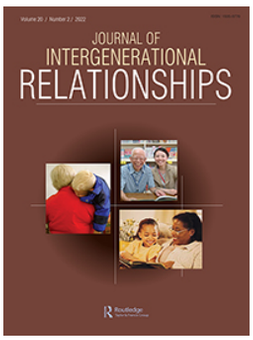

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Being Daughter and Mother: Middle-aged Women in Three-generation Living

Adéla Souralová, Kristýna Kaymak Minaříková, and Michaela Žáková

Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the position of middle-aged women who are part of multigenerational households. Drawing on 20 in-depth interviews with these women, we investigate how middle-generation women understand their roles in the family and intergenerational relations, how they position themselves in relation to older and younger generations, and how they interpret the responsibilities and expectations and their fulfillment in the context of multigenerational living. What are the pressures, tensions, and advantages of being in the middle? We demonstrate several levels of being "in between" while analyzing the care demands, responsibilities, and expectations that these women experience in daily life. The article investigates three kinds of activities that women perform in multigenerational living: care for people, care for intergenerational family relationships, and care for homes. We conclude that middle-generation women struggle between the drive for independence and the appreciation of interdependency among the generations that is both a burden and a relief.

KEYWORDS

Intergenerational relations; middle generation; care; multigenerational living

Introduction

In 2018, we met with Ms. Šeříková,[1] a woman just entering her 50s; a daughter, a mother of two children, and a grandmother of one grandchild. Ms. Šeříková was divorced and lived with her parents and her adult daughter. We interviewed her as part of our project on multigenerational living in the Czech Republic. During the interview, she told us:

> Ms. Šeříková: I can see that my parents need my help because of their health, then I have a daughter at university, so I need to be engaged in her life, and now the grandson. So sometimes I feel I should be cloned. I really feel sandwiched, that I need to function in all their spheres, and it is too much for one person. It's not easy at all. From time to time I am in a state when I say that I cannot go on anymore, just please do not want anything from me, or I will go crazy.

Her narrative resembled the 19 other stories that we gathered from women who are part of three-generation living. These women live with their children

CONTACT Adéla Souralová asouralo@fss.muni.cz Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic.

and with at least one of their parents or parents-in-law. They are women living between two generations.

In the international context, the position of the middle generation is conceptualized as a "sandwich generation" – in which "middle-aged householders were 'beleaguered' by financial, emotional and caring pressure from the adult children and elderly parents" (Liu, 2017, p. 73). Since the term first appeared in Miller's article (Miller, 1981; see Burke, 2017) nearly four decades ago, it has become part of the lexicon, appearing in "dictionaries, [...] numerous government or media reports, and countless academic publications" (Burke, 2017, p. 3). Ulmanen (2017) asserted that calling it the sandwich generation engages a "powerful but slippery metaphor" (p. 242). The definition is not clear, and neither is the frequency of the phenomenon. Sometimes, the concept includes all those "in their 50s and 60s, with aging parents, children and perhaps grandchildren" (Burke, 2017, p. 4). From this definition, it is estimated that 10% to 20% of people worldwide experience the sandwich phenomenon (Burke, 2017). Another definition emphasizes simultaneous caregiving to children (or grandchildren) and elderly parents (Ulmanen, 2017). Chisholm (1999) defines the sandwich generation as the "individuals who, by dint of circumstances, find themselves in the position of being caregivers for their young and/or adult children as well as one or both aging parents" (p. 178). Simultaneous care for children and elderly parents, however, is quite rare because "the configuration requires, however, either later-than-average childbearing in two successive generations, or the unusually early onset of disability in the oldest generation" (Grundy & Henretta, 2006, p. 708; see also Spitze & Logan, 1990; Tebes & Irish, 2000).

Nevertheless, the term "sandwich generation" resonates widely in both academic and public discourse and it is also echoed in the 20 interviews that we conducted. Drawing upon these interviews, the aim of the study is to investigate how middle-generation women understand their roles in the family and in intergenerational relations, how they position themselves in relation to older and younger generations, and how they interpret the responsibilities and expectations and their fulfillment in the context of multigenerational living. What are the pressures, tensions, and advantages of being in the middle? How do these women achieve balance between their role as a daughter and their role as a mother or grandmother? This article addresses these questions while dealing with the perspectives of middle-generation women. As Rosenthal et al. (1989) argued, being "caught in the middle" has both negative and positive outcomes. Our article addresses the positive and negative sides of this position, rejecting both the victimization and the glorification of our interviewees.

Background

Multigenerational living is a specific arena for the negotiations of intergenerational and interpersonal relations. Motivations for this kind of living

arrangement can vary widely. People often choose to live with their parents/children for economic reasons or because of caring responsibilities, emotional support, and companionship (Liu, 2017). In the latter cases, multigenerational living may be seen as a form of family solidarity (Craig & Powell, 2017). Another factor contributing to the prevalence of multigenerational households is increasingly late home leaving, caused for instance, by long years of study or returning to the parent's home after divorce (Easthope et al., 2017).

Previous research on caregiving in multigenerational living has concentrated on two issues that are relevant for our analysis. The first issue is the distribution of caregiving when the care can be divided among more cohabiting people (Muennig et al., 2018). Care does not have to go just in one direction; usually during caregiving, the one who receives the care tries to reciprocate, so there is an exchange of help between caregiver and care recipient (Ganong et al., 2009; Raschick & Ingersoll-Dayton, 2004; Souralová & Žáková, 2019). Thus, when the middle generation cares for their parents, the parents try to return the care and help in various ways. Providing care for parents can also have rewards for the caregiver, such as an improvement of relations (Chisholm, 1999; Raschick & Ingersoll-Dayton, 2004). Within three-generation housing, this exchange of help can be even more obvious; each generation can be partly dependent on the other and care circulates among all members of the cohabitation rather than being simply oriented in one direction (Souralová & Žáková, 2019).

The second issue is the analysis of the responsibilities of the middle generation when overly demanding expectations may lead to greater stress on them that can then cause psychological problems (Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2001; Kwak et al., 2012; Riley & Bowen, 2005). The demands on the middle generation revolve around the issue of care for others, kin work (Di Leonardo, 1987) and the distribution of responsibilities related to the house and household chores. Di Leonardo (1987) argues that kin relations do not simply exist; they need to be intentionally sustained. She defines kin work as "the conception, maintenance, and ritual celebration of cross-household kin ties, including visits, letters, telephone calls, presents, and cards to kin; the organization of holiday gatherings; the creation and maintenance of quasi-kin relations; decisions to neglect or to intensify particular ties" (Di Leonardo, 1987, pp. 442–443). Multigenerational living significantly affects people's relationships both within and outside the cohabitation (Judd, 2017). The middle generation, frequently conceptualized as a mediator or bridge between generations (Chan & Elder, 2000; Monserud, 2008; Mueller & Elder, 2003), plays a key role in maintaining the quality of intergenerational ties.

The actual distribution of the house and of household responsibilities such as chores is another issue addressed by the members of multigenerational household (Craig & Powell, 2017; Harrigan, 1992). Besides the traditional gendered division of domestic tasks, in multigenerational living, the

generational aspect of the distribution of tasks is important. Craig and Powell (2017) concluded that the involvement in domestic work in households where parents live with their teenage/adult children is unequal; parents do more household chores than their children. Moreover, the responsibilities do not end with the regular domestic tasks. Financial transactions and care for the maintenance of the house are another set of responsibilities that are distributed within the household. As Easthope et al. (2017) argue, the story of the multigenerational household is a story "of care provision, financial support and the efficient use of housing and other resources" (p. 285). Based on their empirical data, Easthope et al. (2015, 2017) clarified the meaning of ownership rights and control over space and home in multigenerational households, influencing the establishment of authority, position rights, and other (asymmetrical) family relations. As the middle generation is usually the main breadwinner, its members are responsible for the main financial transactions in the household and may thus experience pressure when balancing their work and family life.

In our analysis, we decided to focus on the generation "in the middle" and analyze their perception of their position between generations. In particular, we investigated their perceptions and experiences with care on several levels: care for people, care for relationships and kin work, and care for homes and housework. We follow the studies on these issues that we presented in this section.

Method

Our study is based on a qualitative research design and presents the findings of the analysis of in-depth interviews with 20 middle-generation women living in three-generation households. We obtained the informed consent of the participants and the approval of the ethics committee of Masaryk University. Our study is part of a broader research project on third-generation cohabitation in the Czech Republic, during which we have conducted interviews with representatives of each cohabiting generation in order to obtain a more holistic perspective on these specific types of cohabiting.

Settings and participants

We see multigenerational living as an important, though quantitatively less common (4% of people ages 15 to 85 live in this kind of arrangement in the Czech Republic), model of living through which we can study intergenerational, interpersonal, and family relations. In our research, we collected the stories of middle-generation women in order to understand their position in the mixture of responsibilities, interdependencies, and daily challenges. We also conducted interviews with 16 parent(s) or parent(s)-in-law and with 18

Table 1. Profile of interviewees.

Name of participant	Marital status	Age	Number of children (cohabiting)	Age of (cohabiting) children	Number of 1 G members	Relationship to 1 G members
Borovičková	Widow	50	2 (2)	(23), 26	2	Daughter
Břízová	Married	55	1	(30), 32	1 (mother)	Daughter
Buková	Divorced (lives with partner)	45	2	(12), (19)	1 (mother) with partner	Daughter
Cypřišová	Married	55	2(1)	(32), 37	1 (father)	Daughter-in-law
Ebenová	Partner	50	2 (1)	(18), 27	2	Daughter
Hlohová	Single	40	1	(14)	1 (mother)	Daughter
Hrušňová	Partner	45	2 (1)	(22), 27	1 (mother)	Daughter
Jasanová	Married	40	3 (3)	(5), (13), (16)	2	Daughter
Jedličková	Married	40	2 (2)	(17), (21)	2	Daughter-in-law
Jilmová	Divorced	50	1	(23), 30	1 (mother)	Daughter
Kaštanová	Married	50	2 (1)	(22), 26	1 (mother)	Daughter
Modřínová	Divorced	45	3 (3)	(6), (22), (25)	1 (mother)	Daughter
Pěnišníková	Married	50	2 (1)	(20), 24	2	Daughter-in-law
Platanová	Married	45	4 (3)	(13), (22), (24)	1 (mother)	Daughter
Smrková	Married	50	3 (2)	18, 24, 26	2	Daughter-in-law
Šeříková	Divorced	50	2 (1)	(22), 25	2	Daughter
Šípková	Divorced	50	2	22, 27	1 (mother)	Daughter
Štědřencová	Divorced (lives with partner)	45	2	(24), 26	1 (mother)	Daughter
Višňová	Married	45	2 (1)	(16), 24	2	Daughter
Vrbová	Married	45	2 (2)	(17), 24	2	Daughter

children (age 15–30) of these women. The interviews with older and youngest generations are not included in the analysis presented in this article. Table 1 presents the profiles of the interviewees and their positions within multigenerational living. The names have been changed in order to ensure the anonymity of interviewees.

We recruited our research participants by following particular sampling criteria that included: living under one roof with at least two other generations, long-term cohabitation (at least 5 years to ensure that it is not a random living pattern), and youngest generation are teenagers or older. We used the snowball method to recruit our participants and very often we got to the family through the youngest generation (mostly university students). We used our personal networks and advertisements to find multigenerationally living families. We found it notable that most of the members of the older generation were not physically dependent on everyday care provided by other family members. In three cases, the middle-generation women provided physical or mental care to a parent experiencing health problems (e.g., Alzheimer's disease, cancer). All of the middle-generation women were employed.

Data collection

The interviews with each generation were conducted individually. During the interviews, we used an interview guide and mapped the specific themes. At the same time, we followed what the interviewees said and encouraged them to come up with their own issues and concerns. We started with an interest in the

reasons and motivations for three-generation living and the advantages and disadvantages of this type of cohabitation. Then, we asked about the following aspects of cohabitation including house structure, ownership, and household responsibilities such as financial obligations and housework tasks. We also focused on aspects of everyday living, timelines, (divided) roles and their legitimization, and ways of forming intergenerational relations. We focused on the views of the middle-generation women about their position "in the middle" and "as a bridge" or "mediator" between the youngest and older generations. The interviews lasted an average of 77 minutes, and they were conducted, recorded, transcribed, and presented in accordance with ethical research parameters.

Data analysis

The thematic analysis was carried out on an ongoing basis. We coded the transcripts and focused on how the interviewees speak, interpret, and make sense of what they do for other family members, how they do it, and what it means. In particular, we focused on how they understand care in a broader sense; this led us to identify several key themes in the narratives that we clustered under the umbrella concepts of care for people, care for relationships, and care for homes. We paid particular attention to how the interviewees themselves articulated their position in the middle and what meanings, roles, and responsibilities they connected with this position. Both the differences and the similarities in the roles of the middle generation across our sample were addressed. The recurring themes and subthemes were then subjected to a deep interpretation aimed at showing the meaning of these issues for the interviewees themselves. All three authors of this article worked on the analysis of the data. In the first phase, we went through the empirical material independently while in the second phase we discussed the themes together in order to enhance the credibility of the findings.

We carefully considered the multiple meanings of care and caring that included a variety of activities – from preparing food and helping with domestic tasks to just "being there," chatting and listening. The analysis often uncovered ambivalent or even contradictory reflections of this position; thus, in the interpretations, we aimed to provide a nuanced picture of the in-betweenness of the interviewed women who both enjoy and dislike being "adult daughters."

Results

This section investigates how middle-generation women experience their role in the middle when it comes to caring responsibilities. We have identified three kinds of activities: caring for people, caring for intergenerational family

relationships, and caring for homes. We are interested in how our interviewees relate to these activities and how they make sense of the distribution of these caring responsibilities in the context of multigenerational living, with an emphasis on gender and generation aspects.

A relief or a burden: caring for people in three-generation living

The demands for care change over the life cycle as people from different generations living together enter particular phases with specific needs and responsibilities. The demands for childcare and eldercare that the middle generation should balance rarely happen at the same time (Loomis & Booth, 1995). In the interviews, we thus encounter the situation in which the middle generation experienced something that could be called a "caring pause" – when they do not have to care intensively for their children anymore and do not yet have to care for their parents.

> Ms. Jedličková: We had a hen party recently and I realized that I am having such a nice period of my life now. My kids are adults and they do not need care all the time, so I have more time for myself. And my parents do not want any care yet. My parents, in fact, are very young, my mother is twenty years older than I am.

The caring pause is appreciated here by Ms. Jedličková (whose children are aged 17 and 21), who refers to this period as a nice time of her life. However, the temporality of this state is clear in the interviews. The caring pause appears here as a stage between past experiences with childcare and the anticipated care for parents in the future. Expectations and anticipation about future caring are significantly shaped by multigenerational living and by the intergenerational share of caring responsibilities. We identified two main ways that our interviewees interpret their caring responsibilities within the context of multigenerational living. On the one hand, it is the relief from care thanks to the co-presence of the older generation; on the other hand, it is the burden to care because of the co-presence of the older generation.

Relief from care responsibilities refers to a situation in which, in the context of multigenerational living, more people are involved in care provision and share care responsibilities and care commitments. We encountered three forms of relief: everyday childcare provided by grandparents, grandparental care as a means for work–life balance, and mutual care between the youngest and older generation. These forms of care are interpreted by the interviewees as the key advantages of multigenerational living.

First is the everyday childcare provided by grandmothers who are "always there." Such care includes little daily activities, the minutiae of everydayness that are key characteristics of the grandparent–grandchild interactions and relations in the context of multigenerational living. The following testimony portrays a typical pattern in our sample:

> Ms. Šeříková: When I needed care or it happened that I was ill, and because my husband worked abroad I was practically alone with the kids, it was easier thanks to cohabitation. Generally, I could go to buy something and did not have to take my kids with me. I just dashed off; I was back in an hour and my parents looked after the children.

Second, as in other European countries, grandparents (grandmothers more often than grandfathers) facilitate the balancing of work and family life in the Czech Republic (Saxonberg et al., 2013; Souralová, 2019). This was true for many women in our sample who frequently appreciated multigenerational living as a setting where the reconciliation of work and care was enabled by the presence of other people who could share the caring responsibilities. Some common examples of help provided by grandparents include taking the children to kindergarten and/or picking them up, staying with them while the parents are at work, or looking after them when extra work activities exceed the fixed work hours. Several interviewed women stressed that without the help of the older generation, the return to the workplace after parental leave would be more complicated or even impossible. That was true for Ms. Buková who started working part-time 6 weeks after the birth of her daughter.

> Ms. Buková: I started working six weeks after my daughter came. And it was thanks to the fact that I had my office in the house and my mother took care of my child. I worked Saturdays and Sundays, when my mother was free, or in the evenings when she came home after 3 p.m. She worked as clerk, so she finished around 3; 3:30 she was at home and I started working at 4. I did not have support from my husband, not at all. He was a terribly irresponsible and totally nonfunctional guy. He was nice, kind, clever, everything, but not useful for life. [. . .] My mom loved it, my daughter was happy, and I was glad to be without her for a while. I am not the kind of maternal type that I would be immersed in childcare. So I was happy that I could work after puerperium, work and be independent thanks to it.

This excerpt illustrates a typical model of managing childcare along the matrilineal family line. Explicitly, when describing the shift in care provision, Ms. Buková frames these practices in the context of a nonfunctioning partner (later Ms. Buková divorced; see also the case of Ms. Šeříková above). For Ms. Buková, the daughter role brings more satisfaction than the role of wife as she was apparently dependent on her mother when harmonizing work and life wishes; however, she interprets this period of life as a period of independence.

The third form of relief was typical in the mutual care between the youngest and older generations that is performed without the engagement of the middle generation. In the narratives, this form appears in those cases when the youngest generation changes from being the receivers of grandparental care to being providers of certain types of care for their grandparents. Elsewhere, we have demonstrated that grandchildren see themselves as contributing to care provision (Souralová & Žáková, 2019). This can be in the form of chatting, preparing food, or just checking that everything is okay. In other words, the youngest generation, previously care receivers, are included in the

distribution of caregiving. This mutual aid thus alleviates the demand for the care that is provided by the middle generation, who perceive the aid as a relief in the form of care maintained by both the older generation and the youngest one.

In contrast to the experience of relief through cohabiting is the experience of burdens due to cohabiting. Some multigenerational living situations emerged when the older generation needed care or in anticipation of future care needs. This was the case of Ms. Břízová, who did not want to move from her apartment to her mother's house. The changing demands for care from her mother radically affect her lifestyle:

> Ms. Břízová: I do not manage to handle it all mentally. I am not a caregiver type; I do not feel the need to take care of anybody or to be a housewife. It just went naturally, it accumulated and now I do not feel well in it. And I have to find a place for myself and it is very difficult. [. . .] So now I must provide care and it is something that is very hard for me to deal with. Because I kind of do not want to care. Or I do not want to accept this role.

Ms. Břízová had trouble identifying with the role of caregiver. She explains this as being due to the fact that her mother returned very early to the workplace and she was placed in day care in the 1960s. In her interpretation, this resulted in a weak emotional bond between the two women and in her current feeling that she is not obliged to provide her mother with any care in return.

In the interviews, we asked about the motivations to care for elderly parents; these motivations can emerge in a rather problematic way and therefore should not be taken for granted. The participants have three sources for their motivations to care for their parents. First is the simple fact of cohabitation – the women in the middle generation can have siblings or siblings-in-law who could be caregivers; however, as they do not live together, it is practical that the main responsible caregiver is the one who shares the living space with the care recipient. The second source is the ownership of the house that is inherited from the older generation. In these cases, we encountered both informal unwritten rules of "the one who gets the house has to provide the care" as well as formalized written agreements.

If the home is inherited and owned by the middle generation, the older generation has the legal right to live there until death. For example, Ms. Smrková said, "I was pushed to care [for my father-in-law] if we wanted the house." In her early 50s, Ms. Smrková is ready to leave her workplace and provide intensive care for her husband's parents when it becomes necessary. In her example, there is a connection between ownership and care that was present in many other interviews: the ownership of the house is transferred and paid for by the provision of care. Similarly, Ms. Cypřišová said: "He [husband's father] had given the house to us, he lived with us and helped us, so we understood that we would return that with our care." In her narrative,

there was a link between the house-giving and caregiving and a view that the house is paid back by the care. Her example, thus, shows also the third source of motivations for eldercare provision. It is a commitment to give back the care that the parents gave to the middle generation or to the youngest generation. In this case, the care appears to be a gift that must be reciprocated among generations.

Buffers, harmonizers, and kin workers: care for intergenerational family relationships

The second theme focused on was the role of women in caring for intergenerational family relationships. Three-generation housing can support intergenerational learning and better understanding and relations among different generations (Easthope et al., 2017). However, it may cause the clash of generational viewpoints, opinions, and expectations; such clashes may even lead to intergenerational conflicts. The members of the middle generation are expected to understand both the youngest and the oldest generations because they are generationally closer to each of them. Ms. Modřínová points out these expectations and the clash of ideas between her children, in their 20s, and her 66-year-old mother as follows:

> Ms. Modřínová: Sometimes it is a huge pressure. There are so many different things, life is diametrically different – then and now. It has advantages but also negatives. [. . .] There has to be an equilibrium and I sometimes ask myself how. And when I am between them, then what is correct, what is right, and what should I say to my daughter? Should I direct my daughter or her grandmother, and how . . . And what direction to go.

Similarly, Ms. Štědřencová sees herself as the key person in maintaining a good mood within the cohabitation. She says that she knows the family members the best – and this knowledge enables her to say or not say the right word at the right moment and so prevents potential tension.

> Ms. Štědřencová: I know how I should react to everybody, how to approach them and talk to them. I am able to recognize what kind of mood they are in and what could worsen it. So I am all the time on alert.

Ms. Štědřencová describes a phenomenon that we would suggest calling the intergenerational challenge of those who are in the middle and who are responsible for the continuation of the wellbeing of the family members and their mutual understanding and respect. Even though the middle generation is very often described in the literature as a bridge between generations, mediating the contact between grandparents and grandchildren (Mueller & Elder, 2003; Neves & Fernandes, 2016), we rarely encountered such situations in our research. The interviewees either denied being the mediators of the contact or were able to recall very particular (and very few) examples of everyday or

regular contact between the older and the youngest generation that occurs spontaneously without the need for a mediator (Kemp, 2005). However, the interviewees highlighted their key role in intergenerational communication and to a certain extent in intergenerational learning.

> Ms. Platanová: It is hard for the children, right? Because you must regulate them so that they have a foundation and respect the older people. And vice versa, you must regulate the older generation so that they do not scold and usurp everything.

Even though multigenerational living is a setting in which the relationships between generations are negotiated directly between the concerned actors and without the mediators (see Souralová & Žáková, 2019), in times of crisis, a mediator and intergenerational interpreter are needed. Frequently, this person's role is to prevent conflicts and to ease the situation during or after them. To our question about how often these situations requiring mediation occur, the interviewees frequently answered "from time to time." They are thus not regular events, though they are emotionally exhausting for the generation in the middle who must discipline and explain to both sides.

Although care for intergenerational family relations was interpreted as the task of the middle generation by the majority of the interviewed women, the care for kin relations and kin work (Di Leonardo, 1987) seemed to be more equally shared between women from the older and middle generations. The calendars with the marked birthdays of all family members, the organization of birthday parties, and preparations for Christmas were among the most frequently mentioned activities that shaped the kin work in three-generation living. Preparations for such events are usually taken for granted and interviewees do not consider it to be demanding although it is often on their shoulders.

Financial operations, reconstructions, burdens: care for homes

One of the main forces that pushes people to start/continue with multigenerational living is the idea of sharing the financial burden (Brandon, 2012; Easthope et al., 2017; Harrigan, 1992). During the life course, the financial burdens may change and the main responsibilities may be transmitted from one generation to another and so change the expectations and requirements of the middle generation. These may be more intensively experienced by divorced and single women (there were four divorced women who did not live with their partner in the house and one single woman in our sample). The homes that the interviewees inhabit are very often (17 in our sample) big houses that are connected with the family history, embody the family memories (Markiewicz, 2006), and "have biographies that are inextricably entwined with those of their inhabitants" (Carsten, 2018, p. 107). The houses are therefore not only material objects that must be maintained and cared for; they are

also the symbols and heritage that should pass from one generation to another. Frequently, these two tasks are fulfilled by the middle generation, who is responsible for keeping the houses clean, repaired, and part of the family (and its future).

Our analysis brought to light important issues that shape the women's lives and contribute to their position within the family as the most overloaded generation. In addition to the finding that there is a gendered division of domestic tasks in multigenerational living and that the middle generation performs more tasks than the youngest one (e.g., Craig & Powell, 2017), we found that the middle generation experienced tension and pressure especially in relation to the description of responsibilities for financial operations (everyday functioning of the household), responsibilities for repairs, reconstruction, and the general condition of the house, and uncertainty about the future of the home. All of these dilemmas are closely connected with the issue of ownership (Souralová & Žáková, 2020).

Responsibilities for the financial operations and provision of the daily functioning of the house appeared in the interviews in several forms. On the one hand, interviewees emphasized that sharing living expenses with their parents reduced their living costs. On the other hand, inhabiting big houses requires frequent repairs and renovations (see below), and it means that the costs (e.g., for energy consumption) are high. Ms. Jasanová likens the house to "a great cow" and a "monster," derogatory expressions for the burden and the high costs of running the house. When the middle generation decides to live multigenerationally, it is often at the time when the older generation is still employed and contributing significantly to the budget. However, as the years pass, the older generation retires, and more responsibilities fall on the shoulders of the middle generation. The pressure to take on the financial responsibility multiplies if the woman is divorced or single. This was the case of Ms. Modřínová (divorced) and Ms. Hlohová (single), who spoke of a huge portion of responsibility in caring for the house. These two cases in particular, embodied life uncertainty and everyday frustration because these women see themselves as responsible not only for themselves but also for the future of the other family members sharing the house.

> Ms. Modřínová: Sometimes I feel a strong responsibility for the house and other family members that are dependent on me. [. . .] It hangs over me and I say, perhaps I can bear the costs, hopefully I can make it, or I do not know the situation, how it will turn out.

> Ms. Hlohová: My mother is more important than a job. What's stupid is that I also need a job because I need money . . . everyone wants money, electricity, gas, it always must be paid, that's the kind of comfort and as it must be done, but I'm saying, the family is more important than the job.

These excerpts demonstrate how the women balance their role as breadwinners responsible for two generations. For Ms. Modřínová, it is the question of whether she can afford to finance the big house; for Ms. Hlohová, the dilemma lies in the balance of work and care provided to her mother. In both cases, the women's experience with economic pressures is framed in terms of their responsibility in relation to other cohabiting family members.

The second aspect of the care for the home is the responsibility for repairs and renovations – both financial and organizational. The big houses inhabited by our interviewees require financial investment in reconstruction – typically changing the windows, getting a new facade, or upgrading the heating in the buildings. This is frequently framed as taking the burden from the older generation onto the shoulders of the middle generation. Removing the responsibility for house repairs from the older generation can be seen as caring for the older generation. Such care appears not only in organizing the repairs themselves but also in showing the older generation that the houses they built or inherited from previous generations will be in good hands and will be maintained for the next generation.

The third factor that affected the situation of these middle-generation women was insecurity about the future of their home. This was apparent in the interview with Ms. Modřínová above. In her case, the insecurity was caused by the burden of home ownership; in many other interviews, it was caused by not owning the home and experiencing uncertainty about the future ownership rights. We encountered three models of home ownership: ownership by the older generation (seven cases), ownership by the middle generation (eleven cases), and shared ownership by the older and middle generation (two cases). The first model usually brings the most painful experiences, tensions, and troubles to the lives of the middle generation. It brings uncertainty for the middle generation about what will happen to the house, if they and their children could lose the roof over their heads or be pushed to give up their life savings to buy out the other siblings. The interview with Ms. Jasanová, who was experiencing such a situation, illustrates the frustrations of that uncertainty:

> Ms. Jasanová: I cannot give the money to my brother. I don't have enough. And when I have money, I put it towards the actual needs of the house. So I am not able to give it to him. [. . .] Yet we have been living here, and it is not ours. So, I refuse to finance something alone, why? I reconstruct the house for my father and he then gives it to my brother . . .

Women like Ms. Jasanová describe the feeling of uncertainty in the period of their life cycle when they have their own families and children for whom they are responsible. The negotiation of ownership is an important part of the story of multigenerational living – often painful and stressful, causing tensions or even conflicts between generations or within

a generation. At the same time, these accounts point out the more general aspect of the position of being both "in between" and dependent on parents in adulthood. The interviewed women are still daughters living with their parents, they are dependent on the older generation and their decisions, and they have limited space for autonomy and independence in their lives (and the lives of their families) in their own hands. The particular case of the middle-generation women cohabiting with parents and child(ren) illuminates the roles' conflicts and expectations, and the recognition of adulthood that does not come automatically with age but must be worked on or even fought for.

Discussion

This article focused on the middle-aged women living as a middle generation in multigenerational cohabitation. The position of the middle generation is specific to the care provision. They are seen by other household members and by themselves as the ones who are the most responsible for caring for others (e.g., Taylor et al., 1993). We investigated their perceptions and experiences with being the generation "in between" while focusing on two key domains: family roles and relations with their parents (women being adult daughters), and distribution of care responsibilities (caring for people, for relations, and for the home). Our analysis can be summarized into three main findings about the position of the middle generation, the expectations and perceptions about their role within multigenerational living, and the character of their responsibilities. All of these are the everyday manifestations of intergenerational ambivalence (Lüscher, 2011; Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998).

First, the experiences of middle-generation women suggest synergic negotiations and appreciations of independence and interdependence. On the one hand, women experience a struggle for independence and for being recognized as autonomous adult human beings while cohabiting with their parents. On the other hand, they report that generational interdependence may be beneficial in sharing the responsibilities connected with care and with maintenance of the house, or just with the issue of companionship, help, and support.

Second, the position of the middle generation is shaped by and shapes the reciprocity and reciprocal relationships among the generations. We observed various "transactions" in the distribution of care responsibilities, both in their daily lives and in the course of the life cycle. Multigenerational living enables sharing of care among family members and the reciprocity of caregiving and care receiving. This can relieve some care demands from the middle generation to the younger or older generations; it also creates lifelong care commitments to pay back. There is an exchange between the older and middle

generations in which the previous (grand)parental care, housing, or ownership of the home are redeemed by the care provided to the older generation.

Finally, returning to the fuzzy concept of the sandwich generation, our analysis confirms the doubts about the coexistence of the caring responsibilities for two generations (Grundy & Henretta, 2006). However, if we use the broader definition of care that includes care for relations and kin work, we can clearly see that the middle generation finds itself under pressure and tension. The members of the middle generation are supposed to maintain harmonious relations among cohabitants. They do not play the role of mediators in terms of creating and maintaining the ties between the older and the youngest generation – these are created spontaneously without intermediaries. However, the middle generation is responsible for solving or preventing problems and for understanding everybody in the home. They face a generational challenge, that is, the intensive or periodic intensification of care for relations and the wellbeing of family members that should lead to the satisfaction of all generations, but as it requires intensive emotional investment usually leads to exhaustion for the middle generation.

Limitations of research

Our study has several limitations. Due to the particular sample and context of the research, the findings of this study do not generalize beyond the respondents. We deliberately involved only women in our analysis; however, we are aware that the middle generation also includes men and that men also experience tension and ambivalence while being sons and fathers at the same time. The interviewees belonged to the middle generation of the majority population: they chose to live multigenerationally and were not pushed by economic pressure. We may expect that the "in-betweenness" would be experienced differently in the context of poverty and in marginalized families.

Future research

Further research is needed to address other perspectives and contexts in which the middle generation experiences care responsibilities. How do the middle generation's parents and children reflect their roles as children and parents in the middle? How do they make sense of the care for people, relationships, and the home? Future research could also address the issue of self-care for those in the middle. Future research could also address policy implications and formulate recommendations at the state and community level for supporting those who are "sandwiched" between the needs of their children and parents.

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ORCID

Adéla Souralová http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2599-4094
Michaela Žáková http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2445-327X

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