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Parents, Children, Siblings, In-laws, and Non-kin As Sources of Emergency Assistance to Black Americans*

Robert Joseph Taylor, Linda M. Chatters, and Vickie M. Mays**

Demographic correlates of familial and nonfamilial sources of emergency assistance among blacks were examined with data from a national probability sample (Panel Study of Income Dynamics—1980). Both family and non-kin were found to be important sources of emergency assistance. Multivariate analyses revealed age, gender, marital status, and urban/rural differences in the source of emergency assistance. The findings highlighted the critical importance of the parent-child bond across the life course. The article concludes with a discussion of the practice implications of the findings.

Professionals involved in family practice are frequently called upon during a stressful event or period in a client's life. Receiving assistance from family and friends is an informal intervention that often helps an individual cope with a crisis or emergency. Much has been written about the extended kin and non-kin support networks of Black Americans (Martin & Martin, 1978; Stack, 1972, 1974). This work provides clear evidence that Black Americans, as a function of their cultural heritage and socioeconomic status, have developed a variety of emotional bonds that extend beyond the nuclear family. These studies, however, generally fail to investigate important demographic and socioeconomic status differences about those persons on whom blacks rely for help. For instance, are married blacks more likely to rely on siblings or in-laws for assistance during an emergency?

Family practitioners who provide services to black clients must base their guidance on information that is both accurate and culturally sensitive. Additionally, for scholars who study the family, it is important to identify general principles for conceptualizing family structure and process in a wide variety of cultural contexts (Peterson & Ellis, 1987). Consequently, it is critical for both family practitioners and researchers to understand the composition of the helper networks of Black Americans and to determine how status characteristics relate to the utilization of parents, children, siblings, in-laws, and non-kin as helpers.

Patterns of Familial and Non-familial Support Networks

Research on elderly adults and adults across the life course indicates

that family and friends are important sources of primary assistance both in response to significant personal crises and in managing the activities of everyday life. Family members, particularly spouse, children, and siblings, provide the majority of aid and are the most important sources of assistance. Family support is distinguished from assistance provided by other groups by the permanence of relationships and the operation of explicit normative expectations for affection and mutual assistance (Branch & Jette, 1983; Horowitz & Shindelman, 1983). Friendships, unlike kinship ties, are based on individual choice, and since expectations to assist are less explicit, the motivation to provide support to a friend arises from a history of reciprocal assistance (Antonucci, 1985). Emerging research indicates that for many individuals, non-kin (i.e., friends, neighbors, church members) are critical sources of informal assistance. Current definitions of social support emphasize that it is provided in a variety of forms, including the provision of instrumental assistance (e.g., food, money, transportation, running errands, performing household tasks), cognitive assistance (e.g., advice, counseling), and emotional assistance (e.g., companionship, visiting) (Antonucci, 1985).

Findings from a broad array of ethnographic studies indicate that the informal social support networks of Black Americans are comprised of family and close friends (e.g., Stack, 1972, 1974). Patterns of assistance are based on reciprocal bonds of exchange that have developed over the life course. In some families, financial resources are pooled and then redistributed to individuals in the support network on the basis of greatest need (Martin & Martin, 1978). Non-kin who

are active in the informal support network are frequently designated as fictive or pseudokin and given terms such as "play" or "pretend" sister or brother and aunt or uncle to denote their high degree of network integration.

Survey research studies of the informal support networks of blacks indicate frequent interaction with family and friends (Martineau, 1977). McAdoo (1978) found that two out of three of the respondents in her sample reported receiving substantial amounts of assistance from family members. Rated importance of the type of help received differed for mothers and fathers. Mothers reported that child care was the most important type of help, whereas fathers indicated financial assistance. In other analyses of this data, McAdoo (1980) found that although both family and friends provided support to black mothers, family members were more integral components of the assistance network. Two thirds of black mothers reported receiving "a great deal" of assistance from family, while 4 of 10 indicated that friends provided assistance at compar-

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able levels. Child care, financial aid, and emotional support were the most prevalent types of reciprocal assistance exchanged with family and friends.

Recent findings based on a national sample of Black Americans indicate that extended family members are extensively involved in the informal support networks of adults of all ages (Taylor, 1986). Respondents reported significant levels of interaction with family members, a high degree of residential proximity to immediate family and other relatives, extensive familial affective bonds, and high levels of satisfaction with family life. Informal helpers were also a primary source of assistance in coping with personal problems which were more serious in nature (Neighbors & Jackson, 1984). An examination of the patterns of informal and formal assistance reveals that the majority of respondents utilized informal help solely (43%), or a combination of both informal and professional help (44%). Four percent of respondents used professional support only, while 8.7% did not receive any outside assistance for their problem.

Research on informal support networks of blacks in later life underscores the importance of kin and non-kin as sources of assistance. Chatters, Taylor, and Jackson's (1985, 1986) examination of the informal helper networks of elderly blacks found that the majority of the sample (56%) reported that there were three or more people who would help them in the event of illness. Twenty-two percent mentioned two persons, 18% identified one individual, and only 3% indicated that they were without informal help resources. With reference to network composition, the majority of respondents (56%) had helper networks which were comprised exclusively of immediate family members. One third had networks which were a combination of immediate family and others, while the remaining 11% had networks comprised of distant relatives and non-kin. Daughters were most frequently chosen as helper followed by son, spouse, sister, brother, friend, and neighbor.

Recent work examines the role of friends and church members in the informal support networks of older black adults (Taylor & Chatters, 1986a, 1986b). Elderly blacks received a variety of assistance from church members including help during an illness, com-

panionship, advice and comfort, help in a spiritual or religious manner (e.g., "We pray together"), financial assistance, and total support (e.g., "They do anything I need"). Taylor and Chatters (1986b) examined patterns of assistance to older black adults from family, friends, and church members. By and large, respondents received assistance from two or more of these groups. Results for type of support indicated that family provided material aid, friends gave emotional support, and church members provided help during an illness. These results indicate that non-kin in general and church members in particular are integral components of the informal support networks of elderly blacks.

The primary purpose of the present study is an examination of the use of familial and nonfamilial sources of assistance during an emergency. In particular, this work focuses on which demographic characteristics are associated with the use of parents, children, siblings, in-laws or non-kin. The set of demographic variables utilized as independent variables were age, gender, marital status, education, income needs, urban versus rural residence, and region.

Methods

Sample

The analysis is based on data from the 1980 Panel Study of Income Dynamics, a longitudinal study of family economics conducted by the Institute for Social Research (Survey Research Center). The Panel Study began in 1968 with a sample of 5,000 families, 2,000 of which had incomes below the poverty level. Each year since 1968 interviews were conducted with these families and with newly formed families originating from the 1968 sample. In 1980, interviews were taken with 6,533 families, representing a response rate of 96.8%. The Panel Study is primarily concerned with variations in family income over time and an examination of related concerns such as unemployment, poverty, occupational mobility, wage growth, and the utilization of government transfer programs (e.g., food stamps, Supplemental Security Income). The 1980 Panel Study instrument included items that examined familial and nonfamilial sources of support including sources of assistance in the event of an emergency.

Demographic Description of the Sample

The 1980 Panel study has 2,533 black respondents. Four out of 10 of the respondents are female (41.1%). Respondents ages range from 17 to 94 years. One of five respondents (18.4%) are 17 to 25 years of age, 28.2% are aged 26 to 35, 32.7% are 36 to 55, and 20.7% are 56 years of age or older. Almost half of respondents are presently married (46.2%), 18.9% are never married, 12.8% are separated, 12.2% are divorced, and 10% are widowed. A majority of the respondents do not have a high school degree (52.6%), 20.9% have completed a high school degree and the remaining 26.5% of the respondents have a high school diploma plus some additional training. Only 3.4% of the respondents have a college degree. Two of three respondents (65.2%) resided in the South, 18.7% resided in the North Central region, 8.2% resided in the West, and 7.8% resided in the Northeast. In addition, 8 of 10 respondents (83.6%) resided in urban areas. One out of three respondents (32.8%) have family incomes of \$9,250 or less, 42.6% have incomes between \$9,250 and \$18,700, and 24.6% of the respondents have family incomes of \$18,701 or higher. The present analysis utilizes a measure of income needs which is a ratio of money income to a money-based standard of needs. This measure is superior to family income because it is adjusted for factors such as family size.

Dependent Variable

Source of emergency assistance was assessed using three questions. First, respondents were asked whether they would receive informal assistance during an emergency with the following question, "Suppose there was a serious emergency in your household. Is there a friend or relative living nearby whom you could call on to spend a lot of time helping you out?" If respondents answered affirmatively, the identity of the emergency helper was determined by two questions: "Would that be a relative?" and again if the response was positive, "What is that person's relationship to you?"

Analysis Strategy

Logistic regression analysis was used to assess the multivariate effects of the demographic variables on the use of particular helpers in an emergency. Ordinary least squares regression analysis using a continuous dependent variable is based on a linear

model. This linear functional form, however, is not a reasonable approximation of the true model when considering a dichotomous dependent variable. The use of ordinary least squares regression with a dichotomous dependent variable can result in misleading estimates that fail to approximate any part of the true probability model. Logistic regression analysis was developed specifically to handle the problems created by regressing a dichotomous dependent variable. The dependent variable is the log of the odds of a given response category, thereby allowing the estimation of the linear effects of the independent variables using the maximum likelihood function. Separate logistic regression models (corresponding to the source of assistance categories) were specified using dichotomous dependent variables that contrasted whether or not the particular category was chosen.

Results

Eight out of 10 black respondents (82.8%) indicated that there was a relative or friend who would help them out during a serious emergency. Nominations to the emergency helper network indicated that parents (23.9%) and siblings (23.6%) were most frequently identified as helpers, followed by non-kin (20.6%), children (12%), and in-laws (9.7%). The categories of aunt/uncle (4.8%), cousin (2.3%), grandparents (1.7%) and niece/nephew (1.3%) were named as sources of emergency assistance on a less frequent basis. Figure 1 presents the bivariate analysis of the source of assistance during an emergency by

Table 1.
Logistic Regression Models of the Demographic Variables on the Utilization of Parents, Children, Siblings, In-Laws, and Non-kin

Predictors	Model 1 Parents	Model 2 Children	Model 3 Siblings	Model 4 In-Laws	Model 5 Non-kin
Age	-.08***	.12***	.008	-.01	.02***
Gender					
Male	-.15	-1.19***	-.19	1.65***	-.16
Marital Status					
Divorced/Separated	.54*	.18	-.25	-1.90*	.22
Widowed	-.36	-.56 ^a	-.42	.75*	.02
Never married	-.34*	-1.03*	-.49**	-10.23	.14
Education	.008	-.09	-.04	.19 ^a	.11
Income Needs	.03	.01	.03	.004	-.02
Urbanicity					
Urban	-.21	.59*	-.22	.34	.18
Region					
Northeast	.01	-.43	.30	.17	.04
North Central	-.27	.15	-.09	.25	.03
West	-.08	.11	-.22	-.32	.08
Constant	2.32***	-6.75***	-.90**	-3.20***	-2.14***
χ^2	266.36***	494.34***	25.06**	204.58***	32.03***

Note. Several of the predictors in this analysis are represented by dummy variables: Gender (0 = women, 1 = men), marital status (married respondents represent the excluded or comparison category), urbanicity (0 = rural, 1 = urban), region (respondents who reside in the South represent the excluded or comparison category).

^a.06 > p > .05.

* p < .05.

** p < .01.

*** p < .001.

race. Racial differences in the helper network demonstrate that blacks were less likely than whites and Hispanics to mention in-laws, but more likely to mention siblings and aunts/uncles.

The small numbers of respondents who mentioned the categories of aunt/uncle, cousin, grandparents, and niece/nephew precluded the use of logistic regression techniques (regression estimates would be unreliable and unstable). Consequently, logistic regression models for these categories of emergency helper were not performed. Table 1 presents the logistic regressions for receiving emergency

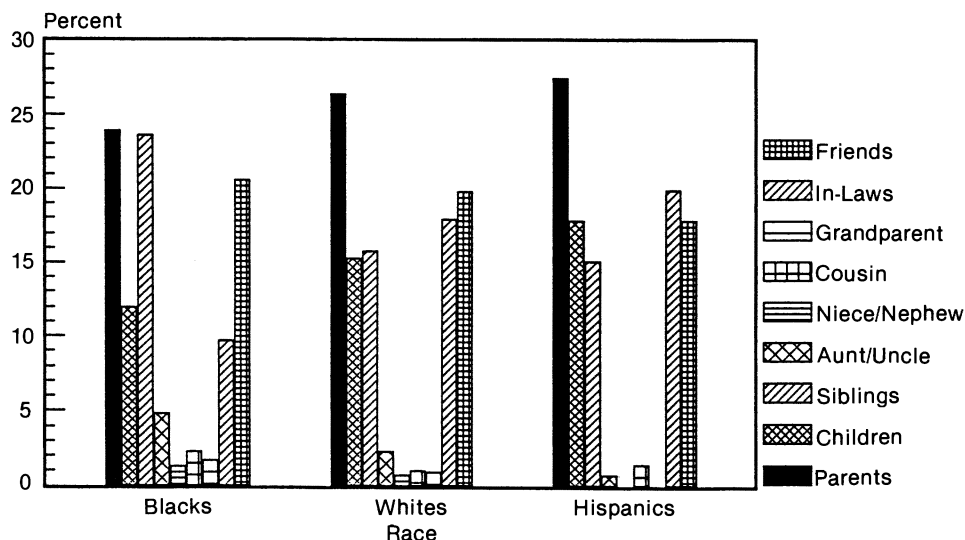
assistance from parents, children, siblings, in-laws, and non-kin. Each of the logistic regression models achieved statistical significance.

Age, gender, marital status, and urbanicity were all predictive of the use of particular helpers. Models 1, 2, and 5 demonstrate that age was a significant predictor for selecting parents, children, and non-kin as sources of assistance; younger respondents were more likely to choose parents and older respondents had a higher likelihood of choosing children and non-kin.

Marital status differences were exhibited in each of the first four models. Divorced and separated respondents were more likely than married respondents to select parents as a source of emergency assistance (Model 1), yet were less likely to choose in-laws (Model 4). Widowed respondents were more likely than married persons to choose children (Model 2). Never married respondents were less likely to indicate that parents (Model 1) and children (Model 2) were sources of emergency assistance, but were more likely than married persons to indicate that siblings would provide assistance.

Gender differences indicated that men were less likely to receive help from children but more likely to receive assistance from in-laws (Models 2 and 4). Urbanicity was significantly related to the use of children as sources of assistance (Model 2); respondents who resided in urban areas were more likely to use children as a source of assis-

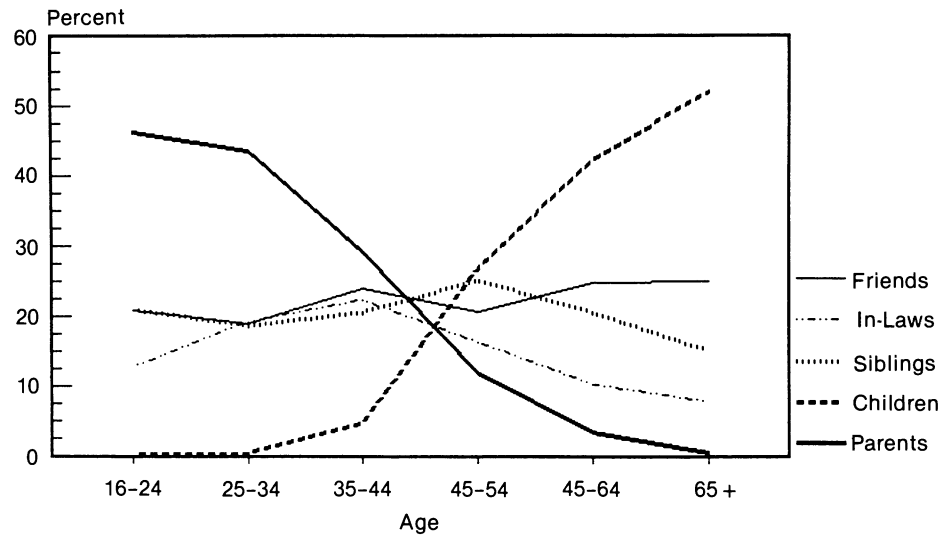
Figure 1. Racial Differences in the Use of Emergency Helpers



tance. In addition, education bordered on significance suggesting that those respondents who had more years of formal education had a greater likelihood of using in-laws (Model 4).

Figure 2 illustrates age differences in the use of emergency help from relatives and friends. Younger respondents report high levels of parental assistance; successive age groups show a decline in the use of this helper category. In contrast, use of children increases with age and is highest among the oldest respondents. The use of siblings and in-laws is consistent across age groups with a higher percentage of respondents indicating the use of siblings as a source of emergency help.

Figure 2. Use of Emergency Helpers. by Age



Discussion

The results of this study indicate that both family and friends are important sources of assistance to Black Americans during an emergency. These findings are consistent with other research which demonstrates that kin and non-kin are integral members of the informal support networks of blacks in general (McAdoo, 1978, 1980), and older blacks in particular (Taylor, 1985; Taylor & Chatters, 1986b). As shown here, a wide array of extended family members are available to provide assistance during an emergency. For a small percentage of blacks in this sample, extended family members such as aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, nieces, and nephews are primary sources of emergency assistance. For most blacks, however, immediate family members (i.e., parents, siblings, and children) are more likely to be used as the primary source of emergency assistance. Although the assistance provided by immediate family is considered qualitatively superior to that provided by extended family members and non-kin, the potential viability and value of extended kin and non-kin as sources of emergency assistance should not be overlooked.

Although race is not a primary emphasis of this analysis, racial differences in the helper network indicate that blacks are more likely to mention siblings and aunt/uncle, but less likely to mention in-laws. Research on racial differences in the composition of informal helper networks is limited. One of the most noteworthy studies (Gibson, 1982) in this area indicated that blacks were less likely than whites to rely upon a single family member in times of stress and blacks sought assistance from a broader base of helpers.

Age differences in the selection of emergency helpers indicate that the parent-child bond is important not only for young persons, but among middle-aged and elderly adults as well. Younger respondents are more likely to rely on parents, older respondents on adult children, and middle-aged respondents rely heavily on both children and parents. These findings are consistent with the observation that young adults may maintain independent living situations, but remain dependent on parents as their principal source of support. Similarly, the importance of adult children in the informal support networks of the elderly is well documented. Although contact with extended family members is maintained with the onset of old age, relationships with daughters and sons are considered the most significant for older adults (Brown, 1974). Other work indicates that for elderly blacks, having an adult child is related to larger helper networks comprised exclusively of immediate family members (Chatters et al., 1985) and a greater likelihood of receiving assistance from extended family members (Taylor, 1985, 1986). In addition, daughters, sons, and spouses were the most frequently mentioned categories of individuals who would assist an elderly person if he were sick or disabled (Chatters et al., 1986).

Current research on familial relationships suggests that middle-aged adults often experience what is termed the "middle generation squeeze." The middle generation squeeze describes the difficult situation in which middle-aged individuals are involved in the care of aging parents, while simul-

taneously rearing their own children. The results of this study suggest that middle age may also be associated with a confluence of support resources. Specifically, these data indicate that it is during middle age that assistance from parents is declining while at the same time aid from children is increasing. Consequently, this life stage appears to be associated with the likelihood of emergency help from both family generations.

A life cycle perspective suggests that there is an intricate relationship and balance between child rearing and parent caring (Cicirelli, 1981). In the early stages of life and continuing into young adulthood, parents provide the abundance of support and guidance. Middle age establishes a balance in the exchange of assistance between parents and children. Middle-aged parents may provide financial assistance and baby-sit with grandchildren, whereas, adult children may provide companionship and transportation. During the later years of the life cycle, the balance shifts so that adult children provide the majority of assistance. Patterns of support exchanges within families are characterized by a dynamic relationship between generations across the life cycle. The care of elderly parents is a component of this relationship and is reciprocally related to child rearing (Cicirelli, 1981).

Consistent with previous research (e.g., McAdoo, 1978) non-kin were prominent members of the informal support network and important sources of emergency assistance. The high percentage of respondents utiliz-

ing non-kin (20.6%) may reflect the geographic dispersion of the modern family and the type of assistance provided. Specifically, Litwak and Szelenyi (1969) suggest that because of the general dispersion of family members, they are unavailable to deal with time urgent tasks such as help during an emergency. Friends and neighbors, who are more immediately based, may represent the most accessible sources of help during an emergency.

It was anticipated that older respondents would be more likely than younger persons to utilize non-kin for emergency help. Potentially, older blacks with limited family resources rely on non-kin for emergency assistance. Other research indicates that although friends and neighbors are important in maintaining the support networks of elderly blacks in general, they play an extensive role in the support network of childless elderly blacks and appear to substitute for family resources (Chatters et al., 1985, 1986).

There is little available research on the role of siblings and in-laws as support providers in general, and among blacks in particular. A study of the composition of informal helper networks of aged blacks (Chatters et al., 1986) found that 28.7% of the sample utilized sisters and 20% utilized brothers. Elderly blacks in that study, however, were more likely to rely on adult children and spouses than siblings. Research on the general population indicates that although their assistance may rarely be needed, siblings are ready to provide help during a crisis (Cicirelli, 1980). The role of siblings in support networks has been described as "standing ready" in the event that other primary sources of assistance are insufficient or unavailable (Cicirelli, 1985).

Marital status differences in the use of emergency helpers, more than any other factor, reflected the nature of personal relationships and bonds. Presumably, strained relations between divorced/separated individuals and their in-laws resulted in a reduced likelihood (as compared to married persons) of receiving emergency assistance from that group. Respondents who are divorced or separated, however, were more likely than their married counterparts to utilize parents. One possible explanation for this finding is that divorced and separated respondents utilized parents to compensate for the unavailability of a spouse and in-laws. Family counseling with

divorced and separated individuals may focus on understanding the nature of these interpersonal difficulties and possibly restoring relations with in-laws. This is particularly important when minor children are involved and in-law relationships were previously a supportive resource in times of need.

Never married respondents were less likely than their married counterparts to utilize parents, but more likely to utilize siblings. These findings are consistent with the observations that many never married adults facing parental pressures to "settle down and get married" may be inclined to seek emergency assistance from siblings instead of parents. In addition, parental aid to married children may be more normative and consistent with the financial needs required to establish married couples and families. The reluctance of never married children to seek assistance from parents could indicate that they feel that their needs are of lower priority (in comparison to married couples). This could be a function of the societal significance given to the establishment of married couples and families. Never married children may perceive that even in the case of an emergency, it is inappropriate for them to burden the family of origin for assistance. As a consequence, never marrieds may forgo seeking help from parents when needed assistance is available.

Widowed respondents were less likely than their married counterparts to utilize children, but more likely to use in-laws as sources of emergency assistance. The reduced likelihood of using children is consistent with other work suggesting that widowed persons are less likely to receive assistance from their immediate families (Berarado, 1967, 1970; Lopata, 1979). Widows are less likely than married persons to participate in reciprocal support with children and to reside with children (Berarado, 1967). Further, Lopata (1979) argues that neither black nor white widowed women are part of an enduring kinship structure.

Studies utilizing the National Survey of Black Americans yield mixed findings regarding the impact of widowhood on support. Widowed in comparison to married blacks were found to have smaller helper networks comprised of distant relatives and non-kin (Chatters et al., 1985). However, there were no marital status differences in the use of children in the support network (Chatters et al., 1986). As

evidenced by the present analysis, in-laws are an important source of emergency assistance to widowed blacks and may compensate for the diminished level of assistance provided by children.

Gender differences indicated that men were less likely than women to utilize children, but were more likely to utilize in-laws. These findings are consistent with other research which indicates that men rely on their wives for support but women turn to both their husbands and children (Antonucci, 1985). In addition, research on blacks reveals that women are more likely than men to utilize daughters in their helper networks (Chatters et al., 1986).

One urban/rural difference indicated that urban respondents had a greater likelihood of relying on children during an emergency. This finding could be the result of the out-migration of adult children from rural settings. As a consequence, respondents who reside in rural areas may not have as many children available to help them during an emergency.

Comparison with Majority Families

This study has yielded important information on demographic differences in the use of support resources during an emergency among a sample of the Black American population. Data of this sort documents the range of variability within the black population, enlarges our understanding of the nature of intragroup differences in these processes, and ultimately facilitates the development of more effective family policy and practice related to these concerns. Further, the exploration of these issues among a black sample contributes in significant ways to the general body of knowledge by highlighting both areas of similarity and divergence in relation to research among nonminority families.

Critical in this regard is the distinction between socioeconomic versus race and cultural differences in family functioning. Studies which allow for the examination of socioeconomic variability *within* racial minority groups, provide a more meaningful context for the discussion of racial group comparisons. Rather than the observation of differences obtained by a simple comparative approach, research utilizing multivariate controls for potentially confounding influences contributes to an enhanced understanding of disparities between groups. Observed differences between



groups can be more clearly attributed to the operation of identifiable factors, and we can begin to unravel the specific processes that are involved.

Several of the reported findings are consistent with research conducted within nonminority samples in documenting the presence of demographic subgroup differences in support network composition and functioning. Research on both blacks and whites underscores the importance of intergenerational bonds in family support relationships. Investigations among elderly groups emphasizes the presence of a child as an important feature of their support networks. Work by Bultena (1969) and Shanas (1979) reveals that white elderly adults are more likely to rely on children for assistance than siblings and other relatives. Across the entire age range, persons who have children have larger informal helper networks than those who are childless (Veroff, Kulka, & Douvan, 1981).

Findings for marital status differences among the general population indicate that the support networks of married individuals were larger than those of persons who had never married (Babchuck, 1978-79; Kahn & Antonucci, 1983). Other work on a majority sample found that when coping with a crisis, married respondents utilize more informal helpers than do their single counterparts (Veroff et al., 1981). Similarly, married respondents in this sample possessed a support advantage, relative to never marrieds, in being more likely to receive assistance from both parents and children.

Very little previous work among either whites or blacks has explored the role of siblings, in-laws, and non-kin within informal support networks. Investigations of siblings (Cicirelli, 1985) and non-kin (Cantor, 1979; Fisher, 1982) suggest that these groups have an important, albeit rarely examined position within informal support networks. Furthermore, the present findings indicate that siblings, in-laws, and non-kin are differentially important for distinct subgroups of the black population.

Finally, despite the many similarities between these findings and previous work on white samples, there are also areas of divergence. Fisher's work (1982) found that non-kin were more prominent in the informal networks of younger respondents and that there were significant income, education, and urbanicity differences in level of involvement with non-kin. Mutran

(1985) found that among older whites income level was inversely related to receiving assistance from children. However, socioeconomic status failed to produce significant differences in the likelihood of choosing particular helpers in the present study.

Practice Implications

Family life in American society is governed by explicit rules and expectations regarding support obligations among family members. The findings of the present study suggest that at several points across the life course, the parent-child bond is of critical importance to the provision of assistance. Children usually turn to parents for general assistance and help during an emergency. As family members grow older, practitioners are often faced with helping parents and their adult children develop identities and relationships beyond their traditional family roles.

One of the most important tasks for family practitioners is the preparation of elderly parents and adult children for a reversal in roles whereby children provide assistance to their parents. As parents grow older and become increasingly dependent, the balance shifts from the parent as the primary provider of assistance to the adult child as the major source of aid. Adult children become the major sources of instrumental and socioemotional assistance, make vital decisions about medical care, and provide help in times of emergencies. Although this analysis focused on assistance provided during emergency episodes, the normative events of later life (e.g., declining health, retirement, widowhood) represent other transitions during which adult children provide assistance to elderly parents.

The reversal in helping roles does not occur without difficulty as both parent and adult child negotiate new roles and behaviors in relation to one another. Adult children must learn how to effectively provide for older parents and to manage their own feelings of ambivalence and fear in seeing their parents in need of substantial amounts of assistance. Older parents must face the prospect of no longer being able to care for themselves and learn to accept assistance from the adult child. Professionals who are involved in family practice could play an important role in facilitating the changing relationship between parent and child and in helping both groups of clients to adjust to the attendant psychological ramifications of this role reversal.

Demographic projections reveal that the aged population is increasing among both whites and blacks (Myers, 1985). As a consequence, greater numbers of middle-aged and older adults will be providing assistance to their parents. In keeping with this projected demographic profile, family practitioners will increasingly assist adult children and their elderly parents in coping with the inevitable consequences of aging.

Equally important for family practitioners is information concerning adult children who express a reluctance to rely on the parent-child bond. These data indicate that black never marrieds tended to rely on siblings rather than parents, whereas divorced/separated persons sought emergency assistance from parents. As clinicians, it may be important to explore with black clients their feelings and perceptions about whether parents are available sources of assistance. Family practitioners who provide long-term services may find that the exploration of this and similar issues between parents and adult children who have never married important in clarifying perceptions of their roles relative to one another.

The set of findings on the family and friendship support networks of Black Americans provides useful information to professionals involved in family practice. As evidenced by these analyses, the use of particular categories of helpers during an emergency episode is a complex phenomena which differs by demographic factors such as age and marital status. Armed with information on informal helping networks, family practitioners can develop and implement interventions for emergency situations which utilize support resources effectively and facilitate problem resolution.

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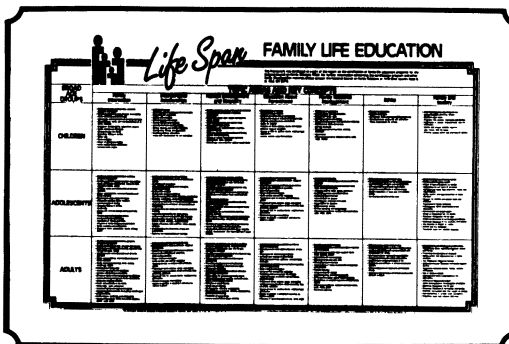
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