

Canada's aging population poses a critical challenge. As economic and human resources in the social services become strained, promoting resilience during late middle adulthood is crucial. This is particularly important for socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals prone to chronic stress and poor psychosocial adjustment. A key factor in fostering resilience is the quality of their relationships with their adult children, who provide essential emotional and practical support in the transition to old age.

Issue to be addressed

As middle-aged adults' social networks are in transformation due to pivotal life transitions such as retirement, parents can capitalize on their relationship with their children to build their resilience before old age. Yet, knowledge of parent-child relationships during this life stage is scant, especially in Canada. It is not clear how these relationships influence psychosocial functioning. Studies are urgently needed to understand how strong family bonds promote resilience in an aging population.

Objectives

1. Identify Predictors of Parent-Child Relationship Quality.

Examine factors measured in childhood and young adulthood (e.g., social behaviors, socioeconomic indicators) that predict the quality of parent-child relationships in middle adulthood.

2. Understand Mutual Associations in Parent-Child Relationships.

Explore interdependence between parents and children by analyzing how their perceptions and behavioral interactions are mutually related, using repeated dyadic data.

3. Examine the Associations Between Parent-Child Relationship Quality and Psychosocial Adjustment.

Using parent and child reports and ratings based on a dyadic parent-child interaction, evaluate how relationship quality predicts psychosocial adjustment in middle adulthood (e.g., life satisfaction, emotional adjustment, coping).

Method

This study leverages data from the Concordia Longitudinal Research Project. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds were recruited in 1976-78 and followed until middle adulthood; 210 participated in the latest wave of the project (2020-2024). Their children were also recruited; 215 young adults participated in the latest wave. We expect similar participation rates for this study. Data will be collected from parents and children with surveys and using a lab-based dyadic interaction task for 75 parent-child dyads. Our project will integrate new data with comprehensive, longitudinal information from previous waves, utilizing a multi-source approach offering depth and reliability in measuring participants' development across life stages. Advanced statistical analyses, including structural equation modeling (SEM) and actor-partner independent modeling (APIM), will be employed to examine predictors, mutual influences, and psychosocial outcomes.

Advancement of knowledge

This study will provide insights relevant to life-course and resilience theories, identifying long-term predictors of parent-child relationship quality through prospective data. The intergenerational design will reveal mutual influences between middle-aged parents and their children, addressing a significant gap in family research. It will advance knowledge of how these relationships relate to psychosocial outcomes in late middle adulthood, particularly for at-risk populations.

Wider social benefits

By identifying strategies to strengthen parent-child relationships, this research will inform prevention programs and social policies aimed at fostering life-long family resilience, helping families achieve better outcomes as they age. This study will contribute to new developments in the study of family dynamics and aging in various academic fields (psychology, psychoeducation, social work), and inform policy specialist and decision makers