

THE ROLE OF INTERGENERATIONAL SUPPORT IN STRENGTHENING FAMILY RESILIENCE DURING ADVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Resilience has become a key concept in family research, especially in the face of crises such as economic instability, health emergencies, family disintegration, pandemics, and other challenges. Parents are known to develop resilience; many researchers emphasise the importance of caregivers in this area. The role of intergenerational support—particularly from grandparents and extended relatives—remains largely underexplored in numerous cultural contexts.

In Indian society, intergenerational relations provide emotional security, shared childcare, economic pooling, and cultural continuity, all of which are vital for resilience. Among the various forms of family support, intergenerational support—assistance exchanged between different age groups within a family—has emerged as a critical factor that can lessen the negative consequences of crises.

A study has been conducted to explore the role of intergenerational contribution in developing family resilience in times of adversity. Families in both nuclear, single-parent families with elderly people, and joint families with elderly people were taken as the sample population. A purposive & snowball technique was used. A structured self-constructed interview schedule was used to interview family heads. 100 families were taken in the survey.

The research shows that intergenerational support strengthened family resilience outcomes, including improved coping strategies, collective decision-making, and emotional regulation. Families with high levels of reciprocity and mutual respect across generations reported stronger cohesion, a heightened sense of belonging, and greater optimism for the future. Understanding the role of intergenerational support in handling crises is critical to developing evidence-based family policies, social work interventions, and community support programmes.

INTRODUCTION :

The concept of intergenerational support is rooted in both sociological and psychological frameworks, emphasising the interconnectedness of family members and the reciprocal nature of care. Families often function as primary support systems, particularly in societies where formal social welfare structures are limited. During crises, younger generations may provide financial assistance or caregiving to older adults, while older family members may contribute through childcare, advice, or emotional support. This dynamic not only strengthens family bonds but also enhances the resilience of individuals by distributing the burden of coping across multiple family members. Research suggests that households with strong intergenerational support networks tend to recover more effectively from economic shocks, health emergencies, and social disruptions, highlighting the protective role of familial ties.

Measuring intergenerational support in crises involves examining both tangible and intangible contributions. Tangible support includes financial transfers, material aid, and

practical help with daily tasks, whereas intangible support encompasses emotional reassurance, guidance, and encouragement. The effectiveness of these forms of support can vary based on cultural norms, socio-economic status, family structure, and the severity of the crisis. Understanding these factors is essential for policymakers, social workers, and researchers aiming to design interventions that leverage family resources effectively. Moreover, identifying measurable indicators of intergenerational support—such as frequency of assistance, perceived quality of care, and reciprocity of help—enables a more systematic evaluation of family resilience in adverse situations.

Despite its importance, intergenerational support in crises remains an underexplored area in contemporary research, particularly in the context of rapid social change and urbanisation, which often disrupt traditional family structures. As families face increasing pressures from economic instability, migration, and changing demographic patterns, understanding how intergenerational support functions becomes critical for maintaining social cohesion and individual well-being. This study seeks to examine the different dimensions of intergenerational support during crises, focusing on measurable factors that can provide insights into the mechanisms through which families cope and adapt. By analysing these aspects, the research aims to contribute to both theoretical knowledge and practical strategies for enhancing family resilience in challenging circumstances.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Objectives

1. To assess the types of intergenerational support families, rely on during crises.
2. To analyse the relationship between intergenerational support and measurable indicators of family resilience.
3. To identify best practices in intergenerational caregiving that can be integrated into family strengthening policies and programs.

Sample population & size of sample

A sample of 110 adults, aged 19 to 52 years, residing in Mumbai city was selected for the study. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to identify and recruit participants. Data were collected using a self-constructed questionnaire, along with a semi-structured interview schedule administered to the respondents.

RESULTS

Demographic Factor

Age & Gender: The largest proportion belongs to the 31-50 years category, comprising 42 respondents (38.2%), indicating that middle-aged adults form the core of the study population. This is followed by 37 respondents (33.6%) who are above 50 years, reflecting strong participation from older adults who may play significant roles in intergenerational family responsibilities. The youngest group, comprising individuals up to 30 years old, accounts for 31 respondents (28.2%), indicating moderate representation of younger adults. Female respondents constitute the majority, with 63 participants (57.3%), while males account for 47 respondents (42.7%).

Marital Status: In terms of marital status, married individuals form the dominant group, comprising 74 respondents (67.3%), suggesting that married adults are more likely to engage in or experience intergenerational responsibilities. Single respondents account for 17

participants (15.5%), while the ‘Others’ category, which may include widowed, divorced, or separated individuals, represents 19 respondents (17.3%).

Family Type: The family type distribution shows that nuclear families are the most common, accounting for 53 respondents (48.2%), reflecting the growing prevalence of smaller family units. Joint families, however, are also significantly represented with 48 respondents (43.6%).

Family living arrangements: The data show that most respondents, 63 individuals (57.3%), live with their parents, indicating strong parental co-residence patterns among families. Another 40 respondents (36.4%) live with grandparents, emphasising the ongoing importance of multigenerational living and caregiving practices. A smaller group, 7 respondents (6.4%), live alone, representing a minority of individuals who manage household and coping responsibilities independently.

Table 1 Mean score of support components with standard deviations.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Emotional Support	110	20	100	62.82	18.393
Practical and financial support	110	20	100	69.18	19.868
Knowledge and Value Transmission	110	25	100	66.95	13.496
Resilience and Coping	110	25	100	64.45	17.562
Communication and Trust	110	35	100	63.36	20.700

The results show that **Practical and Financial Support** had the highest mean score ($M = 69.18$, $SD = 19.868$), suggesting that respondents perceived practical assistance and financial support as the strongest dimension among the areas examined.

Knowledge and Value Transmission had the second-highest mean ($M = 66.95$, $SD = 13.496$), indicating a relatively strong role in sharing knowledge, traditions, values, and life experiences.

Resilience and Coping recorded a mean of 64.45 ($SD = 17.562$), suggesting that the relationships examined provided a moderate level of support in dealing with challenges and coping with difficulties.

The mean score for **Communication and Trust** was 63.36 ($SD = 20.700$). Although the mean was moderately high, its relatively large standard deviation indicates greater variation among respondents in their experiences of communication and trust.

Emotional Support had the lowest mean score ($M = 62.82$, $SD = 18.393$) among the five dimensions. This suggests that, compared with practical/financial support and knowledge/value transmission, emotional support was relatively less strongly experienced by the respondents.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of the responses for the emotional support

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Family members from different generations provide emotional comfort during stressful times.	15	17	26	27	25
2	Older family members are approachable for guidance and emotional advice.	15	14	33	36	12
3	I feel a sense of belonging and emotional security within my family.	18	22	39	19	12
4	Intergenerational communication helps reduce stress during difficult situations.	19	12	27	23	29

The findings reveal that intergenerational relationships provide emotional support to a considerable proportion of respondents, particularly during stressful and difficult situations. Nearly half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that family members from different generations provide emotional comfort (47.3%) and that intergenerational communication helps reduce stress (47.3%). Similarly, 43.6% reported that older family members are approachable for guidance and emotional advice. However, only 28.2% reported experiencing a sense of belonging and emotional security within their families, while 35.5% remained neutral. This suggests that although intergenerational interactions contribute to emotional coping and support, a strong sense of emotional security and belonging may not be consistently experienced by all respondents.

Table 3: Percentage distribution for the Practical and financial support:

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Family members support each other financially during crises.	19	17	27	16	31
2	Grandparents or elders help with household or childcare responsibilities in tough times.	16	16	11	23	44
3	Younger members assist older ones with technology, errands, or healthcare needs.	19	14	24	16	37

4	There is mutual sharing of resources across generations when challenges arise.	8	14	14	40	34
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The findings indicate that practical and financial support constitutes an important dimension of intergenerational relationships. A majority of respondents (67.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that family members mutually share resources when challenges arise, while 60.9% reported that grandparents or elders assist with household and childcare responsibilities during difficult times. Nearly half of the respondents (48.2%) indicated that younger family members assist older members with technology, errands, or healthcare needs. In comparison, 42.7% reported receiving or providing financial support during crises. Overall, the findings highlight the reciprocal nature of intergenerational support, with resource sharing, household assistance, and caregiving emerging as prominent forms of practical support.

Table 4: Percentage distribution of responses for knowledge and Value transmission:

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Elders share life lessons and experiences that guide younger family members.	1	11	40	39	19
2	Cultural and moral values are passed down effectively between generations.	8	20	38	24	20
3	Intergenerational storytelling or discussions strengthen our family identity.	2	30	27	35	16
4	Young family members respect and learn from the perspectives of older members.	6	23	35	29	17

The findings indicate that intergenerational knowledge and value transmission remains an important aspect of family relationships. More than half of the respondents (52.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that elders share life lessons and experiences that guide younger family members. Intergenerational storytelling and discussions were also perceived to strengthen family identity by 46.4% of respondents. Further, 41.8% reported that younger family members respect and learn from the perspectives of older members, while 40.0% agreed that cultural and moral values are effectively transmitted across generations. However, the relatively high proportion of neutral responses suggests that the extent of knowledge and value transmission varies across families. Overall, the findings highlight the continuing role of older generations as sources of experiential knowledge, cultural values, and family identity.

Table 5: Percentage distribution of responses for resilience and coping:

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	My family works together to overcome challenges and crises.	29	14	32	19	16
2	We recover quickly as a family after facing adversity.	20	27	22	19	22
3	Family unity strengthens our ability to cope with stress.	13	28	20	21	28
4	Intergenerational relationships contribute to overall family well-being and stability.	1	23	10	27	49

The findings reveal that intergenerational relationships are perceived as an important contributor to family resilience and well-being. A substantial majority of respondents (69.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that intergenerational relationships contribute to overall family well-being and stability, with 44.5% strongly agreeing. Further, 44.5% of respondents reported that family unity strengthens their ability to cope with stress. However, relatively lower levels of agreement were observed regarding families working together to overcome challenges and crises (31.8%) and recovering quickly after adversity (37.3%). The findings suggest that although intergenerational relationships are widely perceived as beneficial for family stability, the capacity for coordinated coping and rapid recovery from adversity varies among families.

Table 6: Percentage distribution of responses for communication and trust

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Open communication between generations enhances mutual understanding.	21	5	22	25	37
2	I trust my family members to support me in times of need.	29	5	24	22	30
3	Generational differences do not hinder our family's ability to stay connected.	33	17	24	22	14
4	Respect and empathy are key values in our intergenerational relationships.	18	14	20	30	28

The findings indicate that communication and trust play a significant role in strengthening intergenerational relationships. More than half of the respondents (56.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that open communication between generations enhances mutual understanding, while 52.7% identified respect and empathy as key values in intergenerational relationships. Similarly, 47.3% reported trusting their family members to support them in times of need. However, generational differences emerged as a potential barrier to family connectedness, with only 32.7% agreeing that such differences do not hinder their ability to stay connected, compared with 45.5% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Overall, the findings suggest that effective communication, mutual respect, empathy, and trust can strengthen intergenerational relationships, whereas generational differences may create challenges to sustained family connectedness.

Table 7: Mean rank of the Support factors for intergenerational caregiving

Factors with mean Ranks	
	Mean Rank
Practical and financial support	3.42
Knowledge and Value Transmission	2.99
Resilience and Coping	2.91
Communication and Trust	2.89
Emotional Support	2.80

The mean rank results highlight the relative importance of intergenerational caregiving factors for intergenerational support. Practical and financial support ranks highest with a mean rank of 3.42, indicating that families place the greatest emphasis on tangible assistance, such as financial help, caregiving tasks, and daily support, when considering policies that enhance family resilience. Knowledge and Value Transmission follows with a mean rank of 2.99, reflecting the importance of cultural continuity, moral guidance, and the sharing of life experiences across generations. Resilience and Coping (2.91), Communication and Trust (2.89), and Emotional Support (2.80) are closely ranked, suggesting that emotional bonding, effective communication, and supportive coping mechanisms are also crucial but are perceived as slightly less prominent than practical assistance. Overall, the ranking suggests that while emotional and relational dimensions remain important, families prioritise practical and financial support as the most significant factor in designing effective intergenerational caregiving policies and programs.

Table 8: Relationship between intergenerational support and measurable indicators of family resilience.

Correlations			
		Resilience and Coping	Emotional Support
Resilience and Coping	Pearson Correlation	1	.248**
	P-value		.009
	N	110	110
Emotional Support	Pearson Correlation	.248**	1
	P-value	.009	
	N	110	110
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The results indicate that the calculated p-value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. There is a relationship between intergenerational support and measurable indicators of family resilience. The correlation analysis shows a positive and statistically significant relationship between Resilience, Coping, and Emotional Support among the respondents. The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.248 indicates a weak-to-moderate positive association, meaning that individuals who receive higher levels of emotional support tend to exhibit better resilience and coping abilities. The p-value of 0.009, which is below the 0.01 significance level, confirms that this relationship is statistically meaningful and unlikely to have occurred by chance. In simple terms, the findings suggest that emotional support from family members, peers, or other social networks plays an important role in enhancing a person's ability to manage stress, adapt to difficulties, and bounce back from challenges.

Table 9: Differences in Resilience and coping factors according to selected variables

Variable	Category with reported mean	Mean	F value	P value	Interpretation
Age	Above 50 years	77.30	21.075	.000	Significant
Gender	Female	69.52	13.719	.001	Significant
Marital status	Widowed/divorced/separated/single	77.63	7.720	.001	Significant
Family type	Joint family	77.35	8.09	.001	Significant
Living arrangements	Living with grandparents	71.13	5.796	.004	Significant

The findings suggest that **age, gender, marital status, family type, and living arrangements are significantly associated with differences in the measured outcome variable.**

- **Age:** Participants above 50 years had a mean score of **77.30**, with a significant difference across age groups, $F = 21.075, p < .001$.
- **Gender:** Female participants had a mean score of **69.52**. The difference between gender groups was statistically significant, $F = 13.719, p = .001$.
- **Marital status:** Participants who were widowed, divorced, separated, or single had the highest reported mean of **77.63**. The difference was significant, $F = 7.720, p = .001$.
- **Family type:** Participants belonging to **joint families** had a mean score of **77.35**, with a statistically significant difference, $F = 8.09, p = .001$.
- **Living arrangements:** Those **living with grandparents** had a mean score of **71.13**, and the difference was statistically significant, $F = 5.796, p = .004$.

Table 10: Mean ranks of the challenges faced in intergenerational caregiving :

Ranks	
	Mean Rank
Younger generations often prefer casual, fast-paced communication, which can clash with older generations' preference for more direct, face-to-face conversations.	5.13
Smaller family sizes and changing lifestyles can lead to less frequent support or burdening a single family member.	4.71
Middle-aged adults are simultaneously caring for both their dependent children and ageing parents, leading to financial and emotional strain.	4.45
Younger generations may challenge traditional values regarding work ethic, gender roles, and authority, leading to conflict with older family members.	3.85
Older and younger generations often differ significantly in their comfort level with lifestyle choices.	3.72
Individualism in young adults seeking more independence from their parents may be perceived as an emotional & familial disconnect.	3.19
Increased mobility for employment and education causes geographic separation, leaving families dispersed, reducing traditional, in-person support.	2.93

The ranking of intergenerational challenges shows that communication differences are the most prominent, with the highest mean score of 5.13. This is followed by smaller family sizes and changing lifestyles ($M = 4.71$) and the caregiving burden on middle-aged adults who simultaneously support dependent children and ageing parents ($M = 4.45$). Conflicts related to changing traditional values ($M = 3.85$) and differences in lifestyle preferences ($M = 3.72$) were identified as moderate challenges. Individualism among younger adults ($M = 3.19$) and geographical separation resulting from employment and educational mobility ($M = 2.93$) were comparatively less prominent. Overall, the findings suggest that changing communication patterns, family structures, caregiving responsibilities, and generational expectations are important factors influencing the quality of intergenerational relationships.

CONCLUSION

The present study provides an overall understanding of intergenerational relationships, support, communication, and family resilience among the 110 respondents. Intergenerational relationships continue to play an important role in providing emotional, practical, financial, informational, and social support within families. Intergenerational relationships are particularly important as a source of practical assistance, resource sharing, caregiving, and transmission of knowledge and values. Younger members also contribute by assisting older family members with technology, errands, and healthcare needs. Thus, support flows in both directions between generations, rather than being restricted to one generation supporting another. Elders share life lessons and experiences that guide younger family members. Intergenerational storytelling and discussions were also perceived as contributing to family identity. Intergenerational relationships can provide comfort and assistance during stressful situations. Nearly half of the respondents (47.3%) reported that family members from different generations provide emotional comfort during stressful times, and a similar proportion indicated that intergenerational communication helps reduce stress.

The findings related to communication and trust highlight both strengths and challenges. Open communication was positively perceived by 56.4% of respondents, while 52.7% identified respect and empathy as important values in intergenerational relationships.

However, there are challenges in intergenerational relationships, too. Differences in traditional values, lifestyle choices, individualism, and geographical mobility were identified as additional challenges. These findings reflect the impact of social, demographic, technological, and lifestyle changes on contemporary family relationships.

Overall, the study demonstrates that intergenerational relationships remain a significant source of family support, knowledge, caregiving, resilience, and stability. The strongest aspects of these relationships appear to be practical assistance, resource sharing, transmission of life experiences, and the contribution of intergenerational relationships to overall family well-being. At the same time, emotional security, effective communication, and the management of generational differences remain areas requiring greater attention.

The findings suggest that contemporary families need to move towards more intentional and inclusive intergenerational communication, where the experiences and perspectives of both older and younger members are valued. Families can be strengthened by creating opportunities for shared activities, storytelling, decision-making, caregiving cooperation, and open discussion of changing values and expectations. Greater recognition of the reciprocal contributions of different generations can help reduce conflict and strengthen family cohesion.

Based on the study, it may be suggested that families must proactively nurture intergenerational relationships to ensure sustainable support. They must develop healthy communication patterns with family members across generations. Intergenerational support is essential for facing adversity. Intergenerational relationships function as protective factors during crises, reinforcing families' capacity to adapt, recover, and sustain well-being in adversity.

In conclusion, intergenerational support is not merely a mechanism for meeting practical needs; it is an important foundation for family resilience, identity, continuity, and well-being. Strengthening communication, mutual respect, empathy, and reciprocal support can help families adapt to changing social and demographic conditions while preserving the valuable connections between generations.

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