

MATERIAL SUPPORT FROM ADULT CHILDREN TO OLDER PARENTS IN RURAL BAC NINH, VIETNAM: PATTERNS AND FREQUENCY OF INTERGENERATIONAL SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

In the context of an aging population and socioeconomic changes in rural Vietnam, the relationship of material support between children and elderly parents continues to play a crucial role in the intergenerational care system. This article examines the current state of material support provided by children to the elderly in rural areas. The research findings show that various forms of support are provided at different frequencies over time. Cash support and payments for medical expenses are typically made monthly to cover regular expenses and healthcare needs of the elderly. Meanwhile, support in the form of clothing and supplies is mainly concentrated around holidays and Tet (Lunar New Year). At the same time, food and fruit are provided weekly and monthly to ensure daily nutritional needs are met. The research findings confirm that material support from children remains an essential resource for ensuring the livelihoods and healthcare of the elderly in rural areas and for improving their quality of life.

Keywords: older adults; material support; intergenerational support; rural areas; social security.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Amid rapid socioeconomic transformations in rural Vietnam, family structures and intergenerational relationships are undergoing significant change. Labor migration, the expansion of non-agricultural activities, and the trend toward nuclear families have eroded the traditional multi-generational household model, creating new challenges for the care and well-being of the elderly within both the family and the community.

Within intergenerational support networks, material assistance from children to their elderly parents remains a crucial resource for maintaining the social security and stability of life for the rural elderly. Such material support can take various forms, including direct cash allowances, the coverage of medical expenses, or in-kind contributions such as food, household goods, and gifts on special occasions. These forms of support hold not only economic significance but also reflect family responsibilities, the value of filial piety, and the strength of intergenerational bonds. While existing studies have addressed the family's role in elderly care, detailed empirical evidence on the characteristics of intergenerational material support in rural areas – specifically, its forms, magnitude, and frequency – remains limited. Analyzing these aspects is essential for assessing the current state of elderly care and identifying shifts in family

support patterns amidst ongoing social change. Therefore, this article analyzes the forms, magnitude, and frequency of material support provided by children to their elderly parents, aiming to clarify the characteristics of intergenerational material support relationships in rural families.

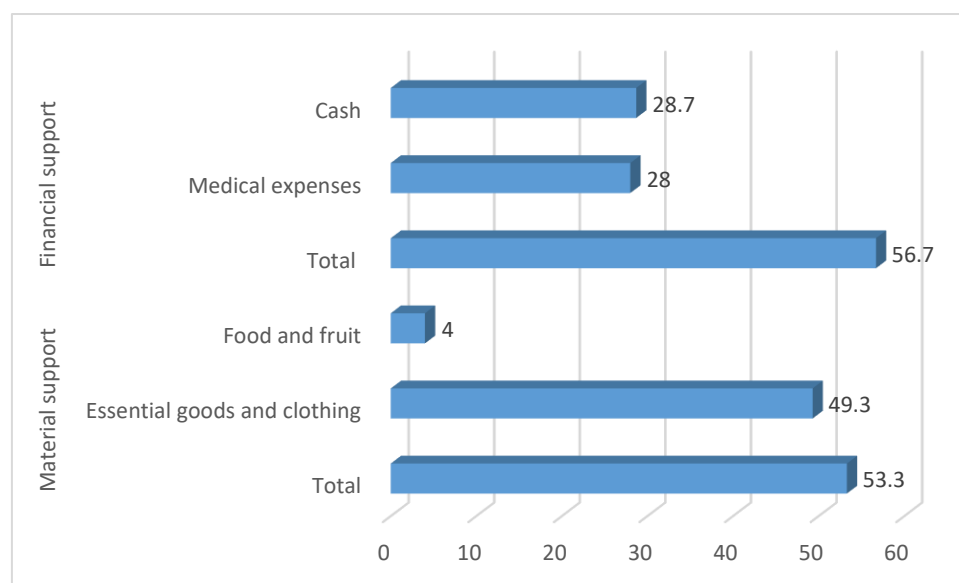
2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative approach and was conducted in a rural area of Bac Ninh Province, Vietnam, a region undergoing rapid transformation due to industrialization and modernization. A probability sampling method was used to ensure the sample was representative of the elderly population in the study area. The sample consisted of 150 elderly individuals aged 60 to 79, randomly selected from the list of households in the commune for the year 2025.

3.0 RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1 Proportion of children providing support to the elderly in rural areas by year

Figure 1: Proportion of children providing support on an annual basis. (%)



Source: Survey data, 2025

An analysis of annual patterns reveals distinct characteristics of intergenerational caregiving in the study area. The provision of essential goods and clothing accounts for the largest share of support (49.3%), indicating that children are highly attentive to their elderly parents' basic daily needs. For rural elderly individuals, children often provide goods and clothing because the elderly tend to be frugal, rarely leave their immediate vicinity, and seldom purchase personal items for themselves. Rural elderly people often feel that, given their advanced age, buying new clothes is unnecessary. Furthermore, because rural elderly individuals typically have limited income, spending is usually prioritized for daily meals. Consequently, children often purchase new clothing for their aging parents, a practice that demonstrates material care

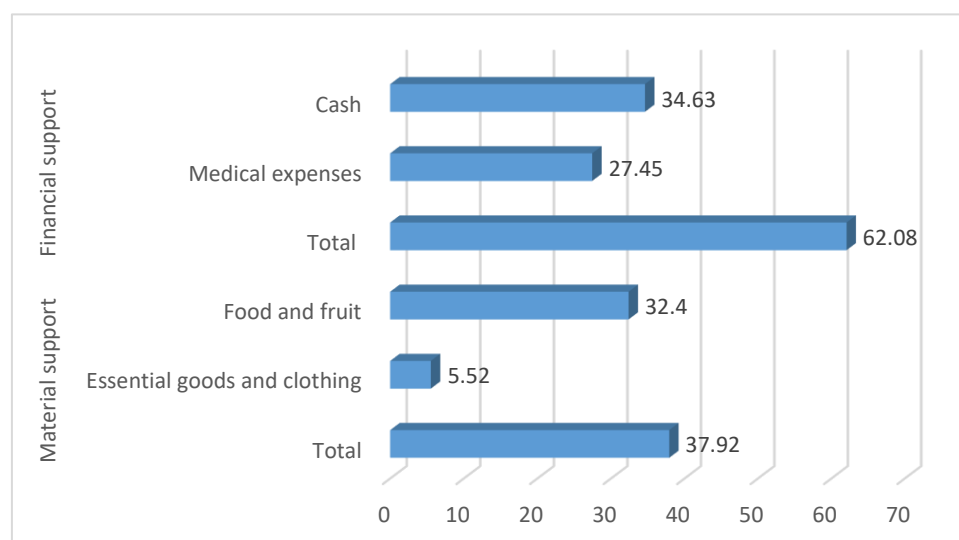
as well as concern and encouragement. In contrast, the provision of food and fruit accounts for only 4.0% of support; this may be because many rural families are self-sufficient in food production or because the elderly remain able to meet these needs themselves. Such forms of support are often associated with occasions like Tet (Lunar New Year), death anniversaries, or birthdays, when gift-giving serves a ceremonial purpose rather than merely meeting daily needs. Regarding financial support, the two primary forms, cash and funds for medical treatment, show comparable rates of 28.7% and 28.0%, respectively.

These figures reflect that children not only cover regular living expenses but also place significant emphasis on covering medical costs, a critical necessity for the elderly. In reality, the need for healthcare and medical treatment tends to increase as people age. Indeed, expenses related to healthcare and medical treatment for the elderly are comparable in magnitude to cash allowances provided by their children. This indicates that medical support is a top priority for the elderly in their later years. The balance between these two forms of financial support demonstrates that children are keenly aware of both their parents' daily living needs and their health-related expenses.

Overall, the data show that material support accounts for a significantly higher proportion than financial support (53.3% vs. 56.7%), reflecting the nature of intergenerational care relationships in today's rural context. This may stem from children's desire to demonstrate attentive care by directly providing necessary items for their parents. However, nearly 30% of children report covering medical expenses, indicating that the responsibility for parental healthcare has become a priority within intergenerational support strategies. Furthermore, this support aligns with the health and medical conditions of the elderly as they age; the risk of illness—particularly chronic disease—tends to increase with advancing age (Binh Tan Regional Health Center, 2024). Regarding long-term support, assistance from children remains crucial for ensuring the well-being of the elderly, especially in rural areas where traditional values of filial piety remain strong.

3.2. Proportion of children providing support to the elderly in rural areas by month

Figure 2: Proportion of children providing monthly support to older adults (%)



Source: Survey data, 2025

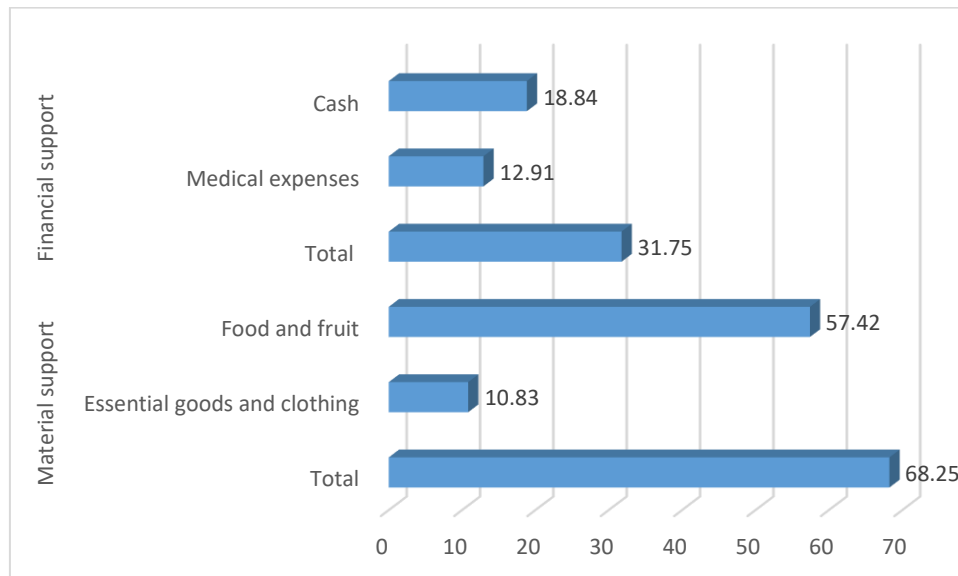
Monthly data indicate that cash-based support significantly outweighs material assistance. Specifically, 34.63% of children provide monthly cash support to their parents, enabling the elderly to exercise greater autonomy over personal spending and meet essential needs. Additionally, financial assistance for medical care stands at a relatively high 27.45%, reflecting the close attention children pay to their parents' health, particularly given that the elderly often suffer from conditions requiring ongoing treatment and regular care. These monthly statistics reaffirm that cash and medical expense support are among the most vital forms of assistance for the elderly in rural areas. While basic human needs generally center on food, shelter, and clothing, medical expenses constitute an indispensable requirement for the elderly, especially those living in rural communities. Furthermore, in the absence of social security benefits, pensions, or allowances, the elderly in the surveyed area rely entirely on their children for such support.

Material support, specifically food and fruit, ranks highest among non-cash forms of assistance at 32.4%, underscoring the importance of ensuring proper nutrition for the elderly in their daily lives. Conversely, the provision of essential household items and clothing is minimal, accounting for only 5.52%. This suggests that such items are not viewed as critical needs or are simply lower priorities for children when providing monthly assistance. Statistical analysis reveals variations in the frequency of material support provided by children: some forms of assistance are delivered annually, while others are delivered monthly. Specifically, children typically gift clothing and other essential goods to their parents on holidays, the Lunar New Year (Tet), or special occasions, usually annually. In contrast, food items such as fruit and daily necessities are generally provided monthly. This pattern reflects a traditional Vietnamese custom, particularly prevalent in rural areas, where families prioritize purchasing clothing for special events rather than on an ongoing basis.

This distinction also highlights a current trend in which children increasingly prefer to provide cash support (offering flexibility and autonomy) over direct material assistance, while still ensuring that their parents' essential needs, particularly food and healthcare, are met. This underscores that the health of the elderly is a constant concern, linked to an aging population and the pressures of providing medical care within multi-generational families.

3.3 Proportion of children providing support to the elderly in rural areas by week

Figure 3: Proportion of children providing weekly support to older adults (%)



Source: Survey data, 2025

Similar to the findings regarding monthly support, children tend to provide more assistance in the form of fruit and food. A closer look at the weekly support cycle reveals that this assistance is more routine, highlighting a clear distinction between material and monetary support compared to monthly or annual arrangements. Specifically, support in the form of food and fruit accounts for the highest proportion at 57.42%, indicating that families place special emphasis on meeting the elderly's weekly nutritional needs.

In general, children tend to attend to their parents' basic needs, such as daily meals. Elderly people in rural areas often use family land for cultivation and livestock rearing, thereby reducing their reliance on purchased food. Consequently, beyond what is produced at home, children often purchase additional food items to ensure their elderly parents receive adequate daily nutrition. In contrast, the rate of children providing cash support is only 18.84%, while financial assistance for medical treatment is even lower at 12.91%; this reflects that such support typically follows a longer cycle rather than a weekly one. Essential goods and clothing remain a minor category of support, accounting for just 10.83%, mirroring the trend observed in the monthly survey, which confirms that these are not frequent needs for the elderly.

The analysis indicates that, compared to cash, material assistance, particularly food and fruit, is provided more frequently every week. This reflects the children's direct concern for their elderly parents' daily nutrition and health. Conversely, cash support and medical expense coverage tend to be more sporadic, occurring monthly or only when significant needs arise. Thus, children often prioritize directly meeting basic needs and ensuring better care for the elderly in their daily lives, while keeping cash support at a moderate level that is flexible according to each family's circumstances.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The study indicates that material support between children and their elderly parents in rural areas remains a crucial pillar of the intergenerational care system. Alongside cash assistance,

in-kind support – such as food, fruit, clothing, and coverage of medical expenses – is regularly provided, reflecting children's commitment to meeting their parents' essential daily needs. In contrast, cash support tends to be provided more flexibly, often on an ad hoc basis or in response to major expenses. These findings demonstrate a blend of traditional filial piety and familial adaptation to the growing care needs of the elderly.

Furthermore, the study suggests that cash and in-kind support from children remain vital sources of income security for the elderly, particularly in rural areas with limited economic conditions, low incomes, and modest savings accumulated during working years. This aligns with the observations of Nguyen Thi Hong Diep et al. (2024), who argue that in contexts where pension and social allowance systems lack full coverage, support from children plays an essential role in securing the well-being of elderly parents; without this support, the burden would shift to the State's social security system.

Amid rapid population aging and the ongoing limitations of formal social security systems, the family remains the primary institution providing security for the rural elderly. The study's findings also reinforce the view held by Tran Thi Minh Thi (2016) that children's support becomes increasingly critical as parents age. Therefore, alongside leveraging the family's role, it is essential to continue refining policies on social security, healthcare, and support for the elderly to share the burden with households while ensuring a good quality of life for older adults amid population aging.

This study has certain limitations. First, the survey was conducted in a rural commune in Bac Ninh province with 150 elderly participants; consequently, the findings have limited generalizability to other rural areas. Second, the study primarily employed quantitative methods and focused on material support, thereby failing to fully elucidate economic, cultural, and social factors, as well as other forms of support exchanged between adult children and their elderly parents. Finally, because the data were collected at a single point in time, they do not fully capture the evolution of intergenerational support relationships. Future research should expand the geographical scope and sample size to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this topic.

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