

# New Developments and Recent Research Questions in the Project “Value of Children and Intergenerational Relations”

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## 1 Overview of the Research Project

The “Value of Children and Intergenerational Relations” project is an interdisciplinary cross-cultural study on values, fertility, and intergenerational relationships. The VOC study focuses on reasons for having or not having children and investigates the interplay of values and parent-child relationships in three generations and across cultures (cf. Trommsdorff/Kim/Nauck 2005; Trommsdorff/Nauck 2005, 2006, 2010). By now, a large data set with  $N = 16,461$  participants (adolescents, their mothers and maternal grandmothers and a sample of mothers with small children) is available from nineteen different countries in four continents.



Isabelle Albert

This report focuses on recent innovative research questions that are currently tackled by international researchers involved in the project. These topics refer to three thematic areas: value of children, intergenerational relations, and value transmission from a cross-cultural perspective. These research questions have been raised in the framework of a recent international workshop on “Value of Children and Intergenerational Relations”, organized by *Gisela Trommsdorff* and *Bernhard Nauck*, principle investigators of the project, at the University of Konstanz (March 29<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012), and financially supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). Some of the studies briefly summarized below will be submitted for publication.

## 2 Value of Children – Cross-Cultural Comparisons

The first part of this report concentrates on cross-cultural comparisons concerning “Value of Children”.

*Gender preference.* *Daniela Klaus* and *Arun Tipandjan* ask in their current work for reasons for higher son preference in North compared to South India (e.g., *Pande/Astone* 2007). They assume that the higher preference for sons in North India can be explained by the rigid patrilineal rules, higher religiosity, and dry agriculture. On the other hand, they

assume that the lower son preference in South India can be explained by higher economic positions and higher educational attainment. Initial analyses indicate that the investigated socio-economic factors and the cultural context can only partly explain the different regional son preferences. They offer the preliminary conclusion that “sex-specific costs and benefits contribute to the explanation but they do not mediate between the considered background variables and the son preference”.

*Cultural differences in negative VOC.* Isabelle Albert, Gisela Trommsdorff, and Katarzyna Lubiewska argue that perceived negative aspects of parenthood may be important for the decision not to have children and may have a special explicative value regarding the current low fertility rates in many European countries (cf. Eurostat 2012). In order to take into account different levels of socio-economic change, the researchers have compared three different cohorts living in Western and Eastern Germany as well as in Poland in their preliminary analyses. Results show that the same negative aspects of having children seem to be most prominent in all subsamples: e.g., worries about job, financial situation, children’s future. Overall, mothers from East Germany and older mothers from West Germany were less concerned about having children than mothers from Poland, young mothers from West Germany and adolescents from all subsamples. In all countries adolescents’ intentions about having children in the future were associated to their level of negative VOC. Negative VOC was further related to actual negative experiences in the family and low satisfaction with the actual living situation in all subsamples and cohorts.

### 3 Intergenerational Relations: Inter- and Intracultural Comparisons

*Cross-cultural variations in intergenerational relations.* In his recent work, Bernhard Nauck argues that research on intergenerational solidarity and ambivalence suggests that intergenerational relationships in wealthy societies are composed of both emotional closeness and conflicts (e.g., Silverstein et al. 2010). The aim of his work is to extend this approach to culturally and economically diverse areas with different kinship systems. Nauck has identified four latent classes of intergenerational relationships (‘ambivalent’, ‘amicable’, ‘disharmonious’, and ‘detached’) which were valid for matrilineal, patrilineal, and bilinear kinship systems but varied in a systematic way. Results based on the VOC data show that affection and conflict in intergenerational relationships are (apart from opportunities, individual choices, and internalized norms) also structured by institutional settings. Nauck concludes that “intergenerational ambivalence is not restricted to Western individualism, but depends on how ‘exit’ and ‘voice’ in intergenerational relationships are institutionally structured in relation to emotional and functional interdependence”.

*Adolescents’ motivation to support parents.* Kairi Kasearu and Dagmar Kutsar note that research on intergenerational solidarity is mostly limited to parents and grown-up children. Hence, a current aim of the researchers is to investigate adolescents’ motives for helping their parents in a cross-cultural comparison. Their initial analyses indicate lower levels of adolescents’ agreement with helping motives in Germany compared to Estonia and Russia. In Russia, the rule-oriented and reciprocal help-giving motives were more highly valued than in the other countries, which might indicate higher collectivism and

traditional family values (which is in line with Mayer/Kuramschew/Trommsdorff 2009). In Estonia the relation-oriented motivation to help was relatively highly valued. Interestingly, in Estonia and to a lesser extent in Russia, the relations-oriented motive was highly positive correlated with the rule-oriented motive. According to the researchers, both motives refer to different aspects of normative solidarity: whereas external rule-oriented motives refer to meeting expectations of others, the relations-oriented motive might be interpreted as internal normative solidarity, assuming that readiness to help a parent is initiated by the wish to sustain stability in the parent-child dyad.

*Intergenerational solidarity and life satisfaction.* The goal of an ongoing work by Wolfgang Friedlmeier and Katarzyna Lubiewska is to detect different dyadic structures of intergenerational solidarity based on relevant components (affectual, consensual, associational, functional, and normative) of the intergenerational solidarity model (e.g., Bengtson/Roberts 1991). The researchers have identified four major types of solidarity, two of which occurred more often (harmonious and amicable) while the other two occurred more rarely (ambivalent and distant). No cultural differences in the distributions of patterns were found; however, dyads of daughters and mothers who did not have a partner were more often characterized by distant solidarity in Poland and by ambivalent solidarity in the USA. Results also showed that US daughters of “distant solidarity” dyads scored higher on life satisfaction than US daughters of “ambivalent solidarity” dyads. Polish mothers with “amicable” and “harmonious” patterns had higher life satisfaction than Polish mothers with “distant” and “ambivalent” patterns of intergenerational solidarity.

*Parenting and attachment.* Katarzyna Lubiewska notes that past research has shown that transmission of attachment is mainly associated with the quality of parenting (e.g., van IJzendoorn/Bakermans-Kranenburg 1997). As past research included often only two generations, Lubiewska is now interested in the role of grandmothers and fathers in the transmission process (e.g., Takahashi 2005). One of her expectations is that grandmothers and fathers differ in their influence on attachment transmission among different regions of Poland due to historical divisions and current socio-political and economical change within Poland. Results of first analyses indicate that a prediction of adolescents’ attachment anxiety can only be made by parents’ attachment and parenting as “transmission belt”. Interestingly, fathers’ anxiety was related to adolescents’ anxiety only in Southern regions, whereas paternal avoidance influenced adolescents’ anxiety only in Western regions and paternal rejection was predictive for adolescents’ anxiety in East Poland. Further, it was found that culture functioned as a moderator between paternal attachment, rejection, and adolescent anxiety.

#### 4 Intergenerational Transmission of Values in Cross-Cultural Comparison

*The intergenerational transmission of Value of Children.* Chin-Chun Yi and Yu-Hua Chen claim that one reason for the decreasing fertility rate in East Asia is the changing VOC (e.g., Yu 2009). Therefore, the aim of their study is to figure out the transmission of VOC in three generations in two Chinese societies, with a focus on identifying identical factor

structures for cultural contexts for positive as well as for negative VOC. Analyses have revealed for both China and Taiwan two factors for positive (physical/social and emotional) as well as for negative VOC (physical/psychological constraint and familial/social demand). Also, as hypothesized, the intergenerational transmission was more evident for grandmother-mother and for mother-adolescent dyads than for grandmother-adolescent dyads, especially for positive VOC. It was found that urban context and exposure to modernity functioned as significant predictors for positive and negative VOC.

*Parent-child value similarities within and across cultures.* Daniela Barni, Ariel Knafo, Asher Ben-Arieh, and Muhammed M. Haj-Yahia want to address shortcomings of earlier research that has typically measured intergenerational transmission of values by focusing on parent-child value similarity, thereby neglecting the role of a shared background – the “cultural stereotype” (Kenny/Acitelli 1994). In order to deal with this desideratum, the researchers have compared samples from two different cultural contexts, focusing on value similarity between parents and adolescent children. In general, the endorsement of cultural stereotypes was higher for Italian than for Israeli participants, and was higher for mothers than for adolescents. Regarding intergenerational transmission of values it was found that collectivistic values were more strongly transmitted from parent to child, whereas similarities in individualistic values could be partly explained by the effect of a cultural stereotype. The researchers conclude that the transmission of socially-supported values needs little investment from the family in a value homogenous context (family as a “source of socio-cultural stability”). In a more value heterogeneous context the transmission of family specific values may be more successful (family as “source of socio-cultural change”).

*Adolescents' relationship with maternal grandmothers.* Mihaela Friedlmeier, Isabelle Albert, Gisela Trommsdorff, and Cigdem Kagitcibasi investigate at present the relationship quality between grandmothers and grandchildren by taking into account the role of the mother as a mediator. It is presumed that mothers might influence the grandchild-grandparent relation (e.g., Chan/Elder 2000). Most research on the mediating role of the middle generation has been carried out in Western, individualistic contexts. Therefore, the authors have chosen Germany and USA to represent individualistic cultures, and China and Turkey to represent collectivist cultures. First results show that the middle generation is an important mediator between non-adjacent generations, and this may point to an intergenerational transmission of relationship quality. Interestingly, the quality of the adolescent-mother relationship was more strongly linked to the adolescent-grandmother relationship than to the mother-grandmother relationship.

*Value of Children and intergenerational relationships in adjacent generations.* The study by Boris Mayer, Beate Schwarz, and Gisela Trommsdorff includes ten cultures and focuses on country-level macro variables (social development and overall cultural orientation) as well as family-related value orientations regarding intergenerational (adult daughters and their mothers) relationship quality and social support. For example, it was found that cultural wealth was related to lower hierarchical values and lower material interdependence values of the family and children (which is in line with Kagitcibasi 2007). The researchers reason that “cultural syndromes of independence and interdependence exist regarding value orientations”, and they are associated with cultural wealth. However, there was no evidence for such cultural syndromes with regard to relationship quality and

support. Differences between collectivistic and individualistic cultures regarding intimate family relations are rather a matter of “type rather than amount of relatedness”.

## 5 Conclusions and Outlook

In the light of ongoing demographic changes all over the world and the related socio-economic and cultural change, it has become more than ever necessary to relate context, socio-economic change, family, and individual development. The currently ongoing studies within the VOC-framework take this claim into consideration by focusing and combining different levels of analysis in line with the culture-informed model of intergenerational relationships across the lifespan (see also *Trommsdorff/Albert* in press).

For more information see: <http://www.psychologie.uni-konstanz.de/en/trommsdorff/research/value-of-children-in-six-cultures/>.

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