

Helen Baykara-Krumme

Immigrant Families in Germany

Intergenerational Solidarity in Later Life

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Gedruckt auf holz- und säurefreiem Papier, 100 % chlorfrei gebleicht.

© Weißensee Verlag, Berlin 2008
Kreuzbergstraße 30, 10965 Berlin
Tel. 0 30 / 91 20 7-100
www.weissensee-verlag.de
e-mail: mail@weissensee-verlag.de

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Umschlagbilder: Helen Baykara-Krumme, Berlin

Printed in Germany

ISSN 1610-5745

ISBN 978-3-89998-136-0

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Acknowledgements

I would like to specifically thank Prof. Martin Kohli for his support and encouragement throughout my dissertation. He granted me freedom in choosing my topic and pursuing my research, and even though his primary research focus is the life course, aging and intergenerational relationships, I always found him highly interested in the migration topic. I am also most grateful to my second advisor Prof. Yvonne Schütze and to the support from the German Center of Gerontology. This research would not have been possible without data of the German Aging Survey 2002 which I was able to get soon after it had been collected in the field, and I benefited greatly from the discussions within the GAS project team on the uniqueness as well as the limitations of the foreigner sample.

I wrote this dissertation as a fellow with the International Max Planck Research School “The Life Course: Evolutionary and Ontogenetic Dynamics (LIFE)” at the Free University of Berlin and the MPI for Human Development Berlin. I am very grateful for the help and advice I received from faculty members, fellows and the LIFE coordinators as well as for the manifold opportunities for insights into related research fields I gained during that time.

Many thanks go to the English native-speakers who proof-read the final version of my dissertation for grammar mistakes and incomprehensible sentences. I remember a professor who once said that dissertations can only be best written in the mother tongue. In the process of this dissertation I realized that he might have been right.

Always highly valuable – but specifically important during the endless years of a dissertation – are patient friends who provide support in manifold ways. I would particularly like to express my thanks to Nina Söhn, Silke Volkhardt and Simone Scherger who have been accompanying me and my work throughout the last years, and to my husband Fahri Babür for weathering through this period with me. While I am writing these last lines, our five-year old son is sitting next to me, drawing numbers and letters, being highly concentrated on his “work.” It is not always easy to keep all the balls in the air. I would like to thank all neighbours who took care of him or cooked the dinner for us whenever we were busy working.

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1 Introduction

The demographic aging process of the immigrant population in Germany has led to an increased awareness of the specific needs and resources of the migrant elderly. One aspect is the family solidarity potential, particularly with regard to parent – adult child relations. Yet, little is known about later-life family potentials in the immigrant population. The present study seeks to address this gap. It does so by building on recent theoretical, conceptual and empirical developments in the field of intergenerational relations research, in order to offer a conceptual approach and analysis of intergenerational family bonds in a migration context.

In recent years, the study of intergenerational family relations has developed as a major field of sociological research in many industrialized countries (e.g. Lüscher & Schultheis 1993, Attias-Donfut 1995, Kohli et al. 2000a, 2005, Bengtson 2001, Blome et al. 2008, see contributions in Silverstein 2004 and Siegrist 2005). The enormous interest in this area of research is primarily due to the increasing percentage of elderly in Western industrialized countries. A rising life-expectancy and declining fertility rates have resulted in a growing proportion of elderly and, at the same time, led to many parents and adult children spending half a century or more together as adults. Intergenerational relationships continue to be important throughout life, and are very likely to affect the quality of life of both adult children and their parents. In contrast to sociological claims of family disintegration in the past century, recent research provides overwhelming evidence of intergenerational solidarity between parents and their adult children. Contrary to popular opinion, the elderly are not left without attachment to their kinship group after their children leave the household: Despite a higher degree of structural independence in a modern society, the intergenerational support potential is significant.

Immigrant and ethnic minority populations in many industrialized countries experience similar aging processes as the native populations, with the share of elderly (60 years and above) increasing steadily (e.g. Bolzman et al. 2004, BMFSFJ 2005, Attias-Donfut, Tessier & Wolff 2005). In Germany absolute numbers are comparatively small. However, growth rates of aging in immigrant and minority populations exceed even those of the native population, and a further increase in absolute and relative terms is expected. Recognition of this demographic shift has led to an increasing socio-political interest in elderly migrant groups since the beginning of the 1990s. In the past fifteen years, a number of descriptive studies have been commissioned and carried out, dealing with diverse aspects of the general life situation of elderly foreigners or immigrants (Zeman 2005). The existing studies, however, lack a conceptual framework and an analytical approach. They are regionally limited and defi-

cient in so far as the native population is not included, thus preventing comparative research. The present research aims to extend the current descriptive information on intergenerational parent – adult child relations in immigrant families. Most importantly, by using nationwide data which includes immigrants and non-migrants, this research permits a comparative analysis. Such an analysis is crucial if we are to have an accurate picture of the specific issues facing immigrant elderly and their adult children.

In this work, a theoretical and conceptual linkage is made between different sociological research fields, namely the areas of intergenerational family relations, migration and aging. In the areas of families in migration and aging in migration, we often find very different arguments with regard to the immigrant family. The difference illustrates an important challenge to empirical research on immigrant families: The current image of the immigrant family in research is contradictory. On the one hand, family resources are assumed to be specifically high among immigrants. Specifically, family cohesion is said to be greater than in the native population. With reference to the cultural context of origin of many immigrants, they are said to preserve a “collectivistic” family culture after migration (highly valued norm of filial responsibility). Accordingly, the needs of most immigrants are assumed to be met by kin networks. Minority or immigrant elderly are, therefore, considered to be at least partially sheltered from the worst outcomes of the risks of aging (isolation, loneliness, lack of care). A second argument considers the experience of stress in a transformation period such as migration as a potential predictor of greater family enhancement. On this view, immigrants retreat into the family as they are faced with a foreign, and often hostile, society. The family is seen as a counter-world, as a haven from an alienating culture and the necessity to preserve this haven creates stronger family unity.

On the other hand, family relations are said to become fragile in migration, resulting in conflicted or distanced relations. For instance, the higher degree of acculturation in the second generation is said to result in a lower willingness to respond to parental expectations. It is argued that a cultural conflict between the generations results in weak family cohesion and a break up of reciprocal support structure obligations. On this view, immigrants can no longer expect to rely on their family network in older age due to changing culture norms and intergenerational conflict. Moreover, the experience of stress entailed in the immigration process, either through contact with the host society or changes within the family, e.g. in authority structure, is argued to lead to greater conflict, distance and a retreat *from* the family. Biographical experiences of family fragmentation in the course of the immigration process are put forward as arguments for this type of increased family disintegration.

In order to contrast this deficit perspective, reference has been made, for instance, to the theoretically and empirically more advanced research on relations between young children and their parents. Since this research does not give evidence of a predominance of conflict and distance, the assumption of fragile later-life family relations has been questioned. Moreover, conflict potentials between young children and their parents may decrease as the former become adults (and parents) themselves. Furthermore, it is argued that the second generation is very heterogeneous with regard to the degree of assimilation and their bonds to the home culture, undermining the hypothesis of highly prevalent intergenerational cultural distance. Finally, it is argued that among Germans in the second half of life, family members are also an important source of affection and support. Thus, a cultural assimilation of the second generation does not necessarily have a negative impact on family solidarity. In conclusion, authors of the 6th Family Report argue that family cohesion and the solidarity potential in later-life immigrant families is quite strong, and might even be quite similar to that of natives (BMFSFJ 2000). What is missing, however, are empirical results confirming this hypothesis.

In this dissertation, the focus is on later-life family relations. They are defined as relations of people in the second half of life (aged 40 to 85 years) to their adult children and their parents, respectively. The issue of parent – adult child relations in migrant families is addressed with reference to theoretical work and concepts in the field of family sociology. Durkheim and Parsons are generally cited as two family sociologists who in the past two centuries laid the grounds for worries and pessimism about intergenerational relations between parents and their grown-up children. Both argued that modernization leads to a destruction of traditional extended family ties with (at least) a structural isolation of the elderly from the conjugal, nuclear family. Their arguments have been widely discussed in the last century, and a large body of research has challenged the argument empirically. Conceptually, since the early 1970s a model of intergenerational solidarity by Bengtson and colleagues, and variations of it have dominated the field. Their model includes various dimensions of parent – adult child interactions, such as association, affection, consensus, proximity or functional solidarity. In all those years, conflict and problems were rarely considered. Only recently, this notion has received greater attention. In contrast to the approach on solidarity, Lüscher and colleagues at the end of the last century have argued for ambivalence as the main characteristic of intergenerational relations. In the subsequent years until today several attempts have been made to connect the aspects of intergenerational conflict and problems to the concept of solidarity, and single items on conflict are included in larger surveys.

Accordingly, the questions posed in this dissertation address issues of interaction, support exchange and conflict between adult family generations. Taken together, analysis of the answers to these questions seeks in turn to answer a question of increasing social importance: To what extent are elderly immigrants embedded in private intergenerational family networks and thereby protected, in terms of support and interaction, from social isolation? Since previous research on native Germans has stressed the role of the elderly as service and support providers, the corollary question is also asked: Can the adult children of immigrants rely on support from their parents, i.e. do immigrant elderly themselves constitute a relevant resource for the younger generation? Since most adult children have left the parental house (or household), the descriptive analysis primarily focuses on relations between parents and adult children in separate houses. Additionally, also cohabitation and spatial proximity patterns are studied, primarily in terms of opportunity structure for support. Overall, the comparative perspective focuses on whether family relations are more, less or similarly cohesive and supportive, conflictive and alienated, in immigrant compared to non-migrant families. Moreover, it poses the question of whether there are significant differentiations among the various immigrant groups themselves. This study aims, through a rigorous descriptive analysis of the situation of elderly migrants and their families, to contribute data relevant to questions of increasing socio-political urgency.

At the same time, there is a deeper theoretical interest in the explanation of immigrant family relations. The immigrant family is seen here, not only as a fixed result of immigrants' pre-migration cultural frameworks, but also as a place where family relations develop and emerge in the context of external social and economic forces. Obviously, in an explanatory analysis of family relationships that also takes account of differences between various groups, diverse influential factors need to be differentiated. Ethnic or immigrant groups may have different cultural values that influence the way they interact within the family, based on individual attitudes or different socialization contexts. Rather than cultural orientation, the immigration experience or the current social situation may cause a certain outcome in family relations. It is a truly sociological concern to detect and describe structural, institutional and cultural influences (Kohli 2004), and thus to reveal whether characteristics of family relations are in fact based on cultural norms, or rather economic needs and resources, or a combination of both. Specifically research on ethnic minorities and immigrant populations stresses the necessity to delineate the salience of structural versus cultural influences on family relations. In contrast to other countries, particularly the U.S., in Germany, as outlined above, very little differentiated research on immigrant families exists. In order to explain

patterns of parent – adult child relationships I analyse determinants of intergenerational relations in immigrant and non-migrant adult families. Multivariate logistic regression analysis is applied to clarify the influence of culture and ethnicity on social relations in an immigration context. Thus, the following questions are addressed: Which roles does the country of origin or the belonging to a certain migrant group play for the outcome of intergenerational relationships? Which influence do the immigration experience, cultural attitude or socio-structural factors have? Is there an ethnic or cultural factor? In addition, this research focuses on different patterns of determinants between immigrants and non-migrants, providing further information on cultural differences between both groups.

The German Aging Survey and the German Socio-economic Panel provide the basis for data analysis. Currently, both are the only two nationwide data bases including immigrants and non-migrants in the second half of life in Germany. The German Aging Survey includes extensive information on intergenerational solidarity as well as some on conflict. The interviewee (aged between 40 and 85 years) is asked for detailed information on each of her children and parents and on the subject's relationship with each of them. The German Socio-economic Panel contains only some aspects of intergenerational relations and provides little further information on the people involved. However, the information on immigration and on different aspects of integration is broad, and thus allows a focus on different migrant-specific aspects of intergenerational family relations.

This study is structured as follows: First, Chapter 2 expands on the demographic background and related motivations of this research. Here, I argue that the growing number and share of foreign elderly in the German population justify the topic of this dissertation. Research concerning aging in immigrant populations is most relevant from a demographic and socio-political point of view. A general overview of the composition of the migrant population in Germany is followed by more specific information on the migration background of the four largest migrant groups considered separately in the analysis.

After presenting the general overview of the demographic situation, I turn to theoretical considerations. In four chapters that follow, I develop the research concepts that will frame this study in the context of existing sociological research on family, aging and migration. Since the research on intergenerational relations in non-migrant (that is, native) later-life family constitutes the background for this study on immigrant families, the third chapter provides a literature review of the concepts and main empirical research results in that field. Moreover, standard theories with

regard to within-societal changes and international research approaches on between-societal differences concerning parent – adult child relations in native families are discussed. Finally, with reference to international comparative research, a link to research on immigrant families is presented.

In Germany, research on immigrant families and family structure changes in the course of an immigration generally focuses on the young or adolescent child and its parents. This field is quite advanced, and constitutes the second reference framework of this study (Chapter 4). Main theoretical approaches on the effects of immigration on family relationships and derived hypotheses are presented and discussed in the light of the existing empirical research. Selected empirical studies which have been published in the past years are examined with regard to their contribution to the knowledge on intergenerational relations in immigrant families. This research overview then allows a final conclusion on the state-of-the-art in young immigrant families.

Chapter 5 offers an overview of the much more limited research on the later-life immigrant family in Germany. Theoretical explanations common in the relevant literature are outlined and the empirical research results on parent – adult child relations of elderly immigrants in Germany are presented and discussed. Based on assumptions and empirical evidence of both research fields (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5), finally the three main hypotheses guiding descriptive research are summarized. Chapter 6 then deals with the conceptual approach of this study. The model to be applied in multivariate regression analysis is developed. Five different groups of variable are identified and discussed with regard to the existing research results in Germany and other countries. Hypotheses are outlined for each variable.

In Chapter 7, I then describe the characteristics, advantages and deficits of the two data bases which form the basis of this research. Here, I detail the distribution of the main sociodemographic variables of both data sets and the methodology applied. In the subsequent chapters, empirical research results are presented. First, I address the topic of existence of family members, cohabitation patterns and geographical living distance (Chapter 8). In Chapter 9 the realms of interaction and affection are studied. Chapter 10 focuses on intergenerational support patterns and its determinants. Chapter 11 is devoted to the dimensions of support potential. Conflicts and problems are dealt with in Chapter 12. In each section, data is separated to account for immigrants and non-migrants, and differentiated according to age group and country of origin. Then a descriptive typology of relations is presented and summarized (Chapter 13), and finally all results are discussed in the light of the developed hypotheses and the existing research (Chapter 14). In Chapter 15, I conclude with a

brief summary on the approach, the main results and implications of this study.

Family relations are as unique as they are primary, intimate, informal and personal. They are characterized by a long time of association. In this research, the focus lies on parent – adult child relationships. Later-life immigrant families are studied from a comparative perspective, aiming at enriching and developing the existent research on elderly migrants and immigrant families by linking three different research fields: Research on intergenerational relations in the native population, research on the consequences of immigration for families, and research on aging in migration, that is, elderly migrants. The conceptual framework that is generally used to study the intergenerational later-life relations of native families is applied for the first time to research on immigrant families in Germany. Based on the currently existing data resources, a broad comparative picture of later-life migrant and non-migrant family relations is offered, aiming at a correction or confirmation of commonly held views. As stated, there is a socio-political motivation behind this project. In order to be useful, social research must specify the particular needs and resources of specific population groups. It has been suggested that the wide spread notion of strong family bonds and cohesion among immigrants may delay the development of national policies and programs to support minority groups, especially elderly immigrants, because of the assumption that those needs are met by their kin networks. Thus, the present study seeks to contribute to a better knowledge on the population group of adult immigrant families, and elderly immigrants in particular, in order to lay the grounds for political awareness and the required socio-political interventions.