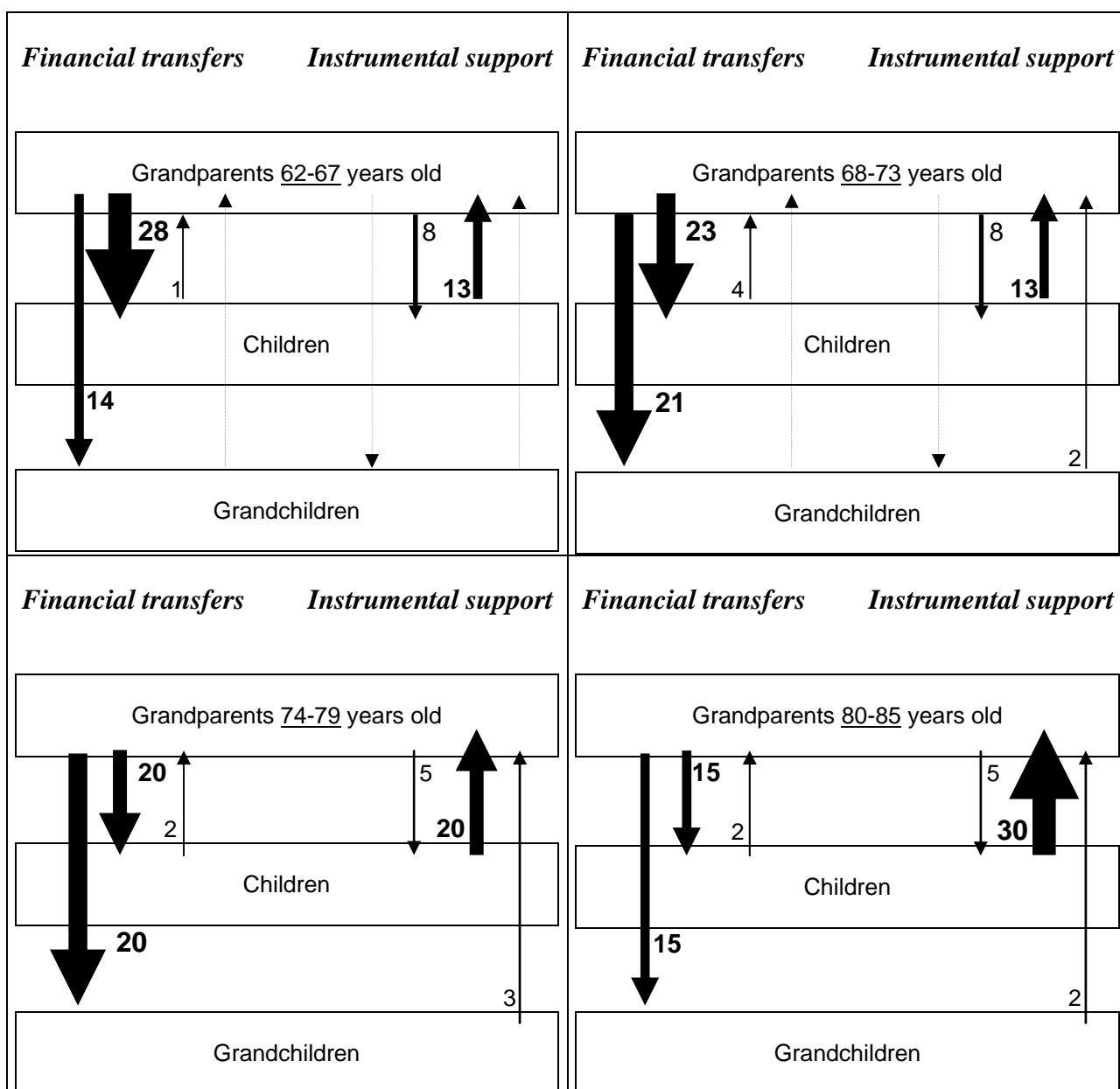
Source: German Ageing Survey, replication sample 2002 with all respondents aged 62-85 who are grandparents (n = 1,211); weighted data. A thin line indicates provision/receipt of financial transfers / instrumental assistance by less than one per cent of the grandparents aged 62-85 years.

Figure 4: Intergenerational support patterns 1996 by age cohort of grandparents (percentages, rounded)



Source: German Ageing Survey, baseline sample 1996 with all respondents aged 62-85 who are grandparents (n = 1,586); weighted data. A thin line indicates provision/receipt of financial transfers / instrumental assistance by less than one per cent of the grandparents aged 62-85 years.

Figure 5: Intergenerational support patterns 2002 by age cohort of grandparents (percentages, rounded)



Source: German Ageing Survey, replication sample 2002 with all respondents aged 62-85 who are grandparents (n = 1,211); weighted data. A thin line indicates provision/receipt of financial transfers / instrumental assistance by less than one per cent of the grandparents aged 62-85 years.

Appendix 2 Tables

Table 1: Changing patterns of financial support toward grandchildren and children,

1996-2002

	N	Percentage
To both in 1996 – to grandchildren only in 2002	7	2.6
To children only in 1996 – to grandchildren only in 2002	10	3.9
To children only in 1996 – to both in 2002	15	6.5
To children only in 1996 – no support in 2002	40	21.9
To children only in 1996 – to children only in 2002	20	10.4
To grandchildren only in 1996 – no support in 2002	16	10.1
No support in 1996 – to children only in 2002	30	13.3
No support in 1996 – to grandchildren only in 2002	27	12.6
Total N (incl. attributes not listed here)	210	100.0
No support in 1996 – no support in 2002	N = 161 out of 371	

Source: German Ageing Survey, panel sample 1996 and 2002 with all respondents aged 62-85 (1996) who are grandparents (n = 371) and who gave money to children/grandchildren in 1996 and/or 2002 (n = 210); percentages weighted – N not weighted.

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