

# The Distribution and Direction of Women's Support Exchanges with Young Adult Children in a Low-Income Setting

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## **Short abstract:**

Flows of intergenerational support shift over the life course, with children requiring support from parents when young and expected to provide for parents as they age. During the intermediate stages of the family life course, as children are gradually transitioning to adulthood and parents are aging, patterns of exchange are complex. It is important to understand the extent and nature of these exchanges, especially in low-income settings with weak social safety nets where people at all ages depend on family for support. This paper analyzes exchanges of financial, material, instrumental, and emotional support between mid-life women and their adolescent and young adult children in a low-income, high-fertility context. We draw on newly available survey data from a longitudinal study of women in rural southern Mozambique. This extended abstract describes the setting and data, outlines our analytic approach, and presents descriptive figures. The completed paper will add multivariable analyses of the association between exchange and women's and children's sociodemographic characteristics.

## **Extended abstract:**

In low-income contexts with weak public safety net programs, families are a primary source of support for children, older adults, and people in poor health. Because mothers have the main responsibility for children and limited engagement with the paid labor market in many settings, women play a particularly important role in the receipt and provision of family support. The direction of support shifts over the life course: Parents are the primary caregivers for children when they are young, and children in turn are expected to help parents as they grow older (Caldwell 1976; d'Albis and Moosa 2015; Whyte and Whyte 2004). During the intermediate stages of the family life course, as children are gradually transitioning to adulthood and mothers are aging out of the reproductive years, patterns of exchange are complex. The nature and direction of support may vary depending on life course context, children's and parents' needs and capacities, and family and cultural expectations (Bucx, van Wel, and Knijn 2012; Fingerman et al. 2011; Lanuza 2020).

In much of sub-Saharan Africa, the transition to adulthood has become later and more variable as school enrollment has increased, age at marriage has been delayed, and the formal labor market remains precarious (Juárez and Gayet 2014; NRC-IOM 2005; Pesando et al. 2021). At the same time, poor health and aging populations may increase the demands for care for aging parents

(Antoine and Golaz 2010; WHO, NIA, and NIH 2011). It is important to understand the extent and nature of bidirectional exchanges of support between women and their young adult children in this context. In particular, limited attention has been paid to the affective dimensions of such exchanges in low-income settings.

In this paper, we describe and analyze exchanges of financial, material, instrumental, and emotional support between mid-life women and their adolescent and young adult children in a low-income, high-fertility context. We draw on newly available survey data from the Men's Migration and Women's Lives project, a longitudinal study of women in rural Gaza Province in southern Mozambique. In this extended abstract, we describe the setting and data, outline our analytic approach, and present preliminary descriptive figures. The completed paper will add multivariable analyses of the association between exchange and women's and children's sociodemographic characteristics, drawing on life course theory and previous research on intergenerational exchange to motivate and interpret these analyses. We will discuss the potential implications of results for understanding women's health and well-being in mid-life.

### **Setting**

Mozambique is one of the poorest countries in the world, with an estimated per capita GDP of \$500 in 2022 and Human Development Index of 0.45 in 2021 (World Bank 2023). Gaza Province, where the study data were collected, is in the southern part of the country, bordering South Africa. In rural areas of the province, most households depend on rain-fed subsistence agriculture (whose yields are increasingly unpredictable due to ongoing climate change). Migration to neighboring South Africa, largely circular and largely by men, provides an additional source of income for many households (de Vletter 2007; Mercandili 2018). Current migration streams are rooted in the historical practice of labor migration to South African mines, which was highly regulated by the mining industry, with recruitment of men in Mozambique and salaries paid directly to their households of origin. Current migration is less formalized, and its returns are more variable and less predictable (Crush and Frayne 2010). Given this unpredictability, and the social and emotional strains of migration for both migrants and their household members remaining in Mozambique, migration can have negative impacts on marital stability and on women's health (Agadjanian, Hayford, and Jansen 2021; Agadjanian and Hayford 2018a).

The study area is dominated by a single ethnic group, the Changana. Marriage is nearly universal, with high rates of divorce and high rates of remarriage (Agadjanian and Hayford 2018a). Family systems are patrilineal (children are considered to belong to the husband's family) and patrilocal (women typically move to the husband's village or household on marriage). Historically, bridewealth payments (payments from the husband's family to the wife's family) were part of the marriage process, and bridewealth continues to be expected in most marriages, but may not be fully paid until several years into the marriage, if at all (Chae, Agadjanian, and Hayford 2021). Birth rates are high, with an estimated TFR of 5.3 children per woman in Gaza at the time of the most recent Demographic and Health Survey in 2011 (MISAU, INE and ICFI 2013).

Perhaps in part because of the high levels of migration to South Africa, Gaza has the highest HIV prevalence of any province in Mozambique, with nearly one in four adults age 15-49 estimated to be HIV positive in 2015 (MISAU, INE and ICF 2019). HIV testing and treatment services are widely available free of charge through government health clinics, and HIV is largely

experienced as a chronic condition in the study area (Agadjanian and Hayford 2018b). Like many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Mozambique had relatively low levels of COVID-19 infection and mortality (Bwire et al. 2022). Still, schools and public services were closed for a period during the early months of the pandemic, and many migrants returned from South Africa in response to economic closures there. The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic in turn impacted women's mental health and social relationships (Agadjanian 2023).

## **Data and methods**

### *Data*

The Men's Migration and Women's Lives (MMWL) project began in 2006 with a sample of married women of reproductive age (18-40) living in rural areas of four districts in Gaza Province in southern Mozambique. In each district, 14 villages were randomly selected with probability proportional to size, and 30 married women were sampled in each village, for a total sample size of 1678 women. Women were re-interviewed in 2009-10, 2011-12, 2014, and 2017-18. At waves 2 and 3, there was sample refreshment to compensate for women who were lost to followup; some of these women were later located and interviewed, leading to an overall increase in sample size. A total of 2466 women were interviewed in at least one of these five survey waves. Approximately 10% of the Wave 1 (2006) sample had died by Wave 5, many of them from HIV (most of this mortality took place early in the study period, before the widespread availability of antiretroviral therapies). Of the surviving Wave 1 sample, 81% were located and reinterviewed at Wave 5. Most of the attrition was due to residential mobility; very few of the recontacted respondents refused to be interviewed.

A sixth wave of data collection (funded by the U.S. National Institutes of Health, grant # R01AG075526) is being fielded in 2023-24, targeting all women interviewed at least once in earlier survey waves and not confirmed dead by Wave 5. To date, 1767 women have been located and interviewed; preliminary results in this extended abstract are based on this sample. We anticipate an additional 50 interviews will be conducted and analyzed by the time of the conference.

The primary goal of Wave 6 is to understand the role that financial, material, instrumental, and emotional exchanges with children play in women's lives, including their implications for health and psychosocial well-being at midlife. The questionnaire also asks about respondents' marital/romantic partnerships, exchanges with other people (relatives, neighbors, church members), and household characteristics, as well as physical and mental health. Respondents provide a full birth history and basic demographic information for all living children.

In this analysis, our primary outcomes of interest are women's exchanges of support with adolescent and young adult children. For children born before 2010 (i.e., children who have reached adolescence), detailed questions are asked about women's provision and receipt of support in multiple domains, including financial, material (food, household goods), instrumental (help with agriculture, household tasks, caregiving), and emotional (listening, providing advice). The survey asks both summary questions about support to/from any children and specific questions about which children received/provided support, enabling analysis both at the level of the woman and at the level of the woman-child dyad. In the sample used in this extended abstract, women report an average of 3.2 living children born before 2010 (see Table 1); 75 women have no living children in this age range. Our analytic sample for exchanges of support with adolescent and young adult children is 1692 women and 5608 woman-child dyads.

Question structure varies slightly depending on the domain of exchange. For financial, material, and instrumental support, women are first asked about support they have given to children in the past year. For each domain, they are asked whether they provided any support to any children in the age range (with children listed by name); if they respond yes, they are asked to list all children they gave to. Following the questions about the provision of support, women are asked about receipt of support. They are first asked whether any children gave support in a given domain, and if they respond yes they are asked which ones.

Questions about emotional support are asked in a separate module, and are asked specifically for each child born before 2010. For each child, women are first asked about provision of support, with questions adapted from standard scales of social support (“how often do you listen when [NAME] wants to talk or express his/her feelings?”, “how often do you give [NAME] advice or useful information to answer questions, solve problems, or help with day-to-day tasks?”); about positive feelings (“how much do you love and care for [NAME]?”); and about worry (“how much do you worry about [NAME]?”). Respondents are then asked about receipt of social support from the child (using the same questions), how much they perceive the child loves and cares for them, and arguments with the child.

One limitation of these measures is that are reports from women and thus focused on one member of the exchange dyad. For all domains, but especially questions related to emotional support, children may have different perceptions and understanding of relationships and support provided and received. Using reports from women is reasonable and appropriate given our goal of understanding women’s perceptions and status, but requires caution when extrapolating to children’s situations.

#### *Analytic approach*

In this extended abstract, we first provide descriptive statistics summarizing the characteristics of women in the sample and their children. We then present figures showing the distribution of exchange relationships across domains and directions of exchange. For financial, material, and instrumental support, we show these distributions at the woman level (i.e., aggregating across children for women with multiple children in the target age range). For emotional support exchanges, we show distributions at the level of the mother-child dyad because the response scale of these questions makes aggregation less straightforward.

For most domains of support, parallel questions are asked about provision and receipt of support, and descriptive figures present these in pairs. Care for grandchildren is a common form of support that women provide for their children for which there is no direct equivalent. We present this domain in tandem with children’s help with caring for sick people in women’s household, which is also a form of caregiving and thus the closest equivalent, but this is not a direct comparison.

For this descriptive analysis, we do not condition on women’s characteristics or children’s characteristics that might be related to the need for support or capacity to provide support. For example, some women may not provide help caring for grandchildren because they do not have grandchildren living nearby. We consider this part of the overall landscape of women’s exchanges that we are seeking to understand, so we include these women in the category of not providing care in this extended abstract.

In the completed paper, we will estimate multivariable models to understand the distribution of specific types and directions of support across mother-child dyads. We will estimate logistic regression models predicting whether a particular type of support is provided/received or not (with separate models for provision and receipt). Predictors in these models will include demographic characteristics of mothers (age, education, marital status and partner characteristics, number of children, work), characteristics of mothers' households (economic conditions, household structure), and demographic characteristics of children (age, gender, education, marital status, parenthood status, place of residence). These predictors will account for the need for support (e.g., whether mothers are in poor health; whether there are grandchildren who need care) and capacity to provide support (e.g., whether children live near enough to provide help with agriculture), as well as for potential variation in cultural expectations for support (e.g., oldest children, sons vs. daughters). Models will be multilevel models with mother-child dyads nested within mothers to account for non-independence of dyads. These models will be focused on understanding the predictors of exchange relationships rather than the potential consequences of exchange.

Our descriptive analyses show seven domains of financial, material, and instrumental support and seven domains of emotional support. The multivariable analyses in the completed paper will focus on a smaller subset of domains (money, household goods, help with household tasks, advice) to highlight key processes. We will also explore the possibility of using summary scales or other approaches to combining information about exchange across multiple domains.

## **Preliminary results**

### *Descriptive characteristics of the sample*

Table 1 shows basic sociodemographic characteristics of women in the sample (including those without children in the target age range) as well as a few summary measures of well-being to provide context for understanding the life conditions of these women. The mean age of the sample is 45 years, with a range of 31-73. (Note that this age range implies some imprecision or misreporting in ages, since the original sample frame was women age 18-40 in 2006. Age misreporting is common in this setting with relatively low literacy and weak administrative record systems.) Women report a mean of 4.7 living children, of which 3.2 were born before 2010. About 22% of the sample is not currently married or living with a partner. Of partnered women, slightly more have a husband/partner working locally (42.8%) than a migrant husband/partner (35.5%).

On measures of well-being, most women report moderate to high levels. The average self-rated health is 2.9 (on a scale of 1 (poor) to 4 (excellent)), and the average life satisfaction is 3.2 (on a scale of 1 (not at all satisfied) to 4 (very satisfied)). Notably, these levels are slightly lower than at the time of the last survey wave in 2017 (not shown), suggesting potentially worsening health and life conditions with age. Only a minority of women report that their household is doing better economically than other households in their community. Food security, measured using an adapted version of a standardized scale describing frequency of food challenges such as worrying about having enough to eat and skipping meals, is relatively high in the sample.

Among children born to women in this sample before 2010, the mean age is 21.5 years old. About half are sons and half daughters. Just over a third (39%) live permanently in their mother's household, and another 17% are living in their mother's household but temporarily absent (e.g.,

for school or work). 34% of adolescent and young adult children are married, and 41% have children of their own.

### *Exchange relationships: Preliminary results*

Figure 1 shows the distribution of exchanges between women and their adolescent and young adult children across financial, material, and instrumental domains. This figure is based on questions about whether women have given to or received from *any* child age 13 or older – that is, they represent the aggregation of exchange across all children. The left bars (in blue) show the proportion of women who have engaged in the form of exchange, and the right bars (in red) show the proportion of women who have not. In each domain, exchanges are paired to show giving and receiving the same type of support.

Exchange is common in both directions across all forms of exchange. The types of assistance that women provide most commonly are food, goods, and care for grandchildren. More than half of women gave food or goods to at least one child in the past year, and 41% helped care for grandchildren. The types of assistance that women receive most commonly are instrumental, with more than half of women receiving help with agriculture from at least one child and more than half receiving help with household tasks. The least common types and direction of exchange are receiving food, giving help with agriculture, and receiving help with sick people in the household. For all other forms and directions of support, at least one quarter of women reported engaging in this type of exchange.

Among the domains of exchange shown here, none are perfectly reciprocal, that is, for no domains of exchange are women equally likely to give and to receive. (Note that this figure does not account for the amount or frequency of exchanges.) Exchange relationships are most balanced for financial assistance and help when sick, and least balanced for food and help with agriculture. Women are much more likely to provide help with grandchildren than they are to receive help with sick household members; these forms of exchange are not perfectly parallel, and this imbalance is likely because women are more likely to have grandchildren than to have household members in need of care. (We will assess this mechanism in the completed paper.)

Figure 2 shows the distribution of women across four categories for each type of exchange: (1) only gave; (2) both gave and received; (3) neither gave nor received; and (4) only received. (Again, this figure shows only the direction and occurrence of exchanges, not the amount or frequency.) While Figure 1 reflects the degree of reciprocity at the population level (the number of women giving vs. receiving), Figure 2 shows reciprocity at the individual level (whether a specific woman gave or received).

Women are most likely to engage in exchanges of goods and household tasks (i.e., these domains have the smallest proportion of women reporting they neither gave nor received). These domains also have relatively high levels of reciprocity (women both giving and receiving). The least common forms of exchange, as might be expected, are the most conditional (care when sick, care for grandchildren/sick household members). Women are most likely to be net givers (gave but not received) of food and goods. They are most likely to be net receivers of help with household tasks and help with agriculture.

In exploratory analyses, we produced versions of Figures 1 and 2 at the level of the mother-child dyad, rather than the aggregate woman level (not shown). As might be expected, these dyad-level figures showed larger proportions of dyads in which no exchange takes place: women are more

likely to exchange support with at least one child of several than with any individual child. The general patterns of which forms and directions of support are most common are similar at the woman and dyad levels.

Figure 3 shows exchanges of emotional support. Here, the response scale measures the frequency (always, often, sometimes, rarely, never) or intensity (a lot, moderately, a little, or not at all) of exchange with a specific child in each domain, rather than a dichotomous measure of whether exchange took place. Overall, levels of emotional support exchange are high and highly reciprocal. For example, for 63% of mother-child dyads, women report that they always listen when the child wants to talk or express feelings, and for 55% they report that the child always listens to them. Women report high levels of love and care for and from their children, but also high levels of worry, suggesting that children may be a source of stress or strain as well as positive support.

### **Discussion and next steps**

In this extended abstract, we presented an initial descriptive picture of women's exchanges of financial, material, instrumental, and emotional support with adolescent and young adult children in a rural site in southern Mozambique. Preliminary results show that exchange in both directions is common, but that women give and receive in different domains. Women are most likely to provide children with material support (food, goods), and most likely to receive instrumental support (help with household tasks, help with agriculture). Children are both sources and receivers of listening and advice, as well as a cause for worry.

The completed paper will estimate multivariable models to understand some of the reasons for variation in exchange. We will incorporate measures of women's, children's, and household characteristics to understand how life course context, economic conditions, and family roles shape patterns of exchange. We will draw on life course theory and previous research on family and intergenerational exchange to motivate and interpret our findings.

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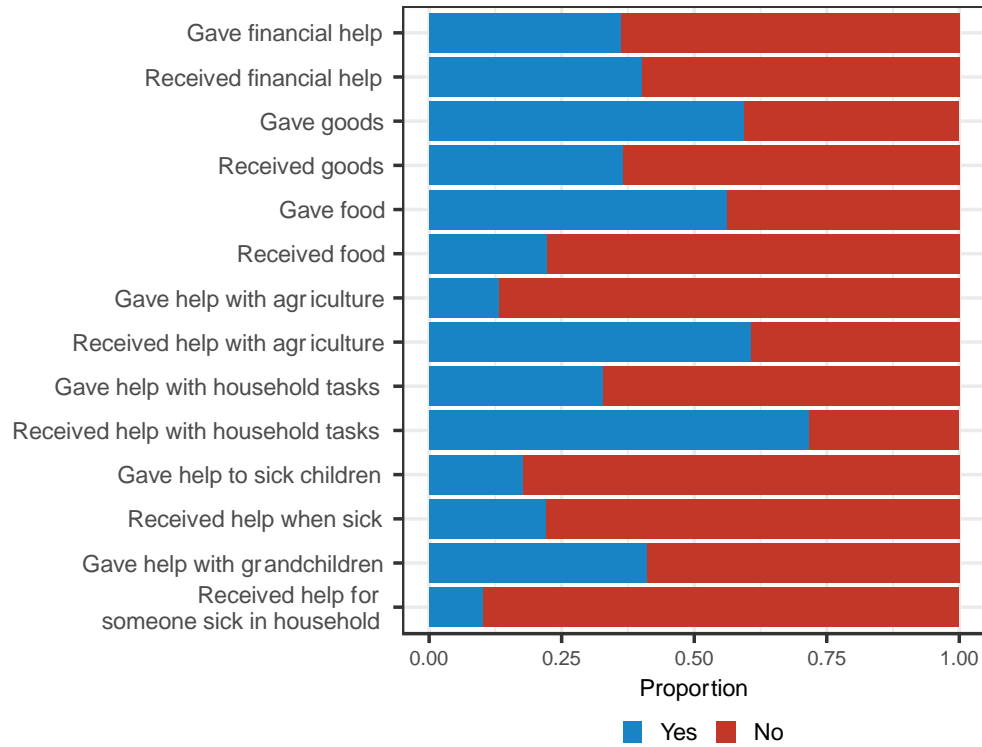
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**Table 1.** Distribution of demographic and life course characteristics and measures of well-being.

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Mean or %</b>
<i>Women's demographic and life course characteristics:</i>	
Age (range, 31-73)	45.0
Number of living children (range, 0-12)	4.7
Number of living children born before 2010 (range, 0-9)	3.2
No partner	21.7%
Non-migrant partner	42.8%
Migrant partner	35.5%
<i>Women's measures of well-being:</i>	
Self-rated health (1-4, 4=Excellent)	2.9
Life satisfaction (1-4, 4=Very satisfied)	3.2
Household perceived better off than others in the community (vs. same or worse off)	17%
Household food security scale (1-3, 3 = most secure; $\alpha = .90$ )	2.3
<i>Children born before 2010 demographic and life course characteristics:</i>	
Age (range, 14-48)	21.5
Male	50%
Living permanently in mother's household	39%
Living temporarily in another place	17%
Living permanently in another place	44%
Married or partnered	34%
Has children	41%

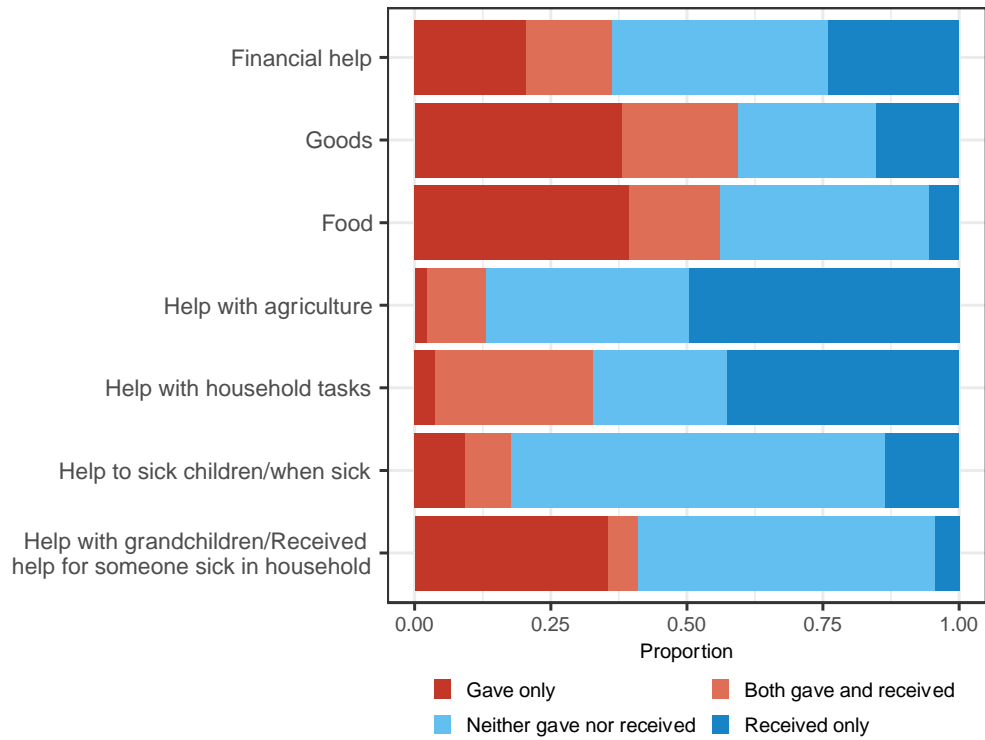
Data: Men's Migration and Women's Lives project. N = 1767 women interviewed at W6 and N = 5608 children born before 2010.

**Figure 1.** Distribution of exchanges between women and their adolescent and young adult children across financial, material, and instrumental domains - aggregation of exchange across all children.



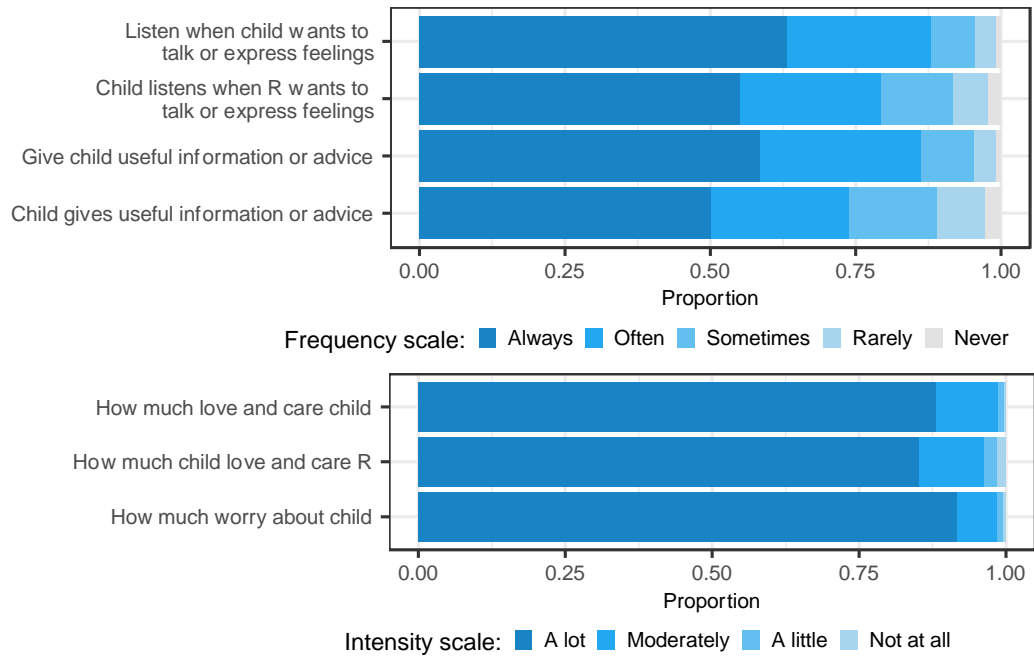
Data: Men's Migration and Women's Lives project. N = 1692 women interviewed at W6 with at least one living child born before 2010.

**Figure 2.** Direction of exchanges between women and their adolescent and young adult children across financial, material, and instrumental domains - aggregation of exchange across all children.



Data: Men's Migration and Women's Lives project. N = 1692 women interviewed at W6 with at least one living child born before 2010.

**Figure 3.** Distribution of exchanges between women and their adolescent and young adult children across emotional domains - exchange with a specific child in each domain.



Data: Men's Migration and Women's Lives project. 1692 women interviewed at W6 with at least one living child born before 2010 for a total of N = 5608 woman-child dyads.