

## “I AM NOT ALONE”: INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY IN THREE-GENERATION HOUSEHOLDS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE OLDER GENERATION

**SIMONA HORTOVÁ, ADÉLA SOURALOVÁ**

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*Mgr. Simona Hortová, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Joštova 218/10, 602 00, Brno, Czech Republic; Mgr. et Mgr. Adéla Souralová, PhD., Office for Population Studies, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Joštova 218/10, 602 00, Brno, Czech Republic; e-mail: [asouralo@fss.muni.cz](mailto:asouralo@fss.muni.cz).*

This article focuses on intergenerational solidarity in three-generation households. Drawing upon in-depth interviews with seven members of the oldest generation cohabiting in a three-generation household, the article investigates the aspects, perceptions, and meanings of intergenerational solidarity. The article is based mainly on the theory of intergenerational solidarity presented by Alice S. Rossi and Peter H. Rossi (1990) and Robert E. L. Bengtson and Vern L. Roberts (1991). We are inspired by the classification of solidarity into seven dimensions – associational solidarity, affectual solidarity, consensual solidarity, functional solidarity, normative solidarity, and intergenerational family structure – and observe these dimensions in the context of three-generation co-living. Using a qualitative approach allows us to capture the emic perspective of the interviewees and their perceptions of intergenerational relations and their position within a three-generation household.

*Keywords:* three-generation cohabitation, intergenerational solidarity, grandparents

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Czech Republic is among the countries that are facing the process of demographic ageing as the number of people aged 65 and over in relation to other age groups in Czech society continues to grow. This is the result of two demographic trends: the declining birth rate and rising life expectancy (Vohralíková, Rabušic, 2004). This means that individual generations may be alive at the same time for longer periods than they used to be in the past (Sýkorová, 2009). It is now common for three or sometimes even

four generations to be living side by side/at the same time. Vern L. Bengtson (2001: 5) has noted also that more generations are living together than tended to do so in the past, but with a smaller number of individual members in each family. For the first time in history, people may spend a longer part of their adult life still with living parents than they will spend as parents themselves of children under the age of 20 (Hagestad, 1990). This development has led to a number of associated changes that relate to the living arrangements of individual family members. However, the cohabitation arrangements of family members are also changing. First of all they are being influenced by the course of the life cycle; second, individuals are influenced by modernisation processes that cause their values to change, which includes increasing their tendency towards individualism (Beck, 2004; Bauman, 2004). Some authors thus speak of a weakening of ties between modern-day married couples and other family members (Giddens, 2000; Možný, 2003). Other authors even go so far as to talk about the demise of the nuclear and extended family (Popenoe, 1993).

All this is coming to represent a challenge to international solidarity within (and beyond) the family context. In the light of the current demographic trends described above, intergenerational assistance is becoming an increasingly more prominent issue in Czech society, as the length of time two adult generations live together/are alive at the same time has significantly increased (Petrová Kafková, 2010). All this has also brought about a transformation of relationships within the family. There was a high rate of intergenerational solidarity within the family in the past, primarily owing to the important role played by grandparents and especially grandmothers in the family (Hasmanová Marhánková, Štípková, 2014: 16). Seniors helped the younger generation both financially and with housing, which led to the existence of three-generation households. Grandparents were also intensively involved in helping to care for the grandchildren, which made it much easier for women to re-join the workforce after parental leave (Možný, 1999; Maříková, 2004).

As many studies have shown, however, the norm of intergenerational solidarity established in the past has changed as relations between parents and children have transformed (Hasmanová Marhánková, Štípková, 2014: 16). Despite this there is still a strong commitment to intergenerational assistance in the Czech Republic (Možný, Přidalová, Bánovcová, 2003; Sýkorová, 2007; Vidovičová, Rabušic, 2003; Vohralíková, Rabušic, 2004), but as Marcela Petrová Kafková demonstrated (2010) there is a greater degree of normative solidarity among the older than the younger generation. The provision of care and assistance by seniors is thus ceasing to be viewed and accepted as something that can be automatically expected (Petrová Kafková, 2010).

The aim of our interview-based research was to examine intergenerational solidarity within the context of a three-generation household and specifically from the perspective of the oldest generation – the generation of grandparents. In this article we investigate the different aspects and meanings of intergenerational solidarity and try to identify perceptions of intergenerational solidarity in the eyes of the grandparent generation. We decided to study intergenerational solidarity using interviews for two reasons. First, most contemporary studies dealing with intergenerational relations have applied a quantitative approach and we sought to fill in the (qualitative?) gap in knowledge in this area. Second, we wanted to shed light on the emic perspective of representatives of the generation we wanted to study and their interpretations of the everyday in three-generation cohabitation.

## 2. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAME: INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY

To discuss the issue of multi-generation cohabitation, the concept of “intergenerational solidarity” needs to be introduced as this is the most significant theory on intergenerational ties. Currently the two most important models of intergenerational solidarity are the ones that were put forth by Alice S. Rossi and Peter H. Rossi (1990) and Robert E. L. Bengtson and Vern L. Roberts (1991). These authors concur on the point that intergenerational solidarity is a multidimensional construct that involves different behavioural and emotional aspects of cohabitation and relations between the older, middle, and younger generations (Rajmicová, 2003). Intergenerational solidarity is founded on the positive aspects of relationships between relatives, such as understanding, cooperation, cohesion, and willingness to help that exist among members of an extended family and across generations (Hank, Buber, 2009; Sýkorová, 2009).

Intergenerational solidarity thus forms an important component of family relations and is especially important for seniors’ happiness in old age and their social integration during their elderly years (McChesney, Bengtson, 1988). However, this solidarity between generations does not just affect the older generation; it contributes to the mental wellbeing of people at any age, that is, throughout a person’s life. The presence or absence of intergenerational solidarity between family members shapes their self-confidence and is reflected in their life satisfaction, and this includes determining the extent to which family members are willing to provide and accept assistance and support from other family members (Daatland, Herlofson, 2001). However, there are a number of factors that influence the nature of intergenerational solidarity. These include the given cultural environment, the family’s lifestyle, the form of housing, the education of individual family members, their age, gender, and socioeconomic status.

It also warrants mentioning that the theory of intergenerational solidarity side-lines the negative aspects of intergenerational interactions. Bengtson’s theory thus overlooks possible crises and conflicts inside individual families, and as a result it clashes with theories that are founded on conflict. With his theory based on the importance of the extended family and mutual support provided between adult children and their parents, Bengtson rejects the theory of the “isolated” nuclear family (Parsons, 1991), which focuses on the nuclear family in isolation in which only two generations interact. There the extended family consequently loses its significance. Conversely, Bengtson (2001) speaks of the decline of the modern nuclear family as a social institution at the start of the 21st century and of its transformation into a social unit that is based on emotional bonds.

Within his model Vern L. Bengtson (2001) conceptualises familial solidarity between generations and sets forth six dimensions that denote different forms of intergenerational support and solidarity (Bengtson, Schrader, 1982; Bengtson, Roberts, 1991; Bengtson, Burgess, Parrott, 1997; Parrot, Bengtson 1999). These dimensions are: associational, affectual, consensual, functional, normative, and structural solidarity.

The first dimension of intergenerational solidarity is *associational solidarity*, which is characterised by social contact between members of both the nuclear and the extended family. It refers thus to the frequency and patterns of contact between family members within the frame of various types of activities they engage in together (Bengtson, 2001). The characteristics of family structure are the fundamental factors that create the opportunities for social contact between family members and for them to get together and engage in joint activities. The frequency of social contact and the

types of activities this contact occurs through provide insight into the nature of the relationships within the family. In this case an important role is played by the geographical proximity or distance between family members, the number of family members, and their state of health (Adams, 1968; Shanas et al., 1968). Gender also plays an important role, specifically the fact that women maintain contact with other family members more than men do (Atkinson, Kivett, Campbell, 1986; Roberts, Richards, Bengtson, 1991). The amount of social contact between individual generations in the family is also influenced by marital status and education. Seniors, both men and women, who are divorced or separated from their partner and who have higher levels of educational attainment tend to be less in contact with their adult children and their families (Crimmins, Ingegneri, 1990). Conversely, widowed seniors maintain more frequent contact with their children (Anderson, 1984). The amount of contact between generations is also influenced by a senior's age and state of health, as people who are elderly, ill, and incapacitated maintain more frequent contact with their children or are even more likely to live in the same household with them (Crimmins, Ingegneri, 1990). Associational solidarity is also influenced by other dimensions of intergenerational solidarity, specifically the affectual and normative dimensions (Lowenstein et al., 2001).

The second dimension Bengtson (2001) describes is the *affectual dimension*, which relates to the positive feelings people have towards family members and the reciprocity of those feelings. This dimension is manifested as the degree of sensitivity, closeness, understanding, affection, respect, and thoughtfulness people feel in their interactions with family members. These feelings go through changes over the course of life, and they gain in importance during adulthood (Rossi, Rossi, 1990). The older generation exhibits this solidarity more than the younger generation (Bengtson, 1986). However, affectual solidarity is also influenced by other factors than just the age of a person. Gender also has an influence on the bond a person feels. In this respect a greater degree of solidarity is observed between women, and the strongest affectual solidarity is observed between mothers and daughters. Affectual solidarity also becomes stronger once a grandchild is born into the family (Rossi, Rossi, 1990). The emotional bond with children also helps widowed parents overcome the loss of a loved one (Silverstein, Bengtson, 1991). Conversely, factors that have a negative effect on the emotional bond between individual members of different generations include older family members/parents being divorced, (greater) geographical distance between the homes of different family members, and the socioeconomic status of family members (Richlin-Klonsky, Bengtson, 1996).

*Consensual solidarity* is the third dimension of intergenerational solidarity. It is based on what consensus exists between family members over specific opinions, values, and beliefs (e.g. in the areas of religion or politics). This consensus most often tends to derive from family members' similar socialisation experiences, which then results in similarities between the values they embrace (Glass, Bengtson, Dunham, 1986). Other studies have shown that the values espoused by parents are adopted by their children when they are adults (Jennings, Niemi, 1981; Smith, 1983), and this consensus of beliefs is influenced by family members having the same economic status, education, and religious faith (Bengtson, Roberts, 1988; Rossi, Rossi, 1990).

The fourth dimension of intergenerational solidarity is *functional solidarity*, which is based on the frequency and extent of assistance provided between individual generations within the family. Specifically it refers to the frequency with which intergenerational assistance and support is provided and to how individual generations perceive reciprocity

in the exchange of resources between them. In this connection Joan Aldous (1987) works with an “exchange model” that relates both to financial and physical assistance. This assistance is provided by the generation that has the necessary resources and sources to the generation that needs them. However, a number of factors influence intergenerational support. One of them is the marital status of the persons involved (Mutran, Reitzes, 1984). Here we find that parents who are married have a greater propensity to provide their children with assistance than do parents who are either divorced or widowed. Conversely, seniors without a partner tend to receive more assistance from their children (Rossi, Rossi, 1990). Parents who are in poor health or have physical limitations also tend to receive physical assistance from their adult children (Mutran, Reitzes, 1984; Rossi, Rossi, 1990). Functional solidarity is influenced by affectual solidarity, as how much affection exists in a relationship (affection that has been formed in the past) has a significant influence on the provision of assistance between generations, and also by associational solidarity, as more contact between older parents and their children results in more support being provided between individual generations and especially by seniors to their offspring, as noted above (Ikknik, Tilburg, Knipscheer, 1999).

The fifth dimension is *normative solidarity*. Here the most important role is played by the duty one has to perform and fulfil family obligations. This relates to the norms that govern individual families and that are the basic factor that motivates people to care for family members in need of assistance. Janet Finch (1989) talks about these norms in relation to the open negotiations about which family members are to assume which responsibilities, and when they will do so. A role in this is played by the meaning a person ascribes to family and to the family roles of individual family members (Bengtson, Schrader, 1982). Higher levels of normative solidarity are shown by people who were raised in two-parent, cohesive families and who themselves are the recipients of normative solidarity from family members (Rossi, Rossi, 1990; Lee, Netzer, Coward, 1994).

The last dimension is *structural solidarity* and it refers to the structure of opportunities for intergenerational relations, which is determined by the number of members in a family, the geographic proximity of family members, and their health. Factors that on the macro level affect or differentiate family structure include differences in the number of births and deaths in families, the divorce rate, and job mobility. On the micro level, data shows that the type of housing and living arrangements are more important factors of structural solidarity among seniors than among the younger (Brackbill, Kitch, 1991).

### 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This paper is based on semi-structured interviews that were conducted with seniors living in a three-generation household.<sup>1</sup> The research that produced the findings presented here was founded on the following research question: *How do individual dimensions of intergenerational solidarity manifest themselves within the frame of three-generation cohabitation from the perspective of seniors?*

1 In our study of three-generation cohabitation, everyone - children, parents, and grandparents - lives together in a two-storey family home. In these living arrangements they are able to live together on two floors of one house, each with their own domestic facilities. Everyone however lives under one roof and shares common areas, even on each of the separate floors, which is what makes this form of housing three-generation housing.

A fundamental step in any kind of research is choosing the units to be studied (Patton, 1990). For our study we looked for persons who had the following characteristics: interviewees in the research had to be over the age of 65, be retired, and live in a three-generation household. The first interviewee was contacted through what is called a “gatekeeper”; the other interviewees were selected using the snowball method. All of these individuals were first given a cover letter to introduce them to the topic of the study and the subject and purpose of the interviews.

The selected research sample contains a total of 7 people<sup>2</sup> between the ages of 66 and 81:

- Mr Alois, age 66, widowed, he lives in a village in a house with his daughter, her husband, and two grandchildren (ages 4 and 7), he is the sole member of his household;
- Mr Bohumil, age 68, married, he lives in a village in a family home with his daughter, her husband, and one grandchild (age 16), his household is made up of him and his wife;
- Ms Cecílie, age 74, married, she lives in a mid-sized town in a family home with her daughter, her daughter’s husband, and two grandchildren (ages 21 and 24), her household is made up of her and her husband (Mr Daniel);
- Mr Daniel, age 77, married, he lives in a mid-sized town in a family home with his daughter, her husband, and two grandchildren (ages 21 and 24), he shares his household with his wife (Ms Cecílie);
- Ms Emílie, age 81, widowed, she lives in a mid-sized town in a family home with her daughter, her daughter’s husband, and two grandchildren (ages 11 and 20), she is the sole member of her household;
- Ms Františka, age 79, married, she lives in a mid-sized town in a family home with her son, his wife, and one grandchild (age 15), she shares her household with her husband;
- Ms Gabriela, age 73, widowed, she lives in a mid-sized town in a family home with her son, his wife, and one grandchild (age 6), she is the sole member of her household.

The interviews focused on the following topics: three-generation cohabitation, intergenerational relations, intergenerational support, grandparenthood and caring for grandchildren, everyday activities. The individual interviews were conducted in the homes of the selected interviewees. Five of the seven interviews were carried out directly in the respondent’s household. An exception was one married couple whose interview took place in the household in which their daughter lives with her family. The interviews were conducted separately with each individual interviewee, the exception again was the same married couple, as both partners participated in the interview at the same time. The interview with Ms Františka was likewise conducted in the presence of her spouse; however, he was there only in the role of an observer, and sometimes just added something to his wife’s response. The interviews ranged in duration from 43 to 85 minutes. A total of 6 hours and 41 minutes of recorded interviewing was obtained. The interviews were in every case recorded and then transcribed with each interviewee’s consent.

The transcribed interviews were analysed using the thematic analysis method (Braun, Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis helps researchers to transition from reading

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2 The names of the participants have been anonymised.

data to identifying and analysing the patterns concealed in collected data. This helps researchers obtain a better understanding of the group of people they are studying (Braun, Clarke, 2006; Boyatzis, 1998). In our case this meant concentrating on individual aspects of intergenerational solidarity. The outcome of this analysis was the identification of the main topics and subtopics presented in the next section of this paper.

The ethical dimension of research was taken into account during the interviewing. All interviewees were informed of the subject matter and purpose of the interviews before the interview was conducted. Everyone who took part in an interview was also informed of the option to refuse (even ex post) to participate in the research. The interviewees were also ensured that their privacy and anonymity would be maintained. For this reason the real names of the participants and the towns they live in are not given in this article. Finally, after the recorded interviews were transcribed all the recordings were erased, and the transcriptions of the interviews were deleted after the analysis.

#### 4. THREE-GENERATION COHABITATION AND INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY

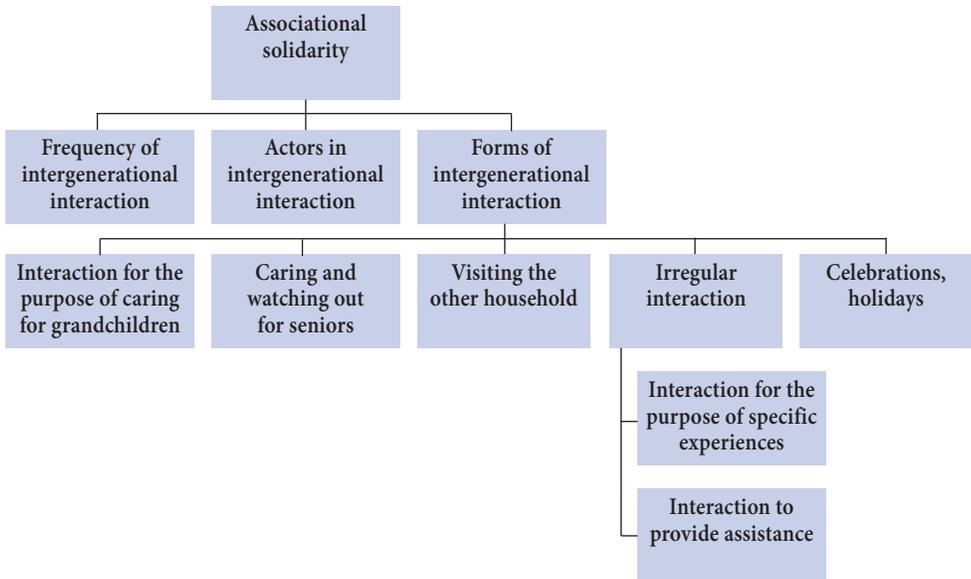
In this section we present the basic findings from our analysis, breaking them down according to the individual dimensions of intergenerational solidarity. One dimension, however, is an exception; structural solidarity, which is based on the opportunities for intergenerational relations, one determinant of which is the geographical proximity of individual family members (Bengtson, Schrader, 1982). Given that this article examines intergenerational relations within the frame of three cohabiting generations of one family, the living arrangements and thus also the physical distance/proximity between relatives is automatically encompassed within this dimension. Therefore, structural solidarity is already reflected within the subject of analysis here. In the text below we analyse the other dimensions of solidarity. It is important to note that the divisions between individual dimensions are not clear-cut, as certain aspects of individual dimensions often overlap or influence others.

##### 4.1 Associational solidarity and intergenerational interaction

Older people spend most of their time at home, in the family environment (Vohralíková, Rabušic, 2004: 65), and consequently three-generation households are a space that creates opportunities for family members to interact, get together, and spend time on joint activities, and to do so with members of every generation of the family. For associational solidarity it is important to observe not just the frequency of intergenerational interactions but also what forms these interactions take and which actors are involved. The findings of our analysis and the subtopics analysed are presented in Figure 1.

With respect to the frequency of intergenerational interaction, in the interviews we compared the differences in the frequency of interaction between the interviewees and their cohabiting relatives. While some stated that they see other family members on a daily basis, others pointed out that cohabitation need not necessarily result in frequent contact. The two excerpts below show how the frequency of interaction between family members is addressed in the interviews:

Figure 1: Analytical diagram of the topics and subtopics identified under the dimension of associational solidarity



“I always say that we’re all in one building, but it happens that we don’t run into each other for a whole week. Because we’re at home, we go out, in the meantime they come back, then we come back in the evening, and maybe we don’t even encounter each other.” (Bohumil)

“Usually they come here, or just my son. They’re in contact with me all the time. Every day, several times. The little one, say, comes in, when they’re seeing to something, then she’s here. Or she’s not here and they are here. That also happens. We see each other basically every day.” (Gabriela)

While Mr Bohumil articulates the paradox that family members do not always encounter each other despite living under the same roof, Ms Gabriela (widow) on the contrary describes interaction occurring every day. In these cases, the frequency of interaction may be influenced by a change in marital status and the senior’s gender. The senior’s marital status, that is, being in a partnership or a marriage, decreases the frequency of contact between the oldest generation and the younger generations (Richlin-Klonsky, Bengtson, 1996), while being widowed increases the frequency of contact (Anderson, 1984). Our findings support the findings of other studies arguing that women experience solidarity to a greater degree, and the most intensive relationship in terms of solidarity is between daughter and mother (Rossi, Rossi, 1990).

Several different forms of intergenerational interaction occurring within the frame of three-generation cohabitation were described in the interviews – from regular interaction, to collective celebrations, to interaction for the purpose of care. The latter type of interaction in particular was highlighted by the interviewees (cf. also Suralová and Žáková in review), who described their role in caring for their grandchildren – they spoke mainly about “*keeping an eye on*” their grandchildren when the parents were absent or busy, and they also talked about “*picking up/taking*” the children from and to

school. Here again, however, there was a great deal of variability, primarily in relation to the age of the grandchildren, and here the older the senior, the less involved he or she was in caring for grandchildren (Hamplová, 2014; Silverstein, Marenko, 2001). Among seniors who already have older grandchildren, the grandparent role was reduced from watching grandchildren to just occasional care, provided several times a year. In the case of Mr Bohumil, Ms Emílie, and Ms Františka caring for grandchildren almost exclusively assumed the form of “*cooking lunch*” for the grandchildren when the parents weren’t home, which tended to happen more during summer holidays.

Another dimension of contact through care took the form of interaction for the purpose of watching and caring for seniors by the second (middle) generation. Frequently the interviewees thus stated that they most often see their offspring in situations where their adult children come to see them to check that they are all right and are doing well. These are frequent, almost daily interactions, but very short in duration, lasting only several minutes. The interviewees spoke about these interactions in the sense of the younger generation keeping an eye on them, and they regarded this practice to be a positive part of cohabitation. They said they appreciated the fact that despite their children and grandchildren having their own responsibilities, they still found time to get together, offer the grandparents assistance, and seek out their company.

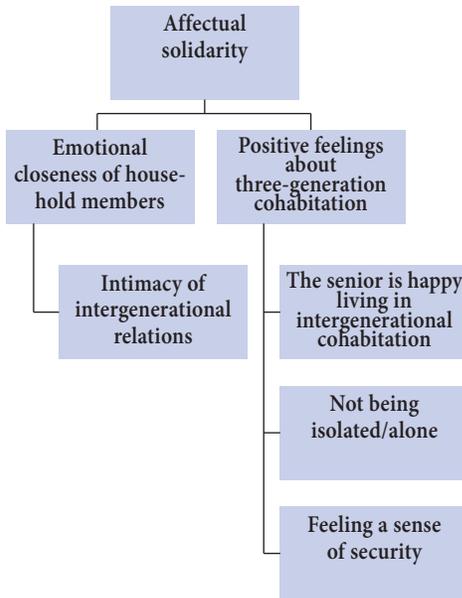
#### **4.2 Affectual solidarity and the emotional bond between generations**

The geographical distance between a senior’s place of residence and that of the younger generation is one of the factors that does not just affect the physical proximity of these individuals but also their emotional closeness. In other words, the greater the distance between them, the less intense the emotional bond between generations (Richlin-Klonsky, Bengtson, 1996). In our analysis of the interviews we mainly examined two topics – the emotional proximity of the members of the three-generation household and what positive feelings seniors had about three-generation cohabitation (see Figure 2).

The analysis of the interviews revealed that there were two dimensions to how the interviewees interpreted the emotions they felt towards the younger generations. The first one relates to seniors’ positive feelings towards the younger generations in the home, feelings such as love, affection, and trust. All of the respondents had been living with their grandchildren since their grandchildren were born and consequently they felt a strong emotional bond with them. In this case affectual solidarity becomes intertwined with associational solidarity (Lowenstein, Katz, Prilutzky, Mehlhausen-Hassoen, 2001), where seniors enjoy spending time with their grandchildren because they have close emotional ties to them and not just because they are physically nearby. The interviewees also spoke about the affection they felt towards their grandchildren, and most of them also mentioned the positive emotions the youngest members of the household felt towards them. Here the emphasis was placed on the reciprocity of the emotional bond. The seniors demonstrated the reciprocal nature of the emotional bond primarily through examples of moments they spent together, which in these cases were initiated mainly by the grandchildren. This mainly related to Mr Bohumil, Mr Daniel, Ms Cecílie and Ms Františka, who live with grandchildren who are already aged 15 and over.

“She still goes on trips with us. Or wants to go, so she goes. And gladly. We don’t force her, not ever. She’s been used to it since she was little, when we used to go around palaces, castles with her, so she likes going even now, at this age.” (Bohumil)

Figure 2: An analytical diagram of the topics and subtopics identified under the dimension of affectual solidarity



As well as their emotional bond with their grandchildren, the interviewees also referred to the love they felt for the middle generation, for their own children specifically. In relation to the middle generation the seniors emphasised the mutual closeness and intimacy of their relationship, which is more strongly felt than in their relationship with their grandchildren. The seniors, especially the female interviewees, referred to their mutual trust and understanding (see also Možný, Přidalová, Bánovcová, 2003). This was most evident in the case of Ms Cecílie, who emphasised being able to confide in her daughter and that her daughter was a source of (psychological) support for her. Ms Cecílie also stated that her daughter (sometimes with her granddaughter as well) advised her in situations involving ordinary activities like, for example, picking out clothing, because, as she phrased it, she was “*not very up on things*” like that.

Our second topic focused on the positive feelings towards three-generation cohabitation. Although many studies that have been carried out have shown that seniors prefer to live on their own and independently, but within reach of the younger generations (Kuchařová, 2002; Vohralíková, Rabušic, 2004; Sýkorová, 2007), all the interviewees interviewed indicated that they are glad they live in a three-generation household and that they would not want to live any other way.

“I’m glad, yes. We’re used to it, I’m glad that she [her daughter] is here. That we’re not alone here; I can’t imagine it. There’s no conflict among us. We have this entrance where they go upstairs, so I know when she’s coming home because we meet up there. We greet each other, she’s getting home tired from work so I’m not going to hold her back. We each have our own place.” (Cecílie)

However, all the interviewees – like Ms Cecílie – also drew attention to the need to maintain their own autonomy and individuality by having a separate space for their own household. They saw several advantages to cohabitation. Above all they mentioned not feeling isolated. Although all the respondents mentioned this feeling, it was emphasised most by Mr Alois, Ms Emílie, and Ms Gabriela, the widowed seniors in our sample:

“If I were alone, then I’d feel the time especially long here. It’s just you know that someone is here. You have someone to look forward to, coming home from work. Even if we don’t meet, or we just meet, say hi, just talk in the hall. But if I were at night alone all the time, you know, that no one was here with me, no one is coming, I don’t know, I’d get used to it, but with difficulty. It’s just better when there’s someone in the building. There are also instances where they’re alone, but it’s just better like that.” (Emílie)

“You don’t feel sad. You have this support. We can rely on them if things were bad, I think. ... I think that if things were bad they’d help us. You’re not alone in a thing.” (Františka)

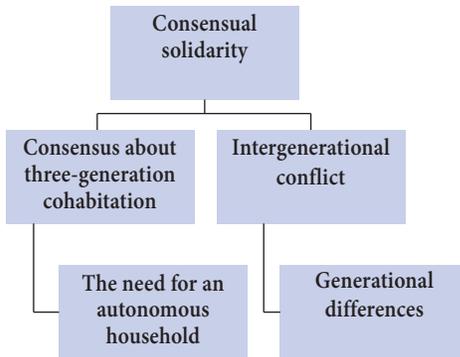
As Ms Emílie’s comment implies, she doesn’t feel isolated, even if she isn’t in direct contact with the other members of the household and they don’t see each other. As with the other interviewees, here again a key role is played by the awareness that there is someone else present in the home with them, even if, for instance, they are not spending time together. The awareness that they are living with the younger generations helps prevent the seniors from feeling isolated, abandoned, or separated from their family. At the same time, as well as mentioning the proximity of their family members in the house and therefore they do not feel isolated in the house, the interviewees (e.g. Ms Františka above) also noted another positive factor relating to three-generation cohabitation: the sense of security they feel because if necessary family members will provide them with help and support.

#### **4.3 Consensual solidarity, consensus and conflict in intergenerational cohabitation**

It was not the aim of this study to determine whether there was a prevailing consensus of beliefs and values, for instance relating to religion or politics, between the generations living together, which fall under the dimension of consensual solidarity (Rossi, Rossi, 1990; Roberts, Richards, Bengtson, 1991), but the interviewees could in the course of the interviews comment on whether in their three-generation household there was a consensus of opinion on issues relating to the cohabitation of three generations (see Figure 3).

As we indicated above, the communication described their cohabitation with other family members as relatively harmonious, as they are able to agree on matters relating to the running of the household. However, this sense of harmony is largely abetted by the fact that they live in separate households. Although the seniors almost exclusively talked about conflict-free relationships based on a consensus in their opinions about their cohabitation, it is not possible to ignore occasional conflicts in the household. As theorists on intergenerational conflicts have noted, conflicts arising in intergenerational

Figure 3: Analytical diagram of identified topics and subtopics within the frame of the dimension of consensual solidarity



interactions are most often based on different ideas and values (Gubrium, Holstein, 1999).

The only one of the interviewees who spoke more about disagreements over the running of the household was Ms Františka. She indicated there was a clear intergenerational difference between individual members of the household that in some situations could lead to conflicts. She also said that members of each generation in the household did not always show understanding for the habits of the other generations, and in some cases pointless conflicts arose as a result.

“We get the newspaper. Our [kids?] think it’s a waste when you can hear it on television. But we read it slowly, when there’s something I don’t understand, I read it through twice, whereas there [on TV] they talk fast and maybe I don’t understand, and then I don’t know. And this way I read it through, maybe I’ll go back to it. Like old folks. But they don’t understand that.” (Františka)

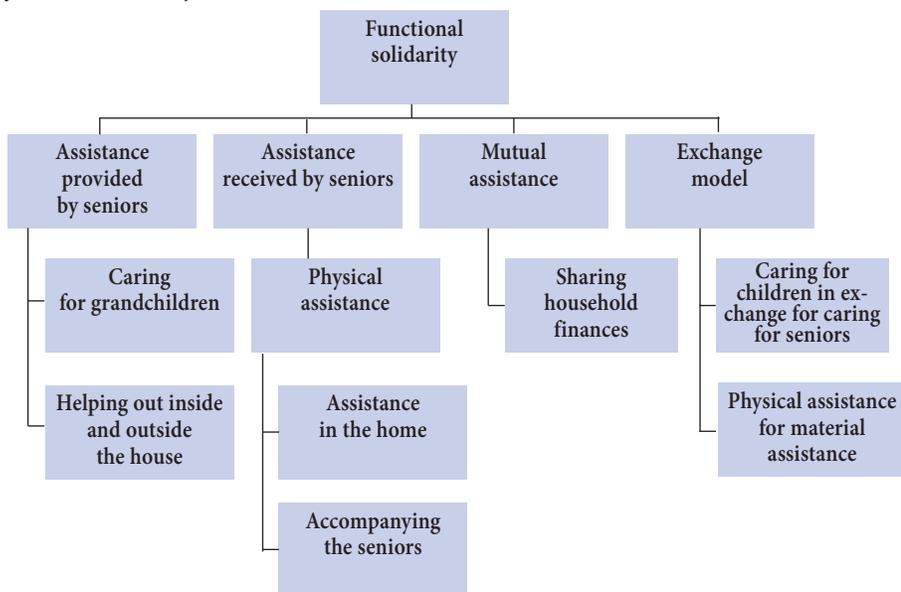
The accounts given by the other interviewees were for the most part somewhat idealised descriptions of how their cohabitation worked, which may have been because the oldest generation always perceives (in the frame of intergenerational relations) their relationship with their adult children in the most idyllic terms (Možný, Přidalová, Bánovcová, 2003). Equally, cohabitation may also be idealised out of a desire to preserve the family’s good image. This is demonstrated by the findings from a study called *Hodnota dětí a mezigenerační Solidarita* [The Value of Children and Intergenerational Solidarity], which showed that among all three generations it was women seniors who most strongly embraced the value that “it is necessary to honour and defend a family’s good reputation” (Možný, Přidalová, Bánovcová, 2003: 20).

#### 4.4 Functional solidarity, receiving and providing intergenerational assistance

It is common in intergenerational relations for seniors, their children, and even the youngest generation to provide (mutual) assistance and support. However, the intensity of this assistance changes over the course of the life cycle. Most often, parents help their children during the stage in life when they are founding their own family. Over time, however, older parents become frailer and their health deteriorates. At that time it is

the adult children who must return assistance to their senior parents (Vohralíková, Rabušic, 2004). The mutual support and assistance provided can take various forms. One of the main factors that affects what form and amount of assistance is provided is the proximity of individual family members. Clearly it is not possible, for example, to help out with everyday tasks from afar, so the most intensive assistance is provided in multi-generational households (Kuchařová, 2003; Vohralíková, Rabušic, 2004: 63).

Figure 4: Analytical diagram of the identified topics and subtopics within the frame of the dimension of functional solidarity



Above we already mentioned the important role of care in everyday activities in a three-generation household. Caring for grandchildren in the interviews became one of the main topics, because grandparents (and grandmothers in particular) traditionally play an important role in many Czech families (Kuchařová, 2003). The seniors we interviewed help to make it easier to harmonise work and family life for the middle generation (see Hasmanová Marhánková, Štípková, 2014; Možný, 1999). This form of support was mentioned by both the female respondents and by Mr Alois.

“I could have gone to work; I was there for a time, but very briefly. Because my daughter went to work, so I said no, so that I could spend time with the kids. I said I’ll just stop, I’ll stop [going to work].” (Alois)

“And then she got a job on the day shift. So she went to work and I looked after them here. So that also really filled the time a lot.” (Cecílie)

In Mr Alois’s case, his marital status plays an important role in his caring for his grandchildren. He has been a widower for several years, so he assumed the role of caregiver in the family, a role that in the other families in our sample was performed by women. Mr Alois retired at the time when he became eligible for retirement so that

he could provide the middle generation of his family with help in the form watching and caring for his grandchildren and so that his daughter could go back to work. We also observed this pattern in other families, where grandmothers left the labour market in order to be able to look after their grandchildren.

Another aspect of functional solidarity and assistance provided by seniors was their participation in performing tasks and chores inside and outside the home. Because as retirees they have more free time, the interviewees were able to help the younger generation in the household and with other activities. Most commonly this involved the seniors helping to prepare lunch for all the household's members or working in the garden or around the house.

“They're so busy with their jobs [note – the middle generation] that they don't have time for the house. So I work ... around the garden, the pool, repairs, cutting the grass, and everything to do with the house. ... I enjoy doing it and when it's done nicely, all around the garden, and when you go have a seat in the pergola that we have in the garden, then it's a joy to look at.” (Alois)

The interviews reveal that the primary motivation seniors have for performing this kind of work is not just to help the middle generation but also their need to be useful and to engage in daily activities after having retired.

In the interviews the seniors also figure as the ones who are receiving and accepting support from the middle generation. In this case the middle generation helps the seniors with running their household – for example, by cleaning up and performing other physically more demanding tasks.

“I do and I don't do the cleaning on my own. I usually tidy up, do the vacuuming, but they help me out too with bigger things, they do. ... I can't, say, hang the curtains, I can still wash the windows, but can't do the curtains any more, I can't climb up, because one time I fell.” (Gabriela)

Other activities that the seniors seek help from the middle generation to perform include doing the shopping together, accompanying them when they go places, and driving them somewhere by car (e.g. to see the doctor).

With respect to functional solidarity, it is also important to mention the topic of mutual support in the household's finances, which in a three-generation household is specific, as the household expenses are shared between the oldest and the middle generation. The seniors see an advantage to sharing household costs in areas of everyday need, such as heating the home, which is again specific in a three-generation household. Ms Emílie and Ms Františka both noted that they are aware that they “*only need to heat half the house*”, which means their expenses are less than if they had to heat the whole house themselves. Similarly, Ms Gabriela, a widow, mentioned that the costs of household maintenance do not rest entirely on her shoulders, and a large portion of them are assumed by the younger generation.

In our analysis we also looked at what kind of mechanisms [practices] support the maintenance of functional solidarity. We argue that in a three-generation arrangement functional solidarity is based on an exchange model (Aldous, 1987), where exchanges are made according to individual need.

“I do something for them; they then do something for me. ... They see to all sorts of things, say when I need something from the pharmacy or to pick something up, then they take care of that. Or the shopping – “We’re going there, do you want us to buy anything?” – my daughter always asks. ... And I, for instance, look after the children. I used to take little Hana to school for them, and little Anthony.” (Cecílie)

These quotes clearly show that Ms Cecílie mentions receiving assistance in return for the care she used to provide for the grandchildren. Here we can see an example of “generalised reciprocity” (Lévi-Strauss, 1969; Finch, 1989). This involves a balancing or equalising of mutual assistance, which however, may not necessarily take place immediately. On the contrary, this form of support “combines past events that motivate repayment today, and in the future when payback can be sought for current assistance” (Sýkorová, 2007: 162), as the above quote demonstrates.

In most cases, however, the interviewees mentioned this exchange primarily in reference to physical assistance for material or financial support. Specifically, in most cases, the object of an exchange was the property in which the seniors and their children and grandchildren were living together. In all of our cases the families were living in a house that had originally belonged to the oldest generation. However, as Ms Františka noted, in old age the seniors left the property to their children. In most cases, the middle generation in return assumed responsibility for seeing to any necessary tasks around the house, such as repairs and renovations.

“This house is basically theirs, we left it to them. ... It’s to our benefit that they have it now. They manage it now. When something needs doing, they say, “we’ll do it like this”, maybe I make some contribution for it, but they’re the ones who initiate it. I don’t have to organise anything or want to get it accomplished. They take care of it. I think that this is to our benefit.” (Františka)

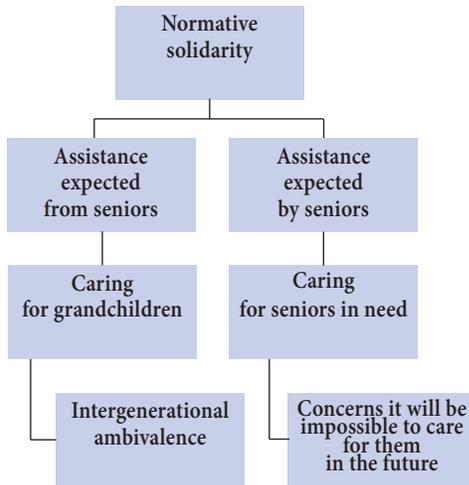
It is clear from Ms Františka’s comments that there is a mutual exchange of resources within their three-generation household (see Aldous, 1987). While she and her husband have the material resources in the form of their property, their son has the physical means necessary to ensure the maintenance of the house they live in together. Thanks to this exchange, the middle generation will inherit the house, while in return they will take care of any necessary tasks that the oldest generation would otherwise have had to take care of. The seniors thus, in their own words, have “*a place where they can live out their lives in peace*” “*that no one will throw them out of*”. In addition, they only have to concern themselves with running their own household and its functioning and do not have to deal with concerns that are connected with living in a house.

#### 4.5 Normative solidarity and expected intergenerational assistance

Vern L. Bengtson (2001) describes normative solidarity as the norms and expectations regarding the obligations people have towards other family members across generations. In our research normative solidarity is primarily manifested through care relations and expectations of care (Figure 5).

The normative expectations about caring for grandchildren were described most markedly in the interviews by Ms Cecílie, who in the past cared regularly for her grandchildren every day in order to help the middle generation more easily balance

Figure 5: Analytical diagram of identified topics and subtopics within the frame of the dimension of normative solidarity



work and family life. Yet this is a typical example of a situation where intergenerational conflicts can arise (Gubrium, Holstein, 1999) along with negotiating personal autonomy that is sometimes at odds with the expected assistance (Hasmanová Marhánková, Štípková, 2014).

“I did take care of them a lot. And then when I had something, they would say: ‘You mean you won’t be at home?’” (Cecílie)

Ms Cecílie was typically engaged in the kind of intensive (almost) daily care grandmothers are involved in that often replaces the presence of parents, especially at the time when a mother has returned to the labour market (see Hasmanová Marhánková, Štípková, 2014). The interviewee added that she could only begin to devote herself to other activities once the grandchildren were older. In other words, she experienced what Dana Sýkorová (2007) has described as the “never-ending duty”. This expression refers mainly to the parental role of women and refers to women going on to care for grandchildren after they have raised their own children.

Normative solidarity and expectations, however, also operate in the opposite direction – from seniors towards their children. The interviewees were without exception aware that in the future they would need help from those closest to them. They did not describe the care as an entitlement, but on the contrary considered the difficulties associated with providing care to the oldest generation.

“The worst is when a person can’t do anything anymore and would have to go to an institution. The young folk have lots of work too, so it may be that they couldn’t handle it if you were really bedridden, you’d have to go somewhere. There’s no thinking up ways around it or a nurse then.” (Františka)

“I also say to myself that I wouldn’t want to live to some old age when they’d have to take care of me. Who? They’re all a long way off from retiring. Franta [note – a son

living in another village] would be the first, so I'd have to go there. So not that. Because they have a house there. And here, my son is 51, daughter-in-law is 48, my other son is 54. So they're a long way from retiring. So I say I wouldn't want it." (Emilie)

From the quotes presented here it is evident that even though the seniors are living with two younger generations they still have concerns about what is going to happen to them in the future, if their state of health prevents them from continuing to live independently. The other women respondents made similar comments. Věra Kuchařová (2002: 72) also found that almost one-half of the seniors in her "Life in Old Age" (*Život ve stáří*) study worry that their adult children will not be able to provide them with the care they need.

However, if the interviewees did say that relatives from the middle generation ought to care for them, they assigned the role of caregivers to their children. This was the case with Ms Cecílie, who lives in a house with her daughter, but also the case of Ms Emílie, Ms Františka, and Ms Gabriela, who live in three-generation households with their sons. It is interesting, therefore, that the senior women do not expect their husbands to care for them (in the cases of Ms Cecílie and Ms Františka) but at the same time expect that if someone were to assume the role of caregiver it would be the children they share a household with, and regardless of their gender. In addition, although it is in most cases women who take up the role of caregiver for family members, in these cases the seniors spoke of their sons not being able to provide their care. In other words, they did not mention the presence of a daughter-in-law (except Mrs Emilia) who could also be a potential caregiver.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This article focused on the cohabitation of three generations – grandparents, their children, and their grandchildren. We examined intergenerational solidarity in their everyday lives from the perspective of the oldest generation in the home. Drawing on interviews with seniors and an analysis of these interviews we were able to identify and describe individual topics within the frame of associational, affectual, consensual, functional, and normative solidarity in a three-generation household. It is the form that the cohabitation of three generation takes that plays a significant role. It is not just about living together under one roof. Two-generation houses represent a specific type of space that allows seniors to be in daily contact with other members of the household. In the interviews, seniors expressed, among other things, positive feelings about this form of living arrangement. We found that multigenerational cohabitation is especially important for senior widows. The interviews also revealed that three-generation households help prevent seniors from feeling isolated, which again is a problem mainly for older people who are living without a partner (Kuchařová, 2003). Seniors also feel more secure and happier living with other generations because have positive feelings about the presence of other relatives

Although the seniors talked almost exclusively about the advantages of multi-generational cohabitation and the support that comes from living together, they also firmly emphasised the importance of having separate households within the house. Maintaining their autonomy is very important to them, and consequently they try not

to ask the younger generations for help if it is not really essential (see also Sýkorová, 2007). At the same time, we showed that although the seniors help the middle generation in different ways, they do not regard caring for grandchildren as something that can be taken for granted from them (see Hasmanová Marhánková, 2009, 2013; Petrová Kafková, 2010), even though all three generations are living under the same roof, which means the grandparents are there every day as potential caregivers. Similarly, the seniors do not feel that the physical proximity of the middle generation means that the middle generation will be able to provide them with the care they need when they are no longer able to take care of themselves.

By means of qualitative research we were thus able to capture aspects of support between generations that quantitative studies do not centre on. As a result, we were able to put together a comprehensive picture of intergenerational solidarity within the framework of a three-generation cohabiting household. One example of this is the finding that relates not only to what forms of support seniors are provided with but also to what kinds of situations they are in when they receive this assistance from younger generations. We also discovered not only how frequent the interaction is between members of a three-generation household, but also the nature and purpose of these interactions. In relation to these intergenerational interactions we discovered, for example, the importance of having coffee together or chatting with the middle generation, which were activities the seniors mentioned. It is this kind of ordinary everyday activity that many people may not see as important that actually is a fundamentally important activity in the daily lives of seniors. Also important for them is the awareness that they are not alone in the house, even if they are not in the direct presence of other members of the household at a particular moment. Last but not least, the qualitative research made it possible to draw attention to the ambivalent nature of some aspects of multigenerational cohabitation. It is this negotiating of intergenerational relations in the everyday life of seniors and their families, as described above that creates a fuller and more fleshed out picture of intergenerational solidarity.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**SIMONA HORTOVÁ** – Simona Hortová graduated from Sociology and Public Policy and Human Resources at the Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. At present, she works as a consultant in an HR consulting agency.

**ADÉLA SOURALOVÁ** – Adéla Souralová is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. Currently, she is the principal investigator of the research project focusing on the three-generation living in the Czech Republic (supported by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic). In her research she concentrates on the issues of care, family, grandparenthood and grandchildhood. More information on <https://www.muni.cz/en/people/144154-adelasouralova/publications>.