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## The Parenthood's intergenerational transmissions in adapting to modern life challenges

### **Abstract:**

The study was undertaken to identify intergenerational transmission in the patterns of early adulthood developmental tasks, with particular emphasis on parenthood. We attempted to explain how intergenerational values are transmitted to young adults when they become parents and how they realize those parental values that are expected of them. The study was performed on 109 three-generation families, N=407 persons. The results illustrated the diversity of intergenerational transmission, depending on a certain cohort's sex and membership. Women were found to be more susceptible to transmitting family models.

### **Keywords:**

developmental task, parenthood, changes in family life patterns, intergeneration transmission, young adult

### **Streszczenie:**

Celem prezentowanych badań było poszukiwanie przejawów transmisji międzypokoleniowej w zakresie wzorców realizowania zadań rozwojowych wczesnej dorosłości ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem rodzicielstwa. W ramach zbudowanego modelu badawczego, starano się wyjaśnić wpływ transmisji międzypokoleniowej na podejmowanie i realizowanie rodzicielstwa przez młodych dorosłych w obszarze: wartości przypisywanym zadaniom oraz kolejności i oczekiwanym czasie ich realizacji. W trakcie postępowania badawczego przebadano 109 trójpokoleniowych rodzin (N=407osób). Wyniki badań zobrazowały różnorodność procesu transmisji międzypokoleniowej głównie w zależności od płci i przynależności do danej kohorty. Wykazano także częstsza podatność na transmisję rodzinnych modeli zachowań wśród kobiet oraz silniejsze procesy transmisji między sąsiednimi pokoleniami.

### **Słowa kluczowe:**

transmisja międzypokoleniowa, wczesna dorosłość, podejmowanie rodzicielstwa, relacje trójpokoleniowe

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## Introduction

Exploring different intergenerational transmission aspects and conditions in respect to parenthood was inspired by discussions on the adequacy of analysing and assessing developmental tasks as a construct (Arnett, 2004, 2007; Trempała, 2000). Taking a decision to become or not become a parent or postponing parenthood (called ‘delaying syndrome’) may indicate that the hitherto prevailing model for realizing early adulthood tasks has collapsed or changed considerably.

The studies of intergenerational transmission studies usually relate to three areas. The first one concerns describing and emphasizing continuation (similarity) in a family treated as a transmittable indicator. This area includes studies of moral norms and religiousness in the family, conducted by Dyczewski (1981); Hoge, Petrilo, Smith (1982), or parental attitudes studies by Hiltin (2006); Parsons, Adler, Kaczala (1982); Tyszkowa (1988); Werner (1991); Ziemska (1975, 2009). There are also numerous studies concerning similar values and expectations towards the future. This aspect has been discussed by Gans & Silverstein (2006); Liberska (2004, 2006); or Trommsdorf (1994); Tyszkowa, (1985); and Valk (2008). Furthermore, there are noteworthy intercultural studies concerning transmitting (similarly) life satisfaction (Katz, 2009); the level of democracy in the family (Miklikowska, Hurme, 2011); or identity and national values (Muldoon, Mc Laughlin, Trew 2007). Problems frequently studied in this area are inappropriate, risky behaviour, or certain patterns of addiction. They have been discussed by, for example, A. Doliński (2002); G. Lowe, R. Foxcroft, Sibley (2000); Thornberry (with team, 2003) or Ryś (2002). Their studies indicate and emphasize of certain family behavioural continuity patterns, especially patterns of addictions.

The second area focuses on the search for mechanisms of dependencies in similarities, (not always sameness), between parents and children, and their conditioning (factors favourable to this process’s effectiveness). The search relates to the influence of birth order and gender (Kulik, 2004, Farnicka, 2013), the climate of family communication (Grygielski, 1999), different ways in performing parental roles (Hiltin, 2006, Tyszkowa, 1990, Rostowska, 1995, Czerwińska – Jasiewicz, (1997), ethnic status (Valk, 2008), marriage satisfaction (Braun-Galkowska, 1985, 1992, Galkowska, 2002), sex identity (Rawa–Kochanowska, 2004), or different ways in coping with, for example, divorce (Wallerstein, 1986), and experiencing and transmitting trauma (Hamm, La Broque, Brennan, 2011; Gans, Silverstein; 2006, Lev – Wiesel, 2007). An example is spreading cohabitation. Two generations ago a person living in an illegitimate relationship was a concern for their family. Today such a person does not feel their behaviour is unusual, and their way of life is treated as an alternative to marriage. This area of studies

concerns the search for behavioural conditioning (especially unwelcome behaviour), which might be used in therapy and prevention. It includes the already mentioned studies by J. Bailey (2009) and studies concerning unhealthy behaviour (Curtis, Stapleton, James, 2011), a tendency to overuse intoxicants (Hartmann, Lessem, Hooper, Crowley, Stallings, 2006), antisocial behaviour (Verona, Sachs-Ericsson, 2005), and concerning violence (Baker, 2011; Ehrenschaft, Cohen, Brown, Smailes, Chen, 2003; Hines, Saudino, 2002; Thornberry, Freeman– Galant, Lizotte, Krohn, Smith, 2003).

When we investigated conditioning of intergenerational transmission we also observed instances of continued behaviour. Our studies involved measuring behavioural frequency as a factor which reveals change in their function and conditions a change in behaviour. The studies explore patterns, such as drinking, spending free time, learning, or aggressive behaviour. Apart from transmissive psychologists, the subject has been explored by anthropologists, sociologists, biologists, and evolutionary psychologists (Benedict 1999; Buss, 2001; Cashmore, Goodnow, 1985; Quadrello, T., Hurme, H., Menzinger, J., Smith, P. K., Veisson, M., Vidal, S., & Westerback, S. 2005).

### **The aim of the study**

The aim of this study was to find out similarities between generations respecting individual experience and expected experience connected with parenthood. The study assumed the model for formulating temporal perspectives (Trampała, 2000), which made it possible to examine the role played by intergenerational transmission in inducing the expected behaviour.

The areas explored in order to find intergenerational transmissions were developmental tasks connected with parenthood. Exploration concerned assessing and placing early adulthood developmental tasks in the planned structured actions of three generations; the tasks included: starting a career, achieving financial independence, loosening bonds with one's parents, finding a life partner, parenthood and taking responsibility for providing for oneself and one's family. According to the assumptions about intergenerational transmissions (Aronson, 2005; Bronfenbrenner, 1976; McGoldrick, Carter, 1980; Radochoński, 1986; Rostowska, 1995; Tyszkowa, 1987, 1993), and on the basis of earlier findings (Fajkowska – Stanik, 2001; Sitarczyk, 1994; Rostowska, 1995), which indicated important characteristics of the of family environment for intergenerational transmission, our study assumed a link between intergenerational transmission in the family and a positive indicator of family closeness.

Similarity between individual and expected generational experiences were examined, which made it possible to compare intergenerational transmissions in two areas of family life: found (knowledge about the world and oneself) and expected. This model permitted us to examine the role of intergenerational transmission in creating temporal perspectives, which are connected with shaping one's further life, since humans do not only react to reality and its challenges, but also shape it actively (Tyszkowa, 1996).

Basis on the theoretical assumptions about the family's primary socializing role and the individual's own activity in acquiring experience, the following questions were formulated.

Is there – and if yes, to what extent – any similarity in biographic experience related to realising developmental tasks in three subsequent generations?

What are the future expectations held by young adults from the grandparents' and parents' perspective regarding the realisation of early adulthood developmental tasks?

Is there – and if yes, to what extent – any similarity in normative development regarding parenthood's developmental tasks and expected experience?

## **Procedure**

In order to answer the above questions, a three-stage analysis was undertaken. The first stage focused on checking the conditions of transmission. The conditions considered were: a family's positively perceived emotional climate and each family member's assessed material status. Statistical analyses at this stage included tests of significant differences, a statistical description and intergroup comparisons. The second stage concentrated on defining transmission variables, in the area of individual and expected experience. The statistical analysis at this stage included an analysis of variance, and tests of significant differences and correlations. The third stage concerned searching for predictions of relations between variables. Analysis of variables permitted us to determine the existing relations among interculturally transmitted areas of parenthood realization. Multiple regression analysis was used at this stage. Assumed model, in different areas of individual and expected experience, the following variables were distinguished: emotional climate and relations with other people in family, assessing material status of close relatives, normative development in three generations, especially concerning parenthood, intergenerational distance, especially concerning parenthood, self-evaluation, influencing one's own life, experiencing parenthood and the number of one's children, assessing the influence of different events on one's life, especially parenthood, and expectations towards the future concerning when parenthood would be realized.

## **The course of research**

We conducted our research in three stages and planned it in such a way as to ensure the least intervention from the the family itself. Representatives of the young adult generation, age between 22 and 35, took part in the first stage. Conditions for participating in the research were agreed upon,, with the possibility of having personal contact with one's parents and grandparents. The second stage focused on parents and grandparents of the people who agreed to participate further in the the research. The third stage consisted in collecting opinions and impressions from the research, and subjects were informed about the research results and their interpretation.

## **Research tools**

The research involved standardized conversation and the following questionnaires and tests:

- Test of Family Relations, the version for adults, by E. Bene – J. Anthony, prepared by A. Frydrychowicz (1986). The degree of closeness between family members was assessed in the way proposed in the book. Particular feelings were assigned with measures from the range -3 to +3; strongly positive feelings were assigned with +3, strongly negative - with -3, intermediate positive +2, intermediate negative -2 and weak positive +1 and weak negative -1. The measures assigned to the feelings directed to a given person and directed from a given person were summed up. The final result was a positive or negative number which illustrated the emotional climate perceived in a given family, the higher the positive number the better the emotional climate). The results from the range up to 10 were assumed as indicating a moderately positive emotional climate, while those higher than 10 indicated a strongly positive emotional climate. The values from the range <0 to -10> were interpreted as indicating a moderately negative emotional climate and those below minus 10 as indicating a strongly negative emotional climate in a family.
- The tool for assessing how different events influenced human life, based on the Questionnaire of Life Experiences by Boszkiewicz (1997,  $\alpha$  Cronbach=0.85); The version proposed by the author used in our study includes 20 inquires concerning mainly from early adulthood. The respondents were asked to assess the influence of these events (e.g. graduation from school, getting the first job) on their life on a 7-degree scale, from very positive (6) to very negative (0).

- The tool for examining the level of normativeness and values ascribed to various developmental tasks, and perceived normative order of task realization (method Q-sort,  $W - Kendall = 0.87$ ); In the first stage the respondents were shown 26 tasks written on separate cards and were asked to choose the life tasks that should be - according to them - realised between 22 and 35 years of age. In this way the perceived normativeness regarding the developmental tasks to be realised in the period of early adulthood was established. The results were transformed into ranks; rank 1 was assigned to the most frequently chosen task and so on to 26. At the next stage the respondents were asked to order the tasks according to their personal significance, from the most important to the least important. The instruction was: "Please order the cards you selected earlier according to their significance for you; the most significant put as the first, then the other cards up to the one representing the task you consider as the least important". In this way, data on the normative significance of developmental tasks for the respondents were obtained. The results were transformed to ranks, the first task chosen was assigned with rank 26 and the last with rank 1.
- SES - The self-evaluation test by Rosenberg (SES 1965).
- Tool for studying the sense of influence on events, modelled on Trempała (2000,  $\alpha_{Cronbach} = 0.765$ ). The test includes eight items and with each referring to a different sphere of life. The respondents were asked to evaluate their own influence on their own material status, health, relations with a partner, with family and with other people, professional life, looks and the way they spend leisure time. The evaluation was made on a 7-degree scale, with the numbers corresponding to the following evaluations: "always" 7, "usually" 6, "often" 5, "rarely" 4, "scarcely ever" 3, "rather no" 2 and "I have definitely no influence" 1.
- Tool to investigate the time expected to realise a task ( $\alpha - Cronbach = 0.767$ ). A special questionnaire was constructed to collect the data on the preferred temporal scheme for realising particular early adulthood developmental tasks, from the perspective of grandparents, parents and young adults (personal temporal perspective). The questionnaire was called "The tool to investigate the expected time of task realisation". The respondents were asked at what age the young adult representing the youngest generation would finish their education, start the first job, gain a stable professional and family life, choose a partner, give birth to the first child and possibly subsequent children.

## **Participants**

The study was performed on 411 people from 109 families represented by three generations, with each of the three generations being represented by at least one member. The criterion of positive emotional climate in the family was met by 335 people from 86 families. The 86 Young adults included 63 women (74.1%), and 22 men (25.9%). Average age in this group was 24.57. The most numerous subgroup were people between ages 23 and 29 (49%). The second most numerous subgroup were people between 19 and 22 (38.5% people). The least numerous subgroup were people between 30 and 35 years old (12.5%). The parents' generation included 145 people (77 mothers and 68 fathers), and the grandparents' generation – 104 people (72 women and 32 men).

## **Results**

### **Presentation of intergenerational similarities**

All subjects had a sense of punctuality with their own generation, which indicates their personal perspective. Data analysis revealed intergenerational transmissions and similarities between generations in such areas as: assessment, evaluation and the sense of normative events connected with parenthood. The similarities were mostly noticed in two successive generations (between parents and children).

However, the findings also confirmed the existence of differences between generations respecting behaviour concerning the number of children one has (and expects), the educational level, and the age for starting one's first job. The findings indicate intergenerational changes, but also areas which undergo changes within family systems. These changes may also be called intergenerational transmission processes, because they do not cause emotional estrangement, but occur in a supportive atmosphere. Thus, this is a case of inverse intergenerational transmission, which is connected to changing conditions of expressed behaviour (economic, cultural and mental climate concerning one's actions). In many areas intergenerational similarities were noticed. These similarities and differences are presented in Table. 1.

**Table 1.** Areas of similarities and differences between generations.

| Kind of Experience    |                                     |  | full intergenerational transmission   | transmission between two generations  | no intergenerational transmission<br>p<0.05   |           |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|---|---|-----------|
| Individual experience | Social knowledge on normativeness   | value attributed to developmental tasks  | preparing for life with partner, having first and second child, looking after children, focusing on home  |   | choice of life partner  |           |
|                       |                                     | order of tasks in developmental sequence | choice of life partner, having first and second child, looking after children, focusing on home   | preparing for life with partner, differences apply to YA - G                  |   |           |
|                       |                                     | concept of realizing parenthood          | age of procreation, number of children, conditions favourable to becoming a parent, motives for becoming a parent   |   |   |           |
|                       | system of self-knowledge            | self-description                         | activity, resourcefulness, protectiveness, responsibility, forbearance, self-reliance, fidelity   | attractiveness, intelligence, diligence, thrift – differences apply to YA - G |   |           |
|                       |                                     | sense of influence                       | on relations with one's family  | one's health - differences apply to YA - G                                    | material status, career, relations with friends, appearance, ways of spending free time                           |           |
|                       | assessment of different life events | influence of events                      | moving to one's own home, choosing a life partner, wedding, one's own or partner's pregnancy, having first child, having second child, looking after children, spending time with children, | taking care of home – differences apply to YA - G                             |   |           |
|                       | family biographies                  | biographical data                        | age of having first child   |   | number of children, place of growing up and living, level of education, marital status, age of starting first job |           |
|                       | Excepted                            | expectation of future events             | expected age of   | having second child, achieving financial and work stability                   | finding a life partner, having first child (differences apply to YA - P)  | First job |



Relations between variables in selected areas of social knowledge and expected experience. In order to recognize specific relations between normative development variables and variables from the area of expected experience, we made models that explored structures of expected experience; these models were made using multiple regression analysis. Due to the research's exploratory character, the progressive model of multiple regression analysis was used. Each time, relations between explored quantitative variables and normal distribution were verified. In order to define covariance, only models with a predictive value higher than 50% ( $R > 0.5$ ) were taken into account.

In the constructed multiple regression models, parenthood expectations have been explained by the expected experience variables and those connected with assessing the influence of realized early adulthood developmental tasks on the subjects' lives.

The most common three-generation model involved Young Adult Women, Parents, Mothers' Mothers, Mothers' Fathers and Fathers' Mothers (without Young Adult Men and Fathers' Fathers). It concerned variables such as: normative order for choosing a life partner, normative value for choosing a life partner, expected age of a young adult in finding a life partner, and having the first child.

The collected research material reveals the role of women in intergenerational transmission (Young Adults – Mothers – Mothers' Mothers and Fathers' Mothers). In the female line, the transmission fully includes expectations concerning realization of parenthood. Among men (Young Adults and Fathers' Fathers), on the other hand, no characteristic relevant model for expected experience was found. This means the conditioning is different for young males than for young females. It also shows different conditioning of expected experience depending on one's role in the family.

The observed models of transmission conditioning recurred in two and three generations. This leads to the conclusion that intergenerational transmission concerns not only the content of one's family experience, but also its conditioning. The most important conditionings for the expected age to having their first child were: expected age in choosing a life partner ( $r_{\text{semi}} = 0.578$ ), assessing the influence leading to choosing a life partner ( $r_{\text{semi}} = -0.236$ ) and the pregnancy influence ( $r_{\text{semi}} = -0.314$ , relevance of the regression equation for all models  $p < 0.001$ ,  $r$  stands for semi-partial  $r$ ). On the other hand, selected conditioning models for variables concerning the young adult's expected age for having a second child were: expected age for having the first child ( $r_{\text{semi}} = 0.5$ ), assessing the influence of having the first child ( $r_{\text{semi}} = 0.236$ ), assessing the influence in having the second child ( $r_{\text{semi}} = -0.279$ ), and material status ( $r_{\text{semi}} = -0.271$ , relevance of regression equation for all models  $p < 0.001$ ).

## Discussion

The above findings indicate numerous transmission areas between generations in a family. The research method revealed the significance of similarity in respect to expected experience, which, after being recognized and accepted by an individual, may be incorporated into their life concept, thus creating a structure for temporal-future content. As a result, it may function later as a future normative developmental task, defined by one's future expectations regarding planned concepts of one's children's and grandchildren's lives (through the ordering and timing of certain events). This assumption is theoretically possible, because the model for reversing the direction of transmission is included in the family development model, proposed by Tyszkowa (1996), and is consistent with the systemic approach. This model also characterises postmodern societal bonds (Mead, 1978, Bauman, 1998, Giddens, 2001). It confirms the thesis that intergenerational transmission participates in assimilating the structures of experience among all generations in a family, and this effect at least partially coheres their concept of developing parenthood.

The life schemes expected by today's Young Adults only slightly differ from their Parents' and Grandparents' schemes. The differences concern: expected time for choosing a life partner and when the first child will be born, as well as the order in preparing for life with a partner / spouse in sequencing early adult developmental tasks, and the importance attached to choosing a life partner. The differences observed in the study show the process of assimilating a changing life context and adapting to that context (both mental schemes and behaviour), rather than to the intergenerational pressure on copying hitherto prevailing patterns.

**Table 2.** Order of expected developmental tasks.

| <i>Young Adults<br/>Mother's Mother<br/>Father's Father</i> | <i>Mother</i>              | <i>Father,<br/>Mother's Father, Father's Mother</i> |
|---|----------------------------|---|
| Starting first job  |                            |   |
| Finding life partner  | Finishing school           | Finishing school                                    |
| Finishing school  | Finding life partner       | Finding life partner                                |
| Having first child  |                            |   |
| Having professional stability                               |                            |   |
| Having financial stability                                  | Having financial stability | Age of having second child                          |
| Age of having second child                                  | Age of having second child | Having financial stability                          |

Expectations towards the future, differences in the roles played in the family can be noticed (Tab. 2). Parents, Fathers' Mothers and Mothers' Fathers expected the following tasks to be realized: starting the first job, then leaving school, and next – finding a partner. On the other hand, Young Adults, Mothers' Mothers and Fathers' Fathers expected a little different sequence: they expected finding a partner before leaving school. However, both groups put expectations connected to starting a career at the beginning of the sequence. This expectation is coherent with the aforementioned crucial role played by young adults, namely, independence<sup>2</sup>.

It is worth noting that no differences in expectations were found regarding young adults' gender. This confirms a uniform model of life which has become common among both young men and women, a model in which involvement in one's professional development precedes involvement in close permanent interpersonal relationships. The model is different from the dynamic model of female development common in the second part of the 20th century, in which involvement in her professional career gradually overtook involvement in her family activity, through the stage of their equivalence and simultaneity. In the present model, on the other hand, starting a professional career took the lead in the sequence of tasks, followed by finding a life partner or finishing formal education. The change, in all generations, may result from the specific job market, and the older generations' experiences in searching for work. Common experience in this area could account for similar expectations related to starting a job before leaving school, and the necessity for constantly improving oneself and developing one's qualifications after leaving school.

The findings concerning expected time for having one's first and second child reveals a specific dichotomy in early adulthood development. The first child is generally expected after finding a life partner and starting the first job. On the other hand, the second child in a Young Adult's family is expected by Fathers, their Mothers, and Mothers' Fathers to occur before achieving financial security by the Young Adult. The other subjects (Young Adults, Mothers, Mothers' Mothers and Fathers' Fathers) expect it after achieving financial security.

The findings might be the basis for a thesis about two models for realising basic early adulthood tasks – becoming a parent and achieving financial security. In the first one, procreation and parenthood can be perceived as a traditional 'stabilizer' on the way to family stability, including financial security, whereas in the second model – it is rather the effect or culmination of achieved prosperity (Bee, 2004, Matuszewska, 1993).

The process of intergenerational transmission is present in families and concerns tasks connected with becoming a parent. It may be concluded that expected and normative

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<sup>2</sup> Obviously, it results also from previous developmental tasks and needs.

events, as well as some developmental tasks in different periods of life, especially early adulthood, undergo evolutionary and discreet adaptive processes every day (Sunker, 2007). In this approach, intergenerational transmission relates to the transfer of widely understood experiences between family generations (as knowledge and ready behaviour models, but also as values and a system of expectations and fears), and also relates to giving support, which enables tasks considered as valuable to be realized, even tasks which were not accomplished by previous generations. According to this model, intergenerational transmission may have a direct influence on individual experience, and indirect – in motivation, evaluation and planning – on expected experience, which is significant as it takes part in forming one's concept of life, and also in transforming the sociocultural context over time (Levinson, 1978; Liberska, 2004; McGoldrick, Carter, 1989; Tyszkowa, 1988; 1993; Rostowska, 1995; Skolnick, Skolnick, 2011).

### **Summary and practical implications**

The research findings revealed a diversity in the process of intergenerational transmission mainly in respect to one's gender and belonging to a specific cohort. In the explored area, it has been shown that:

- structures of social knowledge on normativeness do not have a relevant influence on expected experience,
- women are more prone to transmit family behaviour models,
- the pace of realizing tasks and the order of tasks change, but developmental directions respecting parenthood and life stability remain constant.

It should be emphasized that in recognizing a transmission model, young adults build their own specific, postfigurative, autonomous way of life. This thesis is confirmed by specific ways support is given and by modifying existing models. The change in young adults' behaviour has created an alternative model for realizing parenthood, owing to close emotional contact.

Radicalism and dynamic changes in a socio-economic context have not disturbed the hitherto prevailing cultural prototype of life in the family system. This confirms the importance of intergenerational transmission, and also its constancy and adaptability. It might also indicate links between transmission and the balancing of different generational mental structures, and the relatively limited influence of external changes in one's normative parenthood concept, which applies to all three adult generations in a family (it concerns both the content and the structured form).

In a wider perspective, the research findings have revealed the importance of intergenerational transmission for psychological support between generations. It is significant

not only because it determines the directions of a pro-family policy, but first of all, because families function as small social groups which, in changing times, will naturally transform and support successive generations in the difficult task of accepting challenges from, and dispensing challenges to reality<sup>3</sup>. The oldest generation, owing to its experiential transmission in the family, might understand ongoing changes better<sup>4</sup>, integrate their own experience and adapt to new challenges.

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<sup>3</sup> They create developmental contexts for each other.

<sup>4</sup> It seems necessary to develop emotional and communication competence in families (Harwas–Napierała, 2006).

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