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## The Analysis of Family Support for Older People in Russia

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### Abstract

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The article is devoted to discussion of topical issues relating to such an important challenge as the decline in family support for older people (on the example of Russia). It is well known that the modern family is changing, and relationships within the family are also changing, so that attitude to the family support for older people and an adequacy of such support are shifted. In particular, the presented research tries to answer one of the crucial question: is family support for older people in developing and transitional societies really breaking down? There are many foreign scientific publications devoted to the family support in developing and transitional countries, however, Russia is not mentioned. In spite of the fact that this problem is almost not being discussed not only at a worldwide level but in Russia as well, it is still rather relevant because all abovementioned tendencies are observed in Russia against the background of a steady growth of the specific weight of older people groups in the general population. Therefore, within the given article, the answer to the posed question will be given in relation to Russia. The key conclusion is that the family support for older people in developing and transitional societies has not vanished, and adult children support their parents as before, however when they really need it. In other words, the level of support depends on the level of need.

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**Keywords:** Family institution; support for older people; inter-generational exchange; inter-generational transfers; well-being.

### 1. Introduction

Despite the debates on the family institution transformation in the modern society, the importance of connection between the relatives is undeniable. Family is one of the basic institutions of the society. The primary socialization of an individual takes place in the family. During the whole life of an individual, family determines the opportunities and risks in large part.

The fundamental process that occurs within one family is the exchange between generations. Inter-generational solidarity is of the primary nature in relation to the social and economic formedness of

these relations (McDaniel, 1997). Inter-generational support is a natural phenomenon which is observed even among animals. Animal parents take care of young animals until they become independent.

Inter-generational exchange is a pre-requisite for the social reproduction. This exchange embodies the social justice. The family support is carried out in the form of inter-generational transfers that include more than the allocation of social resources. They are important from the point of view of continuity of the human capital assets.

## **2. Family support in the form of inter-generational transfers**

Inter-generational transfers are represented by physical resources or manpower and also information and experience gratuitously transferred from the older to younger generation (descending transfer) and from younger to older generation (ascending transfer) (Gladnikova, 2009).

Inter-generational transfers can be analyzed both at micro and macro levels. The macro-analysis of inter-generational exchanges is based on a cohort approach. The objects to be analyzed are social transfers that are characterized by their redistribution by the governmental channels. Social transfers are directed from one age group to another. The pension system is an explicit example of social transfers that corresponds to the abovementioned characteristics. The macro-analysis shows the distinctions of inter-generational resource exchange by the governmental channels and assists in studying the evolution of the entire system of inter-generational transfers in the course of time (Denisenko, 2007).

The microanalysis of inter-generational transfers investigates the exchange by different welfare on a grant basis between the members of kin groups belonging to different generations. In this case, generations are considered in the genealogical context, i.e. each generation represents a sub-system in the hierarchical kinship system. The individual belonging to a concrete generation is defined by a degree of relationship between relatives. It is worth noting that age characteristics make no matter in this case, since people of absolutely different ages can belong to one generation. Therefore, to proceed from a wide definition of the term family as a multi-level system of family ties, it is possible to state that the object of microanalysis is the interfamilial transfers. Microanalysis aims at the exposure of reasons and factors of inter-generational exchange, the definition of the transfer amount depending on their purpose, the detection of hallmarks of the exchange participants.

Depending upon the type of assistance, two types of transfers are distinguished, namely: physical and instrumental.

Physical transfer is a combination of financial and physical transfer proper. Financial transfers is a gratuitous money and other financial asset transfer. Physical transfer proper is a gratuitous exchange by various goods, such as property, durable goods, etc.

The difficulty of accounting for physical transfers in carrying out research, especially in the form of inquiry, is that it is impossible to detect the sphere of objects considered by respondents as transfers, since the concept of their valuable including physical one, is rather subjective (Gladnikova, 2009).

Instrumental transfers are the time reallocation between generations that is expressed by flows of different services that include assistance in housekeeping, childcare, joint recreation of individuals who

are not members of the same household. It should be noted that transfers are represented by the assistance rendering purely on a grant basis. Within the instrumental transfers, the functional support (help, transfer) is often highlighted as a separate sub-activity. Functional transfer is assistance granted those people who are not able to look after themselves because of disease.

On the one hand, welfares transferred during the exchange can act as substitutes of the market welfares, and on the other, possess a unique nature. For example, such services as elderly care or lending between generations can be easily substituted by the market substitute. However, interfamilial exchange differs from the market one. Thus, interfamilial exchange does not imply a strictly definite and immediate refundable payment. When one family member receives a present or some help from other family members, it does not mean that he/she must pay at once. As usual, this 'payment' is not obligatory and can be performed indirectly after a long time. The response from the transfer recipient is not obligatory. For example, parents while taking care of their children, get them properly educated. To a certain degree, parents hope that their children will become independent upon a completion of education and will assist them in life. Parents, however, do not bind their children and formalize any official agreement that assumes definite sanctions against a nonobservance of the agreement terms.

It should be noted that due to the population control and improvement of health protection, nutrition, and technological advance, the developing countries are rapidly growing old. Meanwhile, many of these countries have neither resources nor experience in the efficient problem solution concerning the process of aging. In rural areas, the process of aging is accelerated by urbanization forcing the youth to search for earnings and also coming back of older people in the countryside upon a completion of their labor activity. Due to the insufficient development of the social service infrastructure and the unavailability of the system of elderly provision in the most of rural areas of developing countries, the older people can find themselves in the hot seat, if their families will not take care of them. Unfortunately, inter-generational relations in a family also undergo changes that certainly affect the form and degree of the family support.

In developing and transitional societies, industrialization destroyed the traditional familial/neighborly community; a great number of people work for hire outside their families and local community.

The development of the retirement insurance system in these countries becomes a catalyst of 'washing out' older people from family for each generation can live without the previous one. There is no need to have many children to provide a shelter and subsistence for older people. Among other things, the so-called crisis of family is caused by the growth of generational and gender independence.

Individualism and commitment to valuables of the open market inherent to capitalist systems inevitably penetrate and disseminate in the developing and transitional societies. Market valuables have saturated the world that used to be altruistic with a voluntary assistance provided by communities that profoundly affects the assistance to older people.

Moreover, gerontophobia and ageism (fear and non-admission of old age) permeate the society starting from the numerous advertising and ending with mass media. The term ageism was coined in 1969 by Robert Butler to describe discrimination against seniors. The communication with older people is considered as undesirable that reminds young people about their own ageing in the future

(Butler, 1980; Bytheway, 1995). Partly they are right, because young people are not directly experienced in ageing and, hence, must lean on the social stereotypes, as a rule, negative. The problem seems to be in the existence of ageism in all modern developing and transitional societies.

### **3. Analysis of family support provided in Russia**

Let us consider the distinctions of the demographic development of a Russian family for the last time that have not been considered at all in the past generation. They include (a) the growth in nuclear families; (b) the growth in single-parent families headed mostly by mothers; (c) the reduction of extended families. Thus, in 1994, the reduction was 5 % of the whole number; housekeeping including three and more married couples was 0.1 % of the whole number of families (Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service, 2014); (d) the reduction of the average number of children in a family and the number of multi-child families. More and more families are oriented towards only one child whose birth is being delayed. The percentage of children of unwed parents is also grows: in 1994 it was 19.6 %, while in 2003 it came already to 29.7 % of the whole number of newborn children (Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service, 2014). A tendency to a personal organization without family is observed today, i.e. a convenient and not difficult bachelor-like life or the so-called Stockholm model. As consequence, the number of children born in families decreases leading to a dramatic change in the whole way of life, value system, weakening of both father and motherhood, solidarity of parents and children, the roles of brothers and sisters; disorganization of kinship systems that, in turn, results in loneliness in old age and the reduction of social resources of older people. At present, some 5 million lonely older people of the Russian Federation need different kinds of social and medical services, 1.5 million being in need of constant care and attention.

Let us analyze the family support provided in Russia. For this investigation, four major sources of statistical data were used as an empirical basis, namely: 1) non-governmental longitudinal examination of housekeeping provided by The Russian Monitoring of Economic Conditions and Health of Population; 2) Examination of valuables in two federal districts of the Russian Federation; 3) Integrated examination of life conditions in the Russian Federation; 4) the results of three stages of examination by 'Parents and children, men and women in family and society' carried out in 2004, 2007 and 2011, the sampling size being 11 thousand families.

The use of several sources for the analysis is conditioned by the fact that in Russia there is no currently a source containing the comprehensive statistical data on inter-generational exchange.

The analysis of the main characteristics of inter-generational flows (family support) was carried out using the given data. Also, such techniques were used as contingency tables, descriptive statistics, and periodicity distributions.

First, it should be noted that Russia is a family-oriented country, and the mutual support of 'fathers and sons' is considered to be standard. The majority of the Russian citizens suppose that taking care of older people is rather a family prerogative. On the contrary, the financial aid in this group of population is often entrusted to the society. Half respondents think that the financial aid of older people should be performed by the society, and 36.7 % of the Russian people share equally this responsibility between the family and the society. As for taking care of older people at home, 47.8 % respondents suppose that

it is the family who should be responsible for that, while 42.7 % of them also share equally this responsibility between the family and the society.

65 % respondents suppose that taking care of the young generation (assistance in upbringing grandchildren, financial support) should be provided by the older generation as shown in Figure 1.

Conservatism of the Russians is demonstrated by answering the question ‘Should parents change their life such that assist to their adult children?’ 70 % of respondents answered this question positively. Therefore, the respondents acknowledge the mutual support in a family. However, for the past decades, more and more Russians have been oriented to the individual welfare, often to the detriment of the interfamilial support.

In Russia, the absolute majority of respondents (95 %) consider that children must be responsible for their old parents; 78 % respondents consider that children must financially support their parents; and 64 % believe that children should live with their parents in case the latter cannot live alone any longer.

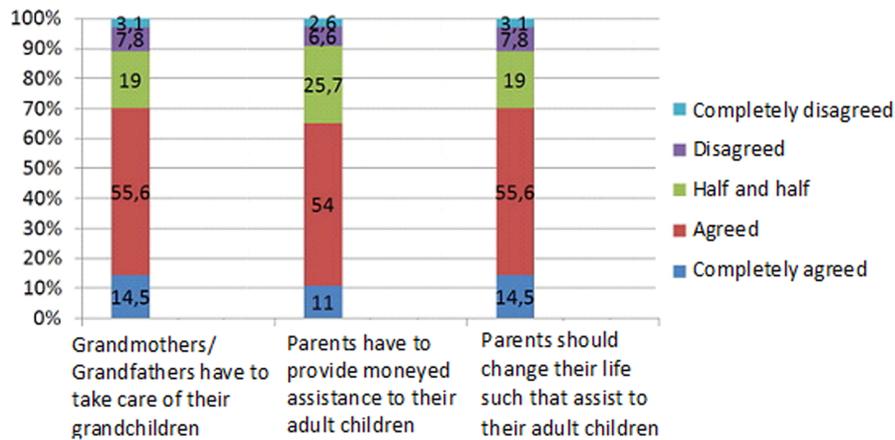
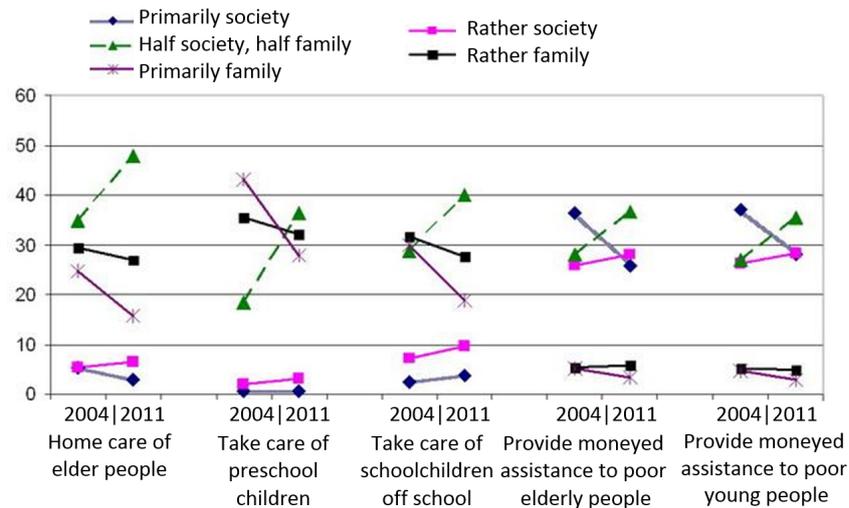


Fig. 1. Whether parents and elder relatives should assist their adult children? (Respondent percentage in Russia, 2011).

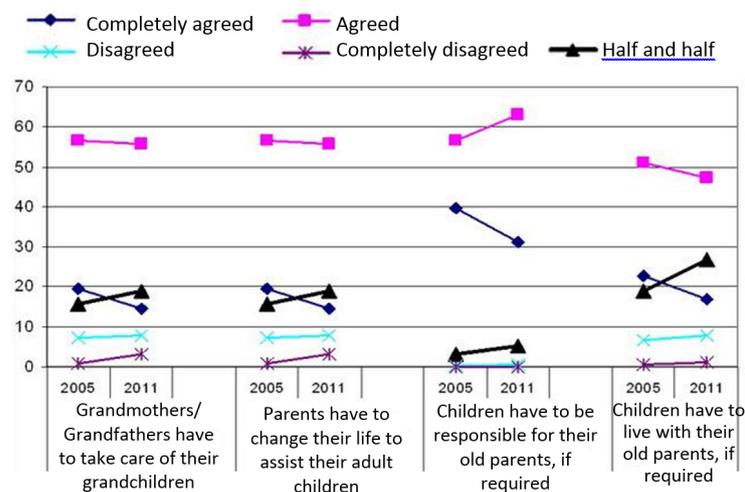
The dynamics analysis of the family problem for the years of 2004–2011 shows clear changes in the Russians’ ideas of the responsibility distribution between family and society concerning the older people assistance. The social expectations related to the support of less protected social groups enhanced in Russia. Thus, the percentage of respondents who think that both the family and society should be responsible for older people rose from 35 to 48 % (see Fig. 2). This dynamics is explained mostly by changes in opinions earlier offered in favour of family.



**Fig. 2.** Evolution of opinions concerning social support of less protected social groups in Russia.

The issue of the financial assistance rendered older people has also demonstrated the percentage growth from 28 to 37 % in favour of the combined responsibility of family and society.

The greater orientation towards the joint responsibility for older people of the government and the family correlates with the growing doubts observed in Russia concerning the interfamilial assistance (Fig. 3). The percentage of those who agree with the statement that ‘children should be responsible for their old parents in case they need help’ decreased down to 8.5 % because of the increase of doubting respondents. The percentage of those who support the statement ‘children must financially support their parents’ also decreased by 9 %, while the percentage for the statement ‘children should live with the parents in case the latter cannot live alone any longer’ decreased by 8 %.



**Fig. 3.** Evolution of opinions concerning interfamilial assistance in Russia.

The percentage of those who are sure that the old generation should help the younger one is also reduced from 20 % in 2005 to 15 % in 2011 (Fig. 3).

The most important parameter of the population involvement in private inter-generational transfers is the periodicity of communication (both personal and remote, e.g. by phone). This parameter indicates to the degree of interaction between the family members, including emotions exchange and the mutual psychological support (Motonishi, 2012).

In Russia, the periodicity of communication between relatives is still high that is proved by the degree of respondents who selected the answer out of all possible which corresponds to more periodic contacts. According to data provided by the Examination of valuables in two federal districts of the Russian Federation in 2012, more than half respondents represented by adult children (parents) living separately, have met with their parents (adult children) three and more times a month (see Table 1). Certainly, relationships between parents and their children are more intensive, however, meetings with other relatives are also not occasional. The close communication between parents and adult children in Russia is described in other research papers (Sinyavskaya, & Gladnikova, 2007).

**Table 1.** Respondent percentage of periodicity of communication between relatives living separately.

Relationship directions	Periodicity of contacts			
	Have no (deceased) this category of relatives	Never for the last month	1–2 times during the last month	3 and more times during the last month
Parents – children	21.2	11.3	11.7	55.8
Parents – children	20.6	6.9	11.5	61
Whole blood brothers and sisters	15.9	15.7	23.5	44.9
Cousins	10.7	34.7	29.9	24.7
Nephews–uncles/aunts	14.8	33.5	27.6	24.1
Other relatives	12.7	33.2	30.3	23.8

Adopted from: Russian Monitoring of Economic Conditions and Health of Population, 2010.

The assisting parents in housekeeping is the most widespread (26.5 %) type of support on the part of children. Children often take care of their ill parents (24.5 %) and assist them in solving other problems (23.7 %). Occasionally (12.8 %), children buy products and goods and render financial support (12.5 %) their parents.

When children do not help their parents, the latter often find important reasons why they do not. Thus, according to the data provided by the Russian Monitoring of Economic Conditions and Health of Population, these category of parents consider the lack of finances (69.5 %) or spare time (20.4 %) to be the reasons why children do not help them. Some of parents (1.2 %) indicated that children cannot help them because of their bad health. 8.8 % of parents do not communicate with their children at all.

Therefore, in the ascending transfer from younger to older generation, the instrumental and functional assistance is mostly spread. This is stipulated by health reasons of older people who need for the functional support, namely housekeeping, paramedic care, and so on. And very often it is children who take care of their old parents. According to the data provided by the Russian Monitoring of Economic Conditions and Health of Population, the percentage of people whose everyday duties include a free care of other people increases with aging. This tendency is fair for both men and women. However, beginning from the age of 25–29, the percentage of women rendering instrumental and functional assistance other people considerably exceeds that of men. Usually, at the age of 25 the majority of people enter the labour market. And, probably, this is precisely the age of 25 the gender differentiation is being explicitly observed since. Having achieved its peak in 55–59 age, the percentage of those who render assistance, abruptly decreases. In this age group, people, as a rule, are bereaved of their parents, and step-by-step move to the category of persons needing help.

Let us consider the distinctions of transfer flows depending upon the type of rendered assistance (physical and instrumental transfers). Table 2 contains the main properties of the flow of inter-generational private physical transfers in Russia.

**Table 2.** General properties of physical transfers in Russia.

<b>Transfer flow direction</b>	<b>Housekeeping involvement (% of respondents)</b>	<b>Average amount (RUR)</b>	<b>Amount of transfers in average income from housekeeping acceptor (%)</b>	<b>Assistance periodicity (modal answer)</b>
Parents – children	16.7	7203	24	Monthly
Grandmothers/ Grandfathers – Grandchildren	11.7	2865	9.5	Several times per year
Parents – children	7	5431	18	Monthly
Grandchildren – Grandmothers/ Grandfathers	1	2105	7	Several times per year
Friends	2.6	7121	23.6	-
Other relatives	3.8	6471	21.5	-

Adopted from: Russian Monitoring of Economic Conditions and Health of Population, 2010.

Descending transfer from the older to younger generation is the most spread. The second place is taken by physical assistance provided by Grandmothers/Grandfathers to their grandchildren. Usually, parents are assisted more occasionally than grandchildren, however more often than other people. Physical transfers from grandchildren to Grandmothers/Grandfathers are the most occasional. It is worth noting that the exchange by financial assistance between parents and children occurs monthly as usual, while other exchange participants assist each other merely several times a year (Mironova, 2012).

As far as the instrumental transfers is concerned, in 2010 it has taken place rather rarely than financial assistance. Parents provide instrumental support more often (8.6 %). They assist in grandchild upbringing, participate in housekeeping. Children are next involved in the instrumental assistance to their parents (4.3 %). Often, this kind of assistance is rendered by other people (3.6 %). Finally, grandchildren (2 %) and Grandmothers/Grandfathers (1.6 %) provide least instrumental support.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this way, one can draw a conclusion that relationships between family members in Russia undergo transformations. Although the mutual support between different generations of one family is still prevailed, the tradition of assisting relatives is becoming a thing of the past. Relations between ‘fathers and sons’ become weaker. New, less intimate interfamilial relations observed in Russia are mostly connected with the fact that western valuables are being inculcated with the individual primacy over the general, i.e. the mutual support ends when the person’s zone of liberty begins. Thus, more and more Russian ‘sons’ doubt in the obligatory support of their ‘fathers’ as well as the support of young people from old parents. As a whole, the interfamilial mutual aid is becoming not so obligatory as it was before.

This research shows that the main flow of physical transfers in a family is oriented from the older to younger generation. Consequently, in case of increasing old age pensions by the government, welfare of older people is not changed because these pensions are distributed in a family in favor of the younger generation. On the contrary, if the younger generation has the appropriate income and need no

a financial support, then the physical transfers from parents to children will be considerably lower. Therefore, incredible as it may seem, the improvement of the younger generation well-being is one of the possible variants to improve well-being of old people.

The assistance from younger generation is often rendered in the form of instrumental or functional transfers. The governmental support that provides the instrumental assistance of older people is not widely used. The instrumental and functional support of older people is entirely the problem of their relatives. In case adult children should take care of their parents because of their bad health, this results in significant expenditures on the part of the younger generation. The constant care of old parents requires great financial and time expenditures that have a negative effect on the professional life of the young people making it sometimes impossible. Socio-economic losses stipulated by this phenomenon, is a very serious problem. The role of the government in this situation is reduced to the creation of the pertinent institutional environment that will allow diminish children's duties or responsibilities in relation to their old parents.

The key conclusion which can be drawn is that the family support for older people in developing and transitional societies has not vanished, and adult children support their parents as before, however when they really need it. In other words, the level of support depends on the level of need. Therefore, it is important to compare countries not only by the level of general support but also by the degree of involvement of children in problems of their parents. Moreover, the studies on family support are of great practical meaning. They allow forming and/or correcting the social policy of the government to support older people. We arrived to the concept of 'mixed responsibility', which means that the family support and social protection of the government must complement each other in order to achieve the maximum results.

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