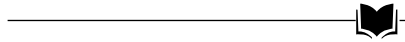
Chapter 19

Spain: Intergenerational Solidarity – Exploring the Impact of Demographic Change on Family Dynamics and Social Policy



Montserrat Gas-Aixendri

Abstract

This chapter delves into the multifaceted theme of intergenerational solidarity, a subject of growing importance catalysed by the European Union's designation of 2012 as the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. Against the backdrop of Spain's demographic transformation, characterised by increased longevity and declining fertility rates, the imperative to establish sustainable and equitable intergenerational relationships transcends national boundaries. This chapter shows that stronger intergenerational solidarity within the family matches with other cumulative effects, in particular in relation to family social capital, which proves to be generated by intergenerational family solidarity and, in turn, helps multiply it.

The circumstances surrounding the study reported in this chapter facilitated collaboration among institutions engaged in research on intergenerational solidarity in Southern Europe. Motivated by the European Year, the *Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore* in Italy conducted a study from 2012 to 2014 titled '"I Don't Want to Be Inactive" – A Longer Life: A Generational Challenge and an Opportunity for Society'. Collaboration networks among researchers enabled the Institute for Advanced Family Studies at the *Universitat Internacional de Catalunya* to establish a parallel investigation in Spain within the framework of institutional cooperation between

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these two academic entities, adapting the study's content to Spain's unique circumstances and research objectives. In this chapter, we embark on a brief review of the two primary studies conducted in Spain on the subject of intergenerational family solidarity.

Keywords: Intergenerational solidarity; family relationships; active ageing; demographic change; social policy.

1. Introduction

The focus on the subject of intergenerational solidarity and its examination in Spain gained momentum with the European Union's[1] resolution to designate 2012 as the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. This decision serves as evidence of the increasing significance of the ongoing demographic changes that have emerged as a pivotal concern in the agendas of policymakers within European institutions.[2]

Though the demographic picture in Spain indicates that the country has found itself in an 'emergency situation' owing to an increase in longevity and a decline in fertility that have grown with singular intensity, the need to find new balances – and above all, sustainable and fair balances – in the relationships between the generations is a necessity that goes beyond any national border.[3] Among the universally acknowledged challenges to be addressed, as recognised by Eurostat,[4] are pressure on public budgets and fiscal systems, strains on pension and social security systems, adjusting the economy and particular work to an ageing labour force, possible labour market shortages as the number of working age persons decrease, the likely need for increased numbers of trained healthcare professionals, higher demand for healthcare services, long term (institutionalised) care, and potential conflicts between generations over the distribution of resources.

While the focus on the implications of demographic ageing may appear pertinent and urgently needed to many, it is crucial to acknowledge that the initiative undertaken by the European Parliament and the Council has historical antecedents that are not particularly distant. In a similar vein, 1993 was also declared the European Year of Older People and Solidarity between Generations. At the end of 1993, the EU Council and Ministers for Social Affairs declared that the Member States wished to pursue policies based on the essential principles of solidarity between and within

1 Decision n. 940/2011/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2011.
2 Herrera Campo, 2016; Karacsony, 2020.
3 Zanfrini, 2012.
4 Eurostat, 2011.

generations in order to promote the social integration of older persons.[5] As promptly documented by Snel and Cremer,[6] based on the proceedings of the European Symposium on Work and Ageing, which was held during the celebrations of that year, the questions posed then regarding policymakers' agenda are identical to those raised today.[7]

Building on the challenges highlighted by the European Year 2012, awareness of the imperative to address the issue of an ageing society has evolved through a more profound study of its relevance and impact. As demonstrated in this chapter, these circumstances have facilitated collaboration among research institutions that are simultaneously engaged in studying active ageing and intergenerational solidarity in Southern Europe, along with providing access to research funds that supplied the necessary resources for related research. First, spurred by the impetus from the European Year, the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (UCSC) in Italy, conducted a study from 2012 to 2014 titled, '"I Don't Want to Be Inactive" – A Longer Life: A Generational Challenge and an Opportunity for Society'.[8] Through collaborative networks among researchers, the Institute for Advanced Family Studies (IESF) at the Universitat Internacional de Catalunya (UIC Barcelona) established contact with UCSC researchers. Within the framework of institutional collaboration between the academic entities of Italy and Spain, a replication was initiated in the Spanish territory, with the study's contents being adapted to Spain's specific situation and the research objectives being redesigned, mirroring the survey conducted in Italy.

Second, the research received financial support and was conducted within the framework of the Santander IsFamily Chair.[9] The objective of this Chair is to depict the family as a model of intergenerational solidarity capable of adapting to change and providing support to its members. The research conducted by the Chair, of which the survey on intergenerational family solidarity (IFS) presented in this chapter is a component, views the family as an environment for the intergenerational transfer of resources. The primary threads of the research revolve around three fundamental aspects influencing the family: the economy, the health and care of individuals, and education.

This research also contributes to shaping social policies that facilitate families in carrying out these intergenerational processes. The Santander IsFamily Chair aspires to create a body of knowledge and initiatives that leverage the intergenerational potential of the family as an agent of social change. Consequently, the Chair plays a

5 C 343/01, 21/12/1993 p. 0001–0003.

6 Snel and Cremer, 1994.

7 Marcaletti, 2012.

8 Bramanti, Meda, and Rossi, 2016; Rossi et al., 2014; Scabini and Rossi, 2016.

9 The Santander IsFamily Chair (Intergenerational Solidarity in the Family) is an initiative established by the Institute for Advanced Family Studies in UIC Barcelona in cooperation with Banco Santander. The studies carried out under the Chair will, from a multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary perspective, consider the family to be a field in which resources are transferred between generations, focusing on three of its fundamental aspects.

role in the development and realisation of a society that accommodates all generations, allowing everyone to actively participate and enjoy equal rights and opportunities throughout their lives.

This chapter commences with a concise review of the two primary studies conducted in Spain on the topic of IFS. Thereafter, the chapter outlines the objectives of the IESF-UIC survey titled, 'Older Parents, Generations, and Family Solidarity: A Multilevel Analysis of the Spanish Context'.[10] The main results of this survey are also presented.

2. Exploring intergenerational solidarity in Spain

In addition to the IESF-UIC study presented in this chapter, various other studies dedicated to analysing IFS have been conducted in Spain. One notable example is the research derived from the OASIS project.[11] Two other studies that explicitly focus on assessing IFS in Spain are also particularly noteworthy.

The first of these studies, 'Individualisation and Family Solidarity', led by Gerardo Meil[12] and published in the 'Social Research' collection of the Fundación La Caixa, undertook an analysis of the resilience of family values and explored the dynamics of support and solidarity exchanged among different generations within families in Spain. The study also investigated the extent to which the family contributes to the individual well-being of its members, concurrently identifying primary family conflicts. This study drew on multiple sources of data, including the Social Networks and Solidarity survey (2007) designed by Meil; various surveys conducted by the Centre for Sociological Research; the International Social Survey Programme;[13] the second (2004) and fourth (2008) rounds of the European Social Survey; the Gender and Generations Survey; the Survey on Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (2004, 2007); and the European Quality of Life Survey (2007)

The principal discovery of the study suggests that in Spain, IFS is predominantly experienced by older individuals, who strongly adhere to norms of solidarity between generations. This is observed even in the face of pressures associated with calls to reinforce the role of the state and the market in caring for dependent family members. Another noteworthy indicator of the significance of IFS in Spanish society is the pivotal role played by families as primary agents of solidarity during the economic crisis that commenced in 2008. Conversely, key findings pertaining to the impact of individualisation on IFS reveal that the individualisation process

10 Marcaletti and Cavallotti, 2018.
11 Lowenstein and Ogg, 2003.
12 Meil, 2011.
13 For webpage see: https://issp.org/.

does not lead to spatial distancing between generations. Furthermore, in Spain, as in many other countries in Europe, the individualisation process coexists with the trend of adult children continuing to reside with their parents.[14] This phenomenon stems from the children's desire to maintain a standard of well-being that living with their parents can provide, particularly in challenging times. Simultaneously, from the parents' perspective, when children do not delay leaving the parental home, the concept of 'intimacy at a distance'[15] helps alleviate the effects of spatial distancing. Examining individualisation through the lens of indicators related to spatial proximity indicates that it has not diminished the frequency of contact among family members in Spain.

Moreover, functional solidarity in the country demonstrates considerable strength, with its frequency and the nature of assistance varying based on the life-course phase individuals find themselves in. Additionally, financial support, while not as prevalent as practical aid, is often directed towards purchasing a home.

In summary, existing research findings underscore that IFS remains a crucial component of social capital, enhancing both subjective and material well-being. However, for individuals to access this social capital, they must invest time and effort in maintaining consistent and satisfactory relationships, ensuring the resilience of family bonds.[16]

A second noteworthy contribution to the analysis of IFS in Spain is the study 'Older People and Intergenerational Solidarity in the Family'.[17] This research measured three of the six dimensions identified by Bengtson and Roberts[18] as defining IFS, generating an index of intergenerational solidarity. The analyses relied solely on official statistics, specifically the Use of Time Survey and the Family Budget Survey, both conducted and published by the Spanish National Institute of Statistics.

The primary findings of the research support the following five conclusions: 1) the intergenerational solidarity index calculation emphasises that the family is the pivotal institution for fostering intergenerational solidarity in society; 2) older people possess social value and serve as the primary contributors to social capital; 3) the social and economic significance of older individuals necessitates appropriate public and private recognition of their role. It is ethically imperative to ensure the economic dignity of all individuals, with particular attention to older people; 4) the solidarity function is not solely the exclusive responsibility of the state because this would be economically unviable and its development hinges on political choices; and 5) the recommended approach for promoting IFS is applying the principle of subsidiarity.

14 Sompolska-Rzechuła and Kurdyś-Kujawska, 2022.
15 Gratton and Haber, 1993; Rosenmayr, 1970.
16 Meil, 2011.
17 López López, González Hincapié, and Sánchez Fuentes, 2015.
18 Bengtson and Roberts, 1991.

The IESF-UIC study titled 'Older Parents, Generations, and Family Solidarity: A Multilevel Analysis of the Spanish Context' distinguishes itself from the aforementioned research by its unique characteristics, methodology, and strengths, which can be summarised as follows. This study stands out as the only survey conducted in Spain based on a national population sample, specifically designed to analyse intergenerational solidarity within families. Despite its non-probabilistic sampling approach, the survey replicates and respects the majority of characteristics exhibited by the target population. Moreover, focusing exclusively on intergenerational solidarity within the family, the survey delved into various aspects of this theme by employing a range of investigative tools, including sets of questions previously validated in other studies, as well as newly devised questions.

Further, the IESF-UIC study adopted a relational approach, in a perspective shared with the survey conducted in Italy and the Older People and Intergenerational Solidarity in the Family study.[19] The relational approach[20] interprets relationships both as objects of observation within the social world and as tools for observing reality itself. This perspective influences choices in operationalising the fundamental concepts that define relationships, facilitating their empirical observation in surveys. In the questionnaire employed for the IESF-UIC study, variables measuring functional family solidarity, the extent of the family network, family social capital, and the normative function of family solidarity were operationalised according to the principles of relational sociology.

3. Results

As foreshadowed in the introduction of this chapter, the aim of the IESF-UIC study was to scrutinise the dimensions of intergenerational solidarity within families in Spain. The research drew inspiration from the study '"I Don't Want to Be Inactive" – A Longer Life: A Generational Challenge and an Opportunity for Society', conducted by UCSC. Indeed, the IESF-UIC survey replicated a similar study for Spain, modelled after the one led by UCSC, albeit with several modifications.

In this chapter, we present the results of the univariate and bivariate analyses focusing on some of the most significant themes that characterised the research, including a general description of the sample; the structure of family relationships; family networks, social ties, and functional solidarity; normative solidarity and social capital; health status, leisure activities, and the use of technologies; participation in associations and volunteering; and representations of old age.

19 López López, González Hincapié, and Sánchez Fuentes, 2015.
20 Donati, 1991, 2013; Terenzi, Boccacin, and Prandini, 2016.

4. Description of the sample

The survey sample was composed of 608 valid cases of parents aged 65–74 years who were resident in Spain and lived with their children. The questionnaires were administered and collected at the end of 2016.

The sample offered a good representation of the age and gender distribution of the total population of the same age in Spain, although it featured the bias of including only parents with living children. In defining the sample, it was not possible to find official data that would enable a comparison of the characteristics used to describe the sample of parents aged 65–74 years old, which was distributed to reflect the total population. We can only observe that within the sample, 16.3% of parents had one child, 43.4% had two children, and 40.3% had three or more children. In 6.1% of the cases, the parents had one or more deceased children.

In terms of spatial mobility, in 11.7% of the cases, no child lived less than 50 km away from their parents, confirming the stronger role that intimacy at a distance still plays in a country like Spain. In addition to distance, if we also consider the number of children the parents had, the percentages are higher. For parents who had only one child, in 73.7% of the cases, the child lived closer than 50 km from their parents; for parents with two children, 63.3% lived that close; and for parents with three or more children, 57.1% lived within 50 km. If we consider that 71.4% of the parents were born in the municipality of their current residence or in another municipality of the same Autonomous Community, it is possible to observe how the interviewees with only one child had, throughout their lives, experienced approximately the same geographical mobility as their own descendants. Greater mobility of the descendants was observed among parents with two or more children.

Regarding the number of grandchildren, 18.4% of the sample had none, 16.0% had one, 21.2% had two, and 44.4% had three or more. Given the age of the sample, it is interesting to consider that amongst those who had grandchildren, in 35.3% of the cases, the grandchildren had already reached the legal age of 18.

In terms of other family members, only 3.6% of interviewees did not have siblings, 17.3% had one, 22.4% had two, 17.1% had three, and 39.6% had four or more. This relative majority of respondents who were raised in large families better explains the demographic transition underway in Spain: 56.7% of those interviewed had three or more siblings, but only 40.3% had three or more children themselves (it should also be noted that this percentage is lower in the actual population because those without children were excluded from the sample). To conclude the description of the interviewees' family structures, it was observed that in 3.0% of the cases, the respondent's father was still alive, while in 11.3% of the cases, their mother was still alive. The percentages of respondents with living mothers- and fathers-in-law were also very low and reflected the same proportion (3.6% and 10.2%, respectively). Considering the age of the interviewees, these figures are very low, a fact that contributes – as we will explain later – to pushing the flows of intergenerational solidarity more towards the descendants (descending family solidarity)

or peers (horizontal family solidarity) than towards older generations (ascending family solidarity).

In terms of descriptive census characteristics, in 61.8% of the cases, the survey was answered by the primary earner of the household (a figure that rises to 89.1% for males); in 26.2% of the cases, another person answered; and in 12.0% of the cases, the survey was answered by a person who contributed financially to the household and roughly to the same extent as the other household members. Based on the income of the main earner in the household, 18.9% of those interviewed were upper or upper-middle class, 44.7% were middle class, and 36.4% were lower-middle or lower class (General Media Survey). This sample is representative for Spain. Four in five interviewees, thus, fell into the middle or lower classes based on their stated income and financial situation. Despite their positioning in the lower-middle social class, it is interesting to note that 91.9% of interviewees owned their own home, only 5.8% lived in rented accommodation, and 2.3% had other living arrangements. Home ownership is, without a doubt, a fundamental source of financial protection for older people in Spain.[21] In addition to this, 79.9% of the interviewees were receiving a retirement pension, whereas other forms of income (each interviewee indicated an average of 1.1 sources of income), including survivor's pension (9.7%), income from employment (5.9%), and rental income (3.1%), comprised minority shares. A total of 6.6% of the sample stated that they had no income.

On average, 1.53 individuals contributed to the household income. The average number of people living off this income, irrespective of whether or not they lived in the household, was 2.13. This figure underscores the idea of the family as a place for redistributing wealth. Moreover, 24.3% of interviewees did not know the average net monthly income of the household (including personal income and that of all members of the household) or did not want to answer the question. However, amongst those who did answer, half of the sample had an average monthly household income of up to 1,200 euros, while only 3.0% declared having an income exceeding 3,000 euros. The majority of those interviewed (59.4%) stated that they had no financial difficulties or problems with regard to saving a little money every month. More than a quarter of the sample (28.7%) reported that they were only able to cover their outgoings, while 11.9% had financial difficulties or needed financial support.

Regarding educational attainment, 8.8% of those surveyed had no formal education. The majority had completed the first cycle of secondary education (57.9%), 17.5% had completed the second cycle of secondary education, and 15.9% had attained a tertiary education degree. In general, though this level of education may appear low, it differs greatly from that of the interviewees' parents, among whom, 37.6% were or had been illiterate or had or previously had no formal education, with the majority only completing the first grades of secondary education. The only significant difference in educational attainment between men and women in the sample was that 18.1% of men had completed a tertiary education degree, compared to 13.9% of women.

21 See: EUROSTAT, 2020.

In terms of being economically active, and consistent with what was observed concerning the households' sources of income, only 2.5% of the interviewees were currently employed (3.2% amongst males). This figure aligns with the 2016 official statistics for Spain, which indicated that the employment rate amongst the 65 to 74 age group was 3.4%. The vast majority of the interviewees were retired or pensioners (80.3%, rising to 96.1% amongst males, as 30.9% of the female interviewees stated that they were housewives).

In terms of the interviewees' current or last job, the generation studied in our survey lived through the transition from a mostly agricultural and industrial economy to another which, whilst still reliant on manufacturing, is more service-oriented. The proportion of labourers amongst those interviewed (43.7%) was practically the same as in their parents' generation (43.0%). However, among the parents' generation, the percentage working in agriculture (mostly as day labourers) exceeded a quarter of the total (28.3%), whereas senior, intermediate, and entry-level administrative employees comprised a minority (9.4%). In relation to their fathers and mothers, these proportions were almost the inverse amongst those interviewed: those working in agriculture comprised just 7.7% of the total sample, whereas those working at different levels in administrative jobs comprised 22.1%.

In summary, the key findings indicated that the sample effectively represented the Spanish population within the age group selected for the study. In addition, the current generation, while not as numerous as its predecessor, belongs to large families. Over four in five interviewees were grandparents, and a significant portion had adult grandchildren; conversely, few interviewees had living parents or parents-in-law. This generation was predominantly inactive in the labour market, with the majority being retirees or housewives, although a small proportion were engaged in employment or job seeking. Further, the educational attainment of this generation was moderate to low, aligning with their social class. Nearly all the interviewees resided in their own homes, with four in five relying on a pension and household income – for half of the interviewees, this income was less than an average of 1,200 euros net per month, which is low for Spain.

5. Structure of family relationships

Following the above analysis of the general characteristics of the sample, we now examine the marital status and household composition (cohabitees) of the older parents studied. Approximately two-thirds of those interviewed were married or lived with their partner (69.6%), just over one-fifth (21.2%) were widowed or single, and the rest were separated or divorced (9.2%). Women were more commonly single or widowed (28.4% compared to 13.0% of men) and separated or divorced (9.9% compared to 8.5% of men). Concerning household composition, the most striking finding

was that 18.9% of the sample lived alone. Of those who did not live alone, 85.5% lived at home with their spouse or civil partner, 31.8% lived with their children, and 6.9% lived with grandchildren or nieces/nephews. Consequently, half of the households comprised partners living without children (51.0%), followed by people living alone (18.9%), and partners living with children/grandchildren (16.5%). The smallest households comprised single-parent families (9.4%) and other household types (9.4%). The typical arrangement of the survey cohort (69.9%) was, therefore, living with a partner (without children) or alone (see Table 1).

Table 1. Structure of family relationships[22]

Type of family	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**	**Percentage excluding single parents** *(N = 489) (%)*
Partner with children	85	14.0	17,2
Partner without children	310	51.0	62,9
Partner with children and grandchildren	15	2.5	3,0
Single parent	57	9.4	11,6
Other	26	4.3	5,3
Single person	115	18.9	
Total	608	100.0	100.0

Almost one-third of households were multigenerational. In total, 25.0% of households comprised two generations, 4.8% comprised three generations, and the remaining 70.2% comprised just one generation. These data suggest that multigenerational families are not a reality of the past: though fully multigenerational families (i.e. three cohabiting generations) represented only a small minority, those that covered two generations (e.g. elderly parents and adult children, parents and ancestors) were more widespread and cannot be considered a novelty.

Looking at the interviewees' care duties for other members of their families, 5.4% of those living with a partner were also their carers, either because their partner was dependent or because they had a chronic illness requiring care (full-time care in half of cases). This figure rose to 27.3% amongst those who had living parents or parents-in-law, who – as we have seen above – represented just a small number of those interviewed: 3.0% had a living father and 11.3% had a living mother (full-time care was required in one in four cases). Only 1.8% of those with siblings were responsible

22 Source: Author's own work.

for their care. In total, 52.6% of those with grandchildren cared for them; in 50% of these cases, care was provided on a part-time basis. This last figure anticipates one of the peculiar characteristics that emerged when analysing the sample, namely, the high involvement of older parents in the care and custody of their grandchildren. This activity takes time, to the detriment of other aspects of active ageing, such as leisure activities or civic participation.

In conclusion, two-thirds of the sample (especially women) lived alone or with a partner and were, thus, more prone to experiencing eroded family dynamics and loneliness. More than one in four of the total sample had children still living at home (rising to almost one-third when considering only those interviewees who did not live alone). Taking these characteristics into consideration, multigenerational households represented less than one-third of the total. Care was provided mostly downwards towards grandchildren and children. Few of the interviewees had living parents.

6. Family networks, social ties, and functional solidarity

A dedicated segment of the survey focused on examining the interviewees' family and social networks, shedding light on their experiences of reciprocity and solidarity in their relationships. Initially, the survey inquired about the number of family members, friends, and neighbours with whom the older parents interviewed maintained substantial and authentic connections. This definition aligns with the relational sociology framework proposed by Donati.[23] Subsequently, the survey delved into the number of family members, friends, and neighbours whom the respondents believed they could count on in times of need. These questions were strategically incorporated to gauge the extent of the interviewees' relationships, a scope positively correlated with the structural characteristics of the family unit. For instance, older parents cohabitating with their children had an above-average number of family members, friends, and neighbours with whom they maintained significant ties and upon whom they could rely in times of need.

In terms of the frequency distribution, 19.7% of those interviewed had between 1 and 4 family members with whom they maintained significant and genuine ties, 26.6% had between 5 and 9, 30.1% had between 10 and 19, 22.5% had 20 or more family members, and only 1.0% had none. The frequency distribution was, therefore, concentrated on between 5 and 9 and between 10 and 19 family members. Adding together the percentages from these categories totals 56.7% of the sample. The average number of family members among the interviewees was 12.8, with a median value of 10. In addition, 42.1% stated that they had between 1 and 4 genuine friendships,

23 Donati, 2013.

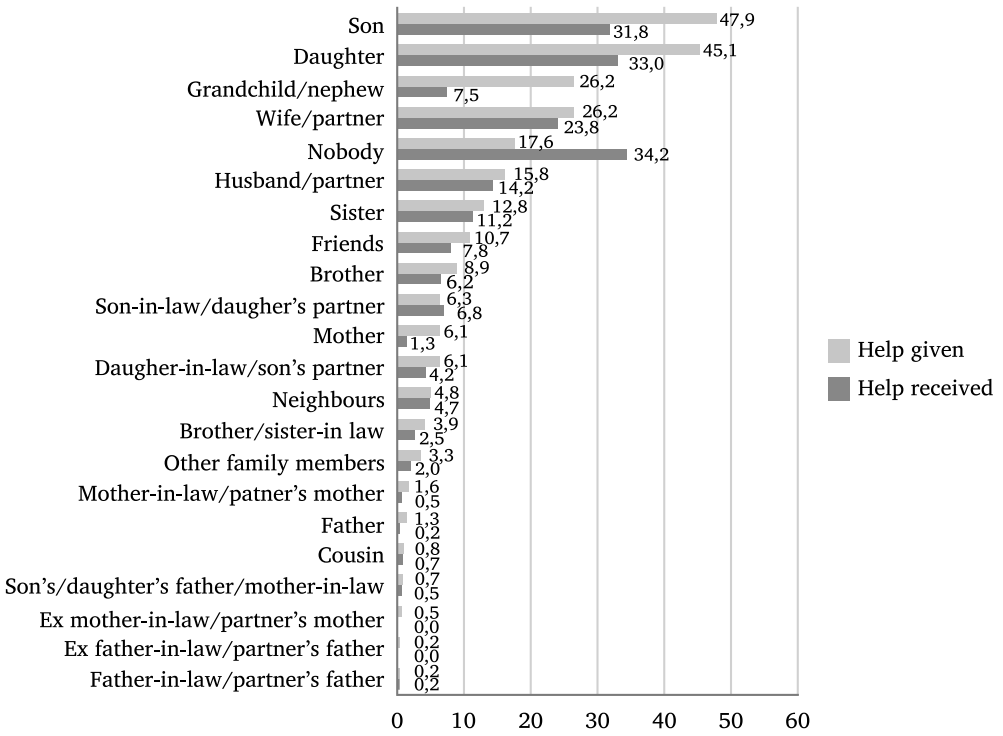
24.5% had between 5 and 9, 16.3% had between 10 and 19, 7.1% had 20 or more, and 10.0% stated that they had no friends. Consequently, the frequency distribution with respect to friends was concentrated in less numerous categories, that is, between 1 and 4 friends and between 5 and 9 friends, which added together represents exactly two-thirds of the total (66.6%). The average number of friends the interviewees reported was 6.8, with a median value of 4. Finally, for neighbourhood ties, 51.6% of the interviewees stated that they had a significant relationship with between 1 and 4 neighbours, 11.3% had a significant relationship with between 5 and 9 neighbours, 9.9% had a significant relationship with between 10 and 19 neighbours, 3.1% had a significant relationship with 20 or more neighbours, and almost a quarter of the total (24.0%) had no relationships with their neighbours. In this case, the frequencies were concentrated in the even less numerous or nil categories. The sum of results for no neighbour ties and between 1 and 4 neighbour ties exceeded three-quarters of the total (75.6%). On average, interviewees had relationships with 4.2 neighbours, with a median value of 2.

Similar results were recorded for the number of family members, friends, and neighbours who the interviewees felt they could rely on in times of need, with even lower figures obtained than for the number of significant and genuine ties they reported having. More than two-thirds of the total sample (67.1%) had 1–4 or 5–9 family members they felt they could rely on; the average number was 8.4, and the median was 6. In terms of friends they could rely on, 70.2% of the interviewees had none or 1–4, with an average number of 4.2, and a median value of 3. Similarly, 31.9% had no neighbours they could rely on; a total of 86.5% had either no neighbours or 1–4 neighbours they could rely on, with an average number of 2.4, and a median value of 1.

These data show that the number of family members, friends, and neighbours that the interviewees felt they could rely on in times of need was lower than the number with whom they maintained significant and genuine ties. Some structural characteristics of the family unit help increase the scope of relationships more than other personal traits (such as gender, age, or feeling old). For those interviewees with children still living at home, the average number of people with whom they had significant ties rose to 14.5 family members, 8.4 friends, and 4.4 neighbours. The same pattern was observed for support in times of need: the average number of people interviewees with children felt they could rely on rose to 8.8 family members, 4.9 friends, and 2.7 neighbours.

According to the structure of these family, friendship, and neighbour networks, another aspect investigated was functional solidarity, which is the support exchanged amongst these networks of relationships. It was striking that the interviewees felt that they consistently gave more support than they received in all types of relationships (Figure 1). The only instance where this was not the case was relationships with a ‘son-in-law/partner of the daughter’, in which the interviewees believed they received a little more support (6.8%) than they gave (6.3%).

Figure 1. Help given and help[24]



Of particular relevance is that more than a third of those interviewed (34.2%) reported that they had not received any type of support in the 12 months prior to the interview, and half of this number claimed they had not supported anyone during the last year (17.6%). Examining the hierarchies of the support given and received (excluding the 'nobody' category) proves interesting. Help was most frequently given in the order of son, daughter, grandchild, wife/female partner, and husband/male partner. Help was most frequently received from, in descending order, daughters, sons, wives/female partners, husbands/male partners, and sisters. Consequently, children, followed by spouses, were both the main targets and the main providers of support, with slight gender-based differences. Help was directed more towards male children than female children, whereas daughters provided more help than sons. Support flowed from parents to children (and vice versa) and to grandchildren more than towards spouses/partners. The difference between the support given and received was greater in these vertical relationships and tended to be minimised in horizontal relationships. We can speculate that in relationships where support has

24 Source: Author's own work.

more of a normative basis, the trend is to provide more. Indeed, comparing the mean values suggests that for both support given and received, the figures are consistently higher when the normative bind is stronger.

Moreover, it is interesting to compare the perception of support given and received between the husband/male partner and wife/female partner. In general, male interviewees declared that they gave more support than female interviewees but that they had received less. Within the couple relationship, this evidence is amplified, with male partners reporting that they had given and received support from their female partners much more than the other way around.

In light of the above, we can add that in terms of the direction of the support given, 66.1% of interviewees provided support to their children (or grandchildren); in other words, there was a descending flow of support from the older to the younger generation. Further, 17.6% stated that no support had been exchanged, 7.9% reported that support had been given horizontally (between partners, siblings, cousins, brothers/sisters-in-law, etc.), 6.7% stated that support had been given in both an ascending and descending direction, and 1.6% stated that only ascending support had been given. Overall, over the previous 12 months, almost three in four interviewees had provided help and support to their descendants (66.1% + 6.7%), whereas only one interviewee in 12 had provided some form of help to older generations (1.6% + 6.7%).

In summary, we can conclude that the structure of family relationships and the composition of family units constitute two variables that are highly influential in shaping both the quantity and quality of support exchanges. This influence spans not only across the intergenerational level but also, as we have explored, within the same generation.

7. Normative solidarity and social capital

The survey concentrated on two intricately related aspects of IFS. On the one hand, it delved into what is identified as normative solidarity, and on the other, it examined what serves both as a product of these norms and their perpetuator – family social capital. Regarding the first of these two aspects, particularly parents' relationships with their children, the interviewees were questioned about the support they perceived they had provided concerning three pivotal life choices: career, settling down, and starting a family.

Overall, 65.1% of interviewees considered that they had provided a lot of support to their children to cultivate a profession, 30.3% quite a lot, 3.1% a little support, and 1.5% none. Concerning settling down, 35.7% of interviewees believed they had provided a lot of support, 34.7% quite a lot, 17.9% a little support, and 11.7% none. Finally, 31.4% felt they had provided quite a lot of support to their children to start

a family, 28.6% a lot, 21.7% a little support, and 18.3% none. More support was, therefore, given to help children make career decisions than to assist them in having their own children.

Analysing the responses by sex reveals that mothers provided more support than fathers in all dimensions, with greater differences noted with regard to support for settling down and having children. Distinguishing between the two age groups shows that older interviewees felt they had provided more support. The average scores (where 1 = none and 4 = a lot) show a clear downward trend in scores from 'cultivate a profession' to 'settle down' and 'have children'. The exception in this case was interviewees who had children still living at home, who had higher perceptions of having supported their children to cultivate a profession. Conversely, those who did not have children living at home had higher scores – for understandable reasons – for providing assistance to their children to settle down and have children of their own.

Overall, when describing their relationships with their children, the interviewees reported having given and received affection, respect, and support in equal measure, with financial help being the only exception. Feelings of blame, remorse, and resentment towards children were extremely low. The interviewees' satisfaction with their children's achievements was predominant, especially among mothers, individuals aged 65–69, and those who had helped all their children to leave the family unit. As parents, the interviewees felt they had done everything possible to ensure their children's well-being and that they had behaved appropriately with them.

However, examining subsamples of the interviewees reveals some differences. There was considerable female/maternal positivity towards children, which prevailed over male/paternal positivity in all indicators, regardless of whether or not the interviewees lived with their children. The sense of having given and received affection, respect, and support in equal measure was slightly stronger among those who resided with their children. Similarly, factors associated with the parental role emerged slightly more within this demographic.

Concerning the respective roles of parents and children, the survey asked another two questions related to the moral obligation to provide care (i.e. another dimension of normative solidarity), each with two possible answers to choose from. The question first investigated parents' attitudes towards their children, and the second examined children's attitudes towards their parents.

In answer to the question on parents' responsibility towards their children, 63.8% of those interviewed responded that 'parents are duty-bound to do the best by their children, although this comes at great sacrifice'. Conversely, 21.7% responded that 'parents have their own lives and should not be asked to make excessive sacrifices'. The rest of the respondents answered 'none of the two' or 'don't know'.

In answer to the question on children's responsibility towards their parents, 44.9% responded that 'adult children have their own lives and should not be asked to make excessive sacrifices'. Conversely, 33.4% responded that 'adult children are

duty-bound to support their elderly parents, although this comes at great sacrifice'. The rest of the respondents answered, 'none of the two' or 'don't know'. The parents' perceptions indicate that normative solidarity was, therefore, professed as more binding for parents than for children.

Analysing the data by sex shows that women were more likely than men to support their children and to receive support from them, without asking for excessive sacrifices. Breaking down the data by age shows that the two age groups (65–69 and 70–74) agreed in equal measure (63.8% in both cases) to the initial statement: 'parents are duty-bound'. However, they differed with respect to the statement that 'parents have their own lives' (23.6% and 19.5%, respectively). The youngest group yielded slightly higher percentages for the statements regarding children's responsibilities towards their parents: 34.0% of the youngest group of interviewees felt that 'adult children are duty-bound', compared to 32.6% of the oldest group. Within the youngest group, 45.7% felt that 'adult children have their own lives', compared to 44.0% of the oldest group.

Finally, if we distinguish between interviewees who did not live with their children and those who did, the latter group yielded the highest percentage of agreement with the statement on parents' responsibility towards their children (66.2% and 63.0%, respectively). The percentage for the statement on children's responsibility to support their parents was also the highest for those still living with their children (40.8%). The circle of normative solidarity is, therefore, stronger when parents and their children still live together.

By establishing and crystallising shared rules of conduct within the family, normative solidarity contributes to giving shape and content to family social capital. From this perspective, analysing social capital means analysing the way in which normative solidarity regulates and reproduces the quality of relationships between family members. Moreover, social capital[25] is an important aspect for analysing the connection between intergenerational solidarity and the possession of relational resources in family life –defined as primary social capital[26]– and in the widest relational sphere (secondary and generalised social capital).

Primary social capital was measured via structured questions about trust, reciprocal support, collaboration, and shared activities. The interviewees were asked to answer about their families, including themselves and their children, even if they did not live together.

In terms of trust within family relationships, the interviewees stated that they trusted their families (4.36 out of 5), that they felt they could rely on one another (4.39), and that they could freely express ideas and opinions (4.27). They also lent and shared personal items among their family members (3.64). Comparing the average scores for the interviewees who did not live with their children with those

25 Adler and Kwon, 2002; Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Fukuyama, 1995; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 1993.

26 Donati, 2003; Donati and Prandini, 2007; Prandini, 2006.

who lived with one or more of their children, those in the latter group yielded higher values for all the questions that were framed positively (i.e. questions about reciprocal trust, trust in others, freedom of expression of ideas and opinions, and exchanging belongings). The average scores for negatively framed questions (i.e. questions about hiding important matters or feeling betrayed by others) among those who lived with their children were lower. The results, therefore, suggest a direct relationship between living together and feeling trust, which in turn, is an element of primary social capital.

Regarding reciprocal support, the highest number of interviewees stated that the members of their family could rely on one another for moral support (4.25 out of 5). This was followed, in descending order, by the beliefs that if one family member has problems, they can ask the others for help (4.10); that anyone who provides help with a certain matter knows that the others will do the same for them (4.08); that those who give advice also accept it (4.00); and (with a somewhat lower score) that the members of their family expect too much of one another (2.21). All these average scores increased for interviewees who lived with their children, with the exception of the question on having excessive expectations of family members. This question was framed negatively, and the resulting score for parents living with children was slightly lower. Again, the results show a direct relationship between living together and volunteering reciprocal support, which in turn, is another element of primary social capital.

In terms of cooperation and the division of labour, the highest number of interviewees stated that both parents shared in educating their children (4.17 out of 5), followed in decreasing order by the beliefs that when there is a problem, everyone works together to solve it (4.01); that decisions are made jointly by everyone (3.98); that everyone lends a hand with daily tasks (3.73); that everyone helps (based on their ability) with domestic chores (3.69), and; that when there is a problem, everyone is invited to make suggestions (3.62). Comparing the results between interviewees who did not live with their children and those who did reveals higher levels of cooperation amongst the second group; in other words, in this case, there was also a direct relationship between cooperation and living together.

This section, which was dedicated to the results pertaining to the normative dimension of IFS and family social capital, underscores that the moral commitment to collaborate, share, and provide support, as well as the practical implementation of these values, is more pronounced in households where older parents reside with their children. Conversely, the level of support extended to children to enable them to establish their own families and have children is more significant among couples of older adult parents who live without cohabiting children.

8. Health status, leisure activities, and use of technologies

One section of the survey specifically addressed the interviewees' health, use of leisure time, and use of technology. Concerning health status, 68.4% of the interviewees did not suffer from any chronic disease, whereas 16.3% had a disease that did not limit them in any way, 11.7% had a disease that did not seriously limit them, and 3.6% suffered from a disease with serious limitations. Hence, a total of four in five of the interviewees (80.1%) did not suffer from any disease or disease-related limitations. This figure rose to 82.8% amongst men and fell to 77.8% for women. Similarly, the rate of absence of diseases and limitations also rose to 82.8% amongst relatively older interviewees (70–74 years) and dropped to 76.9% amongst the youngest (65–69 years).

Despite there being no identifiable causality between the feeling of being old and the condition of being ill (that is, knowing which is the cause and which is the effect), there was, nevertheless, a correlation between the two. The percentage of those suffering from a disease with no serious limitations was double amongst interviewees who felt old compared with those who did not (23.6% vs. 11.5%). This percentage tripled for those with diseases involving serious implications (6.2% vs. 1.9%).

The results indicate that the sample was in good health overall: more than two in three interviewees stated not having any chronic diseases. This may also be explained by the bias produced by the sampling strategy that was used, whereby the chance door-to-door method could have been biased towards 'preselection' of available 'healthy' interviewees.

In addition to their health status, the interviewees were asked about their frame of mind during recent weeks as this is a fundamental aspect of overall psycho-physical well-being. In particular, we asked a set of specific questions on sleep, feeling useful, decision-making ability, stress, reaction to difficulties, state of unhappiness/depression, and confidence in oneself to measure the interviewees' frame of mind.

The interviewees responded that they often felt able to make decisions (2.76 out of 3.00, with 1 = never and 3 = often) and felt useful (2.74). They reported having problems sleeping because of worries 'sometimes' more than 'never' (1.76) and felt constantly stressed in the same measure (1.71). They may have felt unable to overcome difficulties (1.61) and unhappy and depressed (1.56). More rarely, interviewees described having lost confidence in themselves (1.37). These findings reveal a generation that considers itself cognitively healthy and in a position to support others.

Female interviewees reported sleep problems, stress, and feeling unhappy/depressed more than males. Comparing the two age groups in the sample did not reveal any significant differences, nor did living with children cause any significant differences in the results. The data, therefore, confirm greater vulnerability amongst women to psychological distress – a risk that can also be exacerbated by

living conditions. Sleep loss on account of worry and feeling unhappy was more prevalent amongst widows. This was also the case for women who were separated/divorced, with this group experiencing a much higher level of stress. A sense of usefulness was much more evident amongst married women or those living with a partner.

During their leisure time, the interviewees mainly went for walks or bicycle rides, did gardening, grew vegetables, or went fishing (2.44 out of 3.00, with 1 = never and 3 = often). Other activities included reading newspapers (2.12) and books (1.92); going on excursions and trips (1.90); going to the cinema, theatre, or concerts (1.55); going swimming, doing physical training, or dancing (1.47); visiting exhibitions, museums, and archaeological sites (1.46); going to football matches and other sporting competitions (1.39); using the library and attending conferences (1.32); and playing football, tennis, golf, and boules (1.16). There was no difference between the genders in the average scores for free-time activities that are most suitable for couples (e.g. going to the cinema and theatre, visiting exhibitions, going on excursions and trips). The highest average scores amongst women were for physical training and dancing and reading books. Amongst men, the highest scores were for walking, vegetable growing and fishing, playing outdoor sports, reading the newspaper, and watching sporting competitions. All leisure activities were practised less as the interviewees' age increased.

Although the older parents interviewed were in good health, none of them showed signs of being particularly active during their free time, as shown in the results above. One interviewee in eight (12.5%) stated never doing any of the first type of free-time activities (i.e. those that imply a greater level of physical activity outdoors, such as swimming, physical training, dancing, walks, gardening, fishing, football, and tennis, etc.). This figure rose to 14.8% amongst women, 16.0% amongst interviewees aged 70–74, 18.6% amongst those who felt old, and (somewhat surprisingly) 17.2% amongst those who lived with their children, as though the mere presence of these children had robbed them of free time to practice physical activities outdoors, and not the other way around.

Another interesting topic that can be related to active ageing is the relationship the sample had with technology as this is a fundamental indicator of the level of openness to innovations, their willingness to learn, and older adults' ability to use the most modern and up-to-date information and communication technologies. Psychophysical wellbeing, pro-activeness, and the use of information and communication technologies are often cited as fundamental aspects of a good active ageing strategy.[27] However, the relationship between our sample of interviewees and new technologies was concerning and revealed the strength of the digital divide,[28] something that can only be positively overcome via intergenerational exchanges, as we will see later.

27 Bramanti et al., 2016.
28 van Dijk and Hacker, 2003.

The interviewees either owned or had the following electronic devices or services in their homes (multiple choice question): smartphone with internet connection (81.8%), internet connection (modem and router) with contract (73.7%), laptop or desktop computer (68.1%), tablet (29.2%), pre-paid TV package (24.3%), e-reader (12.0%), and videogame console (7.9%). However, the results showed that their level of use of these technologies was low (multiple choice question): smartphone with internet connection (50.7%), internet connection (modem and router) with contract (34.9%), laptop or desktop computer (28.8%), tablet (11.2%), pre-paid TV package (13.7%), e-reader (4.8%), and videogame console (0.3%). There was, therefore, a significant difference (30 percentage points) between the possession and use of smartphones, internet connections, and personal computers.

The use of the Internet was particularly polarised as more than half of the sample never connected to the Internet (51.5%), whereas more than one in four connected almost every day (26.2%). A further 9.0% of the total sample was always online. Users of new technologies represented more than one-third of the total sample.

Intergenerational mediation and exchanges play an important role in the relationship that older adults have with technology. Those interviewed had used different means to learn how to get online (multiple choice question): 49.5% of those who connected to the Internet had learned to do so with their children and 7.1% with their grandchildren. Furthermore, 35.6% taught themselves and 20.3% completed an information technology course. A lower number reported having learned to use the Internet in pairs (e.g. with their partner, friends, or relatives and peers).

Interviewees who used the Internet stated (multiple choice question) that they were now more informed about current affairs than before (54.2% of cases) and that they used it to stay in touch with friends and family (53.2%). Fewer interviewees said that the Internet had helped them get back in touch with old friends (26.1%) or that it had facilitated new topics of conversation with their children and friends (25.4%).

In summary, our study results reveal that the sampled older parents maintained a robust state of health, which was closely linked to a strong sense of purpose within their familial and societal roles. However, the female subgroup exhibited somewhat higher levels of psychological unease. Despite the overall positive health outlook, a significant portion of the respondents was relatively inactive, with this trend being more prominent among women, the oldest interviewees, those who perceived themselves as old, and those cohabiting with their children. The fact that over half of the sample refrained from going online underscores the challenging relationship older generations have with technology. Nearly half of those who did engage online had acquired these skills from their children, emphasising the crucial role of intergenerational dynamics in knowledge exchange and learning in both directions.

9. Participation in organisations and volunteering

After investigating the interviewees' psychophysical wellbeing, free-time activities, and use of technology, the survey then specifically looked at an aspect of active ageing strategies that the European Commission documentation refers to as 'ageing well … and staying socially active and creative'.[29] This is one aspect of the initial concept of active ageing formulated by the World Health Organization, which was expressed in terms of maintaining (or maximising) the possibilities for (social) participation whilst ageing.[30] Participation in organisations and volunteering are good examples of where individuals can get involved at the community level and is related to social capital endowment.

The majority of interviewees (72.2%) were not members of any group or organisation. In descending order (multiple choice question), 8.2% were members of groups that run educational and cultural activities, 5.4% were in church groups, 4.1% were in groups and organisations that provide social support, 3.3% were in groups linked to political parties and trade unions, 3.0% were in human rights groups, 2.6% were in sports or recreation groups, 2.0% were in local and neighbourhood committees, 1.6% were members of professional organisations, and 1.2% were in groups that promote natural environment conservation.

Of those involved in a group, only a minority (42.0%) participated as a volunteer, either doing so irregularly (40.2%), for less than one hour (13.0%), or for between 1 and 5 hours per week (32.0%). In ascending order, 16.6% of those interviewed had participated in meetings to discuss problems in their town or neighbourhood, 36.3% had made charitable donations in the last year, and 90.5% voted in the most recent elections held before the interview.

The results demonstrate that despite being in a good physical and cognitive state and seeing themselves as useful, the generation studied in this survey was not very socially active or committed. This contrasts with the values this population group shared: on a scale ranging from 1 to 4, where 4 indicates 'very important', values that usually imply involvement in prosocial activities were scored by the interviewees as follows: respect towards others (3.81), responsibility (3.77), solidarity (3.63), respect for the environment (3.33), and culture (3.18).

The findings also go some way to confirming that the sample had a characteristically low propensity to participate. On the one hand, the interviewees instead devoted their time to their grandchildren (where relevant) but almost never full-time: 82 of the 100 interviewees had grandchildren; of these, 75 provided part-time or limited support at certain times. On the other hand, in addition to their limited uptake of leisure activities (with the exception of walks, gardening, and fishing), the sample displayed a very low level of social participation, with little added value in terms of the specific support they provided: of the 100 interviewees, only 28

29 European Commission, 2007.
30 World Health Organization, 2002.

belonged to a group; among these, only 12 gave time to the group or organisation voluntarily, and of these 12, only two volunteered for more than 5 hours each week. We noted a more intense level of participation in terms of donations to charity and voting in elections. Research into active citizenship would attest to this being typically linked to a low level of pro-activeness.

10. Representation of old age

A noteworthy aspect of the survey that deserves discussion is the section that delved into how older parents perceive old age. The initial three questions in this section specifically explored perspectives related to societal views, familial perceptions, and the interviewees' individual understandings of ageing.

When asked about feeling old within themselves, 60.2% of the sample declared that they do not feel old in the slightest, 27.1% felt a little old, 11.0% felt quite old, and 1.6% felt very old. However, the percentages varied when they were asked to what extent their families considered them old, with the share of 'not feeling old' decreasing (53.8% not in the slightest, 32.6% a little, 11.2% quite old, and 2.5% very old), and when asked to what extent society considers them old (42.3% not in the slightest, 32.1% a little, 21.4% quite old, 4.3% very old). As such, the interviewees generally felt younger than they believed their family and society perceived them to be.

For analysis, we used the first dimension, 'Do you feel old in and of yourself?', to distinguish the group who declared that they did not feel old in the slightest (60.2% of the sample) from those who felt old to varying degrees (the remaining 39.8%). We use this dichotomous variable to more closely examine the results presented according to other aspects of the representation of old age.

When asked about factors that contribute to a person feeling old, the interviewees indicated, in descending order (multiple choice question), physical conditions (72.9%), perceived loss of cognitive faculties (44.6%), loneliness (42.6%), having lost one or several loved ones (19.4%), lack of future plans (13.7%), not knowing how to pass the time (13.3%), having stopped work (9.0%), financial difficulties (7.9%), having cut down on social interactions (7.2%), and feeling excluded from new communication technologies (2.0%).

Those who did not consider themselves old mostly highlighted dimensions such as loneliness, lack of future plans, and not knowing how to pass the time. Those who considered themselves old seemed to have largely accepted these dimensions as aspects of old age.

However, amongst those who considered themselves old, the dimensions most frequently mentioned were even more pronounced, from physical conditions to the perceived loss of cognitive faculties, and, particularly, having lost one or several loved ones. These results are unsurprising, given that the literature on the subject

sets out the onset of chronic diseases and the loss of a partner as two of the symbolic thresholds of old age.[31]

When asked which aspects of life are most important in old age, the interviewees responded with, in descending order, enjoying good health (80.1%); having good family relationships (52.6%); being independent (46.7%); having a good relationship with one's partner (21.4%); having good friends (18.4%); having a sufficient amount of savings (11.0%); having many experiences, interests, and hobbies (10.9%); enjoying oneself (9.2%); and having a religious faith (5.4%).

With respect to the total sample, amongst those who considered themselves to be old, the most significant aspects mentioned were being independent; having a good relationship with one's partner; having sufficient savings; having experiences, interests, and hobbies; and having a religious faith. Conversely, compared to the overall sample, this group selected the following aspects less frequently: enjoying good health, having good family relationships, and having good friends. Once again, the results imply that those who considered themselves to be old took for granted and accepted certain fundamental aspects of the transition into old age (worsening health, deterioration of family relationships, loss of friends), which up to now had not been experienced to the same degree by those who did not feel old.

Furthermore, when asked about which aspects of life they were most satisfied with, the interviewees responded with, in descending order, family (average score of 3.69 on a scale of 1 to 4), where they lived (3.45), their life as a whole (3.43), their friends (3.39), the relationships with their neighbours (3.30), the work they had done (3.20), their state of health (3.17), the goals they had achieved (3.17), their spiritual life (3.05), and their family income (2.85). There was no significant difference between those who felt old and those who did not in terms of the scores for these variables. In effect, those who felt old did not yield higher scores than those who did not feel old for any of the above-mentioned aspects. This is particularly evident with regard to the interviewees' lives as a whole, their state of health, their friends, the work they had done, and the goals they had achieved. Surprisingly, the results for the last of these two aspects seem to contradict the stereotype of old age, which assumes that an older person has a greater appreciation of how much they have done with their life and the goals they have achieved.

The sample of older parents was also asked about which aspects of life they would like to develop in the future. Their responses, in descending order, were to spend more time with their families (53.5%), travel (53.3%), dedicate more time to themselves (47.0%), dedicate more time to others (17.3%), develop cultural interests (16.8%), volunteer (7.6%), get involved in social affairs and politics (2.0%), and find a job (0.8%). Interestingly, with respect to the overall sample, those who considered themselves old indicated with greater frequency that they wanted to spend more time with their families and dedicate more time to themselves and to others. This group of interviewees mentioned other aspects less often.

31 Settersten Jr. and Angel, 2011.

Finally, the survey also asked the interviewees about their worries for the future. The most frequently mentioned worry was suffering from serious health problems (67.6%), followed by, in decreasing order, being a serious burden on their children and families (45.1%), ending up alone (30.9%), no longer feeling useful to their families (26.2%), concerns about who would look after them when they were no longer independent (22.2%), having financial difficulties (18.6%), ending up in a retirement home (14.8%), and not being able to continue with their hobbies (8.2%).

With respect to the total sample, the worries least frequently cited by those who felt old were not feeling useful to their families and not being able to continue with their hobbies. All other worries were more pronounced in this group, particularly those related to being a serious burden on their children and families and concerns about who would look after them if they were no longer independent. These two aspects are closely tied to the deterioration of a person's physical and mental faculties, and in this regard, the interviewees did not wish to strengthen normative solidarity: as the results show, just one-third of interviewees believed that children have a duty to support their older adult parents despite the great sacrifices involved.

Summarising the diverse facets of old age examined in the survey, several intersecting domains such as health, financial well-being, and family dynamics warrant a more in-depth analysis. In the context of health, respondents expressed the belief that an individual's physical condition contributes significantly to their perception of old age, emphasising that health is the paramount aspect in ageing. When gauging interviewees' satisfaction levels, they consistently rated their health as 'quite satisfactory', and a robust correlation emerged between this variable and the degree to which an interviewee felt old. Notably, their primary concern about the future was the potential for severe health issues.

Transitioning to the interviewees' financial situation, economic challenges were not prominently cited among the primary factors contributing to an individual feeling old. Additionally, family income was reported to bring relatively little satisfaction according to the respondents. Those who expressed a sense of feeling old tended to assess these financial aspects more pessimistically. However, a paradox arises when considering that half of the sample also expressed a desire to travel in the future, suggesting they had a certain degree of financial resources at their disposal, which contrasts with their negative assessments. Nonetheless, the fact that one in five interviewees expressed concern about potential financial difficulties remains a significant area for consideration.

In the realm of family dynamics, one in five interviewees highlighted that the loss of one or more loved ones contributed to a sense of ageing. Notably, just over half of the interviewees mentioned the significance of good family relationships among the most crucial aspects of old age. However, surprisingly, only a little more than one in five underscored the importance of maintaining a good relationship with their partner, despite nearly 70% of those interviewed living with a partner. Family emerged as the most satisfying aspect of life for the interviewees and investing time and attention in family constituted the primary future project for most of them.

Nevertheless, it is essential to note that many of their prevalent concerns centred around family relationships, particularly the potential fragility or dysfunction of the support provided by the family network. Variables such as being a serious burden on their children, the fear of ending up alone, no longer feeling useful to their families, and the apprehension of residing in a retirement home all signify these worries.

11. Conclusions

This examination of the primary findings stemming from the analysis of IFS in Spain prompts the question, 'What links can be discerned between IFS and active ageing?'.

To begin with some overarching considerations, it is crucial to note how family solidarity remains a vital element, ensuring family and social cohesion, and functioning as a social safety net in challenging circumstances. For instance, this was evident in situations where young people may experience delays in achieving autonomy, finding themselves, in some cases, still residing with their parents at an adult age. The exchanges where older adult parents were central, either as providers or recipients of various resources, are noteworthy, even though they did not encompass all the interviewees. As revealed by the results, approximately one in six older adult parents declared that they had not assisted any family member, friend, or neighbour in the last year. Additionally, one in three interviewees mentioned not having received any help. The existing literature affirms that in Southern European countries like Spain, intergenerational exchanges are less frequent but characterised by greater regularity and intensity.[32]

Concerning active ageing, despite enjoying robust health, the studied older adult parents demonstrated limited engagement in leisure activities, associations and civic participation, and technology use. One plausible hypothesis is that this generation of older adults is actively involved in caregiving responsibilities, particularly for their children and grandchildren, manifesting a form of intergenerational solidarity. This engagement occurs in the absence of comprehensive public policies in Spain that provide substantial support for the different family generations responsible for caring for dependent family members, whether they are minors or elderly.

The results affirm two observations documented in the literature. First, the diminished engagement in active ageing among those assuming caregiving roles stems from a cumulative effect. Family members already engaged in caring for one relative tend to extend their caregiving responsibilities to other family members at some point.[33] For instance, half of those interviewees who cared for a partner, sibling,

32 Bazo, 2002, 2004.
33 Zelezná, 2018.

or parent or parent-in-law were simultaneously involved in caring for their grandchildren. Additionally, many of these individuals still had cohabiting children.

Conversely, and concurrent with this pattern, the existing literature has highlighted a distinct correlation between providing care, especially to grandchildren, and experiencing health issues.[34] Our study aligns with this observation, indicating that older adult parents with chronic health problems are more likely to provide care for their grandchildren than those without health issues.

Furthermore, the study reveals that heightened levels of intergenerational solidarity within the family correspond to other cumulative effects. This is particularly evident in relation to family social capital, which not only stems from IFS but also, in turn, contributes to its multiplication.

In conclusion, the majority of the studied generation of older adult parents did not perceive themselves as old in most cases. On the contrary, this inclination was only evident in very specific circumstances, notably those associated with feelings of loneliness or the presence of chronic diseases. Indeed, older individuals living alone often experience a social environment characterised by fewer significant, supportive connections in family, friendship, and neighbourhood relationships. The sensation of loneliness, potentially coupled with the state of being alone – though not necessarily – is subject to diverse measurement approaches, as demonstrated in the literature.[35] This sensation appears to be more pronounced among older individuals in Southern European countries like Spain.[36] One study[37] introduced the concept of a threshold of loneliness, suggesting that different societal norms dictate the varying levels of social relations needed to avert loneliness. In Southern European countries, these levels are generally higher, resulting in an increased sense of perceived loneliness, irrespective of the condition of material loneliness.

The survey findings affirm that the feeling of loneliness is accentuated among individuals living alone, particularly concerning their perceptions of being alone, experiencing the loss of loved ones, and apprehensions about future care when they lose autonomy. However, the fear of being alone is more pronounced among those who do not live alone, supporting the application of the threshold of loneliness theory in interpreting different life-course phases in old age. Moreover, analysing the survey results provides evidence that the factors associated with loneliness have a more substantial impact on concerns for the future than on the sense of feeling old.

34 Di Gessa, Glaser, and Tinker, 2016.
35 Jylhä and Saarenheimo, 2013.
36 Sundström et al., 2009.
37 Johnson and Mullins, 1987.

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