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# **Intergenerational Family Relations in Luxembourg: Adult Children and their Ageing Parents in Migrant and Non-Migrant Families**

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## **Abstract**

Whereas most studies in the context of acculturation research have focused so far on family relations between first generation parents and their second generation children in adolescence, the present study draws its attention on immigrant families at later stages in the family life cycle. This study is part of the FNR-funded project on “Intergenerational Relations in the Light of Migration and Ageing – IRMA” in which a cross-cultural comparison of altogether  $N = 120$  Portuguese and Luxembourgish triads of older parents and their adult children, both living in the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, is envisaged. The aims of this project are, firstly to examine similarities and differences in family values, internalized norms and mutual expectations of older parents and their adult children in migrant and non-migrant families; secondly, to analyze in how far an acculturation gap respectively a generation gap might have an impact on the relationship quality between parents and their adult children; thirdly and related to this, to explore subjective well-being (SWB) of all involved family members. Results are discussed in the framework of an integrative model of intergenerational family relations in the light of migration and ageing.

## **Introduction**

Most studies in the context of acculturation research have focused on family relations between first generation parents and their second generation children in adolescence, but only few studies have focused on intergenerational relations in ageing migrant families (*e.g.*, Attias-Donfut, Wolff & Tessier, 2005). In Luxembourg as in several other European countries, an unprecedented number of first generation immigrants of the large immigration waves of the 1970s will approach retirement age in the next years (Beirão, 2010; Ferring, Thill & Leners, 2008; Statec, 2011). The question of how parent-child relations in migrant families are regulated at later stages in the life span – namely, between older parents and their adult children - is therefore gaining particular importance.

One crucial question regarding intergenerational relations between parents and their children in adulthood refers to intergenerational solidarity and mutual support provision (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991). As old age is still associated with a high probability of physical and functional impairments, older individuals from migrant families – just as their counterparts from the host country – might need support and care from their families at some point in their lives (Ferring, 2010). At the same time, earlier research has also shown that older generations often provide important support of different kinds

to the younger generations, for instance when parents support their adult children financially or help them in practical issues such as caring for grandchildren (Attias-Donfut, Ogg & Wolff, 2005; see also Albert & Ferring, 2013). In spite of the increasing societal relevance, research evidence regarding these issues in ageing migrant families is still very scant. Older migrants (first generation) and their adult children (second generation) compared to families without migration background might be particularly confronted with specific tasks regarding intergenerational solidarity. For instance, first generation parents might need higher intergenerational support from their adult children due to a smaller social network in the host country or due to fewer sociocultural resources such as language competences.

It is still an open question how ageing immigrants will organize their lives after retirement. Although a considerable number of ageing migrants might initially have envisaged a return migration, it seems that a permanent return to the country of origin is enacted more seldom (Baganha, 2003; Beirão, 2010). This might be – among others – due to family related reasons, especially when immigrants have founded families of their own in the receiving country and when grown-up children continue living in the host country. The choice to stay in the host country after retirement might therefore entail specific expectations of ageing parents toward their adult children and vice versa. However, due to an acculturation gap between first and second generation immigrants, parents' and adult children's identity constructions including family values/norms and expectations for mutual support may diverge, and this can have an effect on the quality of their intergenerational relations (Birman, 2006). Differences in expectations and beliefs could for instance lead to intergenerational strain and to a reduced well-being of family members (see *e.g.*, Sam & Berry, 2010; Ward, 2001).

## Research Questions

The aim of the present study is to examine similarities and differences in family cohesion, internalized family norms as well as patterns of mutual support exchange of older parents and their adult children in migrant and non-migrant families in Luxembourg. Further, we analyze in how far intergenerational relations in migrant and non-migrant families might be characterized by an acculturation gap or a generation gap regarding several aspects of intergenerational solidarity. Finally, we investigate in how far intergenerational support exchange can be predicted by other aspects of family relations for older parents and their adult children in migrant and non-migrant families.

## Method

### Participants

The present study is part of the FNR-funded project on “Intergenerational Relations in the Light of Migration and Ageing – IRMA”. In this project, a cross-cultural comparison between Portuguese and Luxembourgish families living in the Grand Duchy

of Luxembourg with  $N = 120$  family triads (older mothers and fathers; one adult child, born resp. grown up in Luxembourg; see table 1) is envisaged. In Luxembourg, 43% of the inhabitants are currently foreigners; Portuguese are the largest immigrant group as they constitute 37% of all foreigners and about 16% of the total population of Luxembourg (Statec, 2011). Large-scale immigration of Portuguese immigrants to Luxembourg started in the late 1960s/early 1970s due to the increased demand for workers in the industrial sector (Beirão, 2010; Willems & Milmeister, 2008). These Portuguese of the first immigration waves are currently close to retirement age (Beirão, 2010), hence our focus on Portuguese families.

**Table 1**

*Sampling plan of the main study*

		Portuguese Families		Luxembourgish Families	
G1		Mother	Father	Mother	Father
	50-60	20	20	20	20
	61-70	20	20	20	20
	71-80	20	20	20	20
G2	±30-50	60		60	

*Note:* The full sample will comprise  $N = 360$  participants.

Our preliminary sample included  $n = 24$  Luxembourgish and  $n = 22$  Portuguese full family triads. Luxembourgish mothers were on average  $M = 55.38$  ( $SD = 6.71$ ), fathers  $M = 59.33$  ( $SD = 7.92$ ) and adult children  $M = 25.92$  ( $SD = 8.04$ ) years old (66.7% female). All Luxembourgish mothers, fathers and adult children reported to have only the Luxembourgish nationality, they were all born in Luxembourg, and all but one mother and one father indicated Luxembourgish as mother tongue. Three mothers reported also German, French or Italian as their second mother tongue, two adult children reported French as their second mother tongue.

Portuguese mothers had an average age of  $M = 54.09$  ( $SD = 5.02$ ), fathers of  $M = 57.33$  ( $SD = 5.78$ ) and adult children of  $M = 27.24$  ( $SD = 7.93$ ); 54.5% of Portuguese adult children were female. All Portuguese mothers reported Portuguese as their first nationality and reported Portuguese to be their mother tongue; two mothers reported to have a second Luxembourgish nationality. All mothers were born in Portugal (except for one mother who did not give this information). They had been living in Luxembourg on average for  $M = 31.36$  years ( $SD = 8.42$ ). Altogether 19 Portuguese fathers reported Portuguese as first nationality, whereas three fathers reported to have a Luxembourgish first nationality; one father reported Luxembourgish as a second nationality. All fathers were born in Portugal and all (except one) reported Portuguese as their mother tongue. They had been living in Luxembourg on average for  $M = 30.81$  years ( $SD = 8.21$ ). About 59% of Portuguese adult children were born in Luxembourg, the remainder had come to Luxembourg at an average age of  $M = 5.38$  years ( $SD = 4.60$ ). Altogether 63.6% of Portuguese adult children reported Portuguese as their first nationality, 36.4%

Luxembourgish; half of the participants reported also a second nationality (a number of six participants reported Luxembourgish and five Portuguese as their second nationality). All Portuguese children indicated Portuguese as their mother tongue; only one indicated also Luxembourgish as a second mother tongue. Data collection is currently going on.

## Instruments

Participants had to fill out a standardized questionnaire which was available in German, French and Portuguese (different language versions were prepared and cross-checked by a team of multilingual psychologists). Almost all Luxembourgish mothers, fathers and adult children chose the German questionnaire version; only two Luxembourgish mothers and two fathers as well as one adult child chose the French version. In the Portuguese sample, most parents chose the Portuguese questionnaire version; only three mothers and four fathers chose the French version. Among Portuguese adult children the picture was more varied: only ten chose the Portuguese version, whereas nine chose the French and three the German version. Constructs were assessed from the perspectives of both parents and their adult children.

*Family Cohesion* was measured by use of 4 items referring to the bonding and closeness among family members (see e.g. Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia, & Scabini, 2006; e.g. “We get along well with each other”).

*Obligations toward family* were measured with 6 items referring to internalized family norms (see e.g., Lay et al., 1998; Merz, Özeke-Kocabas, Oort, & Schuengel, 2009; e.g. “I feel obliged to behave in line with our family rules”).

*Given and received intergenerational support* were measured using 12 items each which referred to the provision respectively the reception of financial, practical and emotional support toward the parents respectively toward the adult child (see also Albert, Michels, & Ferring, 2013; Schulz & Schwarzer, 2003; e.g. “My mother/father/child handles many things for me that I cannot do on my own”, respectively “I handle many things for my parents/my child”).

Items had to be rated on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 = “do not agree at all” to 6 = “fully agree”. All reliabilities were satisfactory, except for the scale measuring family cohesion in the Portuguese mothers’ subsample (see table 2).

**Table 2***Reliabilities (Cronbach's Alpha) of scales in each subsample*

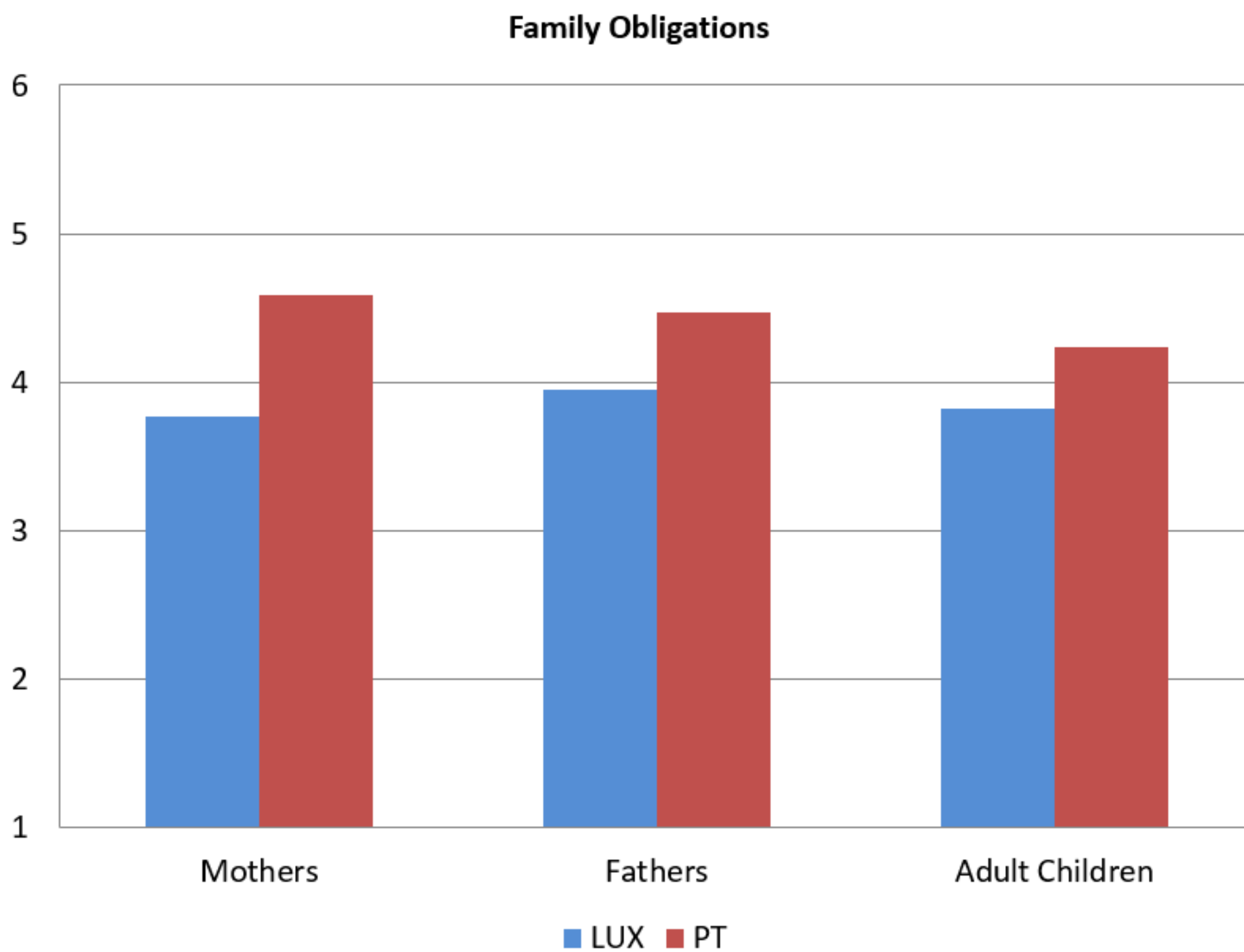
	Family Cohesion	Obligations toward Family	Given Intergenerational Support	Received Intergenerational Support
Lux Mothers	.69	.72	.81	.84
Lux Fathers	.79	.68	.87	.92
Lux Adult Children	.73	.77	.87	.87
PT Mothers	.51	.71	.74	.87
PT Fathers	.77	.78	.90	.90
PT Adult Children	.87	.83	.94	.93

## Results

We carried out four separate analyses of variance for repeated measures regarding each of the four aspects of intergenerational solidarity – family cohesion, family obligations, given intergenerational support and received intergenerational support - as dependent variables, and nationality and position in family (mother, father, adult child) as independent variables.

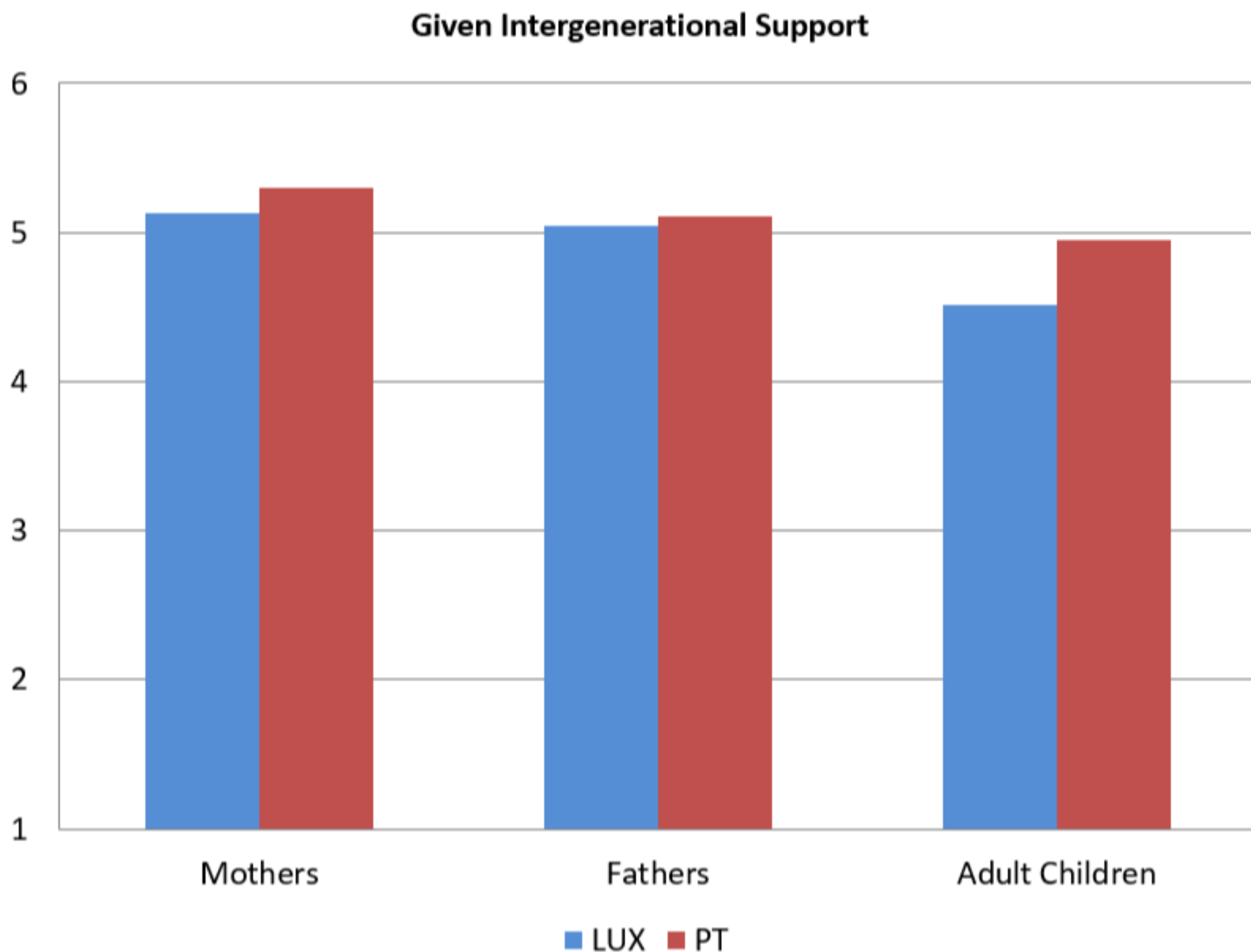
With regard to family cohesion, no differences between Portuguese and Luxembourgish families were found; also, there were no differences between family members, neither in Portuguese nor in Luxembourgish families, *i.e.* mothers, fathers and adult children rated family cohesion as equally high.

As far as family values are concerned, an effect of nationality was found ( $F(1, 44) = 13.99, p < .01, \eta^2 = .24$ ), indicating that Portuguese participants rated the importance of obligations toward their family as higher compared to their Luxembourgish counterparts. Again, no effect of position within the family was found.



**Figure 1**  
Mean differences between Portuguese and Luxembourgish mothers, fathers and adult children regarding Family Obligations

Regarding given intergenerational support, both a weak effect of nationality ( $F(1, 44) = 3.35, p < .10, \eta^2 = .07$ ) as well as an effect of position ( $F(2, 88) = 9.79, p < .01, \eta^2 = .18$ ) were found: Portuguese participants reported to provide more intergenerational support compared to Luxembourgish participants, and parents of both national groups reported to provide more support to their adult children than the other way round, *i.e.* adult children reported to provide less support to their parents.

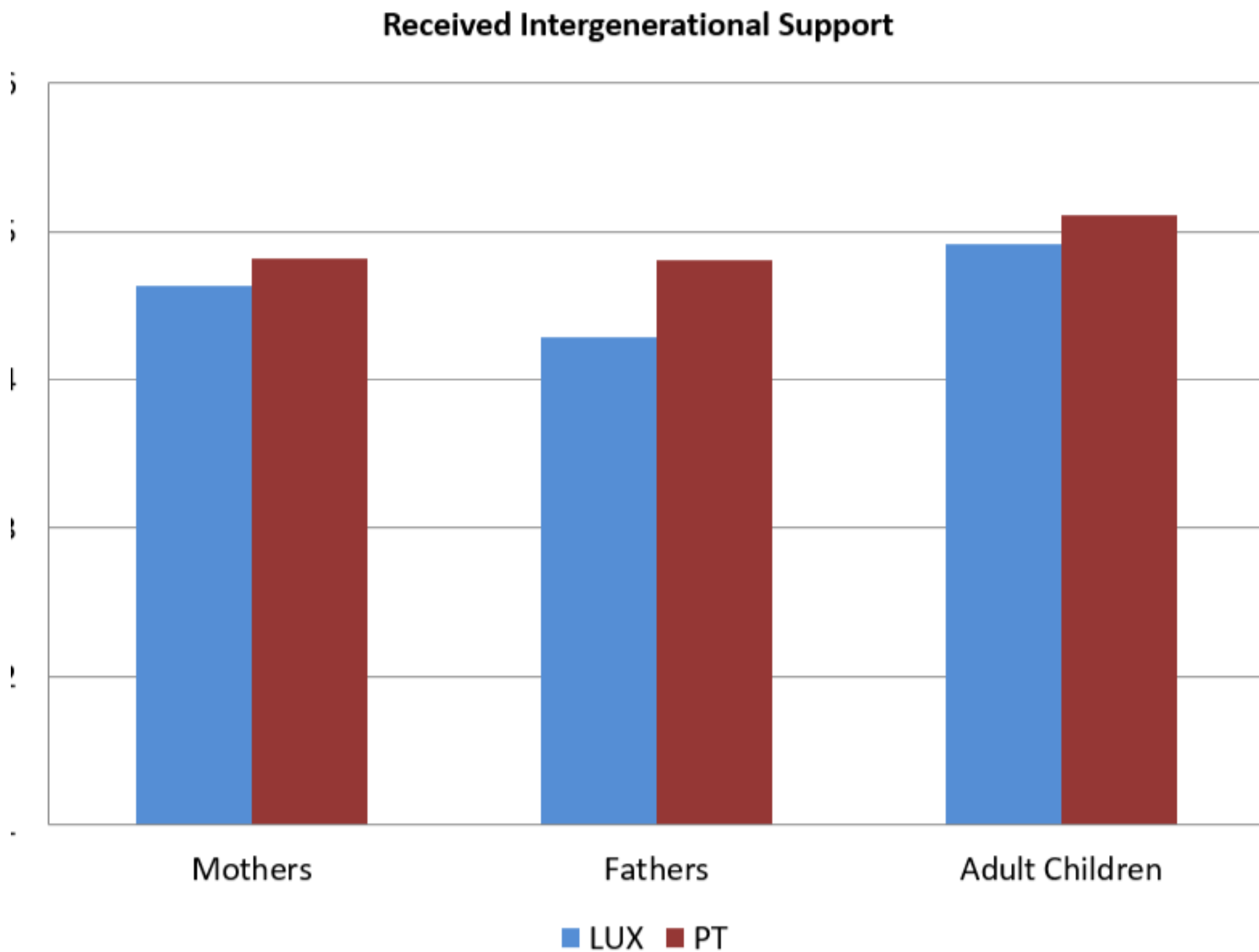


**Figure 2**

Mean differences between Portuguese and Luxembourgish mothers, fathers and adult children regarding Given Intergenerational Support

Finally, similar effects were found with respect to received intergenerational support. Again, Portuguese participants reported to receive more support compared to Luxembourgish families ( $F(1, 44) = 3.35, p < .10, \eta^2 = .07$ ). Further, adult children reported to receive more support from their parents than parents did receive from their adult children ( $F(2, 88) = 4.56, p < .05, \eta^2 = .09$ ).



**Figure 3**

Mean differences between Portuguese and Luxembourgish mothers, fathers and adult children regarding Received Intergenerational Support

Further, we examined in how far there was reciprocity in giving and receiving intergenerational support as reported by Portuguese and Luxembourgish mothers, fathers and adult children, using t-tests for dependent measures. Whereas parents of both nationalities reported to give more support to their children than they receive ( $t(21) = 3.65, p < .01$  for Portuguese mothers,  $t(21) = 1.97, p < .10$  for Portuguese fathers,  $t(23) = 2.91, p < .01$  for Luxembourgish mothers,  $t(23) = 6.19, p < .01$  for Luxembourgish fathers), Luxembourgish adult children reported to receive significantly more support than they provide to their parents ( $t(23) = 3.53, p < .01$  for Luxembourgish adult children). In contrast, support exchange was equilibrated in the perspective of Portuguese adult children: here, no differences between the reported received support and provided support for parents were found ( $t(21) = 1.39, n.s.$ , for Portuguese adult children).

As far as patterns of intercorrelations between all indicators are concerned, different country- and generation specific patterns were found: Whereas family cohesion and family obligations were related positively in all three Portuguese family subsamples (between  $r(22) = .43, p < .05$  for Portuguese adult children and  $r(22) = .66, p < .01$  for Portuguese fathers), for the Luxembourgish families these two variables were related only in the subsample of the fathers ( $r(24) = .60, p < .01$ ), whereas family cohesion and family obligations were unrelated with regard to Luxembourgish mothers and Luxem-

bourgish adult children. Interestingly, provided and received support were intercorrelated for all subsamples (between  $r(24) = .50, p < .01$  for Luxembourgish mothers and  $r(24) = .84, p < .01$  for Luxembourgish fathers, the other subsamples positioned in-between) with the exception of Portuguese mothers for whom no significant correlation between given and received support was found.

Earlier studies on intergenerational solidarity have shown that the quality of the parent-child relationship as well as normative values or felt obligations might have an impact on mutual support exchange (see *e.g.* Albert *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, in the present study family cohesion and family obligations were examined in their roles to predict given and received support. We carried out two sets of regression analyses for each family position, *i.e.* predicting either received or given support of mothers, fathers and adult children respectively. In order to detect cultural differences, we included nationality as a moderator.

Analyses showed that family obligations – but not family cohesion - predicted mothers' reports of received support in the relation to their children, whereas no significant results were found regarding the prediction of support that mothers provide to their adult children. Also, no moderator effect of nationality was found. Regarding fathers, family cohesion predicted both received as well as given support, independently of national group. However, an interaction effect between nationality and family obligations was found with regard to given support. A post hoc test revealed that family obligations were significantly related to provided support of fathers for their adult children only in the sample of Portuguese fathers ( $r(22) = .61, p < .01$ ) but not for Luxembourgish fathers ( $r(24) = .08, n.s.$ ). Regarding adult children, family cohesion – but not family obligations – predicted significantly both support they reported to receive from their parents as well as support that they provided to their parents, and no moderator effect of nationality was found here.

**Table 3**  
*Prediction of received and given intergenerational support by family cohesion, family obligations and nationality in the mothers', fathers' and adult children's subsamples (Hierarchical regression analyses)*

<b>Down the lineage</b>	<b>Mothers' Received Support from Adult Children</b>			<b>Mothers' Given Support to Adult Children</b>		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$
<i>Predictor</i>						
Step 1 $\Delta R^2$	.16+			.09		
Family Cohesion	.12	0.14	.12	.15	0.15	.15
Family Obligations	.41*	0.16	.41*	.16	0.17	.16
Nationality	.17	0.32	.09	-.26	0.34	-.13
Step 2 $\Delta R^2$	.03			.01		
Family Cohesion x Nationality	-.39	0.31	-.30	-.13	0.34	-.10
Family Obligations x Nationality	.03	0.36	.02	.27	0.38	.19
<b>Down the lineage</b>	<b>Fathers' Received Support from Adult Children</b>			<b>Fathers' Given Support to Adult Children</b>		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$
<i>Predictor</i>						
Step 1 $\Delta R^2$	.43**			.31**		
Family Cohesion	.48**	0.15	.48**	.46**	0.17	.46**
Family Obligations	.17	0.16	.17	.15	0.18	.15
Nationality	-.37	0.25	-.19	.06	0.27	.03
Step 2 $\Delta R^2$	.01			.08+		
Family Cohesion x Nationality	.19	0.31	.13	.15	0.32	.11
Family Obligations x Nationality	-.31	0.34	-.18	-.74*	0.35	-.43*
<b>Up the lineage</b>	<b>Adult Children's Received Support from Parents</b>			<b>Adult Children's Given Support to Parents</b>		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$
<i>Predictor</i>						
Step 1 $\Delta R^2$	.47**			.38**		
Family Cohesion	.66**	0.12	.66**	.53**	0.13	.53**
Family Obligations	.02	0.13	.02	.05	0.14	.05
Nationality	-.11	0.23	-.06	-.43+	0.25	-.22+
Step 2 $\Delta R^2$	.01			.01		
Family Cohesion x Nationality	-.15	0.25	-.09	-.11	0.27	-.07
Family Obligations x Nationality	-.16	.26	-.10	-.11	0.28	-.06

Note: \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , + $p < .10$ . All continuous indicators were standardized.  
0 = Portuguese, 1 = Luxembourgish

## Conclusions and Future Directions

No differences between Luxembourgish and Portuguese family triads were found regarding family cohesion, but Portuguese participants rated their family obligations and their mutual intergenerational support higher. Families from both national groups rate

their intergenerational relations as rather close in general, but when it comes to obligations and support, differences are detected. This might be due to a higher family orientation in the Portuguese culture as reported in earlier studies (see Fleury, 2010; see also Hofstede, 2001 and Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, regarding a rather high traditional and collectivist value orientation of Portuguese in comparison to other Europeans). It might, however, also be possible that the specific situation of Portuguese families enhanced their needs for intergenerational solidarity in the context of acculturation. A comparison between Portuguese families living in Portugal compared to those who have immigrated to Luxembourg might help to disentangle effects of culture and effects of migration.

Parents and adult children did not differ with regard to family cohesion and family obligations, but parents reported to provide more support to / receive less support from their adult children than vice versa. This is a rather common pattern of support exchange in adult child-parent relations as reported for several Western European countries (Attias-Donfut *et al.*, 2005). However, interestingly, Portuguese adult children reported to give as much support to their parents as they received from them, whereas Luxembourgish adult children reported to receive more support from their parents than they give (for similar findings see Albert, Michels, & Ferring, 2010; Albert *et al.*, 2013; Fleury, 2010). Again, a comparison with Portuguese adult children who live in Portugal will shed further light on the question if this pattern is specific to the Portuguese cultural context or if it is due to the migration situation and a specific need of support of ageing parents in Portuguese migrant families.

Finally, results regarding correlations between given and received support as well as regression analyses to predict support exchange by family cohesion and family obligations pointed to a rather unconditional support provision of mothers (in particular Portuguese) for their adult children as has been reported also in earlier studies (cf. Albert *et al.*, 2013). However, family obligations were influential regarding mothers' perception to receive support from their children. This result might be due to mothers' normative expectations regarding intergenerational support exchange. Instead, for adult children and fathers of both nationalities, family cohesion was an important predictor for both kinds of support – received and given. For them, mutual support might be kind of an indicator of a positive relationship quality. Family obligations, however, were only meaningful in the prediction of given support of Portuguese fathers to their children.

It is still an open question, if these specific support patterns in immigrant families have consequences for their relationship quality and for their well-being. Our preliminary results provide an interesting starting point for further analyses regarding intergenerational relations in the light of migration and ageing.

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