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Brandt, M; Schmid, T; Haberkern, K

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# Gendered support to older parents: do welfare states matter?

Tina Schmid · Martina Brandt · Klaus Haberkern

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**Abstract** The aim of this study is to examine the association of welfare state policies and the gendered organisation of intergenerational support (instrumental help and personal care) to older parents. The study distinguishes between support to older parents provided at least weekly, i.e. time-intensive and often burdening support, and supplemental sporadic support. Three policy instruments were expected to be associated with daughters' and sons' support or gender inequality in intergenerational support respectively: (1) professional social services, (2) cash-for-care payments and (3) legal obligations to provide or co-finance care for parents. The analyses based on the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe showed that daughters provided somewhat more sporadic and much more intensive support than sons throughout Europe. While about half of all children who sporadically supported a parent were men, this applied to only one out of four children who provided intensive support. Logistic multi-level models revealed that legal obligations were positively associated with daughters' likelihood of giving intensive support to parents but did not affect the likelihood of sons doing so. Legal obligations thus stimulate support in a gender-specific way. Both legal obligations and cash-for-care schemes were also accompanied by a more unequal

distribution of involvement in intensive support at the expense of women. Social services, in contrast, were linked to a lower involvement of daughters in intensive support. In sum, the results suggest that welfare states can both preserve or reduce gender inequality in intergenerational support depending on specific arrangements.

**Keywords** Intergenerational support · Older people · Gender · Gender inequality · Welfare state · European comparison · SHARE

## Introduction

All European societies face demographical ageing due to reduced fertility rates and increased longevity. As the number of older people rises, the need for instrumental help and personal care grows. So far, the family, together with the welfare state, is the main provider of support with activities of daily living (ADL) and instrumental activities of daily living (IADL) to older people. The most common familial caregivers are partners/spouses and adult children (OECD 2005; Schneekloth and Leven 2002). The overwhelming majority of people support their partner when she/he becomes dependent on help with everyday activities—and this is true for women and men alike (Huber et al. 2009). Nevertheless, women provide support in partnerships somewhat more often than men since men often become dependent on support before their partner due to women's greater longevity and because men are typically older than their partners (Arber and Ginn 1991; Huber et al. 2009).

Patterns of support from adult children are also gendered. Daughters take over different tasks than sons and involve themselves in intergenerational support more often

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and at a higher intensity (e.g. Gerstel and Gallagher 2001; Pinquart and Sörensen 2006; Walker et al. 1995). But, unlike partner support, the gendered patterns in intergenerational ADL/IADL support cannot be explained by demographical factors alone and require further investigation. This is particularly relevant if they create unequal living conditions, i.e. when they entail specific advantages or disadvantages for the supporting child.

While it is unclear whether certain *types* of support, such as household work or personal care, are linked to unfavourable living conditions, different support *intensities* are related to well-known drawbacks. Firstly, intensive intergenerational support often results in mental and physical impairments for the caring relatives. Children who intensively support an older parent frequently report that their caring responsibilities cause them to worry, to feel depressed or anxious (Savundranayagam et al. 2011). This burden is often associated with lower levels of self-reported health (see e.g. Eppers et al. 2008; Pinquart and Sörensen 2006; Savundranayagam et al. 2011). Secondly, time-consuming support to an older parent often prompts children to reduce or even relinquish their job (Berecki-Gisolf et al. 2008; Lilly et al. 2007). Employment, however, is tightly linked to income and to better social positions in all Western societies. In many countries the unoccupied also enjoy less social security rights (Leitner 2003). In contrast, occasional or sporadic support to parents has not been found to be associated with general disutility and is seen more as a means of cultivating intergenerational relationships than as a source of disadvantages (Brandt 2009, Walker et al. 1995).

Against this background we distinguish sporadic IADL/ADL support from intensive IADL/ADL support instead of differentiating between ADL and IADL support per se. This is because it is the intensity of support to parents that causes unequal living conditions rather than the type of support. We view unequal living conditions in terms of social inequality, which is defined as a “condition whereby people have unequal access to valued resources, services and positions in the society” (Kerbo 2006, p. 11). Accordingly, the unequal allocation of intergenerational support to daughters and sons can be conceptualized as gender inequality in intergenerational support because it is associated with unequal access to resources such as time and income.

Next, we ask which factors cause daughters and sons to reach different support decisions and how the resulting gender inequality in intergenerational support can be accounted for. While a host of studies have addressed this topic, the contextual influences on the gendered organisation of intergenerational support, such as welfare state policies, have thus far not been analysed empirically. As welfare states and families share the responsibility for

ADL/IADL support in one way or another and family support is highly gendered, welfare states are expected to influence not only familial support behaviour but also gender inequality in support provided by the family (Leitner 2003; Arksey and Glendinning 2008). It is argued that welfare state policies can reinforce or reduce gender inequality, depending on how they are implemented and the values and norms they reflect (Leitner 2003; Plantenga et al. 2009; Ungerson 2004).

The aim of this study is to clarify the influence of three main policy instruments in the field of elderly care on gendered intergenerational support patterns. These policy instruments are (1) professional social services, including housekeeping and home nursing services as well as stationary care services, (2) cash-for-care programmes that either pay relatives for providing care or issue payments directly to dependent older persons for purchasing their preferred (formal or informal) care arrangement (Ungerson 2004; Timonen et al. 2006) and (3) legal obligations requiring relatives to co-finance the cost of care for parents or to provide care to dependent parents (Blackmann 2000; Mestheneos and Triantafillou 2005).

Using comparative data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), we examine, firstly, how the described welfare state policies are associated with daughters' and sons' support behaviour, secondly, whether they are associated with intergenerational support from daughters and sons in some different ways, and, thirdly, whether these policies affect gender inequality in intergenerational support. In order to clarify whether the investigated welfare state policies are indeed linked to involvement in intergenerational support and whether this is gender-specific, we view the policies in relation to sporadic and intensive support from daughters and sons on the country level and to the likelihood of support on the individual level, controlling for well-known individual and family influences. In the next step, we analyse the subsample of children providing support to a parent and examine how welfare state policies are linked to the gender distribution in this subsample.

### **Welfare state influences on gender inequalities in intergenerational support**

Research on intergenerational support consistently shows that adult daughters support their older parents more frequently and at a higher intensity than sons. Moreover, they are more responsive to their parents' needs (Kalmijn and Saraceno 2008). Daughters are more likely to provide intensive personal care whereas sons tend to supply supplemental sporadic support, such as transportation, repairs or paperwork (Campbell and Martin-Matthews 2003;

Matthews and Rosner 1988; Martin-Matthews and Campbell 1995; Miller and Cafasso 1992). Yet, the gendered support patterns have not been explained comprehensively. For the most part, the preponderance of daughters is explained by gender-specific employment patterns and family responsibilities (e.g. Chesley and Poppie 2009; Crespo 2006; Sarkisian and Gerstel 2004) as well as by greater affection and feelings of obligation from daughters towards their parents (e.g. Rossi and Rossi 1990; Rossi 1993; Spitze and Logan 1989; Suito and Pillemer 2006).

To our knowledge, comparative empirical research has not investigated welfare state influences on gendered support patterns. However, a number of studies address the association between welfare states and intergenerational support in general. The major concern in this respect is how public services are linked with the prevalence and intensity of adult children's support. Most studies show that public services do not 'crowd out' intergenerational support but rather lead to a 'specialization' (Igel et al. 2009) or 'mixed responsibility' (Motel-Klingebiel et al. 2005) between the family and the state. Provision of public services relieves children of having to provide time-consuming vital support and allows them to engage in sporadic voluntary assistance tailored to the individual needs of the parent (Brandt et al. 2009; Keck 2008). However these same studies did not address whether public care services influence daughters and sons in a different way.

Even fewer comparative empirical studies address the influence of legal obligations and cash-for-care benefits on intergenerational support or gender differences in intergenerational support. Haberkern and Szydlik (2010) show that legal obligations increase children's care involvement, but do not examine gender differences. Jacobzone and Jenson (2000) and Sarasa (2008) analyse the impact of cash-for-care payments on women's involvement in informal care but reach different conclusions. While Sarasa (2008) found that cash payments reduce women's likelihood of engaging in heavy caregiving, Jacobzone and Jenson (2000) present evidence that high payments encourage women to provide informal care.

In addition to the empirical work on intergenerational support and welfare states, a number of theoretical contributions in comparative welfare state research address gender relations or the association between gender inequalities and 'welfare regimes'—the mix of social policy instruments that vary across European countries (e.g. Anttonen and Sipilä 1996; Bettio and Plantenga 2004; Daly and Lewis 2000; Korpi 2000; Leitner 2003; Sainsbury 1999). Several of these categorisations account for the division of care responsibilities between the family and the state (e.g. Anttonen and Sipilä 1996; Bettio and Plantenga 2004; Leitner 2003).

Leitner (2003), for instance, clusters welfare states by the degree to which they assign caring responsibilities to

the family. Her central argument is that welfare states not only relieve families from providing care but also actively promote family care and thereby affect gender relations (Leitner 2003). Thus, she proposes an analysis of welfare state policies in terms of their incentives for familial care. Different incentives can be found in regard to services, and to financial and legal policy instruments (Haberkern and Szydlik 2010; Saraceno and Keck 2008). Moreover, different welfare state policies can be conceptualized as the institutionalisation of ideological values and norms about family responsibilities and gender roles<sup>1</sup>. Since all European welfare states assign some responsibilities to the family, Leitner (2003) classifies them all as familialistic, further distinguishing between explicit, implicit and optional familialism.

Explicitly familialistic care regimes, such as Austria, Germany, Belgium and France, assign responsibility for elder care to the family. They provide only limited access to public services, impose legal obligations to (co-)finance professional care for parents, and support family care with cash-for-care schemes. The state thus gives parents the opportunity to pay a child for supporting them, thereby not only raising the child's income but also enhancing the appreciation for the support provided. Consequently, cash payments are regarded as an incentive for children to provide care, and one can assume that they encourage support from adult children (Ungerson 2004). Since men earn more than women throughout Europe, this incentive effect is likely to be smaller for sons than for daughters (Mandel and Shalev 2009). Moreover, public funding of family support is likely to have a greater impact on women because care work traditionally falls within their area of responsibility. Cash-for-care payments are thus expected to "reproduce the gendered division of family care" (Leitner 2003, p. 366).

Implicitly familialistic welfare regimes, such as the Southern European countries and Poland, neither support family care by cash payments nor provide generous public care services. Instead, these states put the family in charge by legally obligating children not only to (co-)finance but also to provide care (Haberkern and Szydlik 2010; Mestheneos and Triantafillou 2005). Even though penalties are low and regular involvement in intergenerational care "appears to be legally non-enforceable" (Mestheneos and Triantafillou 2005, p. 20), legal obligations are likely to encourage intergenerational care as they both represent and preserve strong normative filial obligations. As for cash benefits, legal obligations are linked to a gender-specific division of labour with women seen as responsible for

<sup>1</sup> It should be mentioned that welfare state policies are not only shaped by cultural norms but also shape them. For a discussion of the complex issue of the interrelation between welfare states and culture, see for example Pfau-Effinger (2005) and van Oorschot et al. (2008).

intergenerational support. Cash benefits might, thus, activate daughters more than sons.

Finally, the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands<sup>2</sup> belong to the optional type of familialistic regimes. These countries provide generous professional services to dependent older people. Family members are not obliged to support their relatives financially or practically. Nevertheless, these welfare states also support family care financially by cash-for-care programmes. While the provision of social services relieves daughters and sons from providing intensive support to their parents, cash payments encourage them to do so.

Typologies are a suitable way of describing and categorising different welfare states theoretically. Empirically, however, clustering leads to a loss of information and fails to capture the specific mechanisms behind different correlations, such as the support patterns within different welfare regimes. Therefore, in the empirical analyses we will consider different policy measures on the country level instead of by welfare state regimes, for instance public spending on old age benefits in each country. Nonetheless, we draw on the theoretical considerations from comparative welfare state research, i.e. the arguments underlying Leitner's (2003) typology.

Combining these arguments with the empirical findings concerning welfare state influences on intergenerational support, we examine three hypotheses: (1) Generous service provision is likely to relieve children from intensive support and lead to an increase in supplemental sporadic support. (2) Cash benefits are positively associated with daughters' and sons' likelihood of intensively supporting a parent although we expect the effect to be stronger for daughters. (3) Legal obligations to (co-)finance parental care or even obligations requiring relatives to provide care increase children's involvement in care. As the normative obligations underlying these policies mainly address women, we expect them to more strongly motivate daughters than sons.

## Data, operationalisation and method

We use data from the SHARE. The first wave of this representative dataset was collected in 2004/2005 in 11 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden

and Switzerland) and the second wave in 2006/2007 added the Czech Republic, Ireland and Poland. The target population is non-institutionalised individuals aged 50 and older as well as their partners living in the same household (regardless of age). Respondents were interviewed at home using computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI). In total, 31,115 persons were interviewed in the first wave; in the second wave, the sample was supplemented by another 14,540 persons. In order to maximize the number of observations, we pool interviews from wave 1 and 2 into a cross-sectional dataset, i.e. a dataset that contains the first interview of every respondent. This results in our sample consisting of 11,373 persons aged 50+ with at least one surviving, non-co-resident parent<sup>3</sup>. Within the analytic sample, 2,824 persons (24.6%) reported that they sporadically supported a parent and 774 (6.7%) that they intensively did so.

## Variables

SHARE asked the respondents whether they assisted anyone outside their household by providing personal care, practical household help or help with paperwork during the last year, allowing them to indicate up to three beneficiaries including their parents. In addition, respondents were asked how often they gave this support ('almost daily', 'almost every week', 'almost every month', 'less often'). Our dependent variables are based on this information: Intensive support from respondents to their parents is measured as practical help and/or personal care given to parents 'almost daily'; sporadic support was coded when help with IADL and/or ADL occurred less than 'almost daily' within the last twelve months.

Explanatory variables were framed as follows. The availability of social services was measured by the percentage of employees in social and health services (OECD 2010a, b). This variable represents the overall provision of professional help and care services for people in need, i.e. the professional alternatives to family support. We introduced old age expenditures for cash benefits as a percentage of the general domestic product as an indicator of public financial support for family care (OECD 2010a, b). Legal obligations to (co-)finance or contribute practically to care for parents were measured by a dummy variable

<sup>2</sup> Leitner (2003) has classified the Netherlands as an implicitly familialistic country. Due to its relatively generous service provision combined with a cash-for-care scheme ('Persoongeboden budget'), other authors, however, have categorised it as what Leitner has labelled an optionally familialistic care system (Anttonen and Sipilä 1996; Bettio and Plantenga 2004; Haberkern and Szydlik 2010; Timonen et al. 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Only 0.5% ( $n = 199$ ) of the respondents live in the same household with a parent. They were only asked whether they provided personal care to that parent regularly during the last year. Detailed information about the amount of time spent on providing care was not recorded. Moreover, these respondents were not asked about other forms of support to their co-resident parent, such as practical help. Due to the sparse information as well as the small number of observations, we restrict the sample to respondents not living in the same household with their parents.

that takes the value 1 if there are such obligations and 0 otherwise (based upon Mestheneos and Triantafillou 2005).

We included several control variables in the multivariate models. Following previous research on intergenerational support (e.g. Brandt et al. 2009; Haberkern and Szydlik 2010; Kalmijn and Saraceno 2008; Szydlik 2008), we controlled for opportunities and needs of givers and receivers<sup>4</sup>. These included the respondents' gender, age, self-reported health ('very good', 'good', 'fair', 'poor', 'very poor'), level of education based on the ISCED classification ('low', 'medium', 'high'), employment status ('not employed', 'working full time', 'working part time'), whether they live in a partnership and the number of children. Parents' characteristics included gender, number of sons and daughters (apart from the child interviewed) and their health as assessed by the respondent ('very good', 'good', 'fair', 'poor', 'very poor').

## Methods

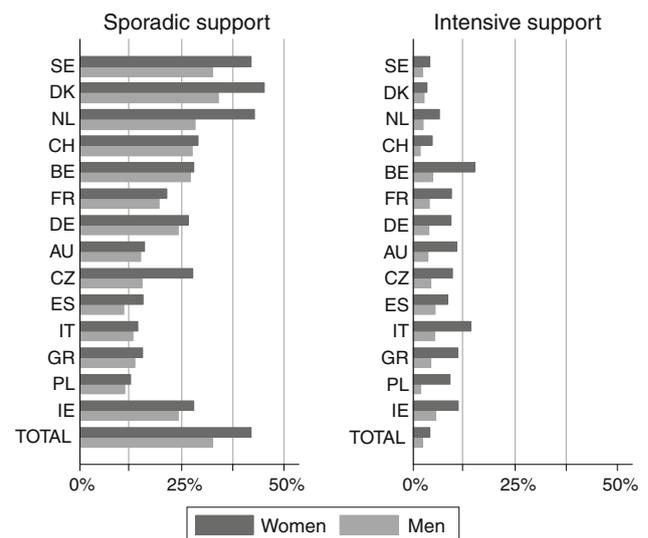
First, we describe the prevalence of sporadic and intensive support to parents on country level and correlate both types of support with social service provision and public cash payments reporting Pearson correlation coefficients and *t* tests for the association with legal obligations, respectively. We then address the individual level by means of logistic multilevel models to assess the effect of these macro indicators on the likelihood of children providing intensive or sporadic intergenerational support. Each respondent-parent dyad counts as one observation in the regression analyses, making it possible to control for respondents' characteristics and those of their parents. This is important since the composition of these individual factors varies considerably between the countries investigated. In comparative analyses it must also be taken into account that respondents from the same country share the same cultural and institutional framework. Assuming independence of observations would lead to an underestimation of the standard errors and thus to overrated significance levels. Multilevel modelling as applied in this study allows estimating the influence of variables on different levels while avoiding distortion (see Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2005; Snijders and Bosker 2004 for details). In order to identify different associations of welfare state policies with the daughters' and sons' likelihood of providing support, we estimate separate models for daughters and sons. Due to the comparably small number of countries

observed, we estimate models with one macro level indicator at a time.

In the second part of the analyses, we examine whether welfare state policies are linked to specific gender distributions of the children providing care. For this purpose, we reduce the sample to those respondents who provided support to a parent and investigate whether they were daughters or sons. We describe the gender distribution in this subsample of supporting children on country level and again link it to welfare state policies. In order to find out whether the different welfare state policies are related to an unequal distribution of sporadic or intensive support between daughters and sons, we predict the gender of the supporting child in logistic multilevel models. The question underlying these models is which factors are associated with whether it is a daughter or son who provides the support received by a parent (also see Lee et al. 1993). We control for parents' and children's characteristics (as described above) and employ multilevel models to receive correct estimations of standard errors and significance levels. All analyses are performed using the gllamm module in the statistical software package STATA 10 (see Rabe-Hesketh et al. 2004 for details).

## Results

Sporadic help with housekeeping, paperwork or personal care was much more prevalent than intensive support in all countries studied (Fig. 1). Overall, sporadic support to a parent was given by 26% of all daughters and by 21% of sons. It was particularly widespread in optionally familialistic



**Fig. 1** Prevalence of sporadic and intensive support. *Source* SHARE (1.3.0, 2.3.0), respondents aged 50+ with at least one surviving parent ( $n = 11,373$ ). Own calculations, weighted

<sup>4</sup> We do not account for geographical proximity, as it is very likely to be a result of different family regimes itself: When family obligations are high and legally reinforced, while the provision of state assistance is low, children are not able to move far from their parents or might even move back in case of frailty and need.

countries, like Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, where over 40% of women and 30% of men provided occasional support to their parents, and comparably low in implicitly familialistic countries. While the prevalence of sporadic intergenerational support varied considerably between the countries studied, there was not much variation in gender differences in sporadic support. In all countries only slightly more daughters than sons were involved.

In the case of intensive support, that is at least weekly help with household tasks and/or personal care, a very different picture emerged. Overall, 9% of all women and just fewer than 4% of all men in the sample intensively supported a parent. Intensive support provided by daughters was particularly high in explicitly familialistic countries, like Belgium and France, as well as in implicitly familialistic countries, like Italy and Greece. Unlike sporadic support, intensive support was rare in optionally familialistic countries. While the share of daughters involved in intensive intergenerational support ranged between 3 and 15%, the proportion of sons was only between 2 and 5%. Intensive support by daughters thus varied much more strongly across countries than intensive support by sons.

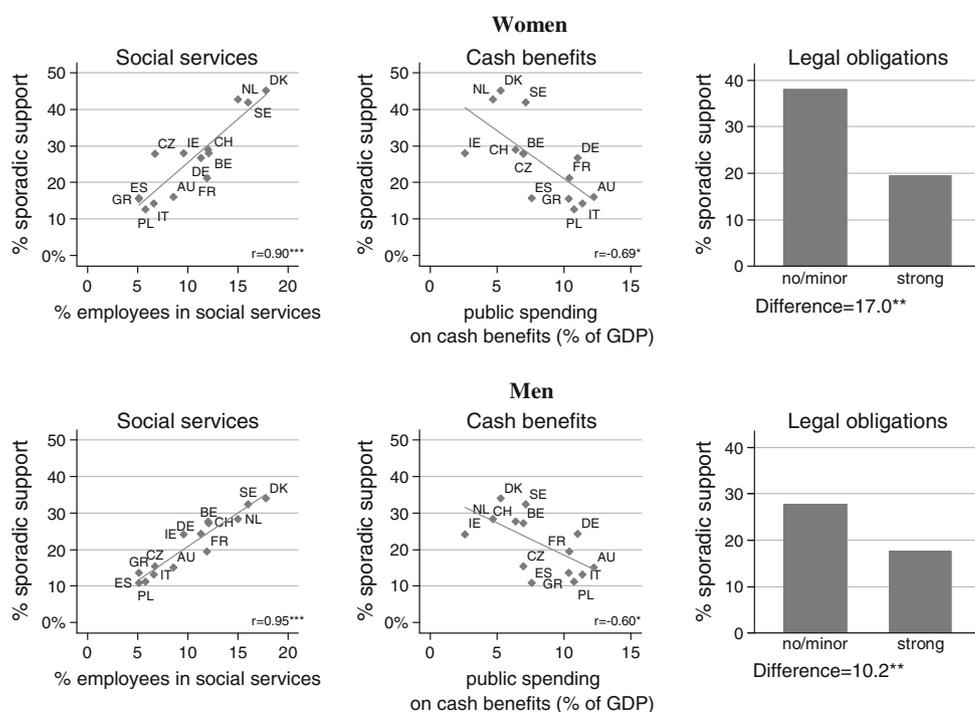
Figure 2 presents the associations of welfare state policies and daughters' and sons' sporadic involvement in support on the country level. The data revealed a strong positive correlation of social services with daughters' and sons' involvement in support: the more generous the provision of social services, the more children occasionally supported a parent. The reverse was true for cash

payments: public spending on cash benefits was negatively correlated with daughters' and sons' sporadic involvement in support. Legal obligations also went hand in hand with a lower share of women and men providing sporadic support to a parent.

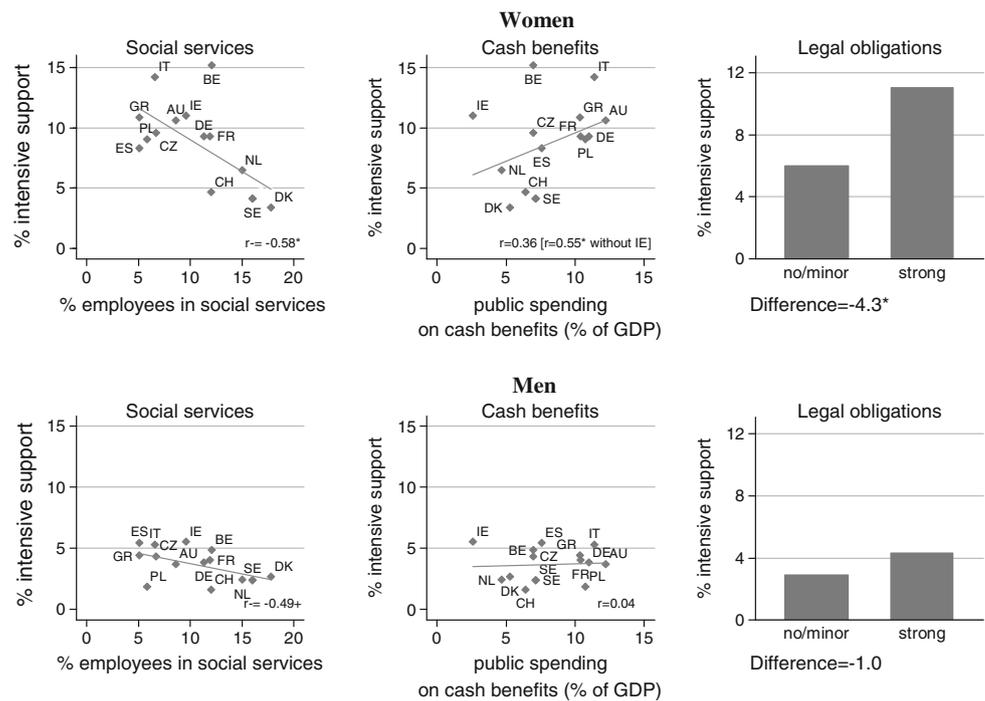
The picture looks different for support given at least once a week, i.e. intensive support (Fig. 3). The associations with involvement in support were stronger for daughters than they were for sons in relation to all three policy instruments. In line with previous findings (Brandt et al. 2009), the analysis reveals that social services relieve children and particularly daughters from providing time-intensive support. The amount the welfare state spent on cash payments was not correlated with support involvement by daughters or by sons. In the sample investigated, only the share of daughters providing time-intensive support to a parent was weakly correlated with public spending on cash benefits. The association with legal obligations was more obvious: The share of daughters providing intensive support was four percentage points higher in countries with legal obligations. Such an effect was not observed in the case of sons.

The multivariate analyses mostly confirmed our bivariate results (Table 1). Welfare state policies were associated with sporadic support from both daughters and sons but only amongst daughters in the case of intensive support. Social services relieved daughters from providing time-consuming intensive support to their parents. A generous provision of services did not lead, however, to a decrease in

**Fig. 2** Prevalence of sporadic intergenerational support and the welfare state. *Source* SHARE (1.3.0, 2.3.0), respondents 50+ with at least one surviving parent ( $n = 11,373$ ), OECD (2010a, b); Mestheneos and Triantafyllou (2005). *Significance levels*  $^+p < 0.1$ ;  $*p < 0.05$ ;  $**p < 0.01$ ;  $***p < 0.001$ . Own calculations, weighted. Coefficients reported: Pearson correlation coefficients respectively  $t$  test (legal obligations)



**Fig. 3** Prevalence of intensive intergenerational support and the welfare state. *Source* SHARE (1.3.0, 2.3.0), respondents 50+ with at least one surviving parent ( $n = 11,373$ ), OECD (2010a, b); Mestheneos and Triantafyllou (2005). *Significance levels*  $^+p < 0.1$ ;  $*p < 0.05$ ;  $**p < 0.01$ ;  $***p < 0.001$ . Own calculations, weighted. Coefficients reported: Pearson correlation coefficients respectively  $t$  test (legal obligations)



**Table 1** Logistic multilevel models for the likelihood of providing sporadic and intensive support

	All		Men		Women	
	Sporadic	Intensive	Sporadic	Intensive	Sporadic	Intensive
Social services	1.11***	0.95*	1.10***	0.97	1.12***	0.94*
Cash benefits	0.87***	1.03	0.90***	0.99	0.85***	1.05
Legal obligations	0.51***	1.66**	0.59**	1.33	0.43***	1.87**
$n$ (dyads)	13,522	13,745	6,078	6,125	7,444	7,606
$n$ (countries)	14	14	14	14	14	14
Variance country level	0.030	0.142	0.013	0.038	0.045	0.144
Intraclass correlation	0.066	0.052	0.051	0.015	0.080	0.062

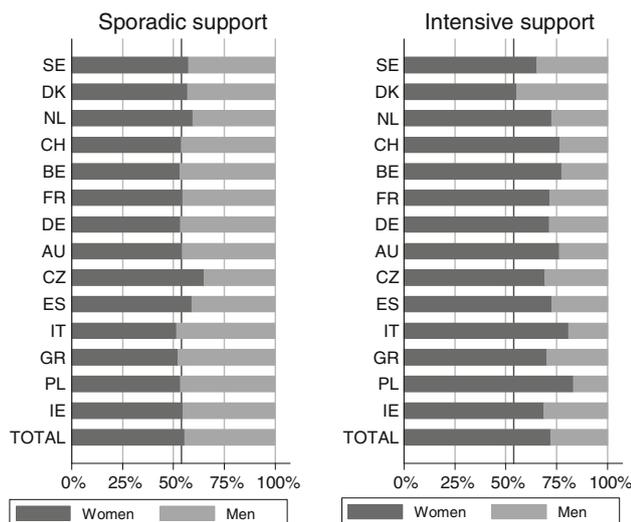
*Source* SHARE (1.3.0, 2.3.0), respondent-parent dyads with respondents 50+, OECD (2010a, b); Mestheneos and Triantafyllou (2005). *Odds ratios, significance levels*  $^+p < 0.1$ ;  $*p < 0.05$ ;  $**p < 0.01$ ;  $***p < 0.001$ . Models are controlled for respondents and parents characteristics

intergenerational support, as children in countries with more social services actually provided more supplemental low-intensity support. Cash payments were expected to stimulate intensive support, particularly from daughters. Yet, the analyses revealed that the amount of public spending on cash payments did not affect daughters' and sons' involvement in intensive support. It was, however, negatively associated with the likelihood of sporadic support by both daughters and sons. Finally, the likelihood of sporadic support was also lower in countries with legal obligations to (co-)finance or contribute to care for parents. At the same time, the likelihood of intensive support from daughters was higher in those countries (but not from sons).

### Gender inequality in intergenerational support

So far, we have examined interrelations between daughters' and sons' support commitments and welfare state policies and found evidence that welfare state policies are linked to children's and particularly daughters support decisions. In a next step, we wanted to find out whether welfare states also affect gender inequality in terms of the gender composition of children supporting their parents.

Figure 4 shows sporadically and intensively supporting children by gender. On the  $x$ -axis, we inserted a line at 55% because this was the share of women in the sample. It stands out that sporadic intergenerational support was divided much more equally between women and men than intensive



**Fig. 4** Gender compositions of children supporting a parent. Source SHARE (1.3.0, 2.3.0), respondents 50+ who sporadically ( $n = 2,824$ ) or intensively supported a parent ( $n = 774$ ) ( $n < 30$  in IE, CH, DK). Own calculations, weighted

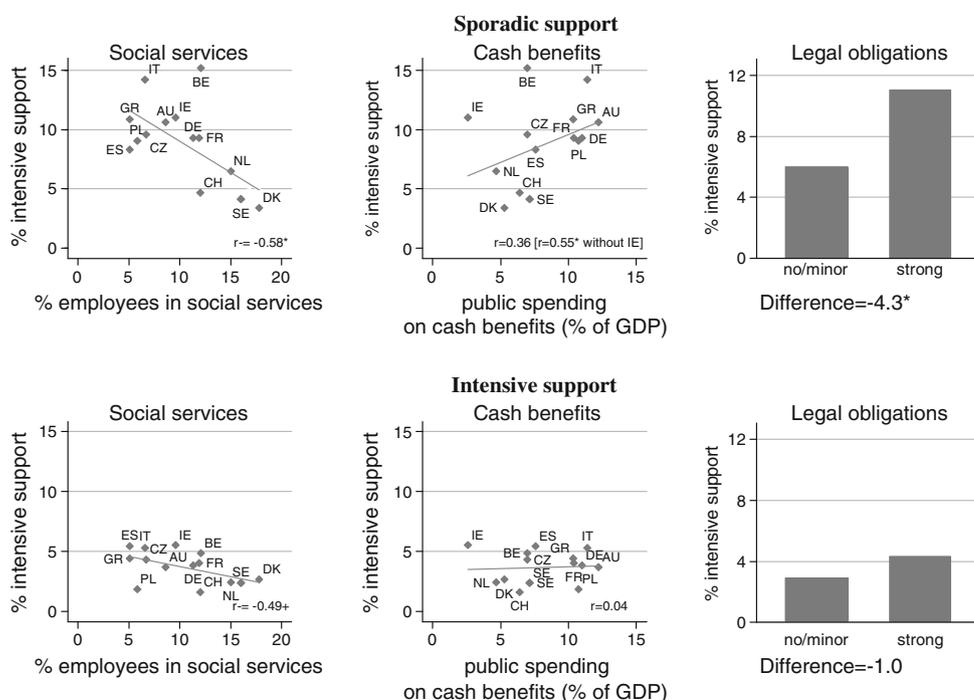
support. Overall, 56% of the respondents who support their parents less than once a week were women. Country differences in the gender composition of sporadic support were small. With the exception of the Czech Republic (35%), the share of men amongst the sporadic supporters was between 40 and 48% across the countries studied.

Country differences were much greater in support provided at least weekly. This regular, time-consuming assistance to parents was still mostly provided by women

(73%). The share of men amongst the intensively supporting children varied between 17 and 44%. It was highest in the optionally familialistic countries Denmark and Sweden and lowest in the implicitly familialistic countries Poland and Italy as well as in some explicitly familialistic countries (Austria, Belgium). In other implicitly and explicitly familialistic countries, involvement of sons in time-intensive support ranged in between. The expectation of high gender inequality in implicitly and explicitly familialistic countries and a comparatively more equal gender distribution in optionally familialistic countries hence seems to hold. Thus, the care burden on adult children was most unequally distributed in countries where children were most frequently involved in family care. These findings raise the question of how welfare state policies are correlated with this unequal distribution.

We therefore linked different welfare state policies to gender inequality measured by the proportion of men amongst all supporting children (Fig. 5). As for sporadic support, the share of men amongst the sporadically supporting children seemed to be somewhat higher in countries with high cash benefits and legal obligations. However, social services were not associated with the gender composition in sporadic intergenerational support. Looking at intensive support, the provision of social services was accompanied by higher shares of men amongst the intensively supporting children. Cash payments and legal obligations, in contrast, were negatively associated with the proportion of men amongst those providing intensive support.

**Fig. 5** Gender compositions of children supporting a parent and the welfare state. Source SHARE (1.3.0, 2.3.0), respondents 50+ who sporadically ( $n = 2,824$ ) or intensively supported a parent ( $n = 774$ ) ( $n < 30$  in IE, CH, DK), OECD (2010a, b); Mestheneos and Triantafyllou (2005). Significance levels  $^+p < 0.1$ ;  $*p < 0.05$ ;  $**p < 0.01$ ;  $***p < 0.001$ . Own calculations, weighted. Coefficients reported: Pearson correlation coefficients respectively  $t$  test (legal obligations)



**Table 2** Logistic multilevel models for gender of supporting child (1 = men)

	Sporadic	Intensive
Social services	0.97***	1.00
Cash benefits	1.05*	0.94 <sup>+</sup>
Legal obligations	1.42***	0.74 <sup>+</sup>
<i>n</i> (dyads)	2,962	791
<i>n</i> (countries)	14	14
Variance country level	0.000	0.000
Intraclass correlation	0.003	0.004

Source SHARE (1.3.0, 2.3.0), respondent-parent dyads with respondents 50+ who sporadically or intensively supported a parent ( $n < 30$  in IE, CH, DK), OECD (2010a, b); Mestheneos and Triantafyllou (2005). Significance levels <sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.1$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Own calculations, weighted. Models are controlled for respondents and parents characteristics

Table 2 presents the impact of welfare state policies on gender inequality in multivariate models that predict the gender of the supporting child, again controlling for individual influences. The analyses revealed significant associations of welfare state policies with the gender composition concerning both levels of support. The chances of being sporadically supported by a son instead of a daughter decreased with the availability of social services, indicating that the positive effect of social services on sporadic support (as demonstrated in Table 1) is stronger for women than for men. Cash payments and legal obligations, in contrast, raised the chances of being sporadically supported by a son instead of a daughter. Daughters indeed provided more intensive as opposed to sporadic support in countries with cash-for-care schemes and legal obligations (as shown in Table 1). The gender-equal distribution in sporadic support was, thus, not the result of sons' greater engagement but rather the consequence of daughters switching from sporadic to intensive support.

As for intensive support, the likelihood of being supported by a son instead of a daughter was lower in countries with generous cash payments and legal obligations, indicating that these policies are more likely to stimulate intensive support from daughters than from sons. However, social services were not significantly linked to the gender composition of intensively supporting children.

## Discussion

Research on welfare state influences on intergenerational support has largely neglected gender differences and gender inequalities in intergenerational support to older parents, although theoretical work from comparative welfare state research suggests an interrelation of welfare states and

gender inequality in intergenerational support (e.g. Leitner 2003; Rummery 2009). The aim of this article was to examine empirically the association between the gendered organisation of intergenerational support and welfare state policies. Three policies were taken into account: (1) professional social services, (2) cash-for-care schemes, i.e. cash payments to older people and (3) legal obligations for children to co-finance the cost of care for parents or to provide care themselves. Social services were expected to relieve children from time-consuming intensive support. In contrast, cash payments and legal obligations were seen not only as an incentive to provide support but also as the institutionalisation of filial obligation norms. These policies were thus expected to encourage children and particularly daughters to provide intergenerational support and thereby to cement existing gender inequalities. We distinguished between intergenerational support provided at least weekly (intensive support) and less than weekly (sporadic support).

The first research question was how welfare state policies are associated with daughters' and sons' involvement in support. Secondly, we wanted to know whether these policies were associated with support from daughters and sons in a different way. We saw that daughters provided somewhat more sporadic support and much more intensive support to their parents than sons throughout Europe. Generally, welfare states policies were associated with daughters' and sons' sporadic support but only with daughters' involvement in intensive support.

Social services were found to relieve daughters from providing intensive support and to encourage supplemental sporadic support (see also Brandt et al. 2009). Professional social services thus seemed to prompt a reduction of time spent for parental support by daughters. In addition, they seemed to activate sons to support their parents sporadically. As for cash benefits, our findings showed that in countries with high amounts spent on public cash payments to older people, the share of children who sporadically support a parent is comparably low. As eligibility for cash payments is normally based upon ADL dependency (or other care dependency measures), one might expect cash payments to increase regularly, i.e. time-intensive, ADL support rather than supplemental sporadic support. However, intensive support is not generally higher in countries that spend more on cash benefits. Although in the countries under study the share of daughters (but not sons) providing intensive support to a parent was higher with higher cash payments, this association was too weak to allow generalisation. Our results thus fail to confirm the hypothesis that cash payments actually provide an incentive for children in general. Legal obligations requiring children to co-finance or provide care, however, do promote family care, at least support from daughters. Both bivariate and multivariate

findings showed that daughters' involvement in intensive support was much higher in countries having such legal obligations. This did not apply to sons. We may conclude that legal obligations, as institutionalisations of normative family obligations, are more likely to activate daughters and thereby to cement the status quo of the gendered division of intergenerational support.

The third research question examined how welfare states policies affect gender inequality, i.e. the gender composition of children providing intergenerational support. Sporadic support was found to be divided quite equally between daughters and sons. Hence, gender inequality was quite low in this case and did not vary much across the countries examined. But, gender inequality in intensive support was much higher. Overall, only one out of four children providing at least weekly support to a parent was male. However, gender compositions varied considerably across the countries studied. The share of men amongst the supporting children was highest in optionally familialistic countries, where intensive support is not very widespread, and it was lowest in implicitly familialistic countries, where intergenerational support is much more common. The unequal involvement of daughters and sons in intergenerational support in these countries is therefore particularly important as many families and persons are affected by it.

The analyses revealed that legal obligations are linked to a lower share of men amongst children who intensively support a parent and a higher share of men amongst children sporadically supporting a parent. The higher share of men in sporadic support does not seem to result from sons' greater involvement, however, but rather from daughters' reduced involvement in sporadic and increased involvement in intensive support. Apparently, legal obligations push daughters to more frequently provide regular support than sons, thereby strengthening gender inequality in intergenerational support. Shifting responsibilities to the family by means of legal obligations to co-finance or to provide care thus means shifting responsibilities particularly to women—at least in the case of intergenerational support. Surprisingly, high amounts of public spending on cash payments were also linked to a lower chance of being supported by a son instead of a daughter, even though these payments were not found to be significantly related to daughters' and sons' support behaviour. Still, we cannot rule out that this might be due to the broad operationalisation of cash-for-care payments used in this study, which was nonetheless the best available comparative measure. That is, cash payments may in fact be associated with daughters' support involvement, but the indicator used in this study might not have sufficiently captured this. Further investigation is needed to clarify the impact of cash-for-care schemes on intergenerational support patterns.

Finally, social services were not found to be associated with the gender composition of children providing intensive support to a parent. Nevertheless, they might lead to a more equal gender distribution of intergenerational support as they reduce intensive support by daughters and increase sporadic support provided by both daughters and sons.

Overall, our results indicate various associations between gendered intergenerational support patterns and welfare states. Generally, welfare state policies seem to affect daughters more strongly than sons. As expected, they not only substitute for time-intensive intergenerational support by providing professional care services, but also promote such support from daughters by legally obligating children and, to a lesser degree, by providing cash-for-care payments. Welfare states therefore appear to strengthen the gendered organisation of intergenerational support.

Regular, time-intensive intergenerational support, in particular, is often associated with physical and mental stress ('caregiver burden') as well as with social hardship due to reduced employment. Policy makers should thus be aware that by shifting care responsibilities to the family, i.e. to children, they might also strengthen gender inequality in intergenerational support because daughters seem to be more responsive to these policies than sons. However, it is important to keep in mind that welfare state policies may have different aims. Even if the policies discussed in this article might preserve gender inequality, they may still achieve other goals. Particularly, cash-for-care policies were introduced not only to encourage informal support but also to enhance the status and incomes of informal carers and to provide a greater variety of choice for persons in need. Moreover, it must be kept in mind that culture, welfare state policies and individual behaviour are closely linked (e.g. Pfau-Effinger 2005; van Oorschot et al. 2008). Although controlling for individual labour market activity it might be true that in familialistic countries women are less likely to work and thus more likely to care—going along with familialistic policies, i.e. legal obligations and cash-for-care payments.

Even though these results are quite robust, we must note that our conclusions are based on a small sample of countries. In addition, we did not assess the influence of the welfare policies over time due to the limited number of waves available. Thirdly, even though more and more countries have begun to analyse the effectiveness of policies, comparative research still lacks precise and clear-cut comparable indicators. In our view, the indicators we used are the best ones currently available for measuring the scope and the nature of care policies. But it is also clear that comparative empirical research on care systems and welfare states needs to be put on a more solid empirical ground. This study provided first insights into the empirical association between gender inequalities in intergenerational support

and welfare state policies. It also shows that comparative empirical research on policy influences still has a long way to go.

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