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Deliverable 12: Report on the substantive and methodological evaluation of the various social network indices in the Generation and Gender Survey

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Pearl A. Dykstra

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Christoph Bühler

Leibniz University Hanover

Tina Kogovšek, Valentina Hlebec

University of Ljubljana

Tineke Fokkema

NIDI

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Report on the substantive and methodological evaluation of the various social network indices in the Generations and Gender Survey

Pearl A. Dykstra[1], Christoph Bühler[2], Tina Kogovšek[3], Valentina Hlebec[3], Tineke Fokkema[4]

[1]Erasmus University Rotterdam
[2]Leibniz University Hanover
[3]University of Ljubljana
[4]Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute, The Hague

Relevance of social networks to the substantive focus of the GGP

A person's social network is the group of individuals with whom that person has a direct relationship (Broese van Groenou & Van Tilburg, 1996). Social networks are relevant to three kinds of substantive issues in the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP): the determinants of (a) demographic behaviour, (b) reliance on public care services, and (c) well-being. Depending on the research question, social networks serve as the independent variable (social networks predict or explain the outcome), or as the dependent variable (explaining differences in characteristics of social networks).

Demographic behaviour

Predicting and explaining demographic behaviour is a key issue in the GGP. Under this perspective, social networks matter firstly because they help to define demographic goals or alternative aims in other spheres of living (Bongaarts & Watkins, 1996, Bühler & Fratczak, 2007). They influence the value and, therefore, the degree of desirability or non-desirability of particular goals and activities. This influence may rest on very different aspects, such as interpersonal communication, provision of information, socialisation, internalisation of values, role models, or normative sanctions, which can be summarised under two general mechanisms: *social learning* and *social influence* (Kohler, Behrman, & Watkins, 2001; Montgomery & Casterline, 1996). Social learning rests on information, evaluations and experiences provided by interpersonal communication and role models observed in the social environment. Social influence is based on the formulation and maintenance of normative expectations by the social environment, implying that individuals feel the need to follow distinct goals by particular means.

Social networks matter secondly because they might help individuals to reach desired demographic goals. Mostly, individuals do not posses all the means they need to reach a goal, but based on direct or generalised social exchange they gain access to *resources* that are under control of their network partners (Coleman, 1990; Granovetter, 1973). The resources that are in principle available are very heterogeneous (e.g. information, money, time, practical assistance, emotional support), and become valuable if they increase the likelihood of reaching a particular goal. Resources embedded in personal relationships are not only important when they are actually provided to an individual. They are also important as potential sources of support. Thus, individuals follow particular goals in the knowledge or expectation that they will obtain resources from their social networks if they need them (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; Lin, 2001).

Thus, social networks influence the occurrence of demographic events, like leaving the parental home, marriage, childbirth, or divorce, by imparting that these events are desirable personal goals, by communicating that these goals coincide with common social norms, and by providing the resources the person needs to reach their aims, but that are not personally possessed by him or her. Of course, social networks do not exclusively have a supporting effect on

demographic events or patterns of demographic behavior. They may also favour goals in other spheres of living, such as giving high priority to an occupational career, define particular demographic events as socially not acceptable, such as having a very large family, or may not be able to provide the support needed to reach a desired demographic goal, like having a second child or living alone after a divorce.

Reliance on public care services

Another key issue in the GGP is the solidarity between family generations. Here, social networks matter because they reflect critical interdependencies between family generations and between men and women in families, which are built and reinforced by social policies (Dykstra, 2010). Legal and policy arrangements constitute differential opportunities and constraints for men and women and across generations in families.

Family members provide the majority of the care that children (Gauthier, Smeeding, & Furstenberg, 2004) and frail older adults (Lyon & Glucksmann, 2008) receive. Nevertheless, a long-standing debate is whether public services erode the provision of informal support (Attias-Donfut & Wolff, 2000). To understand to what degree country-specific institutional frameworks support the desire to be responsible towards one's children and frail old parents and/or support individual autonomy, thereby partially lightening intergenerational dependencies and the gender division of labour, three patterns in legal and policy frameworks have recently been distinguished (Saraceno, 2010):

- *Familialism by default*: there are no publicly provided alternatives to family care and financial support;
- *Supported familialism*: policies, usually through financial transfers, support families in keeping up their financial and caring responsibilities;
- *Defamilialisation*: primary needs are partly answered through public provision (services, basic income).

This categorisation goes beyond the public/private responsibilities dichotomy, showing that public support may both be an incentive for and lighten private, family responsibilities. Generous parental leaves support parental care and, in the case of the presence of a father's quota, support the caring role of fathers, thus de-gendering family care while supporting the "familialisation" of fathers (Brandth & Kvande, 2009). Childcare services instead lighten – without fully substituting – parental care and education responsibilities. At-home care, day care or institutional services for the frail old partly substitute family care. The same occurs when payments for care can only be used to hire someone in a formal way. Non-earmarked payments for care support informal family care but also encourage recourse to the – often irregular – market, as is happening in some Southern European countries (Ayalon, 2009).

Well-being

A third key issue in the GGP concerns differences in well-being. People who are embedded in social networks enjoy better mental and physical health. Large, well-controlled prospective studies show that personal relationships have an impact on physical and mental health independently of potentially confounded factors such as socioeconomic status, health-risk behaviors, use of health services, and personality (Berkman et al., 2000; Uchino, 2004).

People benefit from personal relationships in several ways (Dykstra, 2007). The first is that networks provide opportunities for companionship and social engagement. Shared leisure activities serve as a source of pleasure and stimulation, whereas the participation in meaningful community activities brings social recognition. Second, epidemiologists introduced the concept of social support to refer to positive exchanges with network members that help people stay healthy or cope with adverse events (Kawachi Kennedy, &Glass, 1999). Characteristic of social support is that it involves behavioral exchanges (giving and receiving) that are intended as helpful and are perceived as such. Social control is a third mechanism responsible for the salubrious effects of personal relationships. It operates directly when network members consciously attempt to modify a person's health behavior, or indirectly when people internalise norms for healthful activities. Fourth, and as noted previously, relationships provide access to resources that transcend an individual's means. To have relationships is to have access to other people's connections, information, money, and time. The different functions of relationships (companionship, social support, social control, and access to resources) are related to each other, and not easily separated in everyday life.

Of course, not all our interactions with others are pleasant and enjoyable. Personal relationships can be a source of stress, conflict, and disappointment. For that reason it is important to distinguish positive social exchanges from negative social exchanges (Rook, 1997; Van Gaalen & Dykstra, 2005). Examples of the latter are encounters characterised by rejection and criticism, violation of privacy, or actions that undermine a person's pursuit of personal goals. Ineffective assistance or excessive helping are other forms of negative interactions.

Delineation of social networks

Five methods of network delineation

Several methods have been developed for the delineation of social networks (Marsden, 1990; Van der Poel, 1993a). Some focus on the content of relationships, others on their affective nature, and yet others start from roles. All these methods rest on the principle of "name generators" (Marsden, 2005). Individuals are asked to name all or some of their network partners who are important for them for a particular reason addressed in the name generating question. Table 1 (adapted from Broese van Groenou & Van Tilburg, 1996) provides an overview.
-- Table 1 about here --

The *role relation* method (e.g., Lauman, 1973) delineates individuals who belong to specific relationship categories, such as spouse, child, parent, neighbour, colleague, and so forth. The social network, accordingly, is composed of individuals with whom the focal person maintains a socially recognised role (Litwak & Szelenyi, 1969; Wellman & Wortley, 1990).

The *exchange* method (e.g., McCallister & Fischer, 1978) delineates individuals involved in the provision and receipt of goods, services, and time. Accordingly, the social network consists of people with whom resources are exchanged.

The *affective* method (e.g. Kahn & Antonucci, 1980) delineates individuals with whom a close tie exists. The social network, accordingly, consists of significant others and intimates.

The *interaction* method (e.g., Bernard, Killworth, & Sailer, 1982) delineates individuals with whom the focal person interacts face to face, on the telephone, and so forth during a given length of time (e.g., day, week, fortnight). The social network, accordingly, consists of a person's social contacts in varying contexts (home, work, church, neighbourhood, transportation, public services, and so forth) during a specified period.

The *domain contact* method (e.g., Van Tilburg, 1995) delineates persons from specific relationship categories (domains) with whom the focal person is in touch regularly and who are considered to be important. This method combines the role relation and affective approaches, adding the criterion of social interaction. The social network, accordingly consists of active ties with an affective content from different spheres of life.

Each of these methods has its merits. Substantive questions of interest need to guide the decision which method to use (Marsden, 1990; Van der Poel, 1993b). For example, for a researcher interested in the access to resources, the role relation approach is probably the most appropriate, whereas for a researcher interested in psychological well-being, the affective approach is probably the best choice. Another important consideration is the time and money available for network delineation in the proposed survey (Kogovšek & Hlebec, 2008). Collecting time-consuming social network data is especially undesirable in general purpose surveys, where social networks are only part of a larger data collection effort.

Network delineation in existing surveys

Comparability with existing surveys is yet another consideration in deciding upon the network delineation method. An overview of network measures in a number of often-used general purpose surveys is given first, followed by an overview of network measures in surveys focusing more strongly on families and households. Note that the measures pertain to so-called *ego-centered networks*, where the focal person has a direct relationship with the network members, but no information is available on relationships between network members.

The *International Social Survey Program* (ISSP), which is the largest program of cross-national research in the social sciences, collected network data in 1986 and in 2001. The ISSP has opted for a role relation approach. Respondents are asked to provide the number of brothers and sisters, adult sons and daughters, children aged 18 or younger, father, mother, close friends at

work, in the neighbourhood and elsewhere. Additionally, respondents are asked about the frequency of contact, e.g. "How often do you visit or see your closest friends?", using the following answer categories: "S/he lives in the same household" (1), "Daily"(2) to "Never" (8). Respondents are also asked to identify the role relation regarding several support types (help in household, in the case of flu, borrowing a small sum of money, help in the case of problems with spouse/partner, help in the case of being depressed, advice regarding a big life change). The first two providers may be chosen from an extensive list of largely informal, but also formal sources, such as kin, friends, medical doctors, priests, banks, etc.).

The European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) uses similar questions for measuring network data as the ISSP. The most important person is reported (in terms of a few broad role relation categories such as family, friend, neighbour, etc.) for help around the house when ill, advice about a serious personal or family matter, talk when feeling a little depressed and help when needing a large sum of money in an emergency

The United States *General Social Survey* (GSS), introduced a single exchange network item in 1985: "With whom do you talk about personal matters?" The resulting network is generally described as the "core discussion network" (Burt, 1984; Marsden, 1987; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Brashears, 2006), indicating the key actors in one's personal social network.

The *Survey of Health and Retirement in Europe* (SHARE), which is harmonised with the *United States Health and Retirement Survey* (HRS) and the *English Longitudinal Study of Ageing* (ELSA) included network measures in wave 1 (2004) and wave 2 (2006-2007), opting for a set of exchange network items. Respondents were asked to list the individuals who in the last twelve months (or since the last interview) had provided "personal care, e.g. dressing, bathing or showering, eating, getting in or out of bed, using the toilet", "practical household help, e.g. with home repairs, gardening, transportation, shopping, household chores", and "help with paperwork, such as filling out forms, settling financial or legal matters". Respondents were also asked to list the individuals to whom they had given such help. In addition, questions were asked on the exchange of financial support: "In the last twelve months [the time since the last interview], not counting any shared housing or shared food, have you received any financial or material gift or support from any person inside or outside this household amounting to 250 euros or more?" Again, respondents were also asked to list the individuals whom they had financially supported.

Surveys on family and household support conducted since the 1990s in Europe have invariably used the exchange method. Bonvalet and Ogg (2007) provide an overview of measures in nine surveys: *Close friends and relatives* (France, 1990), *The three-generations study* (France, 1992), *The family and community life of older people* (England, 1995), *The panel study on Belgian households* (1992-2004), *Intergenerational relations: Socio-economic panel* (Luxembourg, 2000-2002), *Social stratification, cohesion and conflict in contemporary families* (Switzerland, 1998), *Families in contemporary Portugal* (1999), *The Norwegian life course, ageing and generation study* (2002-2007), and *Analysis of family networks in Andalusia* (Spain,

2005). Though differing in details, the surveys all enquire into the exchange of childcare, practical help, financial help, emotional support, and personal care.

Network delineation in the GGS

The method of delineation of the social network in the GGS can best be described as a mix of role relation and exchange. However, network members' names are not always recorded.

Role relation network

Given the focus on solidarity in families, the use of the *role relation* method to obtain information on the existence of household and family members makes perfect sense. The wave 1 questionnaire collects this information by the following set of questions (the related question numbers are listed in brackets).

- "To begin, I would like to ask you about all persons who live in this household. Who are they? To help me keep track of your answers, please tell me their first names and how they are related to you." [101]
- "Is there a partner in the household?" If not: "Are you currently having an intimate (couple) relationship with someone you're not living with? This may also be your spouse if he/she does not live together with you. Our survey does not only cover heterosexual relationships, but also same-sex relationships." [306]
- "We already talked about those children who currently live in your household. In addition to them, have you given birth to/fathered any other children or have you ever adopted any other children? Do not include stepchildren, that is, children belonging to your current or prior partner/spouse. I will ask you about those children later. To help me keep track please tell me the names of all children starting with the oldest." [209]
- "Next I would like to know about any stepchildren, that is, children your current spouse/partner has had other than those who currently live in the household. Has your partner had any children who do not currently live in your household. Please include any children who may have died. To help me keep track of them please tell me their names first." [226]
- Information on co-residence with parents is obtained on the basis of the question on household composition. If the respondent is not living with parents, s/he is asked whether his mother and/or father are still alive. [505, 519]
- "How many brothers and sisters have you ever had? How many of your brothers and sisters are alive?" [566]
- "How many of your grandparents are alive?" [567]
- "How many grandchildren do you have?" [238]
- "Do you have any great-grandchildren? If yes, how many?" [242]

-- Table 2 about here --

Table 2 provides an overview of the information that is available in the GGS on the various members of the role relation network. It is important to note that role relations are limited to household and family members. Most information is available for the partner, followed by parents and children. Relatively little is known about siblings, (great-)grandchildren, and grandparents. Insofar role relations are household members, relatively much information is available (e.g. gender, month and year of birth, activity status, disability status).

Exchange network

Given the focus on the interplay of public and private care, the use of the *exchange* method to obtain information on time, services, and money transfers is meaningful. In the wave 1 questionnaire, this information is gathered by the following set of questions.

- "Do you get regular help with childcare from relatives or friends or other people for whom caring for children is not a job? From whom do you get this help?" [204]
- "Over the last 12 months, have you given regular help with childcare to other people? Whom have you helped?" [208]
- Which people give your household regular help with household tasks? [403]
- If personal care needed: "Over the last 12 months, have you received [personal care, such as eating, getting up, dressing, bathing, or using toilets?] from people for whom providing such care is not a job? From whom did you receive this help? " [706]
- "Over the last 12 months, have you given people regular help with personal care such as eating, getting up, dressing, bathing, or using toilets? Whom have you helped?" [710]
- "Over the last 12 months, have you talked to anyone about your personal experiences and feelings? Whom have you talked to?" [713]
- "Over the last 12 months, has anyone talked to you about his/her personal experiences and feelings? Who was it?" [716]
- "During the last 12 months, have you or your partner/spouse received for one time, occasionally, or regularly money, assets, or goods of substantive value from a person outside the household? Please think also about land and property or inheritance that was transferred to you or your partner/spouse during this time. Who has given you that?" [1010]
- "During the last 12 months, have you or your partner/spouse given for one time, occasionally, or regularly money, assets, or goods of substantive value to a person outside the household? Please think also about land and property you or your partner/spouse transferred during this time. To whom have you given that?" [1015]

-- Table 3 about here --

Table 3 provides an overview of the information that is available in the GGS on the various members of the exchange network. For each network member information is available about the role relation to the respondent and whether s/he co-resides in the respondent's household. However, as unique identifying information (i.e. a name) is not collected, the

exchange network and the role relation network can only partly be matched. This is possible, if a network member is a partner, an only child, an only grandchild, or an only surviving parent.

Substantive evaluation

As described earlier, social networks are relevant to three substantive issues of the GGP: (a) the prediction and explanation of demographic behaviour, (b) the interplay of private and public care, and (c) the explanation of differences in well-being. In what follows, we consider the extent to which the social network indices in the GGS are appropriate for addressing the three substantive issues. If they are not sufficiently appropriate, we provide recommendations for improvement.

Demographic behaviour

The concepts of *social learning*, *social influence*, and *resources* can be measured by structural properties of ego-centered networks, characteristics of individual relationships and characteristics of network partners (Hall & Wellman, 1985; Marsden & Friedkin, 1993). Within the process of *social learning*, individuals are influenced by information, evaluations, and behaviours in their social environments. However, these become only influential if they are provided by network members who matter for the particular individual (Friedkin, 1993). Thus, social learning rests on interactions between the individual and a particular network member and the information or evaluation of the behavior performed by the network partner. Interactions can be covered by the indictors of closeness, frequency of contact, tie strength, or role relationship. The kind of behavior depends on the kind of demographic event to be addressed. A simple, yet effective operationalisation is whether a network member has experienced the relevant demographic event (for example, partnership, marriage, a particular number of children, divorce). As Tables 2 and 3 show, the GGS has very little information on the demographic histories of network members. One knows only the partner history of the parents and the partner.

This brings us to the recommendation to collect information on the partner status of network members.

Social influence also rests on an interaction between structural properties of an ego-centered network and the content of communication that express behavioral expectations of the network members. According to structural properties, information is needed that indicates normative power or normative influence of network partners. On the level of an ego-centered network, density is a meaningful indicator (Kohler et al., 2001). On the level of individual relationships, these indicators are role relations and tie strength (Krackhardt, 1992). The kind of relevant contents communicated or implicitly expressed by the network partners depends again on the kind of demographic behavior to be addressed. A simple yet effective operationalisation is whether the respondent perceives informal pressure to engage in specific demographic behaviours, such as leaving home, getting married, becoming a parent, and so forth. In the GGS,

questions addressed within the context of behavioral intentions provide information about these pressures. Question 323 serves as an example: "Although you may feel that the decision to start living together with a partner is yours (and your partner's) it is likely that others have opinion about what you should do. I'm going to read out some statements about what other people might think about you starting to live with a/your partner during the next three years. Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with these statements. (a) Most of your friends think that you should start living together with a/your partner", (b) Your parents think that you should start living together with a/your partner, (c) Your children think that you should start living together with a/your partner, and (d) Most of your other relatives think that you should start living together with a/your partner."

This brings us to the recommendation to maintain the references to social network members in measures of intentions.

Resources embedded in an ego-centered network are often described in terms of social support (Dykstra, 2007). Researchers typically distinguish the following types of supportive behavior: instrumental aid, the expression of emotional caring or concern, the provision of advice and guidance, and financial and material transfers. The child-developmental and gerontological literature also distinguish "care": helping with daily activities such as dressing, bathing, and feeding. An issue of debate in the literature is whether retrospective or prospective support is most relevant to the prediction and explanation of demographic behaviour. Retrospective support is what the focal person has received in the past, whereas prospective support is what might reasonably be expected. Moreover, with regard to demographic behaviour, the resources an individual needs from his or her social network are both very specific and very heterogeneous (Bühler & Philipov, 2005). Taking these considerations together, we feel that an approach is required that specifies (a) conditions for supportive exchanges, such as co-residence, geographic proximity, frequency of contact, and competing obligations, and (b) actual support exchanges. As Table 2 shows, the GGS has information on co-residence, geographic proximity and contact frequency for partner, parents and children. As Table 3 shows, the GGS distinguishes exchanges of childcare, personal care, emotional support, household help, and money and goods with household members and non-household members.

This brings us to the recommendation to collect information on co-residence, geographic proximity and contact frequency for all network members, and to maintain the focus on childcare, personal care, emotional support, household tasks, and financial transfers.

Reliance on public care services

The inclusion of a wide age range (18-80 at wave 1) is one of the unique features of the GGS. The survey is ideally suited to empirically address questions on intergenerational family

relationships in ageing societies, both longitudinally and cross-nationally. Whereas the literature on the middle generations typically considers transfers upwards to ageing parents and downwards to children and grandchildren, it tends to disregard transfers received from older and younger generations. Yet, older generations often serve as significant sources of support and help for young families, through financial transfers, caring for young children and provision of practical help. Young adults should not be solely looked upon as dependents, but also as givers of support and care to their parents and grandparents.

This brings us to the recommendation to maintain the focus on exchanges of social support rather than to concentrate exclusively on support provided to a person.

As described previously, the GGS has information on the provision and receipt of childcare and of personal care in the social network, and on the receipt of help with household tasks from network members. It also addresses the provision of professional childcare [203] and personal care [705]. Costs of professional care, however, are only partially measured. Whereas there is a question on the monthly costs of childcare [205] there is no such question for the costs of personal care.[1] However, there is a question on whether non-professional caregivers are paid for their services [709]. In our view, this incomplete information on costs is undesirable.

This brings us to the recommendation to maintain the focus on professional and private childcare and personal care, but to streamline the information on the costs of professional care.

Well-being

People benefit from personal relationships because they provide companionship, social support, social control, and access to resources. Though these functions are basically positive, not all interactions with others are pleasant and enjoyable. To avoid achieving too rosy a picture of social networks, conflicts with network members should also be considered.

Traditionally, the salubrious characteristics of personal relationships have been indicated by marital status, numbers of close friends and relatives, church membership, and other proxy variables. Over the years, however, this has shifted to a more careful examination of the character and quality of actual transactions. Nevertheless, a generally agreed upon measure does not exist. This lack of consensus is not surprising given the wide range of disciplines in which the associations between social networks and well-being are studied. The GGS has several measures, ranging from crude indicators such as marital status and contact frequency that are typical of epidemiological studies, over subjective measures such as satisfaction with relationships that are

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[1] Paid help with household work [404] is not part of the social network indices. Nevertheless we suggest streamlining the question on paying for household help with that for paying for childcare and personal care.

more typical of research in psychology, to functional measures of support that are characteristic of sociological research.

To what extent are companionship, social support, social control, access to resources, but also conflict covered in the survey? *Companionship* is represented by the frequency of face to face contact. Childcare, personal care, financial transfers, household help, and talking about personal experiences and feelings informs us about *social support*. *Social control* is delineated by household membership, partner status, parental status and subjective perceptions of behavioral expectations by significant actors in the social environment. The GGS, however, only poorly reports about *access to resources*, as it lacks an adequate measure of network size. This is caused by the absence of unique identifying information for members of the exchange network. However, information on the role relationships in the exchange network provides an indication of the diversity of resources given that the kind of resources a network partners provides is significantly determined by the kind of role relationship (Dykstra, 1993; Fischer, 1982; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). *Conflict* is not addressed directly in the survey. Nevertheless, measures of satisfaction with relationships to close family members as well as those about general relationship satisfaction are included, which might be viewed as indications of the joys and tribulations associated with network partners.

This brings us to the recommendation to collect the following information on members of the social network: unique identifying information, role relationship category, household membership, contact frequency, and relationship satisfaction.

Methodological evaluation[2]

Global or relationship-specific

Social network researchers are faced with a constant tradeoff between breadth and depth of analysis. One of the issues to be resolved is whether to use global or relationship-specific measures. Global measures, whereby respondents are requested to provide the number of friends, or to rate supportive exchanges with their friends, neighbors, and relatives taken together, have the advantage that they are relatively easy to administer. The disadvantage is that they provide little insight into the relative importance of various social network ties. Relationship-specific measures, whereby an inventory is made of the characteristics of selected relationships in the network, have the drawback that they are cumbersome to collect. Furthermore, their aggregation is not always straightforward.

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[2] For background information, see chapter four in the report on the methodological evaluation of the GGS questionnaire (Hox et al., 2010).

As a multi-purpose survey, the GGS targets researchers with a wide range of interests apart from a primary interest in social networks: co-residence, family formation, intergenerational transmission, inequality, care arrangements, life course, and so forth. The social network measures need to draw upon and mesh with measures of related topics (such as the household roster, parental home, unpaid labour) as much as possible. Given the household roster with its inventory of the characteristics of individuals residing with the focal person, relationship-specific measures rather than global measures make better sense. Moreover, given the focus on unpaid labour, name generator questions including childcare, personal care, household help, and financial transfers are meaningful.

This brings us to the recommendation to follow a household roster format for the inventory of characteristics of network members, and to include exchanges of childcare, personal care, household tasks, and financial transfers among the name generating items.

Actual or anticipated

Another issue to be resolved is whether to use measures of actual or anticipated support. "Actual" support refers to what has been received from whom during a specified time period. Apart from the problem of accurate remembering (Bernard et al., 1982), there is the problem that support received in the past cannot directly be extrapolated into support to be received in future. "Anticipated" support refers to what might be available from whom should the need arise. Here, unrealistic evaluations of network members pose a risk. As noted by Hlebec and Kogovšek (2005), people tend to be "cognitive misers", who opt for satisficing rather than optimising, and thus give the first answer that pops into their heads instead of the most accurate answer. According to these authors, hypothetical wording is more likely to stimulate a satisficing instead of an optimising response strategy, particularly in situations where support providers have not precisely been determined or are interchangeable. A criticism of measures of anticipated support is that they might say more about the person than about the quality of his or her relationships (Dykstra, 2007). They are a way of measuring social support that makes it indistinguishable from a personality trait. In defense, one can argue that anticipated support is based on assistance that has actually been provided in the past. For analyses of the interface of private and public support, a measure of actual support is more appropriate than a measure of anticipated support.

This brings us to the recommendation to enquire into actual rather than anticipated support.

Type of exchange (name generators)

Careful attention needs to be given to the formulation of supportive exchanges. Gender biases should be avoided (Campbell & Martin-Matthews, 2003), and examples that are given should properly represent the generic support category.

Over the course of the fieldwork, interviewers reported problems with some of the support questions in the GGS. More specifically, regarding *emotional support*, the distinction between "did you talk to someone about your personal experiences and feelings" and "did someone talk to you about his/her personal experiences and feelings" was not considered necessary. Both could be subsumed under "discussing personal experiences and feelings". Regarding *personal care*, a need was felt to distinguish care during short-term illnesses and long-term care. Regarding help with *household tasks*, interviewers would have liked to have had examples of tasks. Regarding *financial transfers*, the criticism was that different kinds were first lumped together (regular payments, inheritance, large sum) and later pulled apart, which was confusing.

Data users reported that the social network measures were scattered all over the questionnaire. They would have preferred to see the various measures in a separate section.

This brings us to the recommendation to integrate the various support (name-generating) measures to achieve a more efficient administration of questions, and to use the following formulations:

Discussing personal matters:
From time to time, most people discuss things that are important to them with others. For example, these may include good or bad things that happen to you, problems you are having, or important concerns you may have. Looking back over the last 12 months, who are the people with whom you typically discuss important personal matters?

Childcare:
Over the last 12 months, have you received help with childcare from relatives or friends or other people for whom caring for children is not a job? From whom did you receive this help?
Over the last 12 months, have you given help with childcare to other people? If the provision of childcare is your job, please consider only the help you have given outside your professional activities. To whom have you given this help?

Practical help:
During the last 12 months, did you regularly receive help with household tasks such as preparing daily meals, doing the dishes, shopping for food, vacuum-cleaning the house, doing small repairs in and around the house, paying bills and keeping financial records? Please consider only people, who do not live in your household. From whom did you get this help?
During the last twelve months, have you given regular help with household tasks to people who do not live in your household? If the accomplishment of household tasks is your job, please consider only the help you have given outside your professional activities. To whom have you given this help?

Personal care:
Over the last 12 months, is there any person inside or outside this household who has helped you regularly with personal care, such as washing, getting out of bed, or dressing? Interviewer: by regularly we mean daily or almost daily during at least three months. We do not want to capture help during short-term sickness of family members. Please do not consider assistance provided by professional persons from the public sector or from a private organisation. From whom did you receive this assistance?
Over the last 12 months, have you give any person inside or outside this household regular help with personal care, such as washing, getting out of bed, or dressing? Interviewer: by regularly we mean daily or almost daily during at least three months. We do not want to capture help during short-term sickness of family members. If the provision of personal care is your job, please consider only the help you have given outside your professional activities. To whom have you given this help?

Financial support
Over the last 12 months, have you [or] [your] [husband/wife/partner] received any financial or material gift from anyone inside or outside this household? Please consider only gifts of at least 250 € (in local currency) and do not count shared housing or shared food. From whom have you received this support?
Over the last 12 months, have you [or] [your] [husband/wife/partner] given any financial or material gift to another person? Please consider only gifts of a value of at least 250 € and do not count shared housing or shared food. To whom have you given this support?
Have you [or] [your] [husband/wife/partner] ever received a gift or inherited money goods, or property worth more than 5000 euro (in local currency)? From whom did you [or] [your] [husband/wife/partner] receive this gift or inheritance?

Time frame

In the GGS a time frame of "the last 12 months" is used in the questions on receiving and providing personal care, financial support, and emotional support. No time frame is specified in the question on the receipt of childcare, but the 12-month frame is used in the question on childcare given to others. The larger the time limit (e.g. six months or longer), the greater the probability that people report "usual" rather than "actual" support (Kogovšek, & Hlebec, 2005). Methodological studies have shown that when asked to report about interactional events that are not rare, such as helping around the house or yard, or providing transportation, people are biased to reporting the usual pattern of occurrence, making the time frame relatively unimportant (Freeman & Romney, 1987).

The GGS enquires into a range of supportive exchanges. Some (e.g., personal care, financial transfers), are relatively rare, others (e.g., childcare, emotional support, practical help)

are not. To maintain consistency across the various kinds of support, and also to retain comparability with SHARE (Börsch-Supan, Brugiavini, Jürges, Mackenbach, Siegrist, &Weber, 2005) the 12-month time frame should be used.

This brings us to the recommendation to use a 12-month time frame in the questions on supportive exchanges.

Number of names

The measurement of social networks tends to follow two steps. Names are generated in the first step, and name interpreter data (i.e. background information on each of the names) are collected in the second (Marsden, 2005). To reduce respondent burden and interview time, the number of generated names can be capped (Kogovšek & Hlebec, 2005; Kogovšek, Mrzel, & Hlebec, 2010). Alternatively, there might be no limit on network size, but name interpreter data are collected for a limited number of names. In the U.S. General Social Survey, for example, name interpreter data are collected only for the first five names given (Burt, 1984). In 1985, the core discussion networks of Americans had an average size of 3, and slightly over 5% of respondents nominated 6 or more persons in their core discussion networks (Marsden, 1987). In SHARE, responses to questions on instrumental support (given/received) and financial support (given/received) are capped at 3.

　　　In the GSS, two items resemble Burt's (1984) measure of the core discussion network: (a) "Over the last 12 months, have you talked to anyone about your personal experiences and feelings? Whom have you talked to?" and (b) "Over the last 12 months, has anyone talked to you about his/her personal experiences and feelings? Who was it?" GGS guidelines were that a maximum of five names should be imposed. Most countries followed this instruction (France was an exception, and imposed a limit of 7). Table 4 shows the distribution of the number of network members nominated in response to the two questions. Data are from Austria, Bulgaria, France, Georgia, Germany, Romania, and Russia. In each country but Austria, the median number of nominated network members was 2. In Austria the median was 3.

　　　　　　　　-- Table 4 about here --

This brings us to the recommendation to cap the number of network members nominated in response to individual name generator items at 5.

Geographic proximity

In the GGS, geographic proximity is measured in terms of traveling time. Travelling time is a less accurate measure than actual distance. For example, a comparison of register and survey data on the distance between the focal respondent and his or her mother revealed a striking similarity of the distance estimates when both were measured in kilometers (Haraldsen, Berglund, Lappegård,

& Brunborg, 2010). The congruence was weaker when distance was measured in terms of travelling time. In SHARE, geographic proximity is measured in terms of kilometers.

This brings us to the recommendation to measure geographic proximity in terms of distance rather than travelling time.

Table 1. Overview of network delineation methods[a]

	Role relation	Exchange	Affective	Interaction	Domain contact
Conceptual definition	Network of individuals with whom a socially recognised role is maintained	Network of individuals with whom resources are exchanged	Network of significant others	Network of social contacts during a specified period	Network of socially active ties with an affective content from different spheres of life
Name generator(s) (examples)	"Please list the names of your spouse, siblings, neighbours, colleagues, and friends."	"With whom do you discuss personal problems?" "Who helps you with household chores?"	"To whom you feel so close that it is hard to imagine life without them?"	"Who did you talk to for at least 10 minutes today?"	For each role relation (e.g. siblings, neighbours): "With whom are you in touch regularly and who is also important to you?"
Number of questions asked	Depending on the roles of interest: 5-7	3 to 20	1 to 3	1 (repeated every day for a certain period of time)	One for each role relation of interest (about 7)
Limits on period of time in question	No	Yes (e.g., past 3 months, past year)	No	Yes (e.g., 1 day, 2 weeks)	No
Resulting network size	Depends on the number of roles of interest	10 to 22	3 to 9	16 to 26	13 to 15
Proportion of kin in network	Depends on the roles of interest	19 to 48%	50 to 78%	10 to 25%	66%

[a] Table adapted from Broese van Groenou and Van Tilburg (1995)

Table 2. Information available in the GGS on members of the role relation network

	Partner	Parents	Children	Siblings	Grandparents	Grandchildren	Great grandchildren
First name[ab]	x	x	x				
Sex[b]	x	x	x				
Month & year of birth[b]	x	x[e]	x			x[g]	
Co-residence	x	x	x				
Partner history	x	x					
Travelling distance[c]	x	x	x				
Level of education	x	x					
Country of birth	x						
Arrival in country of residence[d]	x						
Activity status[b]	x	x[f]					
Disability status[b]	x	x					
Frequency of contact[c]	x	x	x				
Satisfaction relationship	x	x	x				

Note. Information is available on the number of living brothers and sisters, grandparents, grandchildren and great grandchildren.
[a]Or other unique identifier (such as "mother").
[b]Also known for all role relations insofar they are household members.
[c]If not co-resident.
[d]If not born in the country of residence.
[e]Year of birth only.
[f]Occupation at age 15 R.
[g]For oldest and youngest or for only grandchild.

Table 3. Information available in the GGS on members of the exchange network

	Childcare		Personal care	Emotional support		Household help	Financial transfers
	Received	Given	Received	Given	Received	Received	Given
Co-residence	x		x	x		x	x[a]
Role relation	x		x	x		x	x

[a]Information is collected on financial transfers with non-household members only.

Table 4. Distribution of number of network members with whom respondent talked about personal feelings and experiences, selected GGS countries (%)

	Austria		Bulgaria		France		Georgia		Germany		Romania		Russia	
	R talked to other	Other talked to R	R talked to other	Other talked to R	R talked to other	Other talked to R	R talked to other	Other talked to R	R talked to other	Other talked to R	R talked to other	Other talked to R	R talked to other	Other talked to R
0	14	15	33	33	37	27	27	28	44	51	56	57	30	27
1	24	28	31	34	26	36	34	35	28	26	25	26	32	35
2	23	20	18	17	14	14	24	22	14	11	11	10	21	20
3	18	16	12	10	10	9	11	10	7	7	5	5	12	12
4	12	11	5	4	6	6	3	4	3	3	2	2	3	4
5	10	10	3	2	4	4	1	1	3	3	1	1	1	2
6	-	-	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	-

Note. France imposed a limit of 7; the other countries imposed a limit of 5.

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