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What do children learn from their parents and what from their grandparents? Changes in the perception of gender and family roles as seen from the developmental perspective.

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Abstract

The main objective of this presentation is to show changes in common knowledge concerning the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, values and skills in the family system, from the stand point of developmental perspective. The research was based on the cognitive-structural approach. The research focused on beliefs of both children and adults on the intergenerational transmission of personality traits and specific activities associated with gender roles (both male and female) and roles in the family, i.e. the stereotypical assigning of certain values and skills to the generation of parents and grandparents. The survey covered 200 respondents who were classified into five age groups (with the distinction of sex), ranging from the pre-school period up to middle adulthood. The diagnostic-poll method was used. Interview techniques and the enquiry form were applied, a questionnaire designed by the author inclusive. The qualitative and quantitative analyses was carried out. The results suggest that the age and sex of the respondents has a significant impact on their knowledge about the content of intergenerational communications. This will surely contribute to skilful design of educational programmes in this area.

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1. Introduction

The main objective of this presentation is to show changes, from the developmental perspective, in common knowledge concerning the intergenerational transmission of views, values and skills in the family system. The research was based on the cognitive-structural approach, which assumes that people have their own well-established, categorized experiences, based on observations and interactions with individual family members during fulfillment of their social roles.

These studies helped to notice the multi-dimensional perspective of changes occurring in the cognitive representation of persons of all ages (from childhood to adulthood) about intergenerational transmission. Those are the beliefs of both children and adults about the intergenerational transmission of personality traits, actions, values and knowledge relating to:

1. gender roles (women or men)
2. family roles (attributing certain values and skills to parents' and grandparents' generation).

The basis of the study are theories by S. Fiske, A. Cuddy, P. Glick (2007) and B. Wojciszke (2010) treating gender roles in the dichotomous dimension: warmth and competence. Various forms of the transmission of behavior passed from parents to their children depend on personal views, resources, such as age, status, and self-esteem as well as the model family (for example work sharing at home between members of the family). Most research indicates that it is the relationships and expectations of adult family members that have the greatest impact on intergenerational transmission.

2. Method

Respondents

The study involved 200 people in five age groups, ranging from pre-school up to middle adulthood, 40 people were tested in each group. Each group was also analyzed in terms of gender differences. In this article shows the results of 160 people including 4 groups: 2 groups of children and one of adolescents and one adults:

- K - Kindergarten period (4-6 years old)
- S - School period (9-12 years old)
- A – Adolescence (15-16 years old)
- MA – Middle adulthood (40-60 years old)

Research tools

The diagnostic-poll method was used. In the youngest tested group a structured interview was used as a tool. While in the other groups there was used a questionnaire designed by the author (Lasota, 2013) containing open questions.

The qualitative and quantitative analyses were carried out.

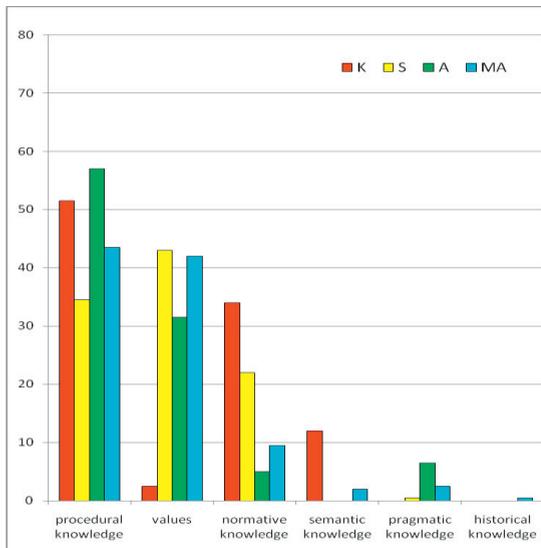
Categories

From the responses about the common knowledge including family transfers there have been created six categories:

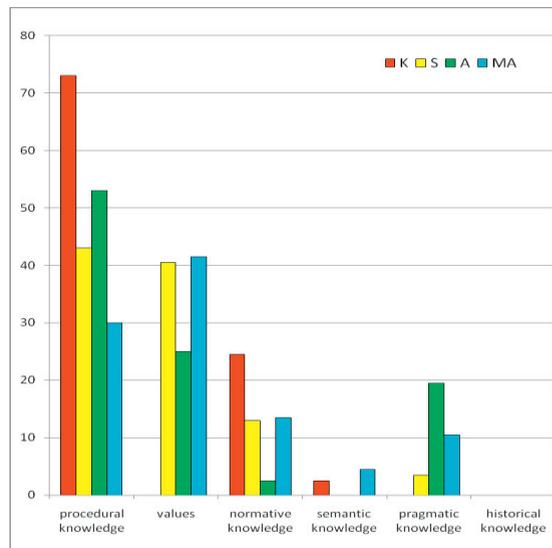
- procedural knowledge (specific activities, skills)
- values
- semantic knowledge (acquisition of knowledge about the world)
- pragmatic knowledge (life knowledge)
- normative knowledge (moral and social norms)
- historical knowledge (the factual knowledge)

3. Results

What do children learn from mothers?



What do children learn from fathers?



Graphs 1 & 2. The transmission of knowledge, values and norms from mothers / fathers to children.

The results have shown that the common knowledge of the respondents surveyed about the transmission of knowledge, values or norms is different depending on the roles they assign to the members of the family, whether these are gender roles or family roles.

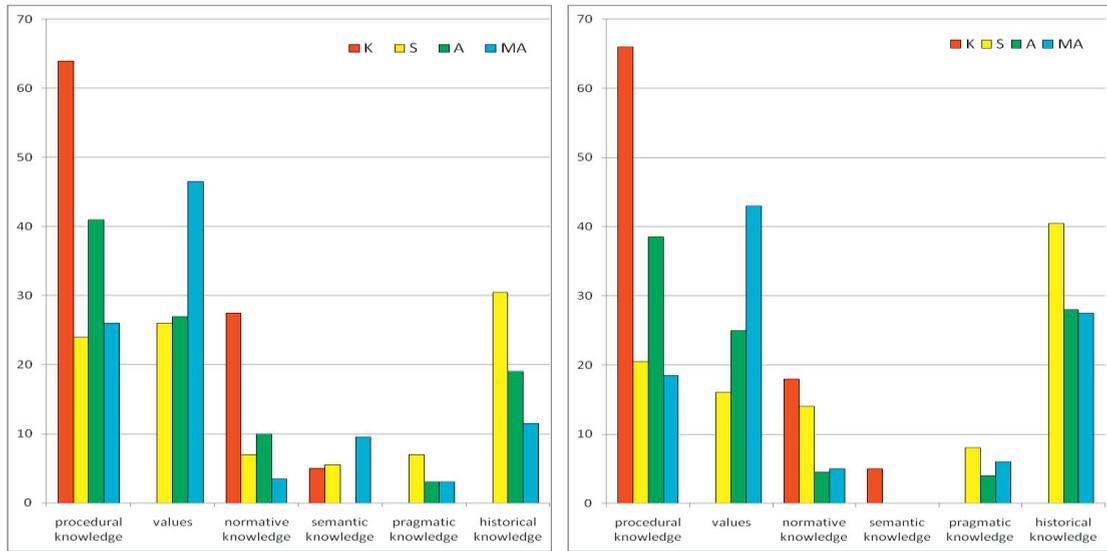
According to preschoolers fathers transmit to children more skills than mothers. Studies about common knowledge show that the preschoolers even at this age learn actions compliant with the traditional division of roles in the family from their parents (for example a mother teaches how to cook, clean, and a father teaches how to ride a bike or work). However, adults have claimed otherwise. In their view it is the mothers that children learn most activities from.

As regards the second category – values – we can notice that pre-school and school children believe that mothers pass more values and traits to their children than fathers. Interesting results were obtained with regard to the intergenerational transmission of the normative knowledge. In the opinion of younger children (preschool and school-aged children) mothers are more likely than fathers to teach the children about the rules and norms, what is allowed and what is prohibited. However, in the adults' opinion, fathers have more authority in this area. In the respondents' answers regardless of age we hardly found any presence of the parent - child transmission in the area of semantic knowledge. Neither surveyed children nor adults appreciate the transmission of information about the world from their parents. Perhaps in the common knowledge of the respondents, learning about the world is reserved for school and teachers, which explains why only pre-school children and adults claimed that parents transmitted semantic knowledge to their children.

Pragmatic knowledge includes specific advice helpful in life. It is the knowledge useful in solving life problems. According to the teenagers and adults, children often receive this knowledge from their fathers. The surveyed did not see any transmission of historical knowledge between generation of parents and children.

Another question concerns the differences in the perception of transmission between grandparents and children.

What do children learn from grandmothers and what from grandfathers?



Graphs 3&4. The transmission of knowledge, values and norms from grandmothers / grandfathers to children.

As shown in the graphs 3 and 4 in the category of procedural knowledge, in children's opinion, both grandmothers and grandfathers hand over to grandchildren a similar number of skills and practical activities. The common knowledge on this subject is very stereotypical. Grandmothers teach how to bake, cook and grandfathers teach to fish or tinker. We found that the adults attribute to the grandmother-grandchild transmission more procedural knowledge than to the grandfather-grandchild transmission.

Looking at the values, the difference appeared among school children and other groups. In their view, grandmothers transmit to the youngest generation more values than grandfathers. Interestingly, the knowledge of the middle aged people about the image of grandmas and grandpas is slightly different from the child's perception.

According to the oldest group the main content of transfers between the oldest and youngest generations are primarily the values. Perhaps this is caused by the fact that most of them had already entered into the grandparents' roles. All other groups believe that the strongest transmission between grandparents and grandchildren occurs in relation to the procedural knowledge. The common knowledge of the surveyed on learning about norms and moral principles from grandparents is different depending on age.

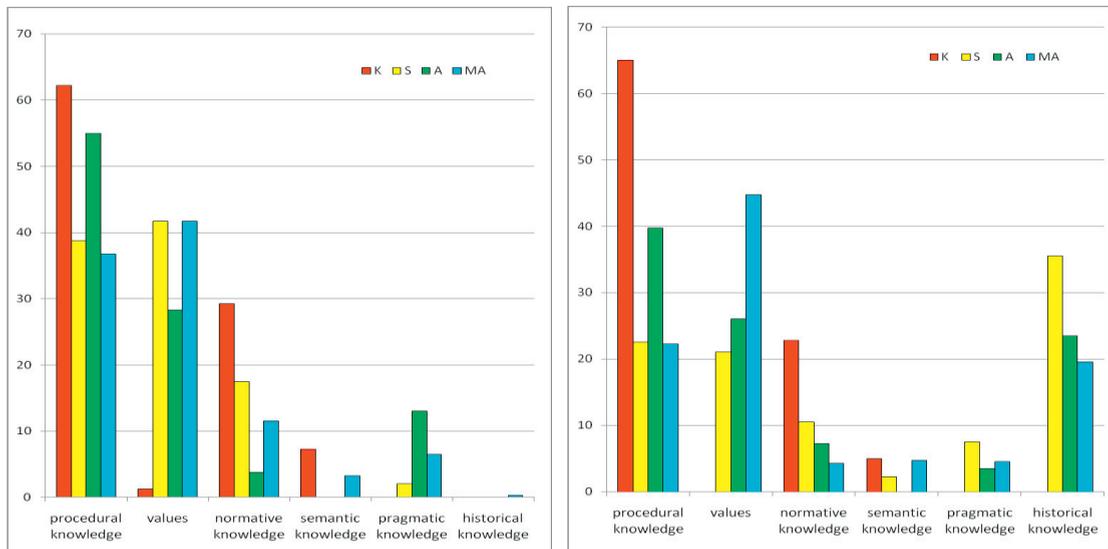
In the opinion of preschoolers and teenagers the normative knowledge is transferred to them primarily from grandmothers, but school-age children attribute more normative content to the transmission from grandfathers. Perhaps we can explain it as in the Polish culture grandparents still play an important role in the upbringing and looking after the children.

The surveyed attributed no transmission of semantic knowledge either to grandparents or to parents. Only the pre-school group and the middle-aged people drew attention to the content of this type, assigning to grandmothers more semantic content than to grandfathers. The findings of this study suggest that in the area of pragmatic knowledge the school-age children learn from their grandmothers as often as from their grandfathers. Only adults attribute more content to grandfathers.

It should be pointed out that the essential importance in the transmission between the generations of grandparents and grandchildren is the transfer of historical knowledge, tradition and culture. The most historical content was attributed by the school children. The interesting thing is that they attributed more historical knowledge to grandfathers than to grandmothers.

The last two graphs highlight the difference between the content of transfers from parents and grandparents directed to children.

What do children learn from parents and what from grandparents?



Graphs 5 & 6. The differences between parents and grandparents in the content of intergenerational transmission.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the study examining the common knowledge of respondents of various ages are as follows: Children learn from their parents specific skills, values and moral norms. The semantic knowledge and the pragmatic knowledge is transferred, in their understanding to a very minor extent. On the other hand, the main content of transmission between the oldest and youngest generation, are the skills, values and what they didn't notice in parents, that is historical knowledge. In the opinion of the respondents, the semantic and the pragmatic knowledge is transmitted, but also to a very small extent. The results of empirical evidence show that people from various generations have different ways of thinking and different experiences deriving from the interpretation of events. Thus, they have different knowledge concerning the content of the intergenerational transfers.

Family roles are behavior patterns of people who perform specific functions in the family, satisfying the needs of the family. The individual family members assume the role of a grandchild, a parent or a grandfather, they also have social and family expectations of people who they assign particular roles to. Our results confirm the developmental regularity. According to the respondents age the number of skills decreases but the number of traits and values increases in the transmission to the youngest generation. The transmission of historical knowledge was assigned to grandparents.

4. Conclusion

The following conclusion can be drawn from the present study:

The research about common knowledge concerning the content of intergenerational transmission in the family shows that the respondents pay attention primarily to the fact that parents and grandparents teach children to satisfy basic needs, specific skills, values and moral norms. Unfortunately they underestimate the transmission of the pragmatic knowledge and the influence of adult family members on the development of children's knowledge about reality.

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