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Norms of filial obligation in the Netherlands

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Abstract

In this article we examine to what extent norms of filial obligation are shaped by (a) group value patterns, (b) family constellation, (c) the possibilities to help others, and (d) actual experiences of support exchange. The data are from the first wave of the combined main and migrant sample of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, the Dutch participant in the Generations and Gender Programme. The Dutch appear to be reluctant to prescribe for others how they should behave vis-à-vis ageing parents. Value patterns are the strongest determinants of filial norms, with migrants, those with low levels of education, and the religious espousing strong filial norms. Contrary to what traditional gender roles would suggest, women less strongly endorse norms of filial obligation than men. Contrary to the notion that divorce weakens family ties, divorcees and children of divorce do not exhibit less commitment to filial norms. Altruistic tendencies are evident in the weaker filial norms among the older age groups, and among those with non-coresident children. Finally, the results show a high level of consonance between actual support exchanges and filial norms.

KEY WORDS — Norms of filial obligation, Netherlands Kinship Panel Study

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1 Introduction

A customary approach to studying the strength of family ties is to assess actual exchanges of help and support between family members. Such exchanges are strongly patterned by needs for support arising from frailty, handicaps, and income deficiencies (Dykstra, 2007). By their very nature, support exchanges and support needs are confounded. Given this confounding, we decided to take an alternative approach, namely to focus on socially shared ideas about obligations towards family members, and more particularly filial norms. The advantage of this approach is that it provides insight into potential family solidarity (Bonvalet and Ogg, 2007). Studies on family obligations are also of interest because they serve as a source of information for policymakers to help them address the discrepancy between policy measures and public attitudes. They also offer tools for developing policy that is in line with people's preferences.

Norms of filial obligation are generalised expectations regarding adult children's responsibilities for their parents (Cicirelli, 1988), which provide guidelines for family behaviour (Finch and Mason, 1990). Filial obligations are socially shared, reflect the cultural and economic climate in which people live, and are shaped by welfare state provisions (Haber Kern and Szydluk, 2010; Lefèvre et al., 2009). Norms of family obligation tend to be lower in generous welfare states (Cooney and Dykstra, 2011; Daatland and Herlofson, 2003; Dykstra, 2010).

Widely held beliefs about appropriate actions in families are important to understand because they serve as mental maps for decisions and behaviours. Research has shown that norms of obligation toward family members have a predictive value for the actual exchange of informal care. A cross-sectional study in the Netherlands, using data from 1992-1993, revealed that the more strongly adult children felt that family members should support one another, the more instrumental support the parents received (Klein Ikkink et al., 1999). In a more recent study using cross-sectional data from 2006, a positive association between filial norms and upward intergenerational support was also found in China and Taiwan (Lin and Yi, 2011). Longitudinal analyses of American data (1997-2000), conducted by Silverstein, Gans and Yang (2006) found that adults espousing stronger filial norms gave significantly more support to their parents, but only in the case of their mothers, not their fathers. In Norwegian and Dutch longitudinal studies (Herlofson et al., 2011), filial obligations predicted support provision to parents five years later, and more strongly so for sons than daughters.

In this article we address the espoused filial obligations of the Dutch, a country with well-developed systems of public care, where the state is clearly regarded as being responsible for providing care for ageing family members (Daatland et al., 2009) and where cultural norms tend to be individualistic rather than familialistic (Kalmijn and Saraceno, 2008). Given both the generous welfare state arrangements and dominance of individualistic values, the Netherlands offers a highly interesting context for the examination of variations in filial obligations. The data are from the first wave of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS), the Dutch participant in the Generations and Gender Programme (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2007).

2 Expected differences in norms of filial obligation

Norms of obligation are shaped by the socio-structural circumstances in which people live and by their cultural background (Daatland and Herlofson, 2003; De Valk and Schans, 2008; Finley et al., 1988; Gans and Silverstein, 2006). Filial obligations reflect broad underlying values, and are therefore considered to be relevant to all members of the population, irrespective of the composition of their family networks (Gans and Silverstein, 2006). Nevertheless, norms of filial obligation can change under the influence of changes in people's personal circumstances (Finley et al., 1988), such as changes in the opportunities for providing care (conflicting activities), changes in care concerns (the arrival or decease of family members), or due to choices as to whether or not to provide support (retrospectively attributing choices made to personal norms). On the basis of the previous considerations, we argue that norms of filial obligation are shaped by four mechanisms: (a) the value patterns of the groups people belong to, (b) the constellation of their families, (c) the practical possibilities people have to help others, and (d) actual experiences of support exchange. This perspective is fleshed out using the characteristics included in the analyses.

2.1 *Group value patterns*

The first characteristic we consider is *gender*. Given the way in which women are socialised to act as carers and given the traditional role of women as social secretaries and kin-keepers (Rosenthal, 1985), we expect that women espouse stronger filial norms than men.

The literature presents different views on how *age* relates to norms of filial obligation. One view is that a sense of social duty is strongest in middle age, when the odds of becoming an informal carer are greatest. The underlying idea is that filial responsibility manifests itself as ageing parents increasingly face cognitive and physical limitations (Gans and Silverstein, 2006). A second view is that norms of filial obligation are strongest at a young age and subsequently decrease. Here, the underlying assumption is that a sense of obligation is rooted in adult children's desire to give their parents something in return for the investments they made in them when they were younger (Rossi and Rossi, 1990). Young adult children have had fewer opportunities to 'get out of the red' than middle-aged children (Stein et al., 1998). A third view is that norms of obligation decrease in later life, as dependence on others becomes real. In this view, the elderly would want to relieve members of younger generations of the burden of care out of altruistic motives (Lye, 1996). Given the divergent views, we have refrained from formulating an explicit hypothesis on age differences.

In the literature, various ideas have been developed about the relationship between a person's *level of education* and his or her family norms. Rossi and Rossi (1990) state that the better educated have stronger norms of obligation than the lesser educated. The underlying reasoning is that people with a higher level of education owe their parents more because they have received more investments from them. In other words, the better educated feel more strongly committed to do something for their parents in return for the substantial investments made in them in the past. At the same time, the more highly educated tend to be better able to afford to offer assistance. Kohn (1977) argues, however, that the more highly educated have weaker norms of family responsibility because they seek greater autonomy. Research has repeatedly found that the better educated have a more individualistic lifestyle than people with a lower level of education (Felling et al., 2000), and for that reason we predict an inverse association between level of education and the strength of filial norms.

Norms prescribing that children should support their parents are embedded in religious ideologies (Reher, 1998). Most Christian denominations teach that one should love and respect one's parents. Muslim doctrines do so even more strongly. We therefore expect people who belong to a particular *religion*, church or creed to more strongly feel that adult children

should support their parents than non-religious people. In addition to denomination, we use active attendance of church services or other religious services as indicators of religiosity.

We also include *ethnicity* in our analyses. The literature commonly makes a distinction between individualistic and collectivist cultures. Said simply, individualists see themselves as autonomous individuals and collectivists see themselves as belonging to a group (Kagitçibasi, 1996; Nauck, 2007). Most North European countries are characterised as individualistic societies. Many migrants¹ in the Netherlands have a Mediterranean or Caribbean background. Mediterranean countries such as Turkey and Morocco can be typified as collectivist societies, with a patriarchal family structure. Caribbean countries such as Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles share the collectivist orientation of the Mediterranean countries, but their families have a matrifocal structure. We expect that migrants from non-Western countries have stronger feelings of filial obligation than non-migrants and migrants from Western countries. We have further distinguished between first- and second-generation migrants from non-Western countries. Migration can have contrary effects on personal values (De Valk, 2006). On the one hand, the cultural orientation of first-generation migrants might gradually move towards that of the host country. In this case, first-generation migrants are exposed to more individualistic values through the media, through their children who are growing up in the Netherlands, by socialising with the native Dutch population, and at work. On the other hand, the cultural orientation of first-generation migrants might move closer to that of their home countries. In this case, migrants hold onto ‘old’ values in order to do away with feelings of alienation caused by their subordinate and isolated position in society. Given these considerations, we refrain from making a prediction about differences in filial obligations between first- and second-generation migrants.

The *degree of urbanisation* of someone’s place of residence is an indicator of both lifestyle and proximity to family members. It is generally assumed that residents of urban areas are more individualistic than residents of rural areas (Hortulanus et al., 2006). It is less common for city dwellers to have family living close by (Mulder and Kalmijn, 2006). In rural areas, on the other hand, it is not uncommon for family members to live in close proximity to one another. We therefore assume that city dwellers have weaker norms of filial obligation than residents of rural areas.

2.2 *Family constellation*

People’s *civil status* is the combined outcome of marital history and current partner status. Marital history indicates whether people have ever been married, have ever divorced, or have ever been widowed. Partner status indicates whether people share a household with a partner. The traditional view in the literature is that divorce and remarriage result in weaker feelings that family members should help one another (Coleman et al., 1997; Popenoe, 1988; Rossi and Rossi, 1990). A number of factors play a role: broken or damaged family relationships, having less time and money to help family members, and being too preoccupied with one’s own problems to be sensitive to the needs of others. This view has recently been challenged, however; the negative effect of divorce on intergenerational exchanges appears to be weakening (Glaser et al., 2008). Moreover, Wijckmans and Van Bavel (2010) report stronger norms of filial obligation among divorcees, which is consistent with earlier findings showing that people who are single have higher expectations in terms of family support than those who live with a partner because they have a greater need for support (Lee et al., 1994). The assumption here is that their strong sense of filial responsibility is a reflection of how they themselves would like to be treated. These considerations lead to the expectation that singles

¹ We use the term ‘migrants’ to cover all people who were born abroad and immigrated as adults or minors (first generation) as well as their children (second generation).

have stronger norms of filial obligation than those who are partnered, regardless of marital history.

Rossi and Rossi (1990) have argued that a sense of responsibility towards ageing *parents* may weaken when older family generations are no longer alive. Elaborating on this view, Gans and Silverstein (2006) state that the death of one's parents entails a change of perspective: a shift from being a potential care giver to being a potential care recipient. There is no longer a need to provide informal care to the older generation. Altruistic feelings towards adult children, such as the desire to protect them from having to assume intensive care duties, may become more dominant. Following these arguments, we predict weaker norms of filial obligation among those who have no surviving parents or parents-in-law.

Parental divorce may affect rationales for filial obligations such as norms of reciprocity and gratitude (Ganong and Coleman, 1998). Adult children may feel reluctant to repay parents who created breaches in their lives, or they may feel they have a lesser debt to repay. Moreover, they may feel less grateful to parents. Filial obligations seen as a moral duty that must be performed to be able to consider oneself a good person are less likely to be affected by parental divorce than norms of reciprocity and gratitude (Ganong and Coleman, 1998). Recent studies give credence to a continuity perspective, which assumes that family norms are resilient against changes in family structure (Gans and Silverstein, 2006; Wijckmans and Van Bavel, 2010). We follow the latter perspective and predict that norms of filial obligation are unaffected by parental divorce. Apart from parental divorce, we include having a stepparent in the analyses.

With respect to the relationship between the presence of *children* and norms of filial obligation towards parents, the literature presents two different views. Both views, however, predict that the presence of children goes hand in hand with espousing weaker norms of responsibility towards ageing parents. We referred to one of these views above: the desire to protect adult children from having to assume care duties. The other view focuses on parental responsibilities. Adult children who have children of their own have 'legitimate excuses' (Finch and Mason, 1993) not to care for older family generations. We include the number of coresident and non-resident children and the presence of stepchildren in our analyses.

Liefbroer and Mulder (2006) discuss two contrasting hypotheses about the relationships between the presence of *brothers and sisters* and norms of obligation towards parents. One view is that the presence of siblings could contribute to a sense of belonging to a broader network of family relationships, and this sense of 'belonging' would manifest itself in espousing stronger filial norms. Conversely, the presence of brothers and sisters could lead to weaker norms of obligation. The presence of alternative sources of support would mean that people feel less responsible for supporting the older generation (Van Gaalen et al., 2008). We included the presence of brothers and sisters and the presence of half brothers and sisters in our analyses, but refrain from formulating explicit predictions about the association between having siblings and norms of filial obligation.

2.3 *Practical possibilities*

It is hardly surprising that *health* plays an important role in determining people's ability to provide care. Following this reasoning, health problems lead to weaker feelings of responsibility; the idea being that when people express norms of filial obligation they bear in mind their own physical limitations. An alternative line of reasoning starts from the perspective of a person with health limitations as the potential recipient of care. Presumably, the potential recipient strongly endorses norms of filial obligations because of an awareness of need. Given the contrasting lines of reasoning, we refrain from formulating an explicit prediction about the association between health problems and norms of filial obligation.

Socio-economic status is a complex variable: it has an *employment status* component as well as an *income* component. Whereas both these components are expected to entail a weakening of family norms, they do so for different reasons (Finley et al., 1988). People with a paid job have less spare time than the unemployed, which means that they are less able to care for their parents. One would expect them to attune their sense of obligation to their practical circumstances and therefore to adjust it downwards, and more strongly so for those with fulltime jobs than for those with part-time jobs. As people who are in a better financial position can afford to buy private care, they would be more inclined to adopt a self-sufficient attitude. In an effort to identify the various influences, we have included indicators of the number of days worked per week and of household income.

2.4 *Actual support exchange*

And finally, we studied the relationship between feelings of responsibility towards parents and the actual *exchange of support*. So, rather than viewing norms of obligation as a determinant of support exchange, we did the opposite. We examined the extent to which actual instances of support exchange influence commitment to filial norms. There is, of course, a mutual relationship between the two. Here we have assumed that there is a stronger sense of obligation among both those who have received intensive support from their parents and those who have offered their parents intensive support. Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory formed the basis for our prediction. In this theory, cognitive dissonance, which refers to a situation in which people's behaviour does not tally with their personal values, is considered to be undesirable. People strive to reduce dissonance. In the current context, dissonance reduction means that giving (or receiving) support is retrospectively attributed to a strong sense of obligation. Alternatively, of course, not giving (or receiving) support could lead to the erosion of filial obligations.

3 Method

3.1 *Sample*

The data are from the wave 1 public release file of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, NKPS (Dykstra et al., 2005). Since 2007, the NKPS is officially the Dutch participant in the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP), a system of nationally comparative surveys and contextual databases which aims at improving the knowledge base for policy making in countries of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (Vikat et al., 2007). We combined the data from the so-called main sample (N = 8,161), a cross-section of the Dutch population aged 18 to 80 living in private households, and the so-called migrant sample (N = 1,402), which included only respondents aged 18 to 80 living in private households from the four biggest migrant groups (Turks, Moroccans, Antilleans and Surinamese).

Data collection, which took place between 2002 and 2004 involved computer assisted personal interviews and self-completion questionnaires. Items in the latter largely pertained to attitudes about family life, norms and values, where self-completion is most suitable (Bowling, 2005). The response rate was 45%, both for the main and migrant sample. The response rate is modest, though comparable to that of other large-scale family surveys in the Netherlands (Dykstra et al., 2005). Response rates in the Netherlands tend to be lower than elsewhere and they seem to be declining over time (De Leeuw and De Heer, 2001). The Dutch appear to be particularly sensitive about privacy issues. Analyses of the representativeness of the NKPS sample (Dykstra et al., 2005) showed that single men and men in couple households were underrepresented, as well as young adults and children still living with their parents. Residents of highly urban and highly rural areas were also

underrepresented in the sample. Women with children living at home were overrepresented. The response for the self-completion questionnaires was 92%.

We restricted our analyses to respondents about whom data were available for all relevant variables: a total of 8,554 (3,660 men and 4,894 women). The average age was 47 years ($SD = 14.6$) for men and 45 years ($SD = 14.9$) for women. Ordinary Least Squares regression was carried out to find out to what extent filial obligations differ according to group value patterns, family constellation, the practical possibilities to help parents, and actual support exchanges, respectively. The final model takes the four sets of predictor variables together. Table 1 shows the descriptives of the predictor variables.

3.2 Measures

Filial obligations were measured using three statements: “Children who live close to their parents should visit them at least once a week”, “Children should look after their sick parents” and “In old age, parents must be able to live in with their children”.² As we are interested in the effects on filial obligations in general, we constructed one index instead of studying the three statements separately. After recoding, the answer categories varied from 0 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree and were summed, resulting in a total score with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 12. The higher the score, the stronger the sense of obligation towards parents. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.75 for the entire sample, 0.70 for the main sample, and 0.76 for the migrant sample.

Gender was measured as 0 for male, 1 for female. Four *age* groups were distinguished: 18-29 years, 30-54 years, 55-64 years and 65-plus.

A set of dummy variables was used to measure the highest *level of education* completed with a diploma. Five levels were distinguished: up to elementary school (reference group), lower vocational training and intermediate general secondary, upper general secondary and intermediate vocational education, higher vocational education, and university education.

Two measures of religiosity were included. The first was the respondent’s *religion*. Respondents were asked to which religion, church or creed they belonged: Roman-Catholic, Protestant, Islamic, and other. The reference group was made up of people who said they did not belong to a particular religion. The second was a set of dummy variables representing *church attendance*, the average number of times respondents attended a religious service: a few times a year, a few times a month, and once a week or more often. The reference group was made up of people who said they never attended a church service or other religious service.

In order to examine the influence of *ethnicity*, the respondents were first divided into two groups: people of Dutch descent, defined as people born in the Netherlands and whose parents were born in the Netherlands, and migrants. The migrant group was subsequently divided up by country of origin: Western versus non-Western³. Where migrants within one family came from different countries of origin, the respondent’s country of origin weighed most heavily, followed by the mother’s country of origin. Additionally, among the non-Western migrants, a distinction was made between people born outside the Netherlands (first generation) and those born in the Netherlands (second generation).

² These three statements were presented to the respondents in both the main sample and the migrant sample; a fourth statement, “Children should take unpaid leave to look after their sick parents” was only presented to the main sample. Note that the measures differ from those in the standardised GGP design.

³ In preliminary analyses we distinguished the non-Western migrant groups ‘Turks’, ‘Moroccans’, ‘Surinamese’, ‘Antillians’, and ‘other’, but found no significant differences in filial obligations between them, neither for the first nor for the second generation, respectively.

With respect to the *level of urbanisation*, five categories ranging from (1) rural to (5) highly urbanised were used for the place of residence.

Six *civil status* categories were distinguished. The first related to people who were in their first marriage/consensual union (reference group). Given the relatively low percentage of unmarried cohabiting couples (9%), no distinction was made in this study between marriage and unmarried cohabitation, and for reasons of simplicity, both were referred to as marriage.⁴ Remarried respondents included those who had remarried after divorce (12%) and those who had remarried following widowhood (1%).⁵ Lastly, three categories of single respondents were distinguished: those who remained single following divorce, those who remained single following widowhood, and those who had never married.

Eight family constellation indicators (all dichotomous; 0 = no, 1 = yes) were included: the presence of living *parents, parents-in-law, stepparents, coresident children, non-coresident children, stepchildren, brothers and sisters, half brothers/half sisters*, and ever having experienced *parental divorce*.

Health status was based on information about whether or not the respondent suffered from a long-term illness, ailment or disability and the degree to which this physical impairment, if any, restricted the person in his or her daily activities (0 = no physical impairment/physical impairment, not restricted, 1 = impairment, slightly restricted, 2 = impairment, seriously restricted).

A set of dummy variables represented *employment status*. Three categories were distinguished: no paid job (reference group), a paid job for less than 4 days a week, and a paid job for 4 days a week or more. Net *household income* per month was based on questions about respondents' own net income from employment and/or social benefits and the net income from employment and/or social benefits of their partners, if any. Respondents who did not know, or did not wish to disclose the amount of income for one or both sources of income were presented with a list of income categories, ranging from less than 550 euros to more than 3,550 euros. Income measured in this way was taken as the median of the category (and 3,850 euros for the highest category); the incomes of the respondent and his or her partner, if any, were subsequently added up. To compare the household income across different types of household, we use the OECD equivalence scale which counts the first adult in a household as 1, additional adults as 0.7, and each child as 0.5 (OECD, 1982). Six adjusted household income categories were distinguished: less than 550 euros a month (reference category), 550 to 950 euros a month, 950 to 1,350 euros a month, 1,350 to 1,750 euros a month, more than 1,750 euros a month, and income unknown.

To assess the impact of support exchange on adult children's sense of obligation toward their parents, two kinds of support were investigated – instrumental and emotional support – from both the perspective of provider (adult child) and recipient (parent). Instrumental support consisted of items measuring how much support with household chores (such as preparing meals, cleaning, shopping, doing the laundry) and odd jobs they were receiving from one of their children and they provided to their parents, respectively, in the past three months. Emotional support was measured using items referring to how much interest and advice they received from and gave to their children and parents, respectively. The answer categories were 0 “not at all”, 1 “once or twice”, and 2 “several times”. In the analysis, answers were dichotomised into “several times” and “less frequently or not at all”, resulting in four dichotomous variables (0 = no, 1 = yes): *intensive instrumental support*

⁴ Preliminary analysis did not show a significant difference in filial obligations between those in first marriages and those in consensual unions.

⁵ There were no significant differences in filial obligations between the two remarried groups.

*received from children, intensive instrumental support given to parents, intensive emotional support received from children, and intensive emotional support given to parents.*⁶

4 Results

Table 2 shows the extent to which respondents endorsed filial obligations. The three statements differ in terms of the costs incurred (time, money, energy, and an intrusion upon privacy) in the provision of help to parents and the degree of vulnerability (parental needs). The first statement about visiting parents if one lives nearby is about a situation that involves minimal costs and with no explicit reference to any parental need. Slightly more than half felt that children who live close to their parents should visit them at least once a week. The finding that about half of the sample did *not* endorse the statement suggests that respondents attached considerable importance to voluntariness in the relationship with parents. What did the Dutch feel that adult children should do when their parents are ill? Slightly less than half were of the opinion that children should look after their sick parents. The last statement – in old age, parents must be able to live in with their children – alludes to greater commitment and sacrifice on the part of children and, although not explicitly formulated, refers to the most vulnerable parents. Close to twenty percent of the respondents felt that parents must be able to live in with them. An overwhelming majority did not feel that children are obliged to have their parents come live with them. In our view, factors that play a role here are not only an undesirable intrusion upon one's privacy, but also the fact that in the Netherlands ample institutional provisions are available for older adults in need of care.

Table 2 also shows differences by gender and age group (ages 18 to 54, and ages 55-79). The older respondents and women were less inclined than the younger respondents and men to feel that children should look after their elderly parents when the latter are in need (statements 2 and 3). Compared to the older respondents and women, the younger respondents and women agreed to a lesser extent with the first statement that children should visit their parents at least once a week if one lives nearby.

Differences in strength of filial norms by group value patterns, family constellation, practical possibilities to help parents, and actual support exchanges, are presented in Table 3. Note that the coefficients represent net effects, controlled for possible associations with other determinants.

4.1 Group value patterns

Contrary to expectations, endorsement of norms of filial obligation was lower among women than men. The youngest age group, 18 to 29-year-olds, expressed the highest level of commitment to filial norms of all age groups distinguished. This finding supports the view that the young are most likely to subscribe to the view that children should help ageing parents as they have had little opportunity to 'pay their parents back' for the investments they made in them.

The level of educational attainment made a difference regarding filial norms, but in a non-linear way. The strongest norms of filial obligation were found among respondents with a relatively low level of education (lower vocational education, lower general secondary), followed by those who had completed no more than elementary school. Those who had completed higher vocational training were found to have the weakest norms of filial obligation. Filial norms were also relatively weak among respondents with a university

⁶ In preliminary analyses, the exchange of financial support was also considered. Given the absence of significant associations, and in an effort to restrict the number of predictors, the exchange of financial support was not included in the final analyses.

education and those who had completed intermediate vocational training or upper general secondary education.

Respondents with a religious background had stronger filial norms than those who were not religious. This was in line with our expectations. Islamic respondents had the highest level of commitment to filial norms. Table 3 also shows that people who regularly attended church or other religious services felt more strongly that adult children should support ageing parents than those who never attended a religious service.

All migrant groups – both Western and non-Western – had stronger filial norms than the native Dutch population. This strong sense of duty was found in particular among first-generation migrants. Second-generation migrants differed less from the native Dutch in terms of the strength of filial obligations than first-generation migrants. This supports the view that people of non-Dutch descent who grow up in the Netherlands acquire a cultural orientation that is similar to that of people of Dutch descent.

The degree of urbanisation had the expected effect: the more urbanised, the lower the level of commitment to filial norms.

As the bottom row of Table 3 shows, group value patterns explained the largest proportion of the variance in norms of filial obligation. A comparison between the group value patterns model and the full model reveals few differences in the magnitude of the coefficients of the various predictors, suggesting that group value patterns are not attributable to family constellation, practical possibilities or actual support exchanges.

4.2 *Family constellation*

Consistent with expectations, divorcees and singles who were never married espoused stronger norms of filial obligation than those in a first marriage. However, not all groups of single people strongly felt that adult children are responsible for ageing parents: no differences were found in filial norms between the widowed and people in their first marriage.⁷ Neither did the level of commitment to filial norms differ between the remarried and people in their first marriage.

Norms of filial obligation were not found to be related to whether or not one's own parents or partner's parents were still alive. Thus our findings provide only partial support for the hypothesis that the presence of an older family generation underlines feelings of responsibility for parents. Consistent with the continuity perspective, family network disruptions, such as parental divorce and remarriage by one of the parents, did not make a difference in the level of commitment to filial norms once ethnicity, religiosity, and educational attainment were controlled for (see the full model).

As expected, compared with childless couples, those with non-coresident children felt less strongly that children should help ageing parents. The presence of coresident children was not related to weaker norms of obligation towards parents, once ethnicity, religiosity, and educational attainment were controlled for (see the full model).⁸ The presence of stepchildren had no effect on a sense of obligation towards parents. Respondents with brothers and sisters espoused weaker norms of filial obligation than only children. This suggests that people less strongly feel that children should help ageing parents if they themselves can share care duties with siblings. However, those with half siblings more strongly endorsed norms of filial obligation, suggesting they have lower expectations about help forthcoming from their half brothers and sisters.

⁷ A separate analysis (see Table 3b in the Appendix) based only on respondents aged 55 to 80 revealed that single widowed respondents more strongly endorsed norms of filial obligations than did older adults in first marriages.

⁸ A separate analysis (see Table 3b in the Appendix) based on respondents aged 55 to 80 revealed that those with coresident children less strongly endorsed norms of filial obligations than did childless older adults.

4.3 *Practical possibilities*

Health showed no association with the strength of filial norms. We cannot rule out the possibility that the two expected health effects, a negative effect one from the provider's and a positive effect from the recipient's view, counterbalance each other.⁹

Contrary to expectations, respondents who had a paid job, either parttime or fulltime, had equally strong norms as those who were unemployed once gender, ethnicity, religion, and educational attainment were controlled for (see the full model).¹⁰ People's financial situation was associated with their sense of obligation towards ageing parents. Consistent with expectations, the higher income groups had weaker filial norms than people with an adjusted household income of less than 950 euros a month.

4.4 *Actual support exchange*

Finally, Table 3 largely shows the expected positive associations between actual support exchanges and the strength of filial norms. Respondents who had provided intensive assistance to their parents in the past three months, either instrumental or emotional, more strongly endorsed norms of filial obligation than those who did not provide such assistance. Moreover, those who had received intensive instrumental assistance from their children in the past three months more strongly espoused norms of filial obligation than those who had not received regular instrumental help from their children in terms of their support norms.¹¹ However, contrary to expectations, respondents who had received intensive emotional support from their children felt less strongly that adult children should support ageing parents.

5 **Conclusion**

The pattern emerging from the findings is that the Dutch are reluctant to prescribe for others how they should behave vis-à-vis their ageing parents. Approximately half of the adult population did not feel that adult children who live close to their parents should visit them at least weekly. Somewhat less than half felt that adult children should look after ailing parents, and the large majority was opposed to the idea that in old age parents must move in with their adult children. Whether this lack of social dictates reflects the generosity of the welfare state or high levels of individualism in the Netherlands, remains an open question, given that both are inextricably linked (Dykstra, 2010).

Of the four sets of predictors (group value patterns, family constellation, practical possibilities to help others, and actual support exchanges), value patterns were the strongest determinants of filial norms. The results show strong differences in terms of level of education, religiosity, and ethnicity. People who had completed upper general secondary education or higher, had relatively weak filial norms. People who said they belong to a religious community and those who regularly attended religious services had relatively strong filial support norms. Islamic respondents felt most strongly that adult children should help ageing parents. Both Western migrants and non-Western migrants, and the latter particularly

⁹ Separate analyses carried out for potential support providers (respondents aged 18 to 54) and potential support receivers (respondents aged 55 to 80) are in line with this view. As Table 3b in the Appendix shows, the 55 to 80 year-olds with serious health impairments more strongly endorsed norms of filial obligation.

¹⁰ A separate analysis (see Table 3a in the Appendix) based only on respondents aged 18 to 54 revealed that respondents with paid jobs (whether part-time or fulltime) less strongly endorsed norms of filial obligations than did jobless respondents.

¹¹ A separate analysis (see Table 3b in the Appendix) based only on respondents aged 55 to 80 showed no significant difference in norms of filial obligation between older adults who had received intensive instrumental support from their children and those who had not.

if they were first-generation migrants, more strongly endorsed filial norms than people of Dutch descent.

We do not want to suggest, however, that the other predictors did not play a role of importance. We found significant differences in filial norms depending on parental status, the presences of siblings, and financial situation. Childless people had stronger filial norms than those with children living at home, and people with brothers and sisters had weaker filial norms than those who were an only child. Norms of filial obligation among high-income groups were relatively weak. We also found a high level of consonance between actual support exchanges and endorsed filial obligations. Those involved in intensive intergenerational support exchanges, either as givers or receivers, had high levels of commitment to filial norms.

A number of hypotheses were not supported by the findings. Contrary to expectations, Dutch women did not espouse stronger filial norms than Dutch men. In fact, the opposite was found to be the case. Norwegian and British samples have also revealed weaker norms of filial obligation among women compared with men (Daatland and Herlofson, 2003). Recent analyses of data from the Generations and Gender Surveys (Herlofson et al., 2011) show that women less strongly endorse norms of filial obligation in Norway, the Netherlands, Germany, and France compared to men, but more strongly endorse norms of filial obligation in Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Russia. No gender differences were observed in Georgia. U.S. research has shown that women have stronger support norms than men (Gans and Silverstein, 2006; Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Stein et al., 1998; Zhan, 2004), or has found no gender difference (Ganong et al., 1998; Killian and Ganong, 2002; Lee et al., 1994; Logan and Spitze, 1995; Wolfson et al., 1993). We have interpreted the gender differences as meaning that perhaps women give more realistic answers than men. Women may give less socially desirable answers because they are all too familiar with the practice of caring. As a rule, caring duties are performed more by women than by men (Gerstel and Gallagher, 2001; Haberkern and Szyldik, 2010). Men, on the other hand, might subscribe to the importance of caring for parents in a theoretical sense. They are less inclined than women to accept the consequence, namely that they are the ones who should provide this care. Findings from recent longitudinal studies in Norway and the Netherlands suggest that filial responsibility norms seem to have a stronger motivational component for sons than for daughters (Herlofson et al., 2011). The correlation between attitudes towards filial responsibility and actual provision of support was higher for sons than for daughters. It is conceivable that daughters take support provision more for granted and are more likely to regard support as part of regular daily life activities, whereas sons to a stronger degree provide support because they feel it is expected of them.

Another hypothesis that was not supported is that the employed would feel less strongly that adult children should care for ageing parents. The strength of the filial norms of those with paid jobs did not differ from that of the non-employed. Previous studies in the Netherlands have shown that having a job does not prevent people from providing care to the needy (Dijkgraaf et al., 2009). One does see, however, that people give up their leisure time to provide care.

A commonly held view is that divorce leads to weaker family ties (Wijckmans and Van Bavel, 2010). Our results do not support this view. On the contrary: divorcees espoused stronger filial norms than did those in first marriages. We also failed to find significant differences in the reported sense of obligation towards parents based on circumstances that could be related to divorce, such as the presence of stepchildren. However, we did find that those with half brothers and half sisters more strongly endorsed norms of filial obligations. We cannot rule out the possibility that the absence of a negative divorce effect might be related to the way in which filial obligation statements were formulated. The statements

pertained to family responsibility among the Dutch in general. We might have found weaker support norms among divorcees if we had asked them about a sense of obligation towards their *own* parents.

Finally, we would like to comment on the finding that the older age groups felt less strongly that informal care should be provided to ageing parents than the younger age groups did. We should not exclude the possibility, of course, that the answers given by the younger respondents reflect an overestimation of their actual willingness to provide care. On the whole, young people are still far removed from the need to care for their older members of family. They might therefore have too rosy a picture of what it means to provide informal care and be insufficiently aware of the practical implications of this responsibility. Among the older age groups, the transition from being a potential provider to a potential receiver of care might strengthen altruistic tendencies of protecting children against the burden of care. Nevertheless, in discussions of informal care, one should not only consider the willingness to provide care, but also the willingness to receive care.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the predictor variables (N=8,554), weighted

	%	M	SD
Group value patterns			
<i>Gender</i> (% female)	50.4		
<i>Age</i> (18-79)		43.78	15.56
18-29	20.8		
30-54	52.8		
55-64	14.3		
65+	12.1		
<i>Level of education</i>			
up to elementary school	29.1		
lower vocational education /lower general secondary	9.0		
upper general secondary/intermediate vocational education	32.2		
higher vocational education	20.9		
university	8.8		
<i>Religion</i>			
none	39.9		
Roman Catholic	25.8		
Protestant	18.8		
Islamic	10.9		
other religion	4.6		
<i>Church attendance</i>			
never/hardly ever	52.8		
a few times a year	24.6		
a few times a month	9.2		
once a week or more often	13.4		
<i>Ethnicity</i>			
Dutch descent	76.0		
Western	3.3		
non-Western, 1st generation	16.1		
non-Western, 2nd generation	4.6		
<i>Level of urbanisation</i> (0-4)		1.61	1.34
Family constellation			
<i>Civil status</i>			
in first marriage	62.8		
remarried	12.0		
single, widowed	3.6		
single, divorced	7.8		
never married	13.7		
<i>Parents alive</i>	70.3		
<i>Parents-in-law alive</i>	73.7		
<i>Parents ever divorced</i>	11.9		
<i>Stepparent alive</i>	4.6		
<i>Coresident children</i>	37.4		
<i>Non-coresident children</i>	29.7		
<i>Stepchild</i>	7.4		
<i>Brothers/sisters alive</i>	93.2		
<i>Half brothers/half sisters alive</i>	6.7		
Practical possibilities			
<i>Health</i>			
no physical impairment/physical impairment, not restricted	77.9		
impairment, slightly restricted	13.1		

	%	M	SD
impairment, seriously restricted	9.0		
<i>Employment status</i>			
no paid job	36.2		
paid job for less than 4 days	16.6		
paid job for 4 days or more	47.1		
<i>Household income</i>			
less than 550 euros	25.9		
550-950 euros	21.4		
950-1,350 euros	18.3		
1,350-1,750 euros	12.3		
more than 1,750 euros	16.3		
income unknown	5.8		
Actual support exchange			
<i>Intensive instrumental support received from children</i>	7.5		
<i>Intensive instrumental support given to parents</i>	18.6		
<i>Intensive emotional support received from children</i>	31.9		
<i>Intensive emotional support given to parents</i>	50.7		

Source: NKPS (2002-2004)

Table 2. Norms of filial obligation (N=8,554, percentage in agreement)

	Total	18-54		55-79		<i>F</i> age	<i>F</i> gender
		Men	Women	Men	Women		
Children who live close to their parents should visit them at least once a week	52	55	49	58	53	32.3***	7.9**
Children should look after their sick parents	47	57	45	46	33	126.4***	89.6***
In old age, parents must be able to live in with their children	18	27	17	13	8	97.1***	145.9***

***: $p < 0.001$ **: $p < 0.01$

Source: NKPS (2002-2004)

Table 3. Differences in norms of filial obligation (N=8,554, standardised regression coefficients)

	Group value patterns	Family constellation	Practical possibilities	Actual support exchange	Full model
<i>Gender: female</i>	-0.12***				-0.12***
<i>Age (18-29 = ref)</i>					
30-54	-0.10***				-0.05**
55-64	-0.14***				-0.07***
65+	-0.14***				-0.08***
<i>Level of education (up to elementary school = ref)</i>					
lower vocational education/lower general secondary	0.05***				0.04***
upper general secondary/intermediate vocational education	-0.08***				-0.08***
higher vocational education	-0.14***				-0.14***
university	-0.10***				-0.10***
<i>Religion (none = ref)</i>					
Roman Catholic	0.05***				0.05***
Protestant	0.03**				0.03**
Islamic	0.19***				0.20***
other religion	0.04**				0.03**
<i>Church attendance (never/hardly ever = ref)</i>					
a few times a year	0.04***				0.05***
a few times a month	0.04***				0.04***
once a week or more often	0.06***				0.07***
<i>Ethnicity (Dutch descent = ref)</i>					
Western	0.03**				0.03**
non-Western, 1st generation	0.21***				0.21***
non-Western, 2nd generation	0.05***				0.05***
<i>Level of urbanisation</i>	-0.05***				-0.03**
<i>Civil status (in first marriage = ref)</i>					
remarried		-0.04**			0.02
single, widowed		0.02			0.02
single, divorced		0.07***			0.04***
never married		0.13***			0.06***
<i>Parents alive</i>		0.01			-0.04
<i>Parents-in-law alive</i>		0.02			-0.02
<i>Parents divorced</i>		0.03*			-0.00
<i>Stepparent</i>		-0.03*			0.02
<i>Coresident children</i>		0.08***			-0.07
<i>Non-coresident children</i>		-0.06***			-0.08***
<i>Stepchild</i>		0.01			0.02
<i>Brothers/sisters alive</i>		-0.02			-0.03**
<i>Half brother/half sister</i>		0.04***			0.02*
<i>Health (no physical impairment/physical impairment, not restricted = ref)</i>					
impairment, slightly restricted			-0.00		0.00
impairment, seriously restricted			0.04**		0.01
<i>Employment status (no paid job = ref)</i>					
paid job for less than 4 days			-0.06***		-0.02
paid job for 4 days or more			0.04**		-0.02
<i>Household income (less than 550 euros = ref)</i>					
550-950 euros			0.01		-0.00

950-1,350 euros						-0.07***		-0.03**
1,350-1,750 euros						-0.11***		-0.03**
more than 1,750 euros						-0.16***		-0.04**
income unknown						-0.09***		-0.02
<i>Intensive instrumental support received from children</i>							0.08***	0.03**
<i>Intensive instrumental support given to parents</i>							0.01	0.03**
<i>Intensive emotional support received from children</i>							-0.15***	-0.07***
<i>Intensive emotional support given to parents</i>							0.01	0.07***
<i>adj. R²</i>	0.26	0.03	0.04	0.02	0.28			

***: p < 0.001 **: p < 0.01 *: p < 0.05
Source: NKPS (2002-2004)

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Appendix

Table 3a. Differences in norms of filial obligation, people aged 18 to 54 (N=6,159, standardised regression coefficients)

Group value patterns	
<i>Gender: female</i>	-0.12***
<i>Age (18-29 = ref)</i>	
30-54	-0.05**
<i>Level of education (up to elementary school = ref)</i>	
lower vocational education/lower general secondary	0.04**
upper general secondary/intermediate vocational education	-0.07***
higher vocational education	-0.12***
university	-0.10**
<i>Religion (none = ref)</i>	
Roman Catholic	0.05***
Protestant	0.05**
Islamic	0.23***
other religion	0.04**
<i>Church attendance (never/hardly ever = ref)</i>	
a few times a year	0.03*
a few times a month	0.02
once a week or more often	0.04**
<i>Ethnicity (Dutch descent = ref)</i>	
Western	0.53***
non-Western, 1st generation	0.22***
non-Western, 2nd generation	0.06***
<i>Level of urbanisation</i>	-0.05***
Family constellation	
<i>Civil status (in first marriage = ref)</i>	
remarried	0.02
single, widowed	-0.02
single, divorced	0.03*
never married	0.04**
<i>Parents alive</i>	-0.01
<i>Parents-in-law alive</i>	-0.02
<i>Parents divorced</i>	0.00
<i>Stepparent</i>	0.01
<i>Coresident children</i>	-0.02
<i>Non-coresident children</i>	-0.04**
<i>Stepchild</i>	0.02
<i>Brothers/sisters alive</i>	-0.04***
<i>Half brother/half sister</i>	0.02
Practical possibilities	
<i>Health (no physical impairment/physical impairment, not restricted = ref)</i>	
impairment, slightly restricted	-0.01
impairment, seriously restricted	-0.01
<i>Employment status (no paid job = ref)</i>	
paid job for less than 4 days	-0.03*
paid job for 4 days or more	-0.04*
<i>Household income (less than 550 euros = ref)</i>	
550-950 euros	-0.01
950-1,350 euros	-0.04**
1,350-1,750 euros	-0.03
more than 1,750 euros	-0.05**

income unknown	-0.02
Actual support exchange	
<i>Intensive instrumental support given to parents</i>	0.03*
<i>Intensive emotional support given to parents</i>	0.06***

*adj. R*² 0.28

***: $p < 0.001$ **: $p < 0.01$ *: $p < 0.05$

Source: NKPS (2002-2004)

Table 3b. Differences in norms of filial obligation, people aged 55 to 80 (N=2,395, standardised regression coefficients)

Group value patterns	
<i>Gender: female</i>	-0.17***
<i>Age (55-64 = ref)</i>	
65+	-0.02
<i>Level of education (up to elementary school = ref)</i>	
lower vocational education/lower general secondary	0.05*
upper general secondary/intermediate vocational education	-0.10***
higher vocational education	-0.15***
university	-0.08***
<i>Religion (none = ref)</i>	
Roman Catholic	0.05
Protestant	0.00
Islamic	0.14***
other religion	0.01
<i>Church attendance (never/hardly ever = ref)</i>	
a few times a year	0.09***
a few times a month	0.07**
once a week or more often	0.11***
<i>Ethnicity (Dutch descent = ref)</i>	
Western	-0.01
non-Western, 1st generation	0.19***
non-Western, 2nd generation	0.02
<i>Level of urbanisation</i>	
	-0.01
Family constellation	
<i>Civil status (in first marriage = ref)</i>	
remarried	0.02
single, widowed	0.06**
single, divorced	0.06**
never married	0.08***
<i>Coresident children</i>	-0.05*
<i>Non-coresident children</i>	-0.14***
<i>Stepchild</i>	0.01
Practical possibilities	
<i>Health (no physical impairment/physical impairment, not restricted = ref)</i>	
impairment, slightly restricted	0.01
impairment, seriously restricted	0.05**
<i>Household income (less than 550 euros = ref)</i>	
550-950 euros	0.00
950-1,350 euros	-0.03
1,350-1,750 euros	-0.06**
more than 1,750 euros	-0.05
income unknown	-0.01
Actual support exchange	
<i>Intensive instrumental support received from children</i>	0.03
<i>Intensive emotional support received from children</i>	-0.06**

*adj. R*²

0.27

***: p < 0.001 **: p < 0.01 *: p < 0.05

Source: NKPS (2002-2004)