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Demand- and supply-side perspectives on parental support: Inequalities between and within families

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A B S T R A C T

Current generations of adult children are believed to rely on their parents for more extended periods of their lives than in the past. Theories of parental transfers to adult children often rely on the logic of demand and supply to explain inequality of support within and between families. The current paper examines these notions using an improved research design for understanding variations in four support dimensions: practical, financial, informational, and grandparenting. Random and fixed-effects regression models were estimated on a sample of 16,603 children aged 18–50 nested in 7826 parents in the Netherlands. Findings reveal that support transfers to children strongly depend on parents' resources and time constraints, confirming the role of supply. Models for sibling differences within families show that parents allocate more support to children with personal problems and children who experienced adverse life events, in line with the notion of demand. Supply and demand-side factors play a weaker role for stepparents but similar roles for married and separated parents. Supply-side effects increase inequality in future generations, whereas demand-side effects reduce inequality by mitigating differences within families.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, support from parents to adult children has received increasing interest (Fingerman et al., 2015; Silverstein and Giarrusso, 2010). One of the better-known findings is that children's reliance on parents does not end when children leave home. Instead, in contemporary society, children receive various forms of support from parents after they leave home and set up their households (Swartz, 2009). Examples are financial assistance to pay for college, instrumental support after buying or renting a new house, advice when deciding about labor market prospects, and support in caring for (preschool) children. Prolonged stays in the parental home and returns to the parental home after having left have also been conceptualized in terms of downward intergenerational support (Albertini and Kohli, 2013; Caputo, 2019; Tosi and Grundy, 2018).

Although parental support ultimately declines as adult children age, reliance on parents is believed to be strong (Logan and Spitze, 1996). Support from parents can continue beyond the transition from school to work and extend into the remaining life course. Some authors speak of 'endless parenting' to describe contemporary patterns of intergenerational dependencies (Vuijsje and Groen, 2016). Enduring parental support is related to increasing uncertainties in the labor market, difficulties in finding steady and secure employment, and inefficiencies in the housing market. Moreover, reliance on parents for support is fostered by the postponement of children's marriage and fertility transitions and by new complexities in the modern life course, such as separation and repartnering (Lesthaeghe, 2014). Studies have shown that the prevalence of downward intergenerational support has increased over time (Fingerman et al., 2012; Henretta et al., 2018). In a more general sense, the adult life course of today is surrounded by stronger and prolonged uncertainty (Blossfeld et al., 2005) and it is primarily for this reason that parents are mobilized for support.

Several recent studies, in particular in the US, have examined the determinants of downward intergenerational support (for overviews, Seltzer and Bianchi, 2013; Swartz, 2009). Determinants of variations in the type and degree of support that parents give to

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adult children have often been classified into demand- and supply-side perspectives (Kalmijn, 2014; Seltzer and Bianchi, 2013; Szydlik, 2016). Demand-side perspectives argue that the needs and interests of children determine how much support they receive from parents. Empirically, these ideas have been tested by looking at indirect indicators of children's needs, in particular, the life course transitions they experience (e.g., divorce, parenthood), their age, and their employment and socioeconomic status. Supply-side perspectives argue that offering support requires resources on the part of the giver so that parents' economic and cultural resources determine how much they give. Supply-side notions have often been tested by looking at parental income and wealth, a resource that is immediately relevant for financial support to adult children.

Demand- and supply-side theories are relevant because they have implications for inequality (Gilligan et al., 2018; Kalmijn, 2024; Swartz, 2009). Supply-side perspectives may imply an increase in inequality in future generations since children receive more support during the life course when their parents have more economic and cultural resources. Authors have argued that downward intergenerational support is one of the more invisible mechanisms behind the reproduction of inequality across generations (Swartz, 2009). While supply-side factors increase inequalities between (children of different) families, demand-side explanations may reduce inequalities. In so far as parental support helps children to get ahead in life or helps them to recover from setbacks, support to children will reduce inequality between children, especially of children within the same family. The overall impact of intergenerational transfers on inequality is complex, depending on the relative strength of demand- and supply-side factors and the possible interactions of demand and supply.

The goal of the current paper is to re-examine the role of demand- and supply-side factors with new data and an improved research design. First, we use data with elaborate measures of parental resources (income, wealth, time availability, and cultural resources) and more direct measures of children's needs than were available in previous studies. Specifically, we look at the role of children's positive and negative life events, which can create a demand for support, and measures of children's well-being as perceived by parents. Second, we analyze a broad range of support dimensions: practical support, household support, financial support, informational support, and support with caring for children (grandparenting). In covering all these support dimensions in one study, we can examine more clearly which needs and resources affect which types of support. Third, we examine how family structure moderates demand- and supply-side factors' role in supporting adult children. Previous studies have examined the main effects of family structure (e.g., comparing divorced and married parents), but few studies have examined interaction effects with demand- and supply-side variables. Fourth, we have data on multiple (adult) children per parent, allowing us to use between- and within-family models. Within-family models yield a more stringent examination of demand-side factors since these models implicitly control for measured and unmeasured parental resources (supply).

Although the contribution of this paper is primarily empirical, we also provide evidence on a European welfare state, i.e., the Netherlands. Many studies on downward intergenerational support were based on the US, in which dependence, especially financial, is believed to be stronger and more enduring given the high degree of inequality in the US, the high private costs of tertiary schooling, and the limited availability of public safety nets (Fingerman et al., 2012; Swartz, 2009). In the Netherlands, income inequality is modest by comparison and the costs of tertiary education are relatively low (OECD, 2011). Moreover, there is universal access to welfare payments, unemployment benefits are more generous than in the US, and there are substantial government subsidies for preschool childcare facilities (Pfeifer, 2012; Roeters and Bucx, 2018). Housing costs, however, are high, and there has been a shortage of affordable housing for young adults, boosting the (financial) role of parents (Hochstenbach and Arundel, 2021). The current paper examines the role of demand- and supply-side factors in a national sample of 7,826 parents in the Netherlands who report about multiple adult children between 18 and 50 (N = 16,603).

2. Background

In studying the determinants of downward intergenerational transfers, several theoretical ideas have been invoked, including notions of exchange and reciprocity (Silverstein et al., 2002), altruism (Arrondel and Masson, 2006), need and opportunity structures (Szydlik, 2016), filial norms (Gans et al., 2009), and macro-level factors such as welfare regimes (Brandt, 2013) and cultural traditions (Reher, 1998). The current study focuses on individual-level determinants that can be grouped into demand- or supply-side perspectives. These factors overlap with notions of altruism and the distinction between need and opportunity structures.

2.1. Demand-side perspectives

In theories of intergenerational support, support transfers are conceptualized as need-driven (Silverstein et al., 2006; Szydlik, 2016). Many authors have theorized that parents are concerned for their children's well-being and support children in need to improve children's well-being (Fingerman et al., 2009; Silverstein et al., 2006). Support is, therefore, not a continuous phenomenon that changes gradually, but something given in specific instances in response to concrete demands. Demands can be motivated by declines in children's well-being but also by negative and positive life events. For example, a child's divorce may trigger support from parents (e.g., emotional support, housing), just as the transition to homeownership (e.g., financial and instrumental support). The notion of altruism has been contrasted with exchange ideas arguing that parents invest more in 'successful' children – e.g., children in better health and with more income – with the expectation of receiving support later in life (Brandt et al., 2008).

In family research, the notion of altruism is commonly tested indirectly, by examining if and to what extent parents respond to the needs of their children. For example, if parents do not financially support a child with financial difficulties, this would be evidence against altruism, assuming the child's well-being would have increased had the child received financial support. Similarly, if a parent gives the same financial support to each child, regardless of need, that would also be inconsistent with altruism and suggest that norms

of equality may play a role. For practical support, giving all children support regardless of need is unlikely – or an example of 'too much of a good thing' (Silverstein et al., 1996). In the case of practical support, the scenario of parents *not* giving support to the child in need provides the more likely refutation of altruism. The test of altruism is further complicated by other processes in the family, such as direct reciprocity (Leopold and Raab, 2011) and exchange over the life course (Silverstein et al., 2002).

Research using the indirect approach thus far has supported the need-based implications of altruism, but most of the evidence applies to financial support. Authors have shown that unemployed and low-income children receive more support from parents than other children (Albertini and Radl, 2012; Altonji et al., 2000; Hochguertel and Ohlsson, 2009; Lennartsson et al., 2010). Less evidence is available for non-financial support. Using an index of six types of support, Fingerman et al. (2009) showed that children with more social and emotional problems received more support from parents than other children (Fingerman et al., 2009). Using a within-family design, another study showed that mothers provide more practical and emotional support to the child with poorer health and less education (Kalmijn, 2013). Few studies have systematically compared different kinds of needs and different kinds of support. In addition, the number of studies using a within-family design is still relatively limited.

A second way in which authors have tested need-based implications of altruism has been to focus on children's life course transitions (Brandt et al., 2008; Bucx et al., 2012; Kalmijn, 2019; Nazio and Saraceno, 2013; Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Silverstein et al., 2002). After a temporary increase in support upon getting married (Leopold and Schneider, 2011), support from parents tends to decline when children marry, primarily because children begin to rely on their partner for support (Bucx et al., 2008; Nazio and Saraceno, 2013; Sarkisian and Gerstel, 2008). Support from parents increases again, however, when children become parents, mainly because the need for support in caring for (grand)children increases (Di Gessa, Glaser, Price, Ribe and Tinker, 2016; Silverstein and Marenco, 2001; Zamberletti et al., 2018), although other forms of support – emotional, household – increase as well (Min et al., 2022). If children separate, support from parents increases further because children are single again and miss the support of a partner. A separation also creates new needs, such as help with housing and emotional problems (Seltzer et al., 2012). Most past studies did not use within-family designs and focused on the classical life course transitions rather than on broader sets of events children experience.

2.2. Supply-side perspectives

While the receipt of support is driven by demand, the giving of support is driven by opportunity. Parents' opportunities depend on the resources and restrictions that they face. The more resources parents have and the fewer restrictions, the greater the support supply. While this is fairly obvious in a general sense, the idea becomes more interesting when considering specific types of support and specific types of resources and restrictions. Commonly, a distinction is made between economic and cultural resources, with different types of support requiring different resources. Many studies have found that transfers of financial support to children depend on parents' income (Albertini and Radl, 2012; Altonji et al., 2000; Hochguertel and Ohlsson, 2009; Lennartsson et al., 2010). Both parental earnings and assets affect financial support to children and the effects of the mother's financial resources appear weaker than those of the father's (Henretta et al., 2018). Parents' economic resources also have a strong positive effect on children's likelihood of receiving an inheritance and its amount (Szydlik, 2004) but this cannot be studied in the current paper. Fewer studies have examined the role of cultural resources. However, one study found that higher-educated parents provided more informational support to children than lower-educated parents, in line with the notion that this support dimension is based upon cultural resources (Kalmijn, 2024). Spillover effects may also occur, for instance, when parents with more financial resources give more informational support to a child as a byproduct of financial support transfers.

Restrictions will especially play a role for time-intensive forms of support like practical support, support with household chores, and grandparenting. Parents have fewer opportunities to provide time-intensive support when they work more hours, are older, and have poorer health. There is abundant evidence for the adverse effects of (grand) mother's employment on grandparenting support. Still, evidence on the effects of health is less consistent and little is known about how such restrictions affect other dimensions of support (Di Gessa et al., 2016; Henretta et al., 2002; Igel and Szydlik, 2011). In a more general sense, it is not well-known if notions of supply used to explain financial transfers are also valid for other resources and other types of support.

2.3. Demand, supply, and family structure

Support for adult children depends not only on demand- and supply-side factors but also on the type of parent and the relationship with the child. Studies have shown that relationships between adult children and separated fathers are weaker on average than between adult children and married fathers (Albertini and Garriga, 2011; Clark and Kenney, 2010; Daatland, 2007; De Graaf and Fokkema, 2007; Van Houdt, 2021). Adverse effects apply to many aspects of the relationship, but the effects are not found for all support dimensions. One study found that divorced single fathers did not give less financial support to their children (Clark and Kenney, 2010), while remarried fathers gave less support compared to first-married fathers. A recent study further shows that in so far as single parents provide less financial support to children, this effect is fully explained by income differences between single and married parents (Hastings and Schneider, 2021). Next to a separation penalty, there is evidence for a stepgap. On average, relations with stepparents – especially stepmothers – are more distant, involve less contact, and less exchange of support than relations with non-separated biological parents (Arránz Becker, Salzburger, Lois and Nauck, 2013; Van Houdt, 2021).

While the role of family structure for support exchange has been relatively well established empirically, less is known about how family structure moderates the role of demand- and supply-side factors. Are separated parents and stepparents equally responsive to the needs of their children as married parents? Similarly, will the different types of parents invest their resources in adult children to the same extent? The effect of children's needs on the support parents give could be weaker for separated parents and stepparents

because their relations with the child are weaker on average, because they may be less aware of their children's problems, or because they delegate support to another parent. Especially for stepparents, people may yield to the biological parent of the same sex to step in when an adult child has a problem that requires support (van Houdt et al., 2020). For the interaction between parents' resources and family structure, one would expect stronger effects for married parents than for stepparents. If parents prioritize their support to, for example, biological children over stepchildren, as vignette studies suggest (Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Van Houdt, 2021), this could further imply smaller effects of parental resources among stepparents than among married parents.

3. Data, measures, and method

We used data from the survey *Parents and Children in the Netherlands* (OKiN) (Kalmijn et al., 2017). The OKiN survey contained two parts: a survey among a register-based sample of children 25–45 in the Netherlands ('anchors') and a survey among the parents and (current) stepparents of these children ('alters'). The parents were selected via the register and not via the children themselves. The data sets were augmented with extensive information from the population registers.

The sample contained a systematic register-defined oversample of children who grew up with separated parents or in stepfamilies. For the current study, the parent (alter) sample was used to compare children within families. Parents were interviewed using CAWI questionnaires and the response rate was 38 %, which is reasonable for web-based surveys (Wu et al., 2022). Analyses of selective response rates of parents suggest that there was little bias in the likelihood that parents responded (Kalmijn, 2023). Parents were also included in the analyses when their children did not participate. Parents were asked about three types of children: (a) children with the current partner (if they lived with a partner), (b) children with a previous partner (if applicable), and (c) the current partner's children from a previous union (i.e., stepchildren). Note that the terms 'stepchildren' and 'stepparent' were not used in the questionnaire. Detailed questions were asked for two randomly chosen children within each category.

The sample was defined as all the adult children belonging to the (step)parents of the anchors. We selected children 18–50 who were not living at home. We excluded children without valid reports from parents. Stepchildren with whom the parent had no contact in the past 12 months were also excluded since these probably are non-existent relationships. Appendix Table 1 provides an overview of the case selections. The total number of dyads in the sample was 16,603, belonging to 7,826 parents. The descriptive results were weighted to correct the oversample of children from separated and stepfamilies (design weight).

3.1. Measures of support

Parents were asked about the following types of support given to each child in the past 12 months: (a) assistance with practical matters, (b) help with household chores, (c) help with taking care of grandchildren, (d) giving money or durable goods worth € 500 or more, (e) giving council or good advice. Response options were (1) not, (2) once, (3) multiple times, (4) often/regularly. The items were dichotomized because dichotomous items have a more intuitive interpretation than ordinal measures and because the interest was in strong reliance on parents. All variables (except financial support) were dichotomized by contrasting (1–2) versus (3–4). For financial support, the contrast was made between (1) and (2–4), because this is a less recurrent transfer than the others. Because they were similar, and because determinants appeared similar as well, practical and household help were combined into one variable called instrumental support. The variable was coded 1 if parents provided either household or practical help multiple times or more (otherwise 0).

3.2. Measures of parent characteristics

Parents' resources were measured in the questionnaire and the register. We used the registers to obtain measures of parents' standardized household income (logged), whether parents owned a home, and the registered value of the home. For selected models, we used personal rather than household income (see below). Income and home values were logged. Cultural resources were measured in the questionnaire by parents' educational attainment and an index of parents' cultural activities. Based on the empirical literature about cultural capital (Jaeger and Holm, 2007; Kraaykamp and Notten, 2016), we created an index of book reading, visiting a theater/classical music concert, and visiting a museum, each coded on a three-point frequency scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.68$).

Parents' restrictions were measured by whether the parent worked for pay for 12 h or more, parents' age (dichotomized in 70 or older versus younger), and a measure of health, using the self-rated health question (Miilunpalo et al., 1997). Interactions of employment and parent gender were explored but not significant. The number of children of the parent was included to examine resource dilution. Parents can provide less support to each child when they have more children, especially for time-intensive forms of support and financial support. In the context of complex families, family size is an important control variable since parents in complex families tend to have more children (Ganong and Coleman, 2017; Kalmijn et al., 2019).

3.3. Measures of child characteristics

The approach to children's demand for support was twofold. First, we used measures of children's problems as perceived by the parents. We distinguished different life domains, following studies on life satisfaction (Weber and Huebner, 2015): work/school, partner/children/own family life, and health/well-being. For each domain, parents were asked to rate how well the child was doing on a five-point scale: (1) poor, (2) mediocre, (3) not good/not bad, (4) well, (5) very well. If a domain was not applicable, parents could indicate so. The items were combined into one scale by taking the average across standardized items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$). If one item

was not applicable according to the parent, the average was taken of the remaining items. The scale was reverse coded so that higher values indicated more problems. Feedback effects may bias cross-sectional associations between support and children's problems. If the support of parents alleviates children's problems, this attenuates the demand effects of children's problems on support. As a result, our estimates provide a conservative estimate of the effects of this variable.

Our second approach to measure demand-side factors was to focus on life events the child experienced which could create a demand for specific kinds of support. Our approach was broader than previous work in that we not only looked at family transitions but also at other important life events. We presented parents with a list of events and asked them to indicate whether the child had experienced the event. The following events were included in the analyses:

(a) marriage/cohabitation,
(b) becoming a parent,
(c) divorce/separation,
(d) unemployment,
(e) a serious health crisis,
(f) dropped out of school or leaving an education without completing it,
(g) having bought a home,
(h) experienced serious financial problems (e.g., bankruptcy).

As can be seen from Table 1, all events did occur so that with the large sample size available, their effects on support could be assessed in a reliable manner. Since the event questions were asked for each of the children (potentially six) during the interview, we abstained from asking further details about the timing of the events.

Table 1
Descriptives by adult child age.

	Age		
	18-29	30-39	40-50
	N = 5,627	N = 8,170	N = 2,806
Instrumental support (0/1)	0.371 (0.483)	0.342 (0.475)	0.278 (0.448)
Informational support (0/1)	0.449 (0.497)	0.343 (0.475)	0.244 (0.430)
Financial support (0/1)	0.423 (0.494)	0.371 (0.483)	0.364 (0.481)
Grandparenting support (0/1)	0.528 (0.500)	0.624 (0.485)	0.468 (0.499)
Grandparenting (unconditional)	0.088 (0.284)	0.380 (0.485)	0.360 (0.480)
Parent household income (ln) [a]	10.481 (0.464)	10.378 (0.457)	10.297 (0.428)
Parent personal income (ln) [a]	10.282 (0.954)	10.063 (1.031)	9.912 (0.878)
Parent homeowner (0/1) [a]	0.858 (0.349)	0.841 (0.366)	0.828 (0.378)
Parent house value (ln) [a,b]	12.387 (0.474)	12.335 (0.475)	12.302 (0.482)
Parent education (isled)	6.027 (1.883)	5.554 (2.010)	5.184 (2.089)
Parent cultural activities	1.691 (0.467)	1.696 (0.468)	1.666 (0.473)
Paid work parent (0/1) [a]	0.747 (0.435)	0.479 (0.500)	0.135 (0.342)
Parent age >= 70 (0/1)	0.012 (0.110)	0.089 (0.284)	0.444 (0.497)
Parent poor health	2.107 (0.686)	2.184 (0.702)	2.249 (0.724)
Daughter (0/1)	0.511 (0.500)	0.487 (0.500)	0.499 (0.500)
Problems school/work	1.728 (0.807)	1.761 (0.814)	1.715 (0.756)
Problems partner/family	1.807 (0.827)	1.758 (0.831)	1.744 (0.815)
Problems health/well-being	1.855 (0.818)	1.887 (0.819)	1.907 (0.803)
Marriage event (0/1)	0.598 (0.490)	0.832 (0.374)	0.879 (0.327)
Fertility event (0/1)	0.167 (0.373)	0.609 (0.488)	0.768 (0.422)
Divorce event (0/1)	0.039 (0.193)	0.081 (0.273)	0.206 (0.405)
Homeownership event (0/1)	0.405 (0.491)	0.743 (0.437)	0.839 (0.368)
Unemployment event (0/1)	0.087 (0.282)	0.117 (0.321)	0.110 (0.313)
Health event (0/1)	0.104 (0.306)	0.117 (0.322)	0.111 (0.315)
Financial event (0/1)	0.016 (0.126)	0.032 (0.175)	0.050 (0.217)
Dropout event (0/1)	0.210 (0.407)	0.170 (0.376)	0.110 (0.313)
Type of dyad			
Married	64.3	72.8	75.8
Separated	19.8	14.2	10.0
Step	14.2	11.3	12.4
Widowed	1.7	1.6	1.8
Mother			
Father	46.5	49.2	51.0
Mother	53.5	50.8	49.0
Number of children	3.205 (1.460)	3.013 (1.308)	2.874 (1.365)
One bio parent deceased (0/1)	0.020 (0.140)	0.029 (0.168)	0.044 (0.204)

Note: OKiN alter data 2017. Weighted results. Standard deviations in parentheses.
[a] Obtained from the register.
[b] Mean value assigned for renters.

3.4. Family structure

To address the role of family structure, we defined different types of dyads, making a distinction between:

(a) children from a current married/cohabiting union,
(b) children from a divorced/separated union,
(c) children of the current partner from a previous union,
(d) children from a widowed union.

The definitions apply to relationships and not to individuals. The same child can be a stepchild for one parent and a biological child for another parent. Similarly, parents can be stepparents and biological parents simultaneously. The effects of the type of relationship were interacted with parent gender since separation and stepfamily effects are known to be gendered (Ganong and Coleman, 2018). We controlled for whether the 'other' biological parent of the child was deceased. This variable applies only to stepchildren and to children of a divorced/separated union (whose other parent could have died after separation). In supplementary analyses, we examined differences between stepchildren who ever lived with the parent (resident stepchild) and those who did not (non-resident stepchild). Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

3.5. Design and method

Dyads were nested in parents and analyzed with multilevel models. Effects of demand and supply-side variables were analyzed with random-effects linear probability models (Table 2). To estimate the effects of demand-side variables, we additionally used fixed-effects models, capturing differences among children of the same parent (Table 3). These models implicitly control for unobserved parent characteristics and provide a more direct view of how parents distribute support among their children. Note that our sibling design differs from recently used models to assess causal effects of parents' characteristics like income and parenting styles on child outcomes, a design that has recently been criticized (Engzell and Haellsten, 2024). In contrast to such designs, our model focuses on how real differences in characteristics of children affect differential responses of a parent to those individual children. To explore the role of family structure, demand and supply-side factors were interacted with the type of dyad (Table 4). Key findings are presented in Figs. 1–3 where we present the model predictions in condensed form. All continuous independent variables were standardized so that the effects could be compared across variables and models. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

4. Findings

Table 1 shows how often parents gave various types of support to their children. Since support depends on children's ages, overall estimates of the prevalence of support in a survey are not always informative since the estimates depend on the sample definition. For this reason, the estimates are broken down by the age group of the child. In the age group of 18–29, 37 % of the parents gave frequent instrumental support, 45 % gave frequent advice or counsel (informational support), and 53 % frequently took care of grandchildren (given that there were grandchildren). Financial support over € 500 was given in 42 % of the dyads. All forms of support declined when children became older, but even in their forties, many children still received support from their parents. For example, among children between the ages of 40–50, 24 % received frequent advice or counsel and 36 % received financial support. These descriptive findings confirm that reliance on parents endures through the life course. Little can be said of whether this support is excessive or evidence of 'overinvolvement'. For that, more subjective evaluations of the transfers are needed (Fingerman et al., 2012).

4.1. Supply-side effects

Table 2 presents the effects of parents' characteristics on the four types of support. Parents' income had the expected positive effects on financial support, but also on informational support and grandparenting, suggesting that financial resources have a broader meaning than simply the availability of money. For instrumental support, there was no positive effect of income but also no evidence of 'compensation' (i.e., no negative effect). The two additional economic indicators had effects on support as well. Parents who owned a home and who owned more expensive homes were more likely to provide support, especially financial. In the model, renters are compared to homeowners who have a home with an average value. Another important finding is that not only economic aspects of socioeconomic status mattered. We found evidence for status effects that are more cultural. Parents with more education and cultural capital were more likely to provide informational, financial, and grandparenting support.

Restrictions on the part of parents also mattered for support, but the effects depended on the type of support. Parents in poor health, who were 70 or older, and who worked for pay were less likely to take care of grandchildren and less likely to provide instrumental support. There was no interaction of gender and employment for any support measure. The findings align with the notion that restrictions are primarily relevant for time-intensive forms of support. The notion of resource dilution was also confirmed. Family size had a strong negative effect on all dimensions of support. When parents had more children, they were less likely to support each child. The effect was weakest for informational support, probably because giving advice and counsel is the least time intensive.

An important question is how strong the supply-side effects are. Given the large sample, statistical significance is not a sufficient guide to evaluate the effects. Moreover, the different parental status elements were represented by multiple variables which will reduce the effect of each component. To better evaluate effect sizes, we created an SES index containing the first five supply-side

Table 2
Random-effects linear probability models for parental support to adult children 18-50.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Instrumental	Informational	Financial	Grandparenting
Supply-side factors				
Parent household income (ln)	.005	.013*	.056**	.031**
	(.345)	(.016)	(.000)	(.000)
Parent homeowner	.025*	−.007	.033**	.040*
	(.024)	(.573)	(.008)	(.012)
Parent house value (ln)	.002	.015**	.029**	.001
	(.682)	(.005)	(.000)	(.929)
Parent education (isled)	.002	.018**	.019**	.009
	(.623)	(.001)	(.000)	(.210)
Parent cultural activities	.005	.010*	.021**	.016*
	(.295)	(.038)	(.000)	(.014)
Paid work parent	−.027**	.005	−.011	−.057**
	(.004)	(.607)	(.264)	(.000)
Parent age≥70	−.037*	−.023	.023	−.044*
	(.012)	(.145)	(.150)	(.019)
Number of children	−.032**	−.016**	−.036**	−.040**
	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)
Parent poor health	−.014**	.008	−.004	−.025**
	(.001)	(.084)	(.447)	(.000)
Demand-side factors				
Age	−.069**	−.091**	−.051**	−.032**
	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.001)
Age squared				−.036**
				(.000)
Child problems	.019**	.040**	.019**	−.026**
	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)
Marriage event	−.041**	−.025**	.007	
	(.000)	(.008)	(.414)	
Fertility event	.063**	.029**	.008	
	(.000)	(.001)	(.347)	
Divorce event	.072**	.090**	.097**	.031*
	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.043)
Homeownership event	.058**	−.010	.002	.088**
	(.000)	(.233)	(.792)	(.000)
Unemployment event	.025*	.064**	.064**	.025
	(.023)	(.000)	(.000)	(.142)
Health event	.069**	.059**	.017	.032
	(.000)	(.000)	(.118)	(.068)
Financial event	.043*	.104**	.138**	−.024
	(.012)	(.000)	(.000)	(.345)
Dropout event	−.005	.025**	.023**	−.006
	(.560)	(.004)	(.005)	(.678)
Family structure				
Mother	−.080**	−.018	−.089**	.060**
	(.000)	(.269)	(.000)	(.008)
Daughter	.043**	.038**	−.001	.072**
	(.000)	(.000)	(.832)	(.000)
One bio parent deceased	.020	.031*	−.007	.004
	(.149)	(.034)	(.651)	(.827)
Child separated union	−.154**	−.035*	−.074**	−.300**
	(.000)	(.018)	(.000)	(.000)
x mother	.131**	.068**	.062**	.295**
	(.000)	(.001)	(.002)	(.000)
Stepchild	−.085**	−.074**	−.125**	−.075**
	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)
x mother	−.120**	−.083**	−.064**	−.248**
	(.000)	(.000)	(.002)	(.000)
Child widowed parent	−.109**	−.018	−.114**	−.246**
	(.000)	(.565)	(.000)	(.000)
x mother	.058	−.007	.149**	.252**
	(.138)	(.856)	(.000)	(.000)
Constant	.330**	.371**	.402**	.493**
	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)
Mean of Y	.288	.368	.354	.475
N dyads	16603	16603	16603	7937
N parents	7826	7826	7826	5056
R2 overall	.070	.086	.087	.147

(*continued on next page*)

Table 2 (*continued*)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Instrumental	Informational	Financial	Grandparenting
Chi-2	1148.4	1567.4	1428.9	1269.2
Rho	.266	.379	.436	.278

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$.
Source: OKiN alter data 2017. P-values in parentheses. All linear independent variables are standardized.

Table 3
Fixed-effects linear probability models for parental support to adult children 18-50.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Instrumental	Informational	Financial	Grandparenting
Daughter	.056**	.048**	−.002	.070**
	(.000)	(.000)	(.790)	(.000)
Age	−.052**	−.072**	−.064**	−.007
	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.710)
Age squared				−.037**
				(.000)
Child problems	.026**	.051**	.019**	−.013
	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.263)
Marriage event	−.039**	−.027*	.006	
	(.001)	(.020)	(.584)	
Fertility event	.065**	.025*	.015	
	(.000)	(.018)	(.116)	
Divorce event	.054**	.076**	.103**	.012
	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.585)
Homeownership event	.036**	−.013	−.013	.081**
	(.001)	(.212)	(.179)	(.000)
Unemployment event	.018	.048**	.055**	.035
	(.185)	(.000)	(.000)	(.191)
Health event	.041**	.043**	.014	.020
	(.003)	(.002)	(.260)	(.456)
Financial event	.014	.075**	.123**	−.045
	(.527)	(.000)	(.000)	(.260)
Dropout event	−.013	.023*	.017	−.022
	(.223)	(.032)	(.096)	(.316)
Child separated union	−.205**	−.157**	−.085*	−.345**
	(.000)	(.000)	(.011)	(.000)
x mother	.043	.048	−.019	.298*
	(.368)	(.300)	(.672)	(.011)
Stepchild	−.130**	−.195**	−.141**	−.096
	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.264)
x mother	−.224**	−.127**	−.152**	−.317**
	(.000)	(.005)	(.000)	(.006)
Child widowed parent	−.216**	−.148**	−.210**	−.326**
	(.000)	(.005)	(.000)	(.003)
x mother	.012	.008	.157*	.292*
	(.875)	(.911)	(.021)	(.044)
Constant	.382**	.471**	.432**	.558**
	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)
N dyads	16603	16603	16603	7937
N parents	7826	7826	7826	5056
R2 overall	.054	.061	.041	.116
F	34.8	57.2	42.6	26.9
Rho	.494	.553	.590	.540

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$.
Source: OKiN alter data 2017. P-values in parentheses. All linear independent variables standardized.

variables (income, education, housing value, home ownership, and cultural resources). The index was created by standardizing the variables first, taking the mean, and subsequently standardizing the scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.69$).

The magnitude of the effect of SES was not trivial, as shown in Fig. 1. To gauge effect sizes, we focus on the middle 90 % of the SES distribution, indicated in the figure by the vertical dashed lines. As the figure shows, financial support was stratified most strongly, with an increase in support of about 30 percentage points in that range. Informational and grandparenting support were also stratified in a non-trivial fashion, with increases of 12 percentage points more informational support and 17 percentage points more grandparenting support when going from the bottom 5 % to the top 5 % of the SES index. Given the overall support frequency (Table 1), these

Table 4
Interactions of the type of dyad and demand/supply-side factors.

	(1)	(2)
	Fathers	Mothers
Child problem index	.208**	.238**
	(.000)	(.000)
Married	Ref.	Ref.
Separated	−.248**	−.046
	(.000)	(.126)
Step	−.231**	−.599**
	(.000)	(.000)
Widowed	−.248**	−.083
	(.000)	(.125)
Separated # Child problem index	−.049	−.025
	(.118)	(.355)
Step # Child problem index	−.034	−.066*
	(.272)	(.021)
Widowed # Child problem index	−.087	−.004
	(.192)	(.936)
Parent SES	.167**	.138**
	(.000)	(.000)
Separated # Parent SES	.021	.054
	(.524)	(.059)
Step # Parent SES	−.127**	−.088**
	(.000)	(.004)
Widowed # Parent SES	.010	.116*
	(.891)	(.033)
Constant	1.245**	1.160**
	(.000)	(.000)
N dyads	7796	8677
N parents	3616	4131
R2 overall	.094	.149
Chi-2	718.1	1767.8
Rho	.407	.405

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$.
Source: OKiN alter data 2017. Dependent variable is support index. P-values in parentheses. Married is the reference category. All variables from Table 2 were included but not printed.

effects can be considered substantial. Instrumental support was stratified to only a limited extent.

4.2. Demand-side effects

Effects of children's characteristics were used to examine the role of demand-side factors. The effects are presented in the random-effects models in Table 2 and the fixed-effects models in Table 3. We focus here mostly on the findings in Table 3. Children's problems, as perceived by the parent, were significantly associated with support. In general, we found that children with more problems received more instrumental, informational, and financial support from parents. The random- and fixed-effects models generally reveal similar effects, providing evidence that parents allocated their support to those children who experienced the most problems. No effect was found for grandparenting support, showing that problems with children themselves did not affect support to grandchildren. Perhaps problems with grandchildren would have been more relevant for grandparental support in this case, but no characteristics of the grandchildren were measured.

The role of demand was also assessed via adult children's life events. Demographic events were associated with changes in support, both between and within families. Focusing on the fixed-effects models, we observe that divorce/separation, parenthood, and home ownership resulted in more support, in line with expectations. Of the demographic events, only divorce/separation affected financial support streams, however. In line with past studies, the transition to marriage/cohabitation was not associated with more support and even revealed a decline in instrumental and informational support (Hogerbrugge and Dykstra, 2009; Nazio and Saraceno, 2013).

Novel findings emerge for the other life events included in the survey. Looking at the fixed-effects models in Table 3, we found that unemployment and financial setbacks were associated with more informational and financial support. Negative health experiences were associated with more instrumental support and more informational support. School dropout was associated with more informational support. In sum, the effects of negative life events reveal clear evidence for a demand-side perspective. Parents allocate more of their time, attention, and money to those children who experience negative events in their lives.

To evaluate the magnitude of the effects, we created an index consisting of the three indicators of children's problems and the five negative life events. After standardizing the variables so that each item has the same weight in the index, the items were summed into a scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.71$) which was subsequently standardized again. The scale does not reflect a true latent variable but was used simply as a summary index for evaluating the strength of the overall demand effect. The effects were obtained from the fixed-effects models. Note that marriage, parenthood, and home ownership were not included in index.

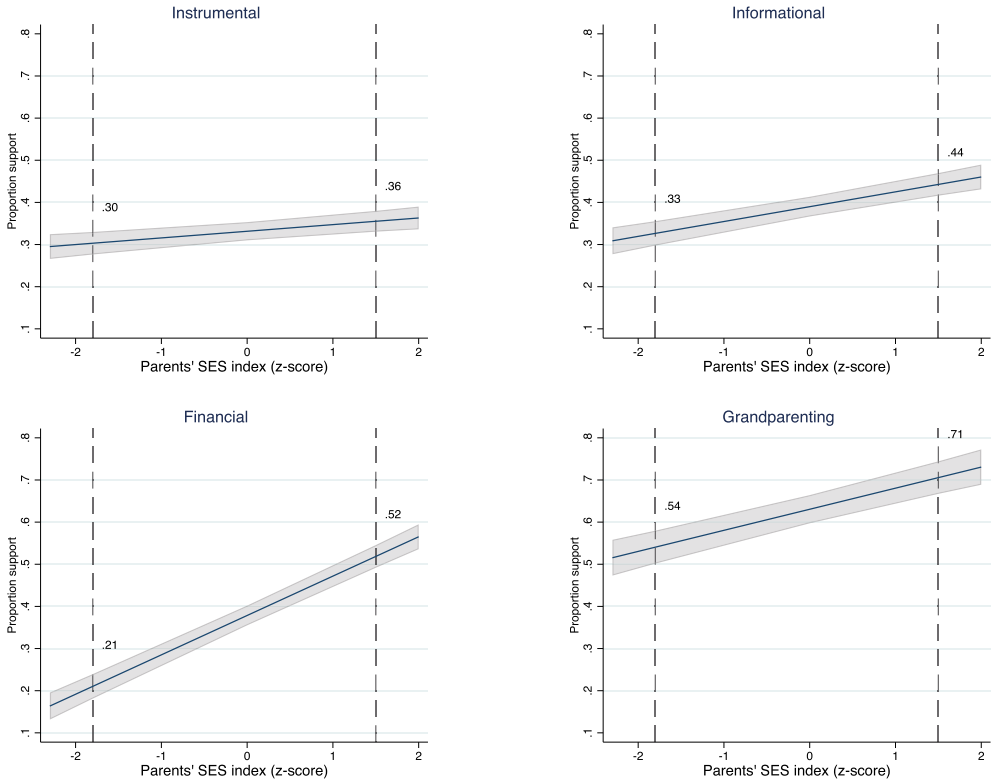

Fig. 1. Effects of parents' SES on parental support.

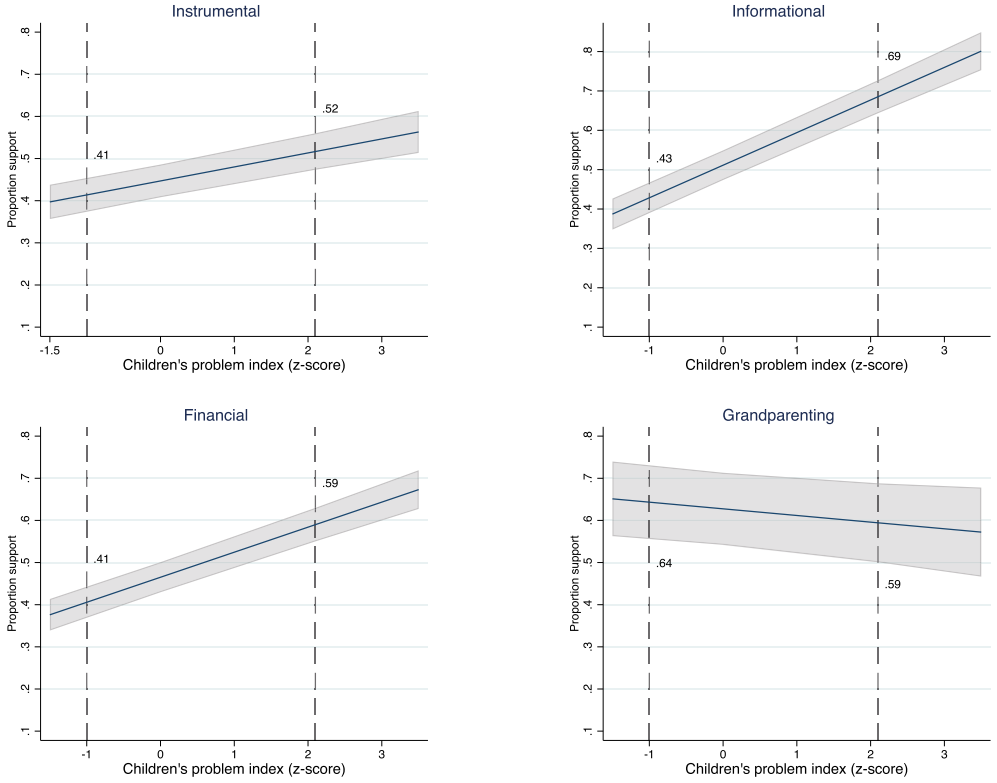

Fig. 2. Effects of children's problems on parental support.

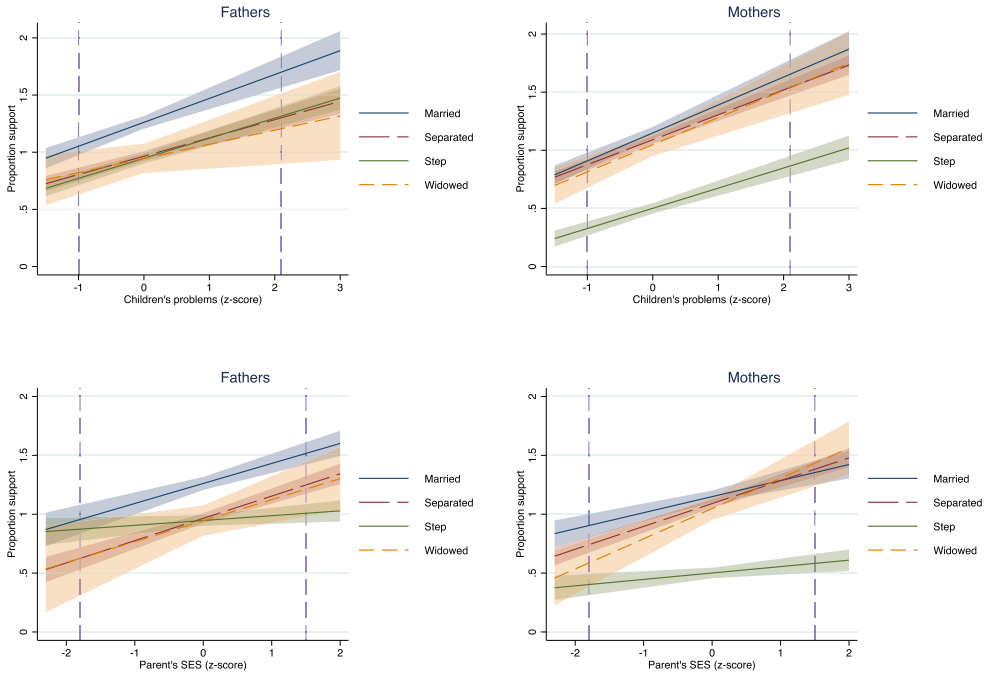

Fig. 3. Effects of demand- and supply-side factors by type of parent.

The effects of the problem index are presented in Fig. 2. Children's problems most strongly affected informational support, with an increase of 26 percentage points when comparing the 5 % and 95 % points on the problem index. Clearly, parents were strongly involved in children's lives when children have social and emotional problems. There was also a substantial effect on financial support, with increases of about 20 percentage points. Instrumental support was more modestly associated with children's problems (i.e., an increase of 10 percentage points). Grandparenting support was not associated with children's problems.

4.3. Family type effects

In the last part of the analysis, we explore differences in the effects of demand and supply-side factors by the type of dyad, making a distinction between married, separated, and steprelationships, further broken down by the parent's gender. To do so, we again used the indices for parent's SES and children's problems. Both variables were interacted by the type of dyad and the models were estimated separately for fathers and mothers to make the results more accessible. To condense the findings, we used a count of the first three support items (instrumental, informational, and financial support). Table 4 presents the estimates and Fig. 3 presents the margins.

According to Table 4 and Fig. 3, there were no differences between separated and married parents in how they responded to children's problems. The effects of children's problems were slightly weaker for separated parents, but these differences were neither significant nor meaningful in size. We did observe a negative interaction for stepmothers, however. As Fig. 3 shows, the effect of children's problems on support was weaker for stepmothers than for biological mothers. In a sense, stepmothers responded less to the problems of adult stepchildren than biological mothers did. For the SES effects, there were significant interactions as well. The SES effect was not significantly different for separated and married parents, but it was weaker for stepparents. As the bottom of Fig. 3 shows, support to stepchildren was less strongly affected by the stepparents' SES. Hence, stepparents invested fewer resources in children than married parents.

Fig. 3 also provides evidence on the overall levels of support of the three different types of dyads. Beginning with fathers, we observed that married fathers gave more support than stepfathers and separated fathers. There were no differences between stepfathers and separated fathers. For mothers, the findings were different. Separated and married mothers provided the same amount of support, whereas stepmothers provided less support. In other words, there was a 'separation penalty' but only for fathers, whereas the 'stepgap' was larger for mothers than fathers.

While these findings align with previous research, what Fig. 3 adds is that the magnitude of the separation penalty and the stepgap depends on demand- and supply-side factors. For example, in high-SES families, separated fathers provided more support than stepfathers, whereas in low-SES families, stepfathers provided more support. Moreover, the stepgap among mothers, often found to be substantial in past studies, appeared especially strong when there were many problems with the child and when the mother had many resources (i.e., higher SES).

In an additional analysis, we distinguished between stepparents who had lived with the child and those who had not. This augmented variable was again interacted with the SES index and the index of children's problems. Married fathers were the reference category, as in Table 4. In only one instance did we find the expected difference. The interaction of fathers' SES and non-resident

stepfathers (b = −.202) was stronger than the interaction of father's SES and resident stepfathers (b = −.087). Moreover, the difference between these two interactions was significant ($\chi^2 = 8.27$, $p < 0.05$). In other words, supply-side effects were weaker for non-resident stepfathers than for (formerly) resident stepfathers. For stepmothers, we found no significant difference between the two SES interactions ($\chi^2 = .85$, $p > 0.05$). For the effects of children's problems, no differences were found between resident and non-resident stepfathers or stepmothers.

5. Conclusion and discussion

The logic of demand and supply has frequently been invoked to understand patterns of intergenerational support. Many theories of intergenerational solidarity use this logic implicitly or explicitly to develop testable hypotheses about support (Albertini and Kohli, 2013; Clark and Kenney, 2010; Silverstein et al., 2006; Szydlik, 2016). Demand- and supply-side perspectives are also important considerations in societal trends. Increasing uncertainty in the labor market and the life course elevated the demand for support and increasing wealth and declining family size in the parent generation elevated its supply. To substantiate such macro-level arguments, it is important to examine the role of demand- and supply-side perspectives at the micro level with variables and designs that directly capture the assumed factors. While there has been research on the topic, the current paper contributes by developing a more elaborate and direct empirical analysis of demand- and supply-side perspectives, using a range of measures for each factor and examining these for a range of support dimensions in a large nationally representative multi-actor survey.

The analyses revealed strong effects of parents' SES on informational, financial, and grandparenting support to adult children, but not on instrumental support. These effects applied to married and separated parents but were weaker for stepparents. While previous research has often demonstrated the effects of parents' income and wealth for financial transfers, the current analyses showed that supply-side effects are considerably broader. Not only did parents' income and wealth matter, but also if they were homeowners, how much cultural capital they had, and their education, even after controlling for income. Moreover, effects were strong on informational support, suggesting that parents play an important role as advisors and coaches in their children's lives. Important to recognize is that support dimensions are correlated so that spillover effects may occur. For example, parental income may affect informational support as a byproduct of its effect on financial transfers. Higher-SES parents also provided more grandparenting support to their children. Previous research has provided a mixed picture regarding the effects of SES on grandparenting (Di Gessa, Glaser and Zaninotto, 2022; Henretta et al., 2002; Zamberletti et al., 2018). In the Netherlands, the gradient appears in a positive direction. No evidence was found for 'compensation of time for money' given the null effect of SES on instrumental support.

New evidence was found for a demand-side perspective. When deciding how to allocate support among their children, parents tended toward investing more in children who needed the most support. There were strong and significant within-family effects of children's problems and children's negative life events on the support parents allocated to them. Effects were strong for all types of parents but somewhat weaker for stepmothers. In general, our findings are consistent with notions of altruism. However, it remains to be seen if the findings persist when exchange, reciprocity, and norms are also taken into account. An advantage of our approach is that the measures are closer to the concept of need compared to what was available in previous survey data. The evidence applied equally to instrumental, informational, and financial support, suggesting a general effect of demand. The strongest effect, however, was found for informational support. Note that the weaker effects for stepmothers do not necessarily imply less altruistic concerns on the part of stepmothers. Stepmothers may not feel entitled to respond to stepchildren's problems, given the normative primacy of the biological mother-child tie within the family system (Weaver and Coleman, 2010).

Effects of demand- and supply-side factors on support have differential implications for inequality (Albertini and Radl, 2012; Morgan and Scott, 2007). Inequality can be reinforced because parents' support for their adult children is more common in advantaged families. The positive SES effects on intergenerational support found in this paper confirm this idea. Our study shows that these effects are not just financial in nature but broader. Moreover, inheritances – which were beyond the scope of this study – are also stratified and thus add to the degree of inequality (Szydlik, 2004). Demand-side effects may have the opposite implication, however. If parents distribute their support more toward the child who needs it most, for instance, because of unemployment, financial issues, health problems, or school dropout, a potential increase in between-family inequality can be counteracted by reducing within-family inequality. Studying the role of demand- and supply-side perspectives is therefore useful not only because it informs us about the cohesion of families but also because it is relevant in the context of inequalities in future generations. Patterns of downward intergenerational support may also contribute to the transmission of inequality across multiple generations, for example, when grandchildren receive inheritances from their grandparents (Gilligan et al., 2018).

In closing, we discuss the strengths and limitations of our design. First, our data are not longitudinal. The effects of children's needs can also be tested in prospective data by comparing parents' support before and after a specific need arises. Such a design has been done in a few studies in the past (Kalmijn, 2024; Min et al., 2022). The limitation of the cross-sectional design needs to be balanced against the strength of the large multi-actor data and its measures. Second, our measures of life events were not timed precisely. There were ten life events in the questionnaire, and these were asked for (a maximum of) six children. To avoid questionnaire fatigue, it was decided not to measure the timing for each of these 60 variables. Third, it was not possible to aggregate support of parents across children as not all parents participated in the study for each child. Anchor data would provide a picture of support from all parents per child, but such a design precludes estimating within-family effects. In our view, the sibling comparisons provided the most informative way to examine the role of demand-side perspectives. Finally, the study used an elaborate set of indicators to examine demand- and supply-side perspectives but we could not explore the role of other important theoretical perspectives, such as direct and extended reciprocity, filial obligations, and welfare state arrangements.

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Appendix

Appendix Table 1
Selection of cases

Selection	Number of parents	Number of dyads
Initial sample	8707	21,503
Children ages 18-50	8473	19,980
Children not living at home	8344	18,939
Valid on key variables[a]	7860	16,787
Exclude stepchildren with no contact	7826	16,603

[a] Excluded are refusals or DK's for parent reports on children's characteristics and support.

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