Taking the Negative with the Positive: Status Transitions and Parents’ Ambivalence Toward Adult Children

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Theoretical Framework

This study is framed by the life course perspective (Luescher and Pillemer 1998)

- Parents and children’s lives are linked throughout the life course; transitions in the lifecourse of one member of a dyad may be related to changes in feelings of perceptions of the other member

Transitions

- Children’s transitions may relate to a higher parental ambivalence (Fingerman et al. 2004; Luescher and Pillemer 1998)
- Parents’ and children’s status transitions
- Implications for relationship quality and parental well-being

Ambivalence

- Intimate relationships are inherently full of contradictions; individuals desire mutual support but also want autonomy (Luescher and Pillemer 1998)
- These contradictory feelings may lead to ambivalence
- Implications for relationship quality and parental well-being

Data and Sample

- This study examined experiences, relationships, health, and finances of middle-aged and older adults (aged 51 and older)
- Data collection from 2006 to 2010
- Uses the core sample and Psychosocial Survey

Dependent Variable

- Positive items: (1 = Not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = some, 4 = a lot)
- Negative items: (1 = Not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = some, 4 = a lot)

Independent Variables

- Children’s transitions (used as proportion variables)
- Moving in and out of parents’ home
- Union formation or dissolution
- Job loss or gain
- Retirement
- Parents’ transitions
- Union formation or dissolution
- Job loss or gain
- Health declines or improvements

Difference in Ambivalence

- Parents’ transitions yield few significant results
- Children’s transitions are more indicative of parents’ ambivalence

Association of Ambivalence with Transitions

- Conclusions
- Questions used to construct ambivalence are not child-specific
- No measures of children’s ambivalence toward parents
- Cannot capture between-wave transitions
- Difficulty in distinguishing between cohabitation and marriage for children in the analyses

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