



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
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EVIDENCE BRIEFING

Intergenerational support



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Practical and financial support across generations within families in Britain

Intergenerational support within families is common and flows in both directions

- Around three in five parents are giving regular practical and/or financial help to their adult offspring
- Around two in five adult children are giving regular practical and/or financial help to their parent(s)

	Given to either parent	Received from either parent	Given to any child	Received from any child
Lifts in your car	•	•	•	•
Shopping	•	•	•	•
Providing or cooking meals	•	•	•	•
Washing, ironing or cleaning	•	•	•	•
Personal affairs like paying bills, writing letters	•	•	•	•
Decorating, gardening or house repairs	•	•	•	•
Personal needs like dressing, eating or bathing	•			•
Looking after your children		•	•	
Any practical help	41%	36%	51%	35%
Financial help	7%	15%	28%	2%
Practical OR financial help	43%	40%	59%	36%

Some families have a strong norm of mutual support across generations, others do not

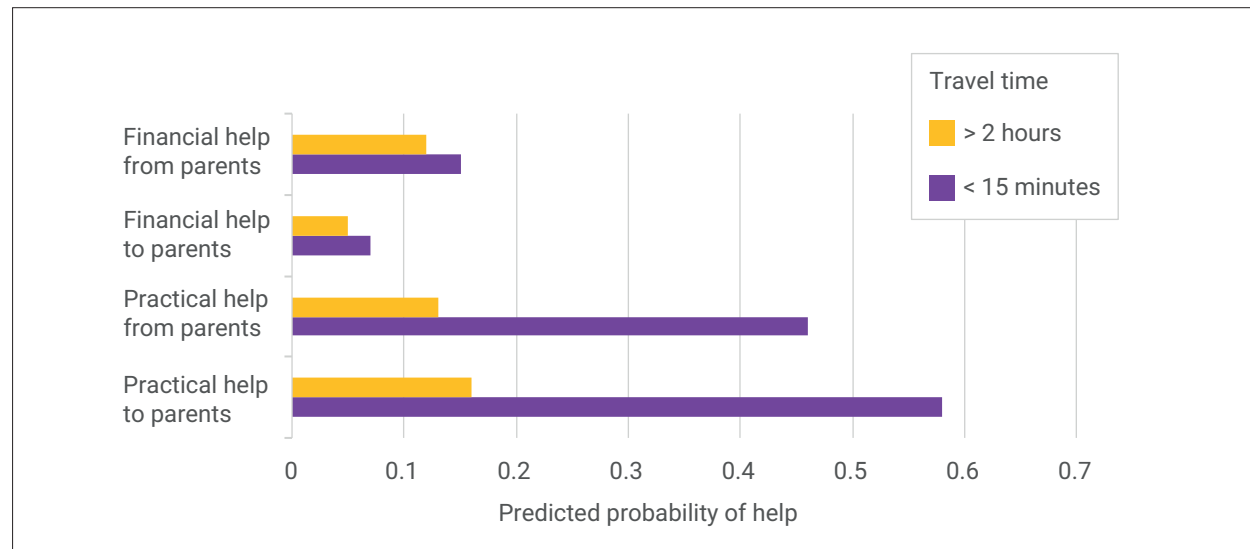
- The chances of receiving help from your parent(s) are about seven times higher if you are also providing help to your parent(s), even after taking account of your other characteristics such as age and income level

Social mobility may be cushioned by intergenerational support

- Downwardly mobile offspring are more likely than their non-mobile counterparts to receive financial and/or practical help from their parents
- Upwardly mobile offspring are more likely than their non-mobile counterparts to provide financial and/or practical support to their parents

Longer travel times are associated with reduced likelihood of intergenerational help

- Adult offspring who live less than 15 minutes away are more than three times as likely to provide regular practical help, and to receive help from them, than offspring who live more than two hours away
- This is not compensated by any increased likelihood of providing regular financial support



There are differences across ethnic groups in the prevalence and direction of support

- Asian/Asian British, and Black/Black British offspring are much more likely to be giving financial help to their parents than their White counterparts, even after taking account of other differences in their characteristics. They are also somewhat more likely to be giving practical help.

Predicted probability of help, taking account of other characteristics, by ethnicity of help-provider

	Practical help to parents	Financial help to parents
White	0.42	0.05
Asian/Asian-British	0.56	0.15
Black/Black-British	0.49	0.18
Other	0.46	0.10

Policy and practice relevance

The “informal economy” of practical help provided by parents and by adult offspring to one another is valuable to the economy as a whole and needs greater recognition and support

- Those providing help at greater intensities need the most support
- A new national carers strategy and action plan for England is long overdue

Voluntary sector organisations have the potential to plug some of the gaps for people without access to intergenerational practical family support

- Assessments of need should include, and be sensitive to, differences in the availability of support from parents or from adult offspring. Limited support can arise because of a lack of surviving family members or lack of capacity, because travel times are too great, or because of different norms within families
- This includes possible differences in cultural norms between ethnic groups and across generations

Informal intergenerational financial support needs to be underpinned by comprehensive and effective social security

- Not everyone has access to financial support from their parents, or from their adult offspring. It is therefore essential that the welfare state provides a reliable and adequate safety net for everyone
- Means-tested social security should be designed to avoid penalising small exchanges of financial support between family members

Housing and regeneration policies should seek to preserve and promote intergenerational support within families

- Benefits caps and Local Housing Allowances are creating widening gaps between actual rents and Housing Benefit for working age families, forcing them in some cases to move away to cheaper areas and undermining their ability to provide and receive help from other family members
- Rehousing a homeless person or family a long way from their existing support network (for example, parents or adult offspring) is potentially damaging and could make the placement unstable
- Regeneration schemes that disrupt support networks by dispersing tenants undermine the ability of family members to help one another

More research is needed on the relationship between geographic and social mobility and intergenerational support

- Longer travel times between parents and children make the provision of practical help more difficult, help which is potentially important to both parties. Policies that promote geographic mobility as a means to achieve social mobility should be treated with caution.
- Upwards and downwards social mobility appear to be compensated or cushioned to some extent by intergenerational flows of support but more research is needed to establish the role of practical support in facilitating upwards mobility.

About the study

The findings in this briefing are based on analysis of the British Household Panel Study (BHPS) for 2001 to 2006 and its successor the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) for 2011-2013 to 2017-2019. Both are longitudinal, nationally representative surveys of private households in the UK. The findings relate, where relevant, to respondents who have at least one non-coresident parent, or to respondents who have at least one non-coresident adult offspring. The questions on “regular or frequent” practical help include eight types, including lifts in a car, meals, help with personal needs (received by parents) or looking after children (received by adult offspring). The question on financial help is also about ‘regular or frequent’ help, and is therefore likely to capture small amounts such as paying a bill, rather than occasional, potentially larger, assistance such as with a house deposit or holiday.

Further information

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Dyadic Longitudinal Analysis of Intergenerational Exchanges [DyLANIE](#) for project description and publications.

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