

Intergenerational relationships on farms

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Abstract - Unfavourable demographic trends brought the issue of solidarity among generations into the front; who is responsible for caring an individual in need. As recent studies reveal, intergenerational relationships are very complex and ambivalent in terms of expressed values and expectations. Existence of farm family is particularly dependent of intergenerational relationships. In this paper we demonstrate, how intergenerational relationships in farm families in Slovenia are perceived. The data from the survey "Generational and gender relations on farms" are analysed. Results indicate considerable ambivalence in the respondents' views on intergenerational solidarity, particularly considering different social settings.

INTRODUCTION

Family farms are still prevailing form of farming in Slovenia (SURS, 2006) and in the most part of the »industrialised countries« (Hildenbrand & Hannon, 2005). Today, to secure a successor on the farm is still a difficulty. In Slovenia, only 23 per cent of farms secure a successor (Dernulc et al., 2002). Therefore, in 2007, we carried out the survey to assess the farm viability in the view of respondents' assessments of their intergenerational and gender relations.

The literature reviewed on generational relationships in farming is scarce despite the fact that unfavourable demographic trends have recently persuaded many social scientists that family relationship across generations is increasingly important in caregiving (Hareven, 1996; Bengtson, 2001; Willson et al., 2003). Some studies stress the commonsensical view on more strong generational relations among rural population in comparison with urban population (Lee & Cassidy, 1985; Marotz-Baden et al., 1988). Other scholars evidenced that sons in farms were also more engaged in caregiving of their aged parents than those sons who had to move to the city (Elder et al., 1996). Yet the research on farming and gender has demonstrated that the caregiving in farm families is mostly a task of women (Shortall, 2006). Finally, in farm setting, family members are usually involved together in economic and domestic activities, which can create feelings of ambivalence among them (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998).

On this background of literature, two hypotheses are presented. Expectations regarding intergenerational solidarity differ by gender, age and social setting. Relationships of mutual generational and gender support distinguish farm receivers of

subventions for early retirement and passing the farm on successor from non-receivers.

METHOD

In the survey we applied the Generations and Gender questionnaire (N=817), addressing only the individual perspective. The data obtained are categorised in three major sub-samples of respondents, aged 18 to 83 of both gender. The first sub-sample consists of 275 urban dwellers, the second of 135 persons from rural areas, and the third one of 407 farmers. The last group is further subdivided in 301 receivers of subvention or their household members, and of 106 non-receivers. The presented analysis is based on urban-rural-farm categorization.

Analyzing the differences among the respondents' views on intergenerational solidarity by their age, gender and social setting, bivariate analysis was employed.

RESULTS

The expressed expectations were observed through three sets of different statements. The first pertains to the assessment, whose responsibility is to care for dependent family members. Our data show that in the respondents' view, the most responsible for the care of preschool and school children is a family (53,8 and 50,2 percent respectively). Yet a society and family are equally obliged (46,4 percent) to care for the elderly. However, for financial support of elderly and young families in need a society is the most responsible (69,2 and 68,8 percent). Collecting these results by gender, age and social setting, the data show significant differences only among urban-rural-farm settings regarding care for elderly and preschool children. In considerably greater share, farm population agree that a family is responsible to care for dependent family members than urban and rural dwellers do.

The second set refers to the assessment of adult children's obligations towards their parents. Data show that the majority agree that in principal children are responsible for care of their parents and financial assistance when parents are in need (70 and 55 percent). Yet in more concrete statements, as 'Daughter should more care for their parents than sons', 'Children should adjust their work to the needs of their parents', and 'Parents should move to the place of their children when they can not care for

themselves anymore', the shares of disagreement prevails (65, 41 and 34 percent). Comparing these results by gender, age and social setting significant differences are found only in assessing the statement 'Children should adjust their work to the needs of their parents'; farm population in greater share than urban population agree with this statement.

The third set relates to the assessment of parents' responsibilities towards their children. The majority agree that 'Grand parents should care for their grandchildren when their parents are not able to do it', 'Parents should financially support their adult children in need', and 'Parents should adopt their life when their children are in need' (52,4, 52,4 and 44,3 percent). Significant differences by social setting, gender and age are found considering obligations of grandparents towards their grandchildren. Women, older respondents and farmers agree with these statements. Significant differences are found also assessing the statement pertaining to financial support of parents to their adult children. The majority of women agree with this statement while the older respondents agree that 'Parents should adopt their lives to their children in need'.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results show that social setting is the most explanatory independent variable compared to gender and age. Significant differences are expressed by urban and farm population, however, there are not expected differences between receivers and non-receivers of subventions. Assessments of women mainly do not differ from those of men, and younger and older respondents mostly express similar views on intergenerational solidarity.

Significant difference is not identified on views about sons' and daughters' responsibilities towards aging parents.

The more complex picture offers the comparison of single statements. At least three ambivalences are identified. The first is recognised comparing the statements related to financial support to elderly parents. The majority of respondents believe that a society is responsible for financial assistance to elderly while in principle more than half of respondents agree that this is the children's duty. However, this ambivalence is more pronounced by urban than farm interviewees. The second ambivalence is extracted from the opposing statements on children's duties towards parents. The majority of urban residents agree that adult children are obliged to care for their parents, but they also strongly disagree that children should adopt their work to their parents in need. The third ambivalence consists of opposing statements that show greater parents' commitment towards their children than the opposite. This ambivalence is

expressed more in view of age than gender and social setting.

On this ground, the first hypothesis is only partly confirmed while the second one can not be accepted at all. People' expectations regarding intergenerational solidarity significantly differ mostly by their social setting. Contrary to our initial expectations, gender is not identified as decisive factor of significant differences regarding intergenerational solidarity.

Our analysis supports those studies that reported on differences of strong and close generational relations between rural and urban population. Moreover, our findings show that there are even more subtle differences among urban and farm population. Additionally, our findings are in line with the bulk of literature on intergenerational ambivalence, and those rear works related to farm context.

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