

# Older Adults and Intergenerational Social Support: Lessons from International Experience

Lihua Huang, PhD. Candidate (MSU), MSW  
Linda Rynbrandt, PhD, Associate Professor, GVSU

Huang & Rynbrandt 2/23/2010 1

## Introduction

- ▶ Overview
- ▶ Intergenerational Family Relations during the Financial Crisis
- ▶ Intergenerational Family Relations around the World

Huang & Rynbrandt 2/23/2010 2

## Family Hardship and Crisis as We Know them

- ▶ Unemployment and underemployment
  - US: 10.0 in Dec. 2009
  - US: 9.7 in Jan. 2010
  - MI: 11.6 in Jan. 2010
  - (Monthly highest since 1984)
- ▶ Housing crisis
  - Foreclosure
  - Underwater
- ▶ High debt
  - Credit debt
  - Medical debt
  - Car loans
  - Tuition loans

Unemployment Rate: Jan. 2008–Jan. 2010

Huang & Rynbrandt 2/23/2010 3

## Purpose of the Presentation

- ▶ To critically rethink the notion of older people being burden to the family and the general society;
- ▶ To develop a more comprehensive and positive attitude toward older adults;
- ▶ To gain a better understanding of the impact of older people's contribution and wisdom in family support as a safety net during family hardship and crisis;
- ▶ To develop a practical application plan for family coping strategies;
- ▶ To advocate for strong social welfare protection.
  - International experience reveals that country-specific transfer patterns follow the typology of welfare regimes.

Huang & Rynbrandt 2/23/2010 4

### A Pyramid of Well-being

▶ Aunt Rose's story

2/23/2010 Huang & Rynbrandt 5

### Two Sides of Crisis

- ▶ 危机
  - Crisis and opportunity
- ▶ Less told stories of contributions of older adults to crisis management
- ▶ Older adults are active providers of younger generations through history and around the world during family hardship and crisis.

Roles of Older Generation during Crisis Family Resilience

Huang & Rynbrandt 2/23/2010 6

### Wisdom of older people as a commodity

John B. Baltes: Two Faces of Wisdom

Huang & Rynbrandt 2/23/2010 7

### Intergenerational Family Relations around the World

- ▶▶ Active roles of older adults in family relations
- ▶ Three international cases
- ▶ Skills for intergenerational justice

Huang & Rynbrandt 2/23/2010 8

### Other Look at Older Adults in family Life

- ▶ Giving and receiving
- ▶ Types of giving
  - Emotional support
  - Instrumental support
    - Monetary
    - Services
    - Material goods
  - Values and believes
- ▶ Giving and psychological well-being of older adults
- ▶ Wisdom as a crucial resource in family hardship and crisis
  - Collective knowledge about the conduct and meaning of life
  - The source of the answers for the family

Huang & Rynbrandt 2/23/2010 9

### Coping with Economic Downturn

- ▶ Economic downturn
  - Higher unemployment and underemployment rates
  - Tightening public resources and state care provision
- ▶ Family survival strategies
  - Increasing intergenerational transfers and support
  - More likely relying on wisdom of lived experience

Coping Strategies

Meanings of Economic Hardship

Huang & Rynbrandt 2/23/2010 10

### Wisdom of Lived Experience and Human Development

- ▶ Wisdom provides older adults the masterful solutions to difficult life problems of generations

Adult Children

- Emotional Support
- Instrumental Support
- Values and Belief

Grandchildren

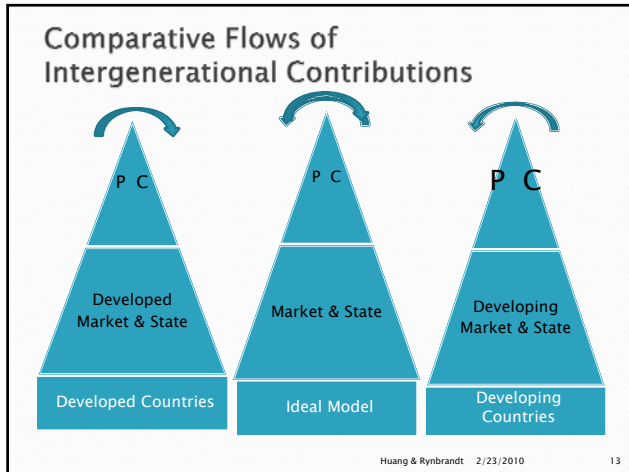
- Instrumental Support
- Values and Belief
- Emotional Support

Huang & Rynbrandt 2/23/2010 11

### Special Contributions: Values and Beliefs

- ▶ Older adults might provide visionary perspective on life and purpose.
  - Giving second thought about the consumer culture that partially contributes to economic and psychological difficulties we are facing.
  - Advising about harmful spending, e.g., living large, get rich quick, unneeded or fraudulent maintenance
- ▶ Teenagers in the midst of economic downturn could greatly benefit from values, beliefs, and perspectives that older adults may bring into their lives.
  - An American teenage psychological study reveals that today's teens are five times more likely to be depressed than those in the 1930s.

Huang & Rynbrandt 2/23/2010 12



### Case 1: China

- ▶ Changing culture of intergenerational support
  1. Traditionally children are your pension.
    - Intergenerational flows from children to parents in old age are strong throughout East and Southeast Asia (Agree et al., 2002; Logan & Bian, 2003).
    - High levels of multigenerational households
      - 71% in Philippines and Thailand
      - 63% in Indonesia
  2. Low coverage of social security insurance and pension
    - 20% of older men and 8% of older women in Philippines in 1989
    - 6% of older adults in China in 2005
  3. Older parents provide extended family support
    - 1996 Philippines data show that 29% of older parents reported giving money to a non-coresident child and 39% of non-monetary support.

Huang & Rynbrandt 2/23/2010 14

### Case 1: China (cont. )

- Nearly half of parents in 1987 reported no exchanges, while many reported exchanges in both directions or only giving
- Paying for higher education and all or part of children's residence are expected parental responsibilities in China.
- 1996 Taiwan 2/3 of coresident parents reported to have paid for all or part of that residence.
- Rural and city grandparents are caring for grandchildren solely or with parents.
  - In 2009 it was reported that grandparent training classes became popular in Guangzhou.
- Older parents provide care to adult children with AIDS and grandchildren.

Huang & Rynbrandt 2/23/2010 15

### Case 2: Older Adults as resources in South Africa

- ▶ Family coping strategies in South Africa
  1. In 63% of matrifocal, multigenerational households, 76% of older adults are the sole providers of household necessities.
  2. Older adults are caring for orphaned grandchildren and other kin in increasingly skip-generation households
  3. Older women are more likely to provide care, even though they lack the resources needed to sustain a family. (Kimuna & Makiwane, 2007; Schatz & Ogunmefun, 2007).
    - Example: one grandmother cares for six grandchildren and one grandchild receives the child grant ("orphan grant").
- ▶ Reason: Direct influence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic
  - Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 80% of the world's orphans as a result of AIDS
  - 60% of South African orphans live in grandparent-headed households
- ▶ Source: 75% of older adults used non-contributory pension funds to support household members (3-4).
  - Few have any money left at the end of the monthly payment period.

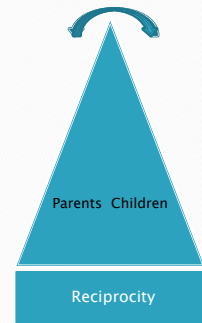
Huang & Rynbrandt 2/23/2010 16

### Case 3: EU

- ▶ There is a net downward flow from the older to the younger generations.
  - Intergenerational financial transfers
    - financial or material gifts and support other than for shared housing and food
  - Instrumental support
    - Personal care
    - Practical household help
    - Help with paperwork
    - Looking after grandchildren
- ▶ Transfers from parents to children are less frequent but more intense in the Southern European countries than in the Nordic countries, with the Continental European countries being somewhere in between the two.

### Reciprocity and intergenerational equity

- ▶ Perception of older adults as resources derive from an **empowerment perspective**
- ▶ Drawing distinction between intergenerational support and intergenerational equity
- ▶ The healthy and active boomers
- ▶ Abilities to give and need for reciprocity change with developmental stages



### Giving and Age

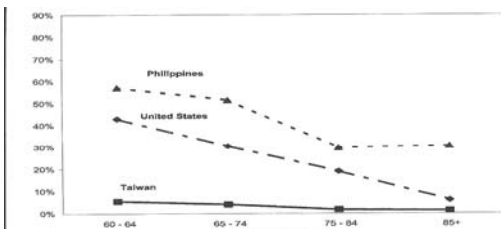


Figure 1. Proportion of adults age 60 and older giving money, goods, or services to non-co-resident children by age of parent.  
Source: Agree, E. M. et al. (2003). Transfers from older parents to their adult children in Taiwan and the Philippines. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, 17, 269-294.

### Prevention of Elderly Abuse

- ▶ Elderly financial abuse in family economic hardship and crisis
- ▶ Independence of adult children
  - Stabilizing income flow, benefits, and housing
  - Education and training to prepare for new job market
  - Securing appropriate governmental aids and other supportive social services as needed
- ▶ Boundaries setting skills
  - Negotiation within the family that ensures the best interests of older adults
  - Promoting positive and appropriate expectations with adult children and grandchildren
  - Disclosure of all financial affairs
  - Explaining bills, statements, legal documents
  - Anticipatory decision-making
  - Obtain legal counsel, e. g., advance directive, will

## Practical Application Plans

- ▶ Public provision advocate plans?
  - Unemployment policy
  - Education policy
  - Housing policy
  - Older adults program design and delivery
  - Intergenerational support program
- ▶ Job market plans?
- ▶ Plans for intergenerational family relations?
  - Older parent → adult child
  - Adult child → older parent
  - Grandparent = grandchild
- ▶ Research and education plans?

## ▶ Last Word

- ▶ Aging and the aged are not, as so often supposed, the cause of our problems– they are and always have been the source of the answers we need.

Dr. William H. Thomas

From *What are old people for?: How elders will save the world*

## Reference

- ▶ Agree, E. M., Biddlecom, A. E., Chang, M., & Perez, A. E. (2002). Transfers from older parents to their adult children in Taiwan and the Philippines. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology, 17*, 269–294.
- ▶ Albertini, M., Kohli, M., & Vogal, C. (2007). Intergenerational transfers of time and money in European families: Common patterns–different regimes? *Journal of European Social Policy, 17*(4), 319–334.
- ▶ Baltes, P. B., & Kunzmann, U. (2004). The two faces of wisdom: Wisdom as a general theory of knowledge and judgment about excellence in mind and virtue vs. wisdom as everyday realization in people and products. *Human Development, 47*, 290–299.
- ▶ Guo, M., Chi, & Silverstein, M. (2009). Intergenerational support of Chinese rural elders with migrant children: Do son's or daughter's migrations make difference? *Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 52*(5), 534–554.
- ▶ Kimuna, S. P., & Makiwane, M. (2007). Older people as resources in South Africa: Mpumulanga households. *Journal of Aging and Social Policy, 19*(1), 97–114.
- ▶ Silverstein, M., Cong, C., & Li, S. (2006). Intergenerational transfers and living arrangement of older people in rural China: Consequences for psychological well-being. *Journal of Gerontology, 61*(5), S256–S266.
- ▶ Schatz, E., & Ogunmefun, C. (2007). Caring and Contributing: The Role of Older Women in Rural South African Multi-generational Households in the HIV/AIDS Era. *World Development, 35*(6), 1390–1403.
- ▶ Thomas, W. H. (2004). *What are old people for?: How elders will save the world*. Acton, MA: VanderWyk & Burnham.
- ▶ Twenge, J. M., Gentile, B., DeWall, C. N. Ma, D., Lacey, K., & Schurtz, D. R. (2010). Birth cohort increases in psychopathology among young Americans, 1938–2007: A cross-temporal meta-analysis of the MMPI. *Clinical Psychology Review, 30*(2), 145–154.

## Thank You!

### ▶ Contact information

- Lihua Huang
  - School of Social Work
  - 254 Baker Hall
  - Michigan State University
  - East Lansing, MI 48824
  - [huanglih@msu.edu](mailto:huanglih@msu.edu)
- Linda Rynbrandt
  - Sociology Department
  - 2151 Au Sable Hall
  - Grand Valley State University
  - Allendale, MI 49401
  - Tel: 616.331–2871
  - [rynbranl@gvsu.edu](mailto:rynbranl@gvsu.edu)