

Family ties: Blood is thicker than water

In South Africa, there are concerns that traditional lines of support between generations (intergenerational solidarity) are weakening. Those born after the advent of democracy are often seen as less likely to support their older counterparts. But are such fears justified? *Steven Gordon, Benjamin Roberts and Jaré Struwig* examine patterns of intergenerational solidarity within South African families.



Intergenerational solidarity is one of the three key themes that has been established by the United Nations for the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family. This article investigates this trend in the South African context, using a detailed set of questions fielded to 2 547 participants during the 10th round of the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) conducted in late 2012.

These questions formed part of a larger questionnaire aimed at determining family-related values, preferences and dynamics. The survey was nationally representative of the nation's adult population (16 years and older) living in private households in the country's nine provinces.

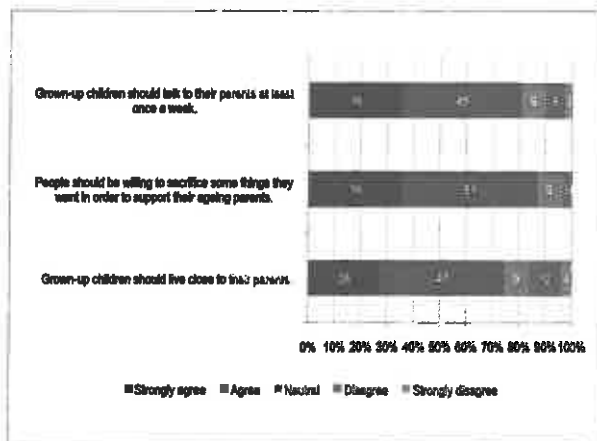
Intergenerational solidarity within families

The results showed that in general, South Africans tended to strongly believe that adult children should have a close relationship with their parents (Figure 1). Three quarters of the adult population agreed that grown-up children should live close to their parents and 81% believed that grown-up children should talk to their parents at least once a week.

There was also a firm belief that adult children should support their parents in their old age. Almost nine out of every 10 (87%) South Africans thought that adults should be willing to sacrifice some of the things they wanted in

order to support their ageing parents. Although there is some speculation about South Africans becoming more individualistic over time, these findings suggested that the vast majority desired strong intergenerational solidarity within families.

Figure 1: Attitudes towards intergenerational solidarity within families



Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2012

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South African Social Attitudes Survey

Preferences for close intergenerational family relationships were widespread across age groups. Younger South Africans were not less likely to support close relationships between adult children and their parents. It was particularly interesting to note that 91% of those aged 16-19 believed that adults should be willing to make sacrifices to support their elderly parents. Encouragingly, men were found to be no different from women in their preferences for intergenerational solidarity within families.

However, there was some evidence of population group-based difference in preferences, with white South Africans being less supportive of strong intergenerational family relationships when compared to other groups.

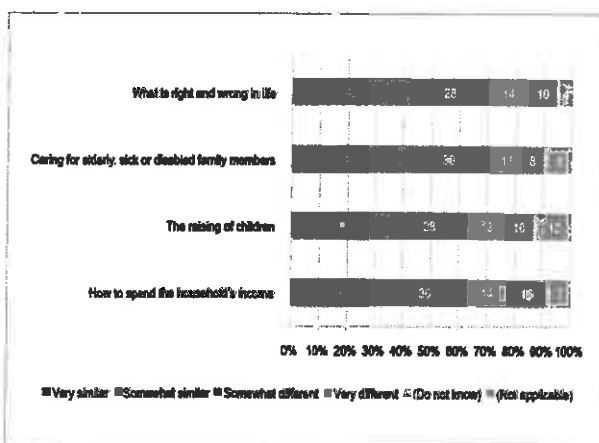
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Intergenerational consensus within families

Given the considerable political and social changes that have occurred in South Africa over the last two decades, one would expect that strong generational differences in values might exist within families. However, these survey results suggested that many South Africans held opinions broadly comparable with their parent or caregivers.

When asked, 'how similar are your opinions to the people who raised you', a majority of the adult population (53%) responded that their views were very similar, with a further 31% indicating that their views were similar. Only a small minority (7%) reported that their attitudes were dissimilar to those who raised them.

Figure 2: Difference on views of older and younger family members on important issues



Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2012

In order to further test consensus between generations in South African families, respondents were asked how similar or different the views of younger persons and older persons in their families were on important issues (Figure 2).

The findings suggested that a majority of South Africans thought that younger and older individuals in their families shared similar views on taking care of sick, disabled or elderly family members (71%), morality (70%), child rearing (64%) and financial decision making (63%).

There were differences in subgroups in intergenerational consensus. Younger respondents perceived differences in the intergenerational views of household financial decision making and raising children. Less than half (46%) of respondents under 20 years of age thought views on how to spend income in the household were similar; 54% believed that views on raising children were alike.

Interestingly, men were more likely than women to believe that the views of younger and older persons in their family differed on the raising of children and caring for vulnerable family members. Population group differences in intergenerational family consensus were also noted, with Indian South Africans reporting higher levels of perceived consensus on all issues, compared with white, coloured and black South Africans.

Black South Africans were found to be more engaged in forms of kinship support networks when compared to other population groups.

Kinship networks and family support

Traditionally, historical family structures have been important sources of support, with strong kinship networks providing assistance to members of the network. However, there are concerns that these networks are breaking down under the weight of changing family values and societal norms as well as new economic pressures.

To test the strength of existing family networks in South Africa, we asked respondents what kind of help they had received, and had given, to family members that did not live in their household in the past three months (Figure 3).

More than two-thirds (65%) of the adult population had helped family members outside the household in some or other way. Fewer South Africans (56%) indicated that they had received some form of help during the reference period. The most popular forms of assistance were advice on decision making and financial assistance. The forms of assistance provided depended on the economic resources of the household, with wealthy South Africans being twice as likely to assist family members financially, relative to their poorer counterparts.

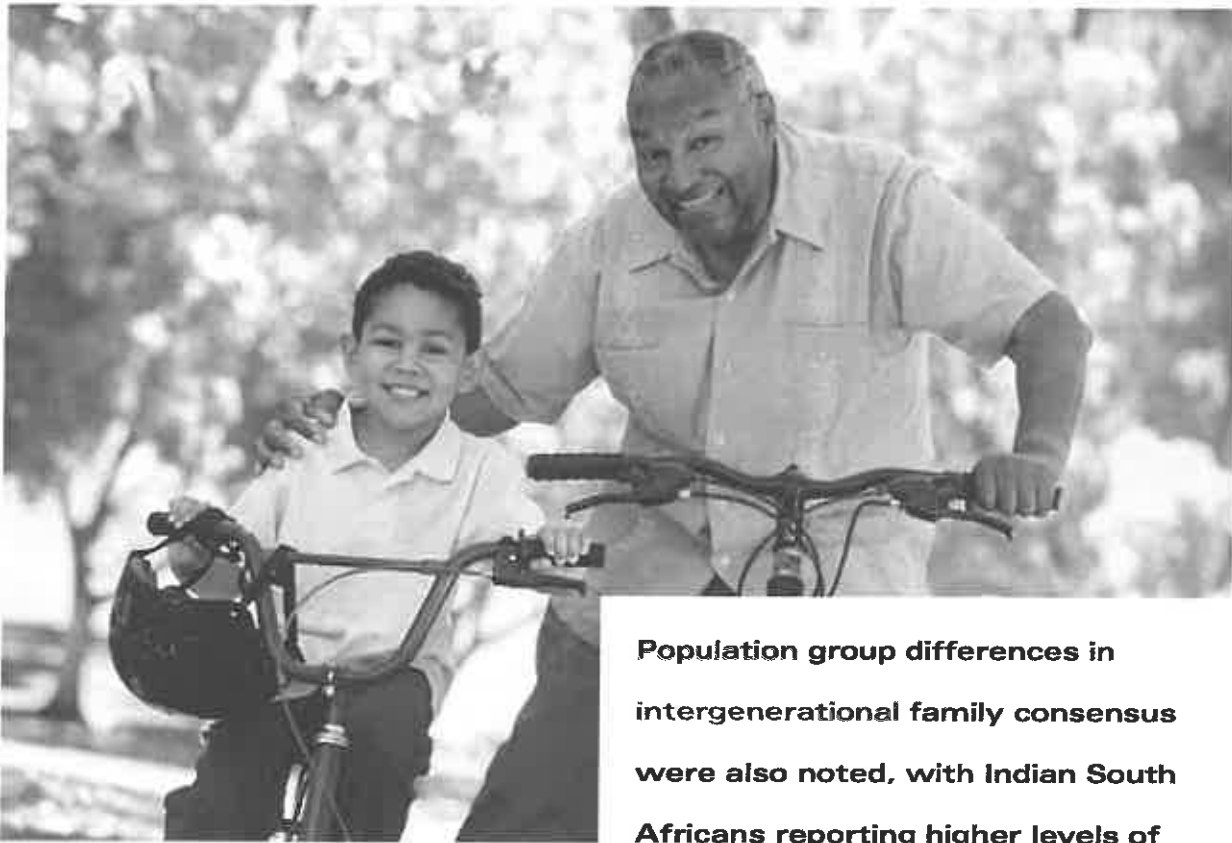
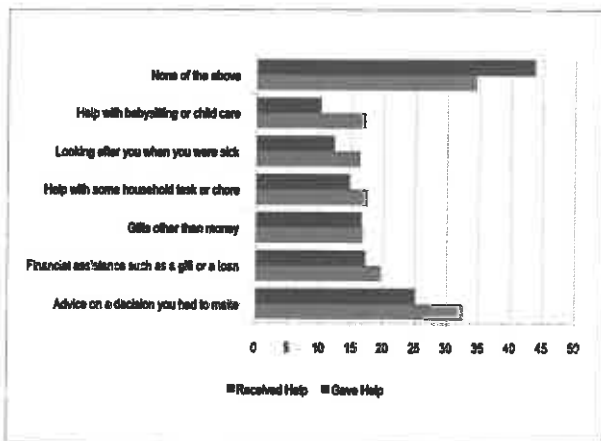


Figure 3: Giving and receiving help from those outside the family



Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2012

Most individuals gave or received one form of aid, with 29% giving and even less (22%) receiving multiple forms of assistance. Significant subgroup differences were noted in the extent to which help was given and received. When compared to other age groups, those in their middle age were also more likely to give multiple types of assistance to family members.

Black South Africans were found to be more engaged in forms of kinship support networks when compared to other population groups. Surprisingly, the wealthy were not more inclined to have given multiple forms of assistance. This may indicate that an ethos of giving is driven by factors other than economic position.

Population group differences in intergenerational family consensus were also noted, with Indian South Africans reporting higher levels of perceived consensus on all issues, compared with white, coloured and black South Africans.

Conclusion

In charting its national long-term perspective and strategy for the county, the National Planning Commission has placed significant emphasis on the need for, and challenges associated with, promoting nation-building and social cohesion. The family, its structure and functioning plays an integral role as part of a broader conceptualisation of socio-cultural cohesion.

The results present here suggest that there is a strong inclination for intergenerational family solidarity among the populace, keeping in mind that many families face numerous challenges, such as HIV/AIDS, poverty and unemployment, that negatively impact on their ability to look after family members in need. Families must be strengthened through interventions that will enable kinship networks to maintain and improve support to vulnerable family members. ■

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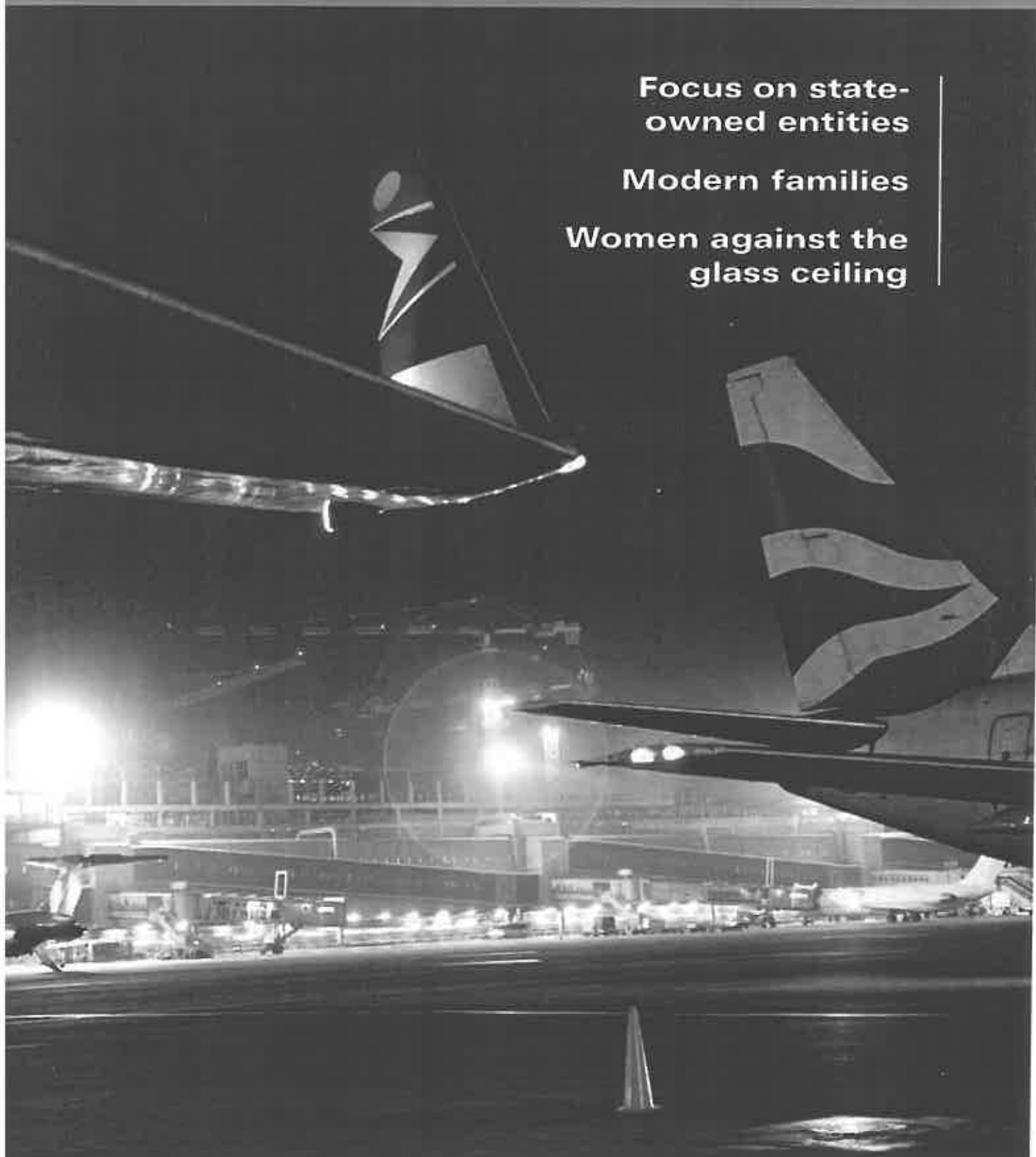
REVIEW

VOLUME 11 NUMBER 3 JULY 2013

**Focus on state-
owned entities**

Modern families

**Women against the
glass ceiling**



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Understanding the scourge of corruption

In 1983 I was with my family in Buea, Cameroon – waiting in a long line for my turn to buy stamps at a post office. Someone shouted that if he were in Lagos, Nigeria, he could have waved his 10 nairas at the man behind the counter and would have been allowed to jump the queue and get his stamps immediately. We all laughed, and I said South Africans were lucky because corruption had not reached the level where it hampered people's daily living...

That was the memory I had before I left for exile in 1975. Perhaps I was naïve and idealistic in my youthful days, thinking we were a different breed and had strong ethics as a people. The 2013 Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer reminded us that we were in fact no different to the 36 other countries that believed that the police were corrupt. While almost half (47%) of South Africans paid a bribe in the past year, 36% of urban-based South Africans admitted to bribing a police officer!

The public can only try to bribe the police if it believes they will take the bait. Yes, the public definitely believes the police are corrupt. It has become common for some members of the public to bribe their way out of acts of lawlessness such as drinking and driving, driving without a licence and other serious criminal acts involving the loss of dockets and important evidence in order for the perpetrator to walk free. The media is certainly full of anecdotal stories of police demanding bribes from drug dealers and illegal shebeen owners to turn a blind eye.

In the 2012 June edition of the HSRC Review, Steven Gordon, Ben Roberts, Jarè Struwig and Siphesihle Dumisa published findings from the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS), showing that 66% of the population perceived people working for the South African Police Service to be corrupt. Without enablers, police could not perpetuate corrupt practices. In this case, the environment seemed to promote corrupt activities. With regard to the reasons offered as to why corruption existed, these scientists found, inter alia, that the public believed that:

- The executive and parliament did not do enough to fight corruption (63%);
- Corrupt people got away easily because the judiciary did not impose appropriate sentences or prosecute the perpetrators (33%); and
- They, as the public, had come to accept corruption as a reality (28%).

Of all issues related to rampant corruption in South Africa, the one that is most concerning is the public acceptance that corruption is a way of life. This is a sign that it will be very difficult to root it out if allowed to permeate all facets of life. Socially aberrant behaviours thrive in environments where there are enough people who share the same perspective. Corrupt people do not operate alone. They exist within our communities; they are all around us: in the families, workplaces, places of worship etc. all around us.

While there are increasing concerns about corruption, there is also a glimmer of hope. The 2013 SASAS survey showed that 94% of the South African population perceived corruption as a major problem, which means that the majority of South Africans do not support this behaviour. However, the challenge remains that the 36% of urban residents who bribed the police officers are also inclined to perceive corruption as a problem, while their behaviour serves to exacerbate levels of corruption. These findings suggest a need for social scientists to investigate the reason for this cognitive dissonance. It is time that social scientists go back to social experimental studies to understand this phenomenon of corruption; to understand the ethical, social and economic determinants in order to devise strategies to end it before it is too late.

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