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Generational interdependencies in families: The MULTILINKS research programme

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Abstract

Background: We identify four research themes where MULTILINKS, a programme of research on intergenerational family ties funded through the Seventh Framework of the European Commission, has brought new and unique insights. Key premises of the MULTILINKS approach involved an emphasis on (1) both young and old in families, (2) the ways in which social policies structure independencies in families, and (3) the influence of historical, economic and cultural contexts.

Methods: Our overview includes research done in the context of the MULTILINKS programme at large as well as the papers in this special collection.

Results: Firstly, by combining macro and micro perspectives on family constellations across Europe it has been possible to provide a more nuanced view than is common in conventional portrayals of family change. Secondly, by extending research to Eastern European countries, the programme has not only identified crucial regional differences in family patterns, but also shown that explanations of well-being differentials are similar in Eastern and Western Europe. Thirdly, by focusing on legal and policy frameworks regarding the division of caring and financial responsibilities for the young and old between the family and the state, it has been possible to distinguish patterns in the degree to which national policies strengthen or weaken generational interdependencies in families. Fourthly, research conducted in the context of the MULTILINKS programme has demonstrated the usefulness of paying attention to preferences about family members' responsibilities for each other.

Conclusions: Recognition of the key premises of MULTILINKS has led to challenging, critical insights on intergenerational family ties.

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