

## The Closeness of Young Adults' Relationships with Their Parents

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### Abstracts

#### The Closeness of Young Adults' Relationships with Their Parents

How close are the relationships between young adults and their parents today? Which factors account for closer or less close relationships between the generations? The theoretical model considers opportunity, need, family and cultural-contextual structures. The empirical analyses draw on the Swiss TREE survey ("Transitions from Education to Employment"). They reveal remarkably close ties between the generations. However, we also find a number of strains, such as the separation of parents and unemployment of adult children, that contribute to family relationships being less close. The findings provide insight into the reality of intergenerational relationships during a dynamic period of life.

Keywords: Generations, family solidarity, emotional closeness, young adulthood, child-parent relationship

#### Die Enge der Beziehung von jungen Erwachsenen zu ihren Eltern

Wie eng sind heutzutage junge Erwachsene mit ihren Eltern verbunden? Welche Faktoren sind für mehr oder weniger enge Generationenbeziehungen verantwortlich? Das theoretische Modell berücksichtigt Opportunitäts-, Bedürfnis-, Familien- und kulturell-kontextuelle Strukturen. Die empirischen Analysen greifen auf die Schweizer TREE-Studie («Transitionen von der Erstausbildung ins Erwerbsleben») zurück. Es zeigen sich beeindruckend enge Bindungen zwischen den Generationen. Allerdings lassen sich auch eine Reihe von Belastungen feststellen, die zu weniger engen Familienverhältnissen beitragen, z. B. Trennung der Eltern und Arbeitslosigkeit der erwachsenen Kinder. Die Ergebnisse bieten einen Einblick in die Ausgestaltung von Generationenbeziehungen in einem dynamischen Lebensalter.

Schlüsselwörter: Generationen, Familiensolidarität, emotionale Verbundenheit, junges Erwachsenenalter, Kind-Eltern-Beziehung

#### La proximité relationnelle des jeunes adultes à leurs parents

Quel est le niveau de proximité relationnelle entre les jeunes adultes et leurs parents aujourd'hui? Quels sont les facteurs qui influent sur la proximité des relations? Le modèle théorique considère les structures d'opportunités, de besoins, ainsi que les structures familiales et celles des contextes culturels. Utilisant l'enquête suisse TREE («Transitions de l'École à l'Emploi»), les analyses empiriques révèlent des liens d'intimité considérables entre les générations. Toutefois, certains facteurs de tension, tels que la séparation des parents ou l'expérience de chômage des enfants adultes, peuvent conduire à une relation plus distante. Les résultats offrent un aperçu de la réalité des relations intergénérationnelles durant une étape dynamique de la vie.

Mots-clés: Génération, solidarité en famille, proximité relationnelle, jeunes adultes, relation entre enfants et parents

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## The Closeness of Young Adults' Relationships with Their Parents<sup>1</sup>

Ariane Bertogg\* and Marc Szydlik\*

### 1 Introduction

Young adults face major challenges of various kinds. Young adulthood is characterised by crucial developmental tasks and transitions in all areas of life, such as finding one's place in the world of work and gaining financial independence, leaving the parental home and entering into a relationship with a partner (Elder 1998; Arnett 2000; Shanahan 2000). Rather than being a clearly defined period in the life course, young adulthood is an extended phase between adolescence and middle age involving multiple status passages (Konietzka 2010, 109 ff.). Although the sequence of the landmarks on the way to adulthood has become more flexible and reversible, this greater freedom at the same time requires that young adults make the proper biographical decisions, which have consequences for their entire future life. These decisions are strongly influenced by the wider context of family and society. In finding their own path through life, young adults thus not only encounter a host of opportunities but also substantial obstacles and uncertainties. The main reasons for this have to do with education, the labour market and the family of origin.

The importance of education for the entire life course can hardly be overestimated. Educational decisions and trajectories as well as the transition to working life hence put young adults and their families under considerable pressure. For many young adults, the expansion of tertiary education leads to a prolonged dependence on their parents (Höpflinger and Perrig-Chiello 2008). The challenges of (longer) education go hand in hand with increasing demands in the labour market. Even young adults holding a university degree experience fairly long periods of inadequate employment and job insecurity upon first entering the labour market (FSO 2011). A critical development in this context is growing youth unemployment, which has been on the rise in Switzerland since the turn of the century as well (OECD 2010; FSO 2013). Swiss studies have shown that young people with little work experience have been particularly hard hit by the economic crisis (Weber 2007; Sacchi and Salvisberg 2011). Moreover, the flexibilisation of work has led to a situation

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in which the workforce faces more rapidly changing demands, skills are rendered redundant at a faster pace, and the demands for flexibility in and between companies are on the rise (Szydlik 2008).

The family is another area where young adults increasingly experience uncertainty and instability. On the one hand, increased divorce rates and the greater diversity in types of partnerships and families (Settersten and Ray 2010, 142) pose a challenge to family cohesion. Conflict between parents and subsequent separation can have a lifelong impact on intergenerational family relationships (Szydlik 2000). On the other hand, the transition involved in entering into a partner relationship, including moving in with one's partner, has increasingly taken on the nature of an "experiment."

These manifold challenges thus affect the young adults and their life course, but also their social environment, including their family of origin (Swartz et al. 2011). This raises the question of what role parents still play in the lives of their adult children. Do there exist strong ties, or are the bonds between young adults and their mothers and fathers mostly of a loose nature? Does ongoing dependency strain the relationship, and are there long-term consequences associated with critical life events? Against the backdrop of the aforementioned challenges, there is an ever more urgent need to study intergenerational family ties in general and their functioning in the critical phase of consolidation in young adulthood in particular. Families, after all, can provide a "safety net" that offers flexible and episodic support as needed (Höpflinger and Stuckelberger 1999, 150 ff.). While public transfers flow from young to old, private transfers in families go in the opposite direction, from parents to children (Attias-Donfut 1995; Kohli 1999). However, it is not just financial resources that help young adults gain a foothold in life. Parents' emotional support also assists children in making the transitions to adulthood (Berger and Fend 2005; Settersten and Ray 2010).

It is the emotional relationship between adult children and their parents that will be subject to closer scrutiny in this paper. Existing research on this topic shows significant gaps in three respects. Firstly, there are only a few studies so far on the emotional ties between the adult generations of families (e. g., Rossi and Rossi 1990; Lawton et al. 1994; Szydlik 1995; Kaufmann and Uhlenberg 1998; Berger and Fend 2005; Steinbach 2010). This owes mainly to a lack of suitable representative data and particularly concerns the perspective of young adults. Most studies either present general findings across all age groups or primarily focus their analyses on the views of the older population.

Secondly, empirical evidence suggests that family relations have a prior "history" and that early bonding patterns influence relationship behaviour also in adulthood (Ainsworth 1989; Schneewind and Ruppert 1995; Englund et al. 2011). The present paper therefore not only focuses on the current housing, employment and family situation, but also explicitly analyses (the timing of) past events and their

long-term consequences. For instance, it is not only asked whether the adult child has left home, but also when this happened. The paper takes the same approach to possible instances of unemployment or the issue of whether the time of parental separation has an impact on intergenerational relations later on.

Thirdly, the research gaps are particularly severe for Switzerland, even though it is a particularly interesting case since it offers the opportunity to investigate how major challenges affect family relationships even in a rather secure economic environment. However, the research group AGES (LAbour, Generation, Stratification) has suggested adopting a corresponding question on intergenerational closeness that has recently been included in the Swiss TREE study ("Transition from Education to Employment"), which serves as the basis of the following analyses.

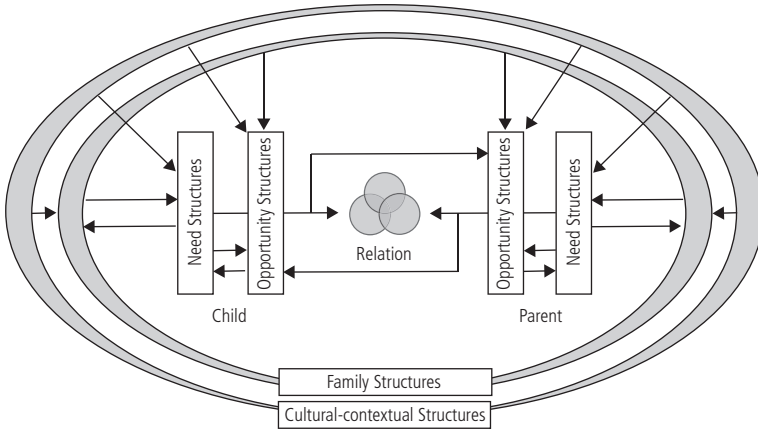
Briefly stated, two issues are at the heart of this paper. Firstly, it investigates how close young adults in Switzerland perceive their relationships with their parents. The second issue concerns the factors that account for closer or less close relationships between the generations. The following section identifies potential factors on the basis of a theoretical model. Section 3 provides information on the data and methods. The subsequent section reports the empirical findings concerning the closeness of relationships and its determinants. Finally, the paper ends with a brief summary and conclusions.

## 2 Theoretical background

The closeness of a relationship describes the emotional bond between people. It represents a sense of emotional attachment, community and belonging together and thus an enduring emotional disposition. Affectual solidarity is one of the three key dimensions of so-called intergenerational solidarity, together with associational solidarity (contacts and common activities) and functional solidarity (giving and taking of money, time and space; Bengtson and Roberts 1991; Szydlik 2000, 34 ff., 173 ff.). The distinction between affectual and associational solidarity also suggests that the emotional closeness of a relationship must not be confused with frequent contact. A close relationship is furthermore not automatically a "good quality" relationship. It can be perceived differently from both sides and can also be viewed as too close, for instance, if parents cling to their children or if adult children depend on their parents their entire life, both emotionally and otherwise.

Which factors account for closer or less close relationships? A general model of intergenerational relations provides the theoretical foundations for the empirical analyses (figure 1). At the heart of the model are the three key types of intergenerational solidarity, which are represented by three inner circles. The factors determining intergenerational relations can be classified into four groups, namely opportunity, need, family and cultural-contextual structures. Intergenerational relations are

Figure 1 Theoretical model of intergenerational relations



Source: Szydlik (2000, 45).

generally dyadic, which means that essentially two people are involved, each one with specific opportunities and needs. This relationship is embedded in a family and, beyond that, in a societal context.

*Opportunity structures* reflect opportunities or resources. They enable, promote, hinder or prevent social interaction. In this respect, living in the same household may enhance emotional closeness, for instance, as a result of frequent contact and emotional support as well as the existence of a mutual understanding in regard to saving costs and sharing household tasks (see Isengard and Szydlik 2012). However, children with looser ties to their parents might be more inclined to move out earlier. Furthermore, we consider the point in time at which the shared living arrangements have ended, assuming less intergenerational attachment the longer the generations have been living apart.

Besides space, family wealth is another potential resource to foster closer intergenerational relationships. Financial resources can encourage adult children to keep in touch with their parents and to cultivate stronger ties (e. g., Szydlik 2012). By the same token, financial strains can be expected to have an adverse impact on intergenerational ties. Experiencing poverty and financial difficulties in childhood and adolescence has been shown to have longer-term consequences, such as negatively affecting educational achievement and socioemotional adjustment (McLoyd 1998; Davis-Kean 2005) as well as influencing parenting styles (see Elder et al. 1985; Nauck 1989; Dunn et al. 2000; Kwak 2003). Finally, good health can also

be understood in terms of opportunity since it offers better chances of cultivating social contacts and actively participating in family life.

*Need structures* indicate the needs for social interaction. They also include desires, goals, interests, motives, wants and wishes of individuals, for themselves or for significant others. To young adults, the employment situation represents a key aspect of the need structure. A young person who experiences initial difficulty in gaining access to employment is in special need of support, including financial as well as emotional support, which can strain the relationship from the child's and the parents' perspective alike. In any case, empirical evidence points towards reciprocal relationships being more harmonious and young adults having successfully mastered the transition to working life reporting fewer disagreements (Trommsdorff and Albert 2009, 129 ff.). Buhl (2007, 563) comes to the conclusion that the successful transition to the workforce nourishes closer child-parent relationships, enhances the convergence of goals and reduces disagreements. We therefore expect to find closer intergenerational ties among respondents in employment in contrast to those who are unemployed or not in the workforce. In addition to that, empirical findings show that early unemployment has long-term biographical, psychological and financial effects (Bynner and Parsons 2002, 301; Gregg and Tominey 2005; Mroz and Savage 2006). This being the case, it should be particularly promising to apply a temporal perspective and distinguish between current and past unemployment accordingly.

Needs can also be expressed through financial transfers from parents to their adult children. One can formulate two contradictory hypotheses in this respect. On the one hand, we can assume economic need and the giving of money to put a strain on intergenerational relationships. On the other hand, financial transfers could also well be associated with closer ties – be it that the adult children are grateful for the gift (Simmel 1908) or that parents are particularly inclined to give support to the children to whom they feel close.

The relation between parent and child is embedded in *family structures*. They include, for example, family size and composition, earlier family events as well as family roles and norms. One can expect to find differences along gender lines, both among the parents' and the children's generation. There is sufficient empirical evidence that women tend towards closer relationships and the role of "kinkeeper," i. e., keeping the family together and providing a variety of support services (Rossi and Rossi 1990; Igel and Szydlik 2011; Haberkern et al. 2015). This leads to the assumption that differences between gender lines are not only found in levels of closeness, but also in respect to other determinants of such closeness. The following analyses will therefore be further differentiated according to gender constellations.

A separation of parents is likely to have a significant effect on current intergenerational relationships (Amato and Booth 1996; Hines 1997; Dunlop et al. 2001). Experiencing the separation or divorce of one's parents during childhood – including marital crises and the more frequent absence of a parent due to separation – has

a particularly strong impact on the relationship with the father (Aquilino 1994; Berger and Fend 2005).

In this analysis, the number of relatives with whom the respondent has a close relationship serves as an indicator of family orientation as well as the chance to turn to other family members when facing problems. The transition of adult children to a permanent partnership or even marriage relieves the burden on parents because the partner now becomes the main addressee for support. Settersten and Ray (2010, 136) found that a child's marriage leads to a "blossoming" particularly of the relationship between child and father. At the same time, intergenerational ties could diminish once adult children turn to new significant others. This applies to one's own children as well. Becoming a parent can therefore be expected to cause a reorientation towards one's own nuclear family, and discordance in parenting styles could also contribute to less close relationships. On the other hand, the middle generation is in the role of a "gatekeeper" who regulates grandparental access to grandchildren, and grandparents (grandmothers in particular) frequently provide grandchild care (Igel and Szydlik 2011), which could also promote closer bonds with their adult children.

*Cultural-contextual structures* represent societal conditions in which intergenerational relations develop. These include social, political, economic and cultural conditions as well as rules and norms of institutions and groups. In this respect, intergenerational (im)mobility and thus similarity or discrepancy between educational status of adult children and their parents might play a role, contributing to less close relationships amongst generations belonging to different educational classes. Upward mobility could be claimed to contribute to intergenerational alienation (Pott 2002, 136), whereas downward mobility might be associated with disappointed parental expectations concerning the educational success of their offspring (Schmeiser 2004, 218).

Parental educational aspirations affect the children of immigrants as well, including the second generation (so-called *secondos* or *secondas*). Juhasz and Mey (2003) speak of a "double bind" between such aspirations and labour market discrimination (Riphahn and Bauer 2007). The experience of migration, the situation in the new country as well as cultural and language differences to the country of origin are likely to also have an impact on intergenerational family relationships. Empirical findings point to greater solidarity in immigrant families (Bolzman et al. 2003, 121 ff.; Baykara-Krumme et al. 2011, 261). This is also supported by the fact that children of immigrants typically have better knowledge of the local language and a more extensive network of contacts with natives than their parents do and therefore frequently act as "language brokers," adopting adult roles in the family and thus gaining status and voice in the family setting (Titzmann and Silbereisen 2011, 123; Titzmann 2012). There is thus reason to suspect that the special challenges confronting immigrants in their host country contribute to forging closer family

ties. However, Titzmann also points out that taking this role can also be too taxing on youths, and discrepancies between the cultural norms of parents and their adult children may be of importance, too.

The last factor to be considered here is regional disparities between the different parts of Switzerland. Regional labour market conditions as well as general family norms and orientations may have a relevant influence on relationships between adult children and their parents. For example, a comparatively high regional unemployment rate and labour market competition in Italian-speaking Switzerland (FSO 2013) might increase insecurity during the status passage to adulthood, thus inducing an even stronger orientation towards the family (of origin). Furthermore, the proximity to Italy in terms of language, geographic location and culture may play a role here as well. At least, international empirical analyses (e. g., Blome et al. 2008; Isengard and Szydlik 2012; Haberkern et al. 2015) show that intergenerational solidarity is especially pronounced in Italy.

### 3 Data, variables, methods

The empirical analyses employ data from the TREE panel survey (“Transitions from Education to Employment”), which, at the suggestion of the OECD, was designed as a follow-up survey to the first PISA study in 2000 (TREE 2013, 6). The TREE project has been funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, the University of Basel, the Swiss Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology, the Swiss Federal Statistical Office and the cantons of Bern, Geneva and Ticino. The initial TREE sample population comprised pupils who had completed the last year of compulsory education in Switzerland in 2000. The information used in our study stems from the PISA survey and from all the eight subsequent panel waves (2001 through 2007, as well as 2010). At the time of the last wave in 2010, the majority of the 2 226 young adults who had participated in all waves, are 26 years old. Since most of the respondents still have two living parents, with whom they may have different relationships, we reshaped the dataset into dyads with a maximum of two observations for each child, referring to the mother and the father. This results in a total of 4 306 dyads, reflecting four possible constellations: daughter-mother, son-mother, daughter-father and son-father.

The survey question for the dependent variable in the eighth wave in 2010 was phrased as follows: “How close do you feel to your father/mother today?” The response options were “very close,” “close,” “medium,” “not very close” and “not close at all.” The wording of the question clearly focuses on emotional closeness and is designed to avoid confusion with the frequency of contact or geographical proximity. In addition, the question was posed immediately after inquiring about coresidence and frequency of contact.



The following paragraphs describe the independent variables. *Opportunity structures*: Coresidence means that, at the time of the survey, the respondent was living in the same household with the respective parent. We further distinguish three periods of time in which coresidence ended: at most 1 year ago, more than 1 but at most 3 years ago, and more than 3 years ago. For family wealth, the metric Warm scale of the 2000 PISA wave is applied, with values ranging from -2.93 to 3.38. The scale was constructed from items pertaining to size of the residence and household furnishings as well as other durable goods, such as cars or consumer electronics (OECD 2002, 224). Health is incorporated into the model as a metric variable using the five-point scale from the questionnaire ranging from very poor to very good.

*Need structures*: Apart from respondents in employment, there are those who are in education, unemployed or not in the workforce. The additional category of “past unemployment” pertains to previous experiences of unemployment throughout the entire survey period, irrespective of the current employment status, except for current unemployment. “Money from parents” refers to financial transfers received from parents, using a dummy variable (1 = yes).

*Family structures*: The dyads comprise the four possible gender constellations (daughter-mother, son-mother, etc.). In the case of separated or divorced parents, we distinguish between separations that occurred before and after the respondent had reached majority. If the number of relatives (without parents or family members living in the same household) to which the respondent maintains close ties exceeds ten, the value is set to 10. The category “lives with partner” includes unmarried respondents who live with their partner. The dummy variable “own child(ren)” takes on the value 1 when the respondent has at least one child of his or her own.

*Cultural-contextual structures*: Since the TREE data provide detailed information on educational achievement of both children and their parents, we are able to identify upward and downward mobility as well as a similar level of education. A similar level of education of children and parents is further distinguished in “both tertiary” and “both non-tertiary.” Individuals still in education are categorised based on the educational certificate pursued. “Swiss natives” were born in Switzerland and have at least one Swiss parent. “Second generation” (*secondos*) are the children of foreign nationals who were either born in Switzerland or migrated to the country up to the age of four and therefore spent their entire educational career in Switzerland (Bolzmänn et al. 2003; Juhasz and Mey 2003). “Migrants” immigrated only after the beginning of compulsory education. Furthermore, we distinguish between the regions of German, French and Italian Switzerland.

The ordinal scales or natural rankings used in attitude measurements can be understood as “simplifications” of underlying metric scales. The categories of the variable Y can be interpreted as realisations of the latent variable Y\*, which cannot be measured directly (Long 1997, 116). Ordered probit models estimate the prob-

ability of belonging to one of these response categories. The estimated “cut points” are threshold values and represent “dividers” between the response categories on the underlying latent scale. We estimate the effects of the independent variable both individually (gross) and simultaneously in a single model (net) for all valid observations. In addition, we calculate four separate models for the respective gender dyads. The coefficients of the independent variables can be interpreted in terms of effect sizes and whether they are positive or negative, where a positive coefficient indicates a closer and negative coefficient a looser relationship. Due to the low number of observations in the categories “not very close” and “not close at all” (figure 2), these two categories are combined in the multivariate analyses (e.g., Agresti 2002). Thus the dependent variable has four categories. Additional calculations with all five categories as well as alternative models (rare event models, robust regression models) show stable results.

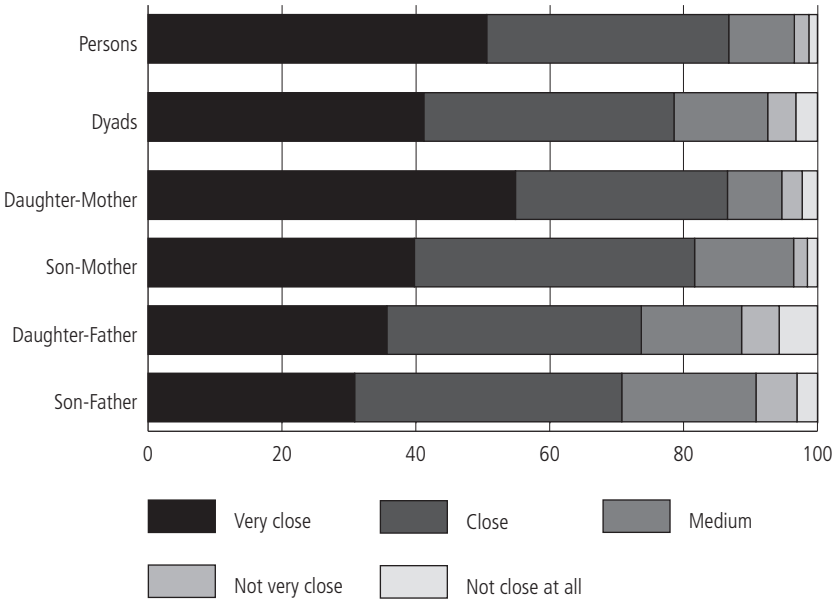
## 4 Results

How close are the intergenerational relationships of young adults with their parents overall? This is the first issue addressed in this paper. Figure 2 shows the percentages for the five levels of closeness. The first bar depicts the situation for the entire sample. It indicates the extent to which the young adults report a close relationship with at least one parent. The figure also considers the dyads – that is, the relationships with mothers and fathers – and provides information on the four possible gender dyads.

More than eight in ten young adults have a close relationship with at least one parent, and half of them even feel very close to their mother or father. If we look at the dyads, the latter is true for more than four in ten respondents. For more than three-quarters of the dyads, the respondents report at least a close relationship. These are impressive numbers. Only 14% choose the medium category, while 4% report that their relationships are not very close, and 3% that they are not close at all. The already remarkable degree of emotional closeness is even stronger if we consider the “intergenerational stake” hypothesis (Bengtson and Kuypers 1971; Giarrusso et al. 1995). According to this hypothesis, children have a desire for independence and self-fulfilment that stands in contrast to parents' wish for continuity, so that parents tend to report closer relationships than their offspring (Rossi and Rossi 1990; Lynott and Roberts 1997; Schwarz and Trommsdorff 2007). We can therefore assume that if the parents of the TREE participants had been asked, they would have described intergenerational relationships as being even closer. The percentages registered here can thus be considered a cautious, conservative assessment.

The remaining four bars in figure 2 depict the closeness of the relationships for the four gender dyads. Mother dyads show higher percentages of close or very close ties than father dyads, which is also true for daughters compared to sons. As

Figure 2 Closeness of young adults' relationships with their parents



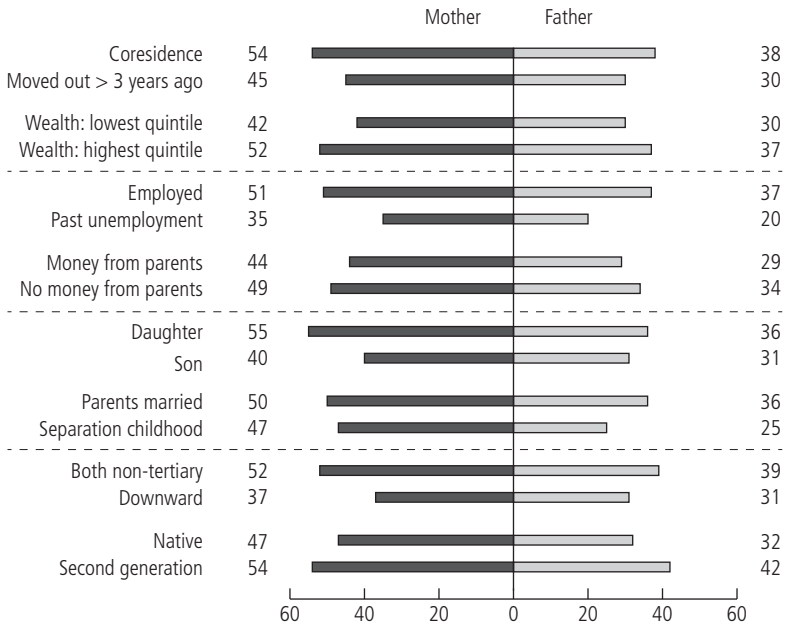
Notes: Weighted results, per cent; n (persons): 2 226, n (dyads): 4 306.

Source: TREE (2012), own calculations.

expected, the daughter-mother relationship therefore turns out to be the closest intergenerational bond, whereas the son-father relation is the least close one.

Figure 3 provides first insights into the factors that determine closer or less close relationships. The descriptive findings suggest that intergenerational ties are closer when generations live together than when the children have moved out of the parental home some time ago. Family wealth also seems to be conducive to emotional attachment. This also holds true for adult children who are in employment – especially compared to those having experienced past unemployment. (The causes behind) current money transfers from parents to adult children seem to strain the relationship. Figure 3 mirrors the gender differences observed in figure 2. In the event that the respondents' parents separated during the respondents' childhood, this apparently results in much looser intergenerational relationships with fathers. Moreover, children with a similar level of education as their parents (both non-tertiary) display closer ties than those having experienced downward mobility. Second-generation immigrants more frequently state having very close relationships with their parents than the native population.

Figure 3 Percentage of "very close" relationship with mother and father



Notes: Weighted results, per cent, dyads; n: 4 306. Total: 49% (Mother), 34% (Father).  
 Source: TREE (2012), own calculations.

However, figure 3 presents descriptive findings for one response option and does not control for the influence of other potentially relevant factors. This requires multivariate analyses, which are documented in table 1.

*Opportunity structures:* For young adults, living in the same household with their parents (reference group) is clearly associated with a closer emotional relationship. At the same time, it obviously makes sense to take the time of leaving the parental home into account if the generations live separately. If the respondent moved out of the parental home within the past year, there is no significant difference to those coresiding with their parents. Significant differences only emerge if parents and child have been living separately for a longer period of time. The effect is particularly pronounced when the family generations have been living apart for more than three years. The separate analyses of the gender dyads further suggest that coresidence is especially associated with closer ties between sons and fathers. At least when children move out of the parental home, sons' relationships with their father become looser more rapidly.

Table 1 Determinants of closeness

|                                       | All Gross | All Net  | Daughter-Mother | Son-Mother | Daughter-Father | Son-Father |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|----------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
| <b>Opportunity Structures</b>         |           |          |                 |            |                 |            |
| Coresidence (ref.)                    |           |          |                 |            |                 |            |
| Moved out ≤ 1 year ago                | -0.12*    | -0.06    | 0.12            | -0.14      | -0.03           | -0.18      |
| Moved out 1–3 years ago               | -0.12**   | -0.13**  | -0.14           | -0.03      | -0.10           | -0.24**    |
| Moved out > 3 years ago               | -0.27***  | -0.29*** | -0.33***        | -0.19      | -0.26**         | -0.29**    |
| Family wealth                         | 0.07***   | 0.08***  | 0.13***         | 0.05       | 0.11***         | -0.01      |
| Health                                | 0.13***   | 0.14***  | 0.17***         | 0.17***    | 0.12**          | 0.17***    |
| <b>Need Structures</b>                |           |          |                 |            |                 |            |
| Employed (ref.)                       |           |          |                 |            |                 |            |
| In education                          | -0.08*    | -0.12**  | -0.26**         | 0.16       | -0.37***        | 0.18       |
| Currently unemployed                  | -0.20*    | -0.38*** | -0.32           | -0.50*     | -0.15           | -0.85***   |
| Past unemployment                     | -0.17***  | -0.18*** | -0.24**         | -0.14      | -0.11           | -0.21*     |
| Not in workforce                      | -0.10*    | -0.19*** | -0.20*          | -0.08      | -0.27**         | -0.19      |
| Money from parents                    | 0.02      | 0.09     | 0.13            | -0.13      | 0.31***         | -0.12      |
| <b>Family Structures</b>              |           |          |                 |            |                 |            |
| Daughter-Mother (ref.)                |           |          |                 |            |                 |            |
| Son-Mother                            | -0.34***  | -0.42*** |                 |            |                 |            |
| Daughter-Father                       | -0.50***  | -0.54*** |                 |            |                 |            |
| Son-Father                            | -0.63***  | -0.72*** |                 |            |                 |            |
| Parents married (ref.)                |           |          |                 |            |                 |            |
| Separation in adulthood               | -0.35***  | -0.34*** | -0.39***        | -0.13      | -0.44***        | -0.30*     |
| Separation in childhood               | -0.37***  | -0.38*** | -0.17**         | -0.03      | -0.74***        | -0.46***   |
| Number of close relatives             | 0.02***   | 0.02***  | 0.02            | 0.01       | 0.04***         | 0.01       |
| Single (ref.)                         |           |          |                 |            |                 |            |
| Lives with partner                    | 0.04      | 0.11***  | 0.08            | 0.02       | 0.15**          | 0.16*      |
| Married                               | 0.25***   | 0.42***  | 0.37***         | 0.11       | 0.61***         | 0.37**     |
| Own child(ren)                        | 0.07      | -0.12    | 0.10            | -0.10      | -0.43***        | 0.10       |
| <b>Cultural-contextual Structures</b> |           |          |                 |            |                 |            |
| Education: Upward                     |           |          |                 |            |                 |            |
| Both tertiary                         | -0.10*    | -0.06    | -0.05           | -0.06      | -0.02           | -0.19*     |
| Both non-tertiary (ref.)              |           |          |                 |            |                 |            |
| Downward                              | -0.22***  | -0.15**  | -0.33**         | -0.21      | -0.11           | -0.04      |
| Native (ref.)                         |           |          |                 |            |                 |            |
| Second generation                     | 0.18***   | 0.15**   | 0.22*           | 0.16       | 0.16            | 0.06       |
| Migrant                               | 0.16**    | 0.14*    | 0.04            | 0.39**     | 0.02            | 0.30*      |

Continuation of table 1 on the next page.

*Continuation of table 1.*

|                           | All Gross | All Net | Daughter-Mother | Son-Mother | Daughter-Father | Son-Father |
|---------------------------|-----------|---------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
| German Switzerland (ref.) |           |         |                 |            |                 |            |
| French Switzerland        | 0.03      | -0.01   | 0.03            | -0.07      | -0.01           | -0.10      |
| Italian Switzerland       | 0.60***   | 0.67*** | 0.66***         | 0.67***    | 0.73***         | 0.70***    |
| Cut point 1               | -1.44     | -1.50   | -1.31           | -1.06      | -0.96           | -0.88      |
| Cut point 2               | -0.82     | -0.82   | -0.68           | -0.27      | -0.31           | -0.11      |
| Cut point 3               | 0.13      | 0.21    | 0.31            | 0.92       | 0.67            | 0.97       |
| n                         | 4 197     | 4 197   | 1 328           | 811        | 1 266           | 792        |

Notes: Unweighted results, dyads. Ordered probit regressions, unstandardised coefficients. \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*  $p \leq 0.1$ .

Source: TREE (2012), own calculations.

Wealth keeps families together – at least it increases adult children's emotional ties to their parents. The more material comforts the parental home had to offer during adolescence, the more likely are the 26-year-old to report a strong attachment to their parents. If we consider the models for the individual dyads, this is particularly true for the female respondents. Apparently daughters experience the financial situation of their parents differently than young men do. Apart from family wealth, children's health also plays a role. The better the state of health, the closer the relationship. Wealth and health both clearly provide opportunities for close intergenerational relations – and vice versa: financial and health problems can be a burden on families, resulting in looser bonds.

*Need structures:* As expected, unemployed young adults in particular, but also young adults who are not economically active and those in education, much more frequently perceive their relationships with their parents to be less close than their peers in employment. This supports the "strain hypothesis." A situation where parents and adult children have little reason to worry about financial and job security and which allows young adults to gain independence is typically associated with close intergenerational relationships. Current unemployment has the strongest negative effect overall. Moreover, strain resulting from unemployment does not immediately subside as unemployment ends, which attests to its long-term influence. For 26-year-olds, previous periods of unemployment mean having experienced problematic situations at the vulnerable time of entering the workforce. Compared to employment, not being economically active is associated with less close ties to one's parents as well. This seems to be the case particularly for daughters, whereas current unemployment more strongly affects sons, indicating gender roles in regard to gainful employment, although we partly reach the limits of the sample size here.

Being in education is associated with less closer ties between daughters and parents. Since most of the respondents who report being in education are pursuing a university degree, the economic utility of gender-specific choices of disciplines might play a role here (FSO 2011, 10).

Concerning financial transfers from parents to adult children, the two contradictory hypotheses can offset each other. At least for daughter-father relationships, the empirical findings suggest a bonding effect as a result of gratitude or, in turn, more transfers to an adult daughter to whom one feels close.

*Family structures:* The gender effects illustrated in the two descriptive figures hold even if we take the other factors into consideration. Women maintain closer intergenerational relationships than men, which underlines women's kinkeeper role. If the parents no longer live together, this has consequences for the intensity of the relationship between children and parents. It reduces the closeness of the relationship, irrespective of when separation occurred. The findings also confirm the hypothesis that the separation of parents has a particularly strong effect on the relationship with the father. This comes as no surprise since the children of divorced parents in the cohort under study, in accordance with common legal practice, typically grew up in the custody of their mothers. Parental separation does not seem to have significant effects on the son-mother relationship, and daughters especially report less close ties with those mothers who have separated in recent years. One cannot rule out that this is a short-term effect of separation that will decrease over time.

The number of relatives to which the respondent maintains close ties has a highly significant effect on the closeness of the relationship with the parents. This suggests that a pronounced family orientation contributes to strong bonds to the parents, yet this seems to hold primarily for the relationships of daughters with fathers. The "easing-the-burden" hypothesis is also supported by the finding that adult children who are married and those who live with a partner report closer intergenerational relationships compared to their single peers. The divergent hypotheses pertaining to the existence of children (i. e., grandchildren from the perspective of the respondents' parents) could ultimately offset each other so that there is no clear overall effect. However, having own children has a negative impact on the daughter-father relationship, be it because the daughter is now more preoccupied with the next generation or because of different parenting styles.

*Cultural-contextual structures:* To what extent does educational mobility or status transmission affect intergenerational relationships? Adult children who have an education similar to their parents report having closer relationships with them. Conversely, upward and downward mobility can be associated with differences in attitudes and lifestyles as well as disappointed expectations, resulting in less close bonds. The impact seems to be stronger on same-gender dyads, indicating a corresponding orientation amongst family generations in regard to educational pathways. In daughter-mother relationships, upward and downward mobility are both

associated with looser ties. On the male side of the family, however, this applies “only” to higher-educated sons.

The multivariate analyses show significantly closer intergenerational relationships of second-generation young immigrants living in Switzerland compared to Swiss natives. This is an indication of the above-mentioned bonding effect of “language brokering” and of the closer family ties of migrants as a result of the special challenges that they face in their host country; this also applies to migrant sons, who face particularly difficult situations in education and employment.

Between the German-speaking and French-speaking Swiss regions, there are no differences in terms of the closeness of relationships. However, there exist marked disparities between German and Italian Switzerland. The young adults of the latter region report having substantially closer ties to their parents, independent of gender. Our additional analyses of TREE data have further shown that the respondents from Italian-speaking Switzerland (Ticino) differ significantly from other Swiss regions in terms of coresidence, age at marriage and parenthood as well as parental separations and divorces. The same applies when we compare the canton of Ticino to the whole Swiss population in terms of age structure, age at marriage and at first birth (FSO 2014). Moreover, characteristics observed for Ticino resemble the empirical findings for Italy (e. g. Rusconi 2004; Röbbel 2006; Buchmann and Kriesi 2011). The shared history and culture as well as the orientation towards the neighbouring country in terms of literature and mass media consumption (Altermatt 2003; Mediapulse 2010) could be an indicator of an enduring cultural similarity extending beyond national borders. Furthermore, tighter labour market conditions in Ticino are likely to form a distinct frame of reference for the negotiation and interpretation of intergenerational relationships.

## 5 Conclusions

The major challenges that young adults face today typically do not lead to cutting the cord to their family of origin. To the contrary. The adage “out of sight, out of mind” does not apply to the intergenerational relationships of the young adults in Switzerland. Half of the respondents state that they have very close relationships with at least one parent, and more than three quarters of the child-parent relations are perceived to be at least close. Only three per cent report that their relationships with their parents are not close at all. These results are all the more striking if we consider that intergenerational relationships are typically perceived to be even closer from the perspective of the parents.

If we trace the causes for closer or less close intergenerational relationships, all four groups of factors prove to be of significance: opportunity, need, family and cultural-contextual structures are all crucial factors for relationships. Coresidence,



wealth and health foster emotional bonds, whereas difficulties in the labour market contribute to intergenerational relationships being less close. Daughters and mothers are more likely to maintain intergenerational family ties than sons and fathers, which supports the kinkeeper hypothesis. Furthermore, the relevance of other factors often depends on gender. For example, early separation of the parents has the strongest long-term effect on the child-father relationship: it clearly becomes much looser. Finally, we must not lose sight of cultural contexts. Relationships tend to be closer when the differences between the education of children and their parents are not too large. Moreover, we find strong family ties particularly in Italian Switzerland.

Despite all the emphasis on strong intergenerational solidarity, we must also not neglect the challenges mentioned in the introduction. The empirical findings support the strain hypothesis. Unemployment of young adults apparently puts a strain on intergenerational relationships even in Switzerland with its favourable labour market by international standards. The pluralisation of ways of life, as in the event of parents separating, results in looser relationships, especially with fathers. In any event, new models of partnership and family life also require making greater efforts to maintain intergenerational relationships. Educational mobility is another factor that can contribute to looser relationships of adult children with their parents. This is true for both upward and downward mobility. The longitudinal information furthermore shows that particularly events earlier in life have a sustained impact. This applies to leaving home early, past unemployment and early separation of one's parents. We can conclude that family generations have remarkable potential to weather the challenges. Nevertheless, the generations are also under considerable strain, which can eventually lead to a loosening of the bonds between adult children and their parents.

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