

That's the way it should be..

Perceptions on intergenerational obligations among migrant and Dutch older persons

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Introduction

Ageing and international migration are two demographic features that are often studied separately. Until recently migrant elderly in many western countries were expected to return to their home-countries (Warnes, Friedrich, Kellaher, & Torres, 2004). However, the majority of migrant elderly is found to stay in countries like the Netherlands, which implies that in the near future a larger and growing share of the elderly has a migrant origin. The growth of this groups may have serious implications for care, policy and family relations.

It is often assumed that migrant elderly are part of family systems that have strong interdependent ties and obligations (Bolzman, Poncioni–Derigo, Vial, & Fibbi, 2004). Although not so much is known on migrant groups in Europe, American studies show that expectations parents have towards their children differ by ethnic group (Burr & Mutchler, 1999; Lee, Peek, & Coward, 1994; Rosenthal, 1986). However, another strand of research also points to the fact that interethnic differences are rather the result of differences in demographic characteristics and socio-economic position between natives and migrants (Glick & Hook, 2002; Mitchell, Wister & Gee, 2004). Differences in family relations between groups may thus be not as large as assumed (Silverstein & Waite, 1993; Schans & Komter, 2005) and may be subject to the migration experience itself as well.

Little is known on the perceptions migrant elderly have regarding support of their children, and the extent to which they differ from natives. In this paper we aim to show how migrant background compares to other socio-demographic factors that might be of influence. Our study focuses on the Netherlands and includes four major migrant groups and native Dutch.

Hypotheses

Based on previous studies and theoretical notions that will be elaborated on the paper we formulate two sets of hypotheses.

Ethnicity and family relations

Derived from theories on different family-systems (Todd, 1985; Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Kagitcibasi, 1996; Reher, 1998) migrant elderly in the Netherlands are expected to be grown up in more traditional group oriented societies. Dutch society is characterised by individualisation and independence of parent and child. We therefore hypothesise that migrant elderly will be more often of the opinion that children should support their parents than is the case for Dutch elderly (*H1*).

According to assimilation theories migrants will adjust their perceptions and orientations to their country of residence after a period of time. Based on these notions we expect that migrant elderly who resided a longer period in the Netherlands, will be less of the opinion that children should support their parents than those with a shorter period of residence (*H2*).

Well-being and socio-demographic characteristics

Beside a possible ethnic factor in perceptions, we may also assume that differences in socio-demographics and well being account for different opinions between and within (migrant) groups. Three socio-demographic features are often related to opinions and perceptions regarding the family (Kalmijn, 2004; Roschelle, 1997; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Spitze & Logan, 1990). We hypothesise that married (a), women (b), and higher educated (c) will be less of the opinion that children should support parents than is the case for unmarried, men and lower educated.

Additionally we study the impact of physical and emotional well being on perceptions regarding children's support (De Jong Gierveld & Van Tilburg, 1999; Gierveld, 2003). We expect that older people who are lonely and physical health problems will be more of the opinion that children should support their parents than those who don't.

Data

We analyse data from the first round of the *Netherlands Kinship Panel Study* (Dykstra, Kalmijn, Knijn, Komter, Liefbroer, & Mulder, 2004). We include the main (Dutch respondents) and migrant (including Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, and Antillean respondents) sample. The migrant sample is drawn from 13 major cities all over the Netherlands in which half of the migrants from the four groups reside. Migrant data were combined with data on Dutch respondents living in one these 13 cities. We selected those respondents aged 50-80 years. After these selections 70 Turkish, 73 Moroccan, 125 Surinamese, 59 Antillean, and 469 Dutch respondents were included.

Dependent and independent variables

First part of the analyses focus on three variable related to intergenerational obligation of children towards parents. Respondents were asked (on a five point likert scale) whether they agreed with the statement that “children who live nearby should visit their parents at least once a week”, “children should care for their sick parents”, and “if parents are old, children should provide co-residence for them”. Answers ranged from 1) fully agree (group oriented) to 5) fully disagree (individualistic oriented).

In the second part of the (multivariate) analyses these three variables are combined in a scale for obligation towards parents (counting the answers and dividing by three). The scale has a good reliability for the total group $\alpha = .78$ (For the separate groups ranging from $\alpha = .66$ among Turks to $\alpha = .86$ among Moroccans).

An overview and description of independent variables is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Description of independent variables, mean and SD per group

Variable	Range	Dutch (n = 469)	Turkish (n = 70)	Moroccan (n = 73)	Surinamese (n = 125)	Antillean (n = 59)
Period of residence in the Netherlands (in years)	1-72	n.a.	29.0 (7.67)	29.2 (7.51)	29.8 (10.2)	22.7 (15.1)
Loneliness(1 = lonely– 3 = not lonely)	1-3	2.56 (0.43)	2.22 (0.45)	2.56 (0.51)	2.54 (0.44)	2.38 (0.52)
Physical health (1 = good – 5 = bad)	1-5	2.21 (0.85)	3.17 (1.13)	2.99 (0.95)	2.70 (1.05)	2.53 (1.06)
Marital status (1 = married)	0-1	0.34 (0.78)	0.81 (0.39)	0.81 (0.40)	0.38 (0.49)	0.24 (0.43)
Educational level (1 = low – 3 = high)	1-3	2.07 (0.85)	1.19 (0.49)	1.14 (0.45)	1.79 (0.75)	1.73 (0.88)
Sex (1 = woman)	0-1	0.45 (0.50)	0.31 (0.47)	0.32 (0.47)	0.56 (0.50)	0.46 (0.50)
Age (years)	50-79	62.4 (9.19)	57.9 (6.60)	60.3 (5.80)	59.4 (7.48)	58.4 (6.97)
one of four major Dutch cities (1 = G4)	0-1	0.62 (0.49)	0.76 (0.41)	0.75 (0.43)	0.75 (0.43)	0.64 (0.48)
Number of children	0-20	1.74 (1.52)	3.67 (1.57)	5.76 (2.86)	3.45 (2.63)	3.07 (1.94)

Source: NKPS (2002), NKPS-SPVA (2002).

Older persons on support obligations of children

50% of the Turkish and 53 % of the Moroccan elderly agree with the statement that children who live nearby should visit their parents at least once a week. 16% of the Antilleans and Dutch agree with this statement and Surinamese take an intermediate stand with 36% agreeing on this point. On the other hand three to four per cent of Turks and Moroccans do not agree with the statement against 26% among the Dutch. Testing these group differences (ANOVA, LSD-post hoc comparison) shows that opinions Turks and Moroccans differ from the other three groups but not from each other. Dutch agree least with this statement and differ from each of the migrant groups.

Perceptions on whether children “should care for the sick parents” again show a similar pattern of responses among the groups. More than half of the Turks and Moroccans agree (57% and 51% respectively) compared to only 11% among Dutch. Again we find Surinamese and Antilleans in between these extremes. 27% of Surinamese do not think this is a duty for the children. Results of ANOVA comparison again show a distinction into three groups who differ from each other: 1) Turks and Moroccans, 2) Surinamese and Antilleans and 3) native Dutch

Finally perceptions on whether children should provide elderly parents a home is agreed with by 44% of the Moroccans and 34% of the Turks. Among the other three groups these percentages are clearly lower with around five percent of the respondents agreeing. ANOVA comparison shows that Moroccans agree most with the statement followed by Turks, Surinamese/Antilleans and Dutch elderly.

Perceptions: ethnic differences or socio-demographic factors?

Table 2 shows the results of the ordinal logistic regressions for each of the three dependent variables. Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese elderly are more often of the opinion that children should visit their parent at least once a week than is the case for Dutch. Educational level is the only socio-demographic factor of influence on the older persons’ perceptions of support. However, controlling for this characteristic does not explain the differences found between the migrant groups and Dutch.

With regard to obligations of providing care to older persons analyses show that all migrant groups (Turks and Moroccans most explicit) agree more than Dutch elderly. Two socio-demographic characteristics are found to affect the perception of older persons, namely educational level and sex. Higher educated as well as women hold a more liberal view on this point.

Also with respect to providing co-residence to parents we find differences between Dutch and migrants. Older persons with a migrant background more often agree that children should do this for their parents than is the case among Dutch. Once more we find that educational level and sex have an effect. But in this last analyses we also find that age and living in one of the four largest Dutch cities has an effect. Elderly living in one of the largest cities more often agree with the statement that children should provide the possibility of co-residence to their parents.

Table 2. Ordinal logistic regression on perceptions regarding three types of support from children to parents

	Children should visit parents at least 1x per week		Care for ill parents		Parents should be able to live in with children when old	
	B	s.e.	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
<i>Migrant group</i>						
Turkish	-1.31***	0.298	-2.13***	0.305	-2.22***	0.296
Moroccan	-1.48***	0.319	-2.08***	0.321	-3.09***	0.328
Surinamese	-1.05***	0.217	-0.79***	0.212	-1.51***	0.217
Antillean	-0.42	0.280	-1.02***	0.280	-1.36***	0.279
Loneliness	0.03	0.155	0.21	0.155	0.15	0.155
Physical well being	-0.09	0.078	-0.06	0.077	-0.03	0.077
Marital status	0.08	0.180	0.25	0.178	-0.04	0.179
Educational level	0.58***	0.097	0.27**	0.094	0.43***	0.096
Sex	0.09	0.167	0.40**	0.166	0.39**	0.166
Age	0.01	0.009	0.01	0.009	0.02*	0.009
Larger city	0.03	0.150	-0.24	0.148	-0.44**	0.150
Pseudo R ² (Nagelkerke)	0.21		0.25		0.39	

The second part of the analyses focuses on determining effects of period of residence and socio-demographic factors within the different groups. We distinguish a Mediterranean (Turks and Moroccans), a Caribbean (Surinamese and Antillians) and a Dutch group.

Results of the OLS regression are shown in Table 3. We focus on the results for period of residence as the other findings are basically in line with those presented before. Despite the fact that we expected and effect of period of residence on the perceptions towards support children should provide to their parents, we only find this (small) effect among the Mediterranean group. The longer they reside in the Netherlands are less of the opinion that children should provide support to elderly parents.

Table 3. Regression analyses for perception regarding support from children to parent, by group of origin

	Mediterranean		Caribbean		Dutch	
	B	s.e.	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Intercept	2.86***	0.707	1.41~	0.789	1.77***	0.393
Period of residence	-0.01	0.009	0.01*	0.006	n.a.	
Loneliness	-0.30**	0.110	0.06	0.172	0.23**	0.084
Physical well being	0.01	0.051	0.02	0.076	-0.03	0.045
Marital status	0.25	0.164	-0.20	0.171	0.09	0.099
Educational level	0.21~	0.118	0.24*	0.108	0.22***	0.047
Sex	0.13	0.148	-0.16	0.156	0.28**	0.094
Age	-0.01	0.010	0.01	0.011	0.01	0.005
Larger city	-0.24*	0.125	-0.39**	0.163	0.03	0.079
R ²	0.14		0.09		0.10	

Discussion

In this article we provided insight in the perceptions older persons with a migrant and Dutch background have regarding the support children should provide to their elderly parents. We suggested that perceptions will be shaped during socialisation in the countries of origin and main aim was to determine the importance of this ethnic factor compared to other socio–demographic characteristics. Results showed that the extent to which elderly perceive that children should support parents is predominantly determined by their ethnic origin. All migrant groups, Turks and Moroccans most prominent, agree more with the statements on intergenerational obligations children have towards their aged parents. The finding that period of residence in the Netherlands has no effect on these perceptions shows once more that they are rooted in the opinions and norms in which one is socialised. Opinions on intergenerational relations and support are among the *core values* that are contrary to more practical domains of life not easily changed or adjusted to in a new context after migration. As the current group of older migrants is mainly first generation, we can expect that older migrant in the future who will belong more and more those to the second generation, may hold views that are more comparable to those of the Dutch.

Despite the fact that differences between the ethnic groups can not be deduced to socio–demographic composition, we find clear effects of the educational level. Higher educated are less of the opinion that children have an obligation to care for elderly parents than the lower educated. Our finding implies that with a rising educational level among the migrant groups, opinions and perceptions will change accordingly. For the future generation older migrants we can thus at least expect a diversification in perceptions.

In this paper we just focused on the perceptions towards obligations of children, whether the older persons indeed receive the expected support remains to be seen. This will depend on a range of factors on the side of the elderly parent, child and society.

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