

Public Abstract

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Beliefs about Intergenerational Assistance Following Divorce and Remarriage: Does Race and Ethnicity Matter?

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Beliefs about intergenerational assistance have historically been shaped by societal and cultural expectations for adult children to assist their aging parents. Three demographic factors – the increase in the racial and ethnic minority population, the population over the age of 65 years, and complex family structures due to divorce and remarriage – suggest that societal perceptions of intergenerational assistance might change in the future. However, most researchers who have studied beliefs about intergenerational assistance have studied primarily white European Americans living in nuclear families rather than diverse racial and ethnic groups. Thus, the purpose of this thesis was to (1) compare similarities and differences in beliefs that African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, and white European Americans hold about adult (step)children's obligations to assist older (step)parents following divorce and remarriage, and (2) to identify respondents rationale for helping the older adult.

A nationally representative sample (n = 3316) was drawn using random digit dialing. Participants over the age of 18 years responded to vignettes in which older (step)parents needed help from adult (step)children with diverse types of assistance. The qualitative data were analyzed using the matrix analysis method. Overall, the results indicated more similarities than differences in beliefs and reasoning about intergenerational assistance between the four groups. Future studies should examine more diverse tasks and contexts that may elicit different responses between the four groups; how familism may be applied differently to kin versus step-kin; and the influence of acculturation on Latinos' and Asian Americans' beliefs about intergenerational assistance.