Published in final edited form as:

J Fam Issues. 2018 September ; 39(13): 3535–3563. doi:10.1177/0192513X18783805.

Instrumental Social Support Exchanges in African American Extended Families

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Keywords

Extended Family; Social Support; Support Networks; Reciprocal Support; Tangible Assistance

A large body of research indicates that family members are a primary source of instrumental (also referred to as “tangible” or “practical”) support (Adams, L. King, & D. King, 1996; Garrett-Peters & Burton, 2016; Stack, 1974; Taylor & Chatters, 1986; Taylor, Chatters & Mays, 1988) such as helping with transportation and household chores, care during illness episodes, and providing financial and housing assistance to one another. Instrumental supports of these types are related to a wide array of health and wellbeing outcomes. Positive instrumental support has been shown to reduce mortality risks and stress and anxiety, improve individuals’ standard of living, and to assist with prisoner reintegration (Beehr & McGrath, 1992; Naser & La Vigne, 2006; Semyonov & Lewin-Epstein, 2001; Swartz, 2009; Wotoshin et al., 1997). Despite a substantial literature on social support, few studies focus specifically on the types and levels of instrumental support that individuals exchange (give and receive) with family members or the factors associated with the provision and receipt of various types of instrumental support (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004). Research on specific types, levels and correlates of instrumental support exchanges among African American families is particularly limited. Given persistently low mean household incomes and family wealth for this group (Hamilton & Darrity, 2017; Mazumder, 2008; Proctor, Semega, & Kollar, 2016), information on instrumental family support is critical for understanding how and why families allocate resources and function as safety nets to their members.

This study seeks to fill this gap by using nationally representative data from the National Survey of American Life (NSAL) Re-interview to examine instrumental family support exchanges of African Americans. We focus on the levels and types of instrumental support that are commonly given to and received from family members, namely transportation assistance, help with chores, financial assistance, and help during illness. We also explore the sociodemographic and family correlates of instrumental support exchanges and consider the extent to which any observed associations between family factors and exchanges of support are moderated by individuals' sociodemographic characteristics. The literature review begins with a discussion of family systems theory and the family solidarity model as theoretical frames for the current analysis. This is followed by a review of previous research on African American instrumental family support exchanges. We conclude with a discussion of the focus of the present investigation.

Family Systems Theory and the Family Solidarity Model

Family systems theory states that individuals' behaviors cannot be understood in isolation from their family systems, but rather must be investigated as part of the larger familial context. Individuals are embedded within their families which constitutes a system of interrelated and interdependent individuals (Kerr & Bowen, 1988) such that the thoughts, feelings, and actions of family members mutually influence one another. Kerr and Bowen (1988) argue that families fulfill a range of functions for its members, one of which is the provision of social support. Family members' ongoing and reciprocal relationships with each other affect the level and types of support individual family members receive and provide (Kerr, 2000; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). More specifically, characteristics of family members' interactions with each other (e.g., frequency, quality) and their level of subjective closeness to each other determine the level and types of support that are exchanged between family members. Consequently, examining characteristics of the family system (e.g., frequency of contact, subjective closeness) is crucial for understanding instrumental support exchanges.

In a similar vein, the family solidarity model promotes the concept of family cohesion as a key component of family life (Bengtson, Giarrusso, Mabry, & Silverstein, 2002). This model states that support exchanges within the family are a product of shared attitudes, sentiments and behaviors, including family members' attitudes concerning the family (e.g., meaning and function of the family), sentiments regarding the family (e.g. feelings of closeness), and actual behaviors (e.g., quality and levels of interaction) (McChesney & Bengtson, 1988; Taylor, Forsythe-Brown, Lincoln, & Chatters, 2015). The family solidarity model asserts that positive family attitudes, sentiments, and behaviors are positively correlated with each other and, further, are positively associated with support exchanges. However, this model also acknowledges that conflict is an inherent feature of family relations that affects the way family members perceive each other and their willingness to assist one another (Clarke, Preston, Raskin, & Bengtson, 1999; Lowenstein, 2007; Parrott & Bengtson, 1999). Taken together, the family systems theory and the family solidarity model suggest that the provision and receipt of instrumental support cannot be understood by solely examining individual characteristics. Rather, these support exchanges are embedded within the interdependent relationships of family members, and are contingent upon family members' sentiments, attitudes, and behaviors.

In addition to these dimensions of family relations, recent scholarship has identified a number of demographic factors that are also related to support exchanges among family members. Research has found that demographic variables such as gender, age, marital status, income, education and region are associated with family support exchanges (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016; Swartz, 2009; Taylor et al., 2016). Women tend to be more involved in the maintenance of familial relationships and the provision of family support, due to prevailing gender expectations and socialization (Antonucci, 1994; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004). Findings with regards to age and family support are mixed. Some studies find that older individuals tend to provide more resources to younger family members than vice versa, as a means of investing in younger generations (Fingerman, Miller, Birditt, & Zarit, 2009; Grundy, 2005). Other research, however, finds that older African Americans receive less overall assistance (emotional and instrumental) (Taylor, 1986) and less emotional support (Lincoln et al., 2012) from their extended family members. Similarly, Taylor et al., (2016) found that even after controlling for family factors, older African Americans gave and received less overall support with extended family members than their younger counterparts.

Marital status has been found to be an important correlate of the receipt and provision of support. Some research indicates that married persons tend to be less involved in support exchanges than nonmarried or previously married persons, in part because they rely more on spousal support than support from the broader family network (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016). Other research has found no marital status differences in the exchange of support (Taylor et al., 2016) or that married respondents were more likely than their non-married counterparts to provide assistance to older parents (Chatters et al., 1993).

Research findings on socio-economic differences in the exchange of support are inconclusive. There is research indicating that individuals with fewer financial resources are typically more involved in support exchanges than those with greater financial resources (Silverstein, Gans, & Yang, 2006). However, other work finds that indicators of socio-economic status are either unrelated to the receipt of support (Taylor et al., 2014) or positively associated with the receipt of support (Taylor et al., 2016). However, most of this work investigates global measures of overall assistance or emotional support and the findings may be different when considering instrumental support. Although only a limited amount of research focuses on regional differences in social support, some studies indicate that African Americans who reside in the South are more involved in exchanges of family support (Chatters, Taylor, & Jackson, 1985; 1986). Thus, combined with the family solidarity model, this research suggests that family support exchanges are patterned by dimensions of family relations such as family closeness and frequency of family contact, as well as a variety of demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, income, education, and region.

Instrumental Family Support among African Americans

Instrumental family support refers to the tangible assistance that relatives provide to each other (Adams et al., 1996; Beehr & McGrath, 1992; McIntosh, 1991). While there is no consensus as to which activities constitute instrumental support, scholars often refer to help with household work, transportation, childcare, financial assistance, and caregiving during

illness as common types of instrumental support (Adams et al., 1996; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004; Taylor, Chatters, Lincoln, & Woodward, 2017). A longstanding tradition of ethnographic research on African American families emphasizes the reciprocal nature of instrumental support. Stack's (1974) research on African Americans in a low-income urban community indicated that family members often exchange money for rent, food, and childcare services as a strategy for survival. Garrett-Peters and Burton's (2016) research among primarily low-income African-American families in the rural South documents family members' sharing of housing, household resources, and childcare. These exchanges are vital for survival and contingent on the consistent actions and durable resources of family members. Although rich and insightful, these findings are primarily derived from studies of low-income African American families. Few empirical studies use national data to examine instrumental family support exchanges across diverse groups of African Americans. Jayakody, Chatters, and Taylor's (1993) study on the family support networks of single and married African-American mothers is a notable exception. They found that approximately 80% of women reported that emotional support was the most important type of assistance received from relatives. This is followed by nearly 25% of the sample reporting financial support and roughly 15% reporting child care as the second and third most important types of family support, respectively.

Most empirical research available on instrumental family support among African Americans examines racial (mainly black-white) differences in family support exchanges. In some studies, African Americans are less likely than Whites to give or receive family support (Hofferth, 1984; Hogan, Eggebeen, & Clogg, 1993; Jayakody, 1998; Lee & Aytac, 1998; Silverstein & Waite, 1993; White & Riedmann, 1992), while others indicate that African Americans are more likely than Whites to give or receive family support (Benin & Keith, 1995; Hatch, 1991; Hogan, Hao, & Parish, 1990; Mutran, 1985; Parish, Hao, & Hogan, 1991). Discrepancies in these findings are largely attributed to differences in the type of support analyzed (e.g., instrumental or emotional support), the population groups of interest (e.g., single mothers or the elderly), and differences in how support is measured (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004; Taylor, Chatters, Woodward, & Brown, 2013). Findings from a nationally representative study (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004) involving robust measures of practical (instrumental) support and a wide array of sociodemographic controls found that relative to Whites, African Americans were more involved in help with transportation, household work, and child care, and less involved in financial support.

Collectively, while these findings help us better understand relative racial differences in family support, they tell us less about instrumental family support among African Americans in absolute terms. Moreover, the focus on racial-group comparisons overlooks important within group heterogeneity in support exchanges among African Americans. Finally, prior studies do not consider how the quality and levels of interaction (i.e., subjective family closeness and frequency of family contact) are also related to the types and levels of support that family members exchange. A number of crucial questions remain including: *Which types of instrumental family support do African Americans exchange, and how frequently do they offer this support? Which sociodemographic and family factors are associated with the provision and receipt of instrumental family support?* Our research seeks to answer these questions by using a nationally representative sample of African Americans from the

National Survey of American Life (NSAL) Re-interview to examine the provision and receipt of instrumental family support among African Americans.

Focus of the Present Study

The current study examines African Americans' reports of the types and levels of instrumental support exchanges that occur among family members. We focus on four types of instrumental support: transportation assistance, help with chores, financial assistance, and help during illness. The analysis examines reports of how frequently respondents receive these supports from family members, as well as how often they provide these supports to relatives. Additionally, we investigate the sociodemographic correlates of the provision and receipt of support. Further, because family systems theory and the family solidarity model suggest that subjective family closeness and family interaction are related to family support exchanges, we explore whether these factors are associated with giving and receiving instrumental support. Moreover, given that the association between family factors and the provision and receipt of support may vary by sociodemographic characteristics (Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch, & Ungar, 2005; Lee & Aytac, 1998), we test whether the relationship between support exchanges and either subjective family closeness or family interaction is moderated by key sociodemographic variables included in our analysis (i.e., gender, age, income, or education).

Methods

Sample

This analysis is based on data from The National Survey of American Life Adult Re-interview. Both the original National Survey of American Life (NSAL) and the NSAL-Re-interview (NSAL-RIW) were collected by the Program for Research on Black Americans at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. The NSAL sample has a national multi-stage probability design which consists of 64 primary sampling units (PSUs), 56 of which overlap substantially with existing Survey Research Center's National Sample primary areas (see Jackson et al., 2004 for a more detailed discussion of the NSAL sample). Data collection was conducted from February 2001 to June 2003, resulting in a total of 6,082 interviews with persons aged 18 or older (3,570 African Americans, 891 non-Hispanic whites, and 1,621 Blacks of Caribbean descent). The overall response rate for the NSAL was 72.3%. Final response rates for the NSAL two-phase sample designs were computed using the American Association of Public Opinion Research guidelines for Response Rate 3 samples (AAPOR, 2006).

All respondents in the original NSAL were invited to complete a self-administered follow-up questionnaire. The NSAL Adult Re-interview (RIW) included additional measures of instrumental family support that were not available in the original NSAL. Of the 3,570 African American NSAL respondents who completed the original interview, a total of 2,137 completed the self-administered NSAL-RIW (response rate of 60%) and comprise the sample for the current study. The analytic sample includes respondents who answered all relevant items used for this study is 2079. Data collections for the NSAL and NSAL-RIW were approved by the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board. Both datasets are

available through the Inter-University Consortium of Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan.

Description of Sample

Table 1 presents the distribution of sample characteristics and the study variables. Respondent average age is 44 years and women comprise 59% of the sample. On average, respondents report 12.5 years of education and yearly family incomes of \$35,281. Roughly comparable percentages of respondents are married (32.67%) or never married (30%), 8.5% are cohabiting with a partner, and 28.8% are separated, widowed or divorced. A majority of respondents reside in the South (56.9%), 20% in the North Central region, 14.9% in the Northeast and 8.25% in the West.

Measures

Dependent Variables

Eight dependent variables are used in this analysis, 4 of which assess how often respondents receive different types of support from their family members and 4 of which assess how often respondents provided specific types of support to their family members. With regards to receiving support, respondents were asked how often their family members (other than spouse or partner) do the following things for them: 1) provide transportation, 2) help with regular chores, such as shopping, cleaning or yard work, 3) help financially and 4) help when sick or ill. Respondents were also asked how often they provided assistance to family members in the form of: transportation, chores, financial help, and help when ill. Response categories for each of these 8 instrumental social support items were very often (4), fairly often (3), not too often (2), and never (1).

Independent Variables

Several sociodemographic factors (i.e., age, gender, family income, education, marital status, and region), which have known associations with family relationships and support exchanges, are included. Age and education are coded in years and family income is coded in dollars. Marital status is coded as married, cohabiting, separated, divorced, widowed and never married. Region is coded as four categories (Northeast, North Central, West and South). Employment status differentiates respondents who are employed (the reference category), unemployed, and out of the labor force.

We also included a measure of material hardship in this analysis that reflects “an inadequate consumption of goods or services that the public deems minimally necessary for decent human functioning” (Nelson, 2011). In the NSAL, material hardship was measured using the item: In the past 12 months, was there a time when you: a) didn’t meet basic expenses, b) didn’t pay full rent or mortgage, c) didn’t pay full utilities, d) had gas, electric, oil disconnected, e) had telephone disconnected, f) were evicted for non-payment, or g) couldn’t afford leisure activities. Scores for individual responses (Yes=1, No=0) were summed across the 7 items into a single composite measure ranging from 0 to 7. Higher scores on this measure indicate higher levels of economic hardship ($\alpha = .76$).

Two family network variables that are commonly used in social support research are utilized as independent variables. Frequency of contact with family members is measured by the question: “How often do you see, write or talk on the telephone with family or relatives who do not live with you? Would you say nearly every day (7), at least once a week (6), a few times a month (5), at least once a month (4), a few times a year (3), hardly ever (2) or never (1)?” Degree of subjective family closeness is measured by the question: “How close do you feel towards your family members? Would you say very close (4), fairly close (3), not too close (2) or not close at all (1)?”

Analysis Strategy

Computations for the distribution of the sociodemographic characteristics and linear regression analyses were conducted using SAS 9.1.3, which uses the Taylor expansion approximation technique for calculating the complex design-based estimates of variance. Gender, marital status, and region were represented by dummy variables in the regression analyses (male gender, married, and Southern residence were designated as reference categories); education and family income were continuous variables. All analyses utilize sampling weights. To obtain results that are generalizable to the African American population, all statistical analyses accounted for the complex multistage clustered design of the NSAL sample, unequal probabilities of selection, nonresponse (including the lower response rate of the NSAL-RIW), and post-stratification to calculate weighted, nationally representative population estimates and standard errors.

We tested for interactions between several variables. Only interactions that were significant at the 0.05 level were included in the final regression analysis. We did not find evidence that gender, age, income, or education moderated the relationship between the family variables and any of the dependent variables. We did, however, find significant interactions between marital status and education on: 1) receiving help when ill, 2) providing chores, and 3) providing transportation. To illustrate these interactions, we constructed figures using predicted values of the dependent variables and used mean values for covariates to represent the interactions for the average respondent in the analysis (Figures 1–3).

Results

Transportation

Roughly one out of three respondents (37.1%) report that they receive help with transportation either very often (15.7%) or fairly often (21.4%). Similarly, 44.2% of respondents report that they provide transportation to their family members either very often (17.6%) or fairly often (26.6%). The regression analyses for receipt and provision of transportation to family members are presented in Table 2. Age, gender, education, employment status, marital status and subjective family closeness are all associated with the frequency of receiving transportation. Younger adults receive help with transportation more frequently than their older adult counterparts. Men receive transportation assistance less frequently than women. Respondents who are unemployed and not in the labor force receive help with transportation more frequently than their employed counterparts. Widowed and never married respondents receive transportation assistance more frequently than married

respondents. Lastly, subjective family closeness is positively associated with the frequency of receiving transportation.

Region and subjective family closeness are significantly related to the frequency of providing transportation to family members. Respondents who reside in the Northeast provide transportation less frequently than Southerners. Subjective family closeness is positively associated with providing transportation to family members. Interactions between educational attainment and marital status indicated that education was inversely associated with the provision of transportation to family members among married respondents (Figure 1). That is, for married respondents, as education increased, the frequency of providing transportation decreased. In contrast, more highly educated cohabiting and separated respondents provided transportation more frequently to their relatives. However, among respondents who were divorced, widowed, and never married, there was no association between educational level and providing transportation.

Chores

Three out of ten respondents (30.5%) report that they receive help with chores either very or fairly often. However, 44.9% of respondents report that they provide help with chores to family members either very or fairly often. Regression analyses for both receiving and providing help with chores are provided in Table 2. Gender, education, marital status, region and subjective family closeness are significantly related to the frequency of receiving help with chores from family members. Men and respondents with higher levels of education receive help with chores less frequently than their counterparts. Widowed and never married respondents receive help with chores more frequently than married respondents. Respondents who reside in the West receive help with chores less frequently than Southerners. In addition, subjective family closeness is positively associated with receiving help with chores from family members.

Age and subjective family closeness are significantly associated with the frequency of providing help with chores. Age was inversely associated with providing help with chores, and subjective family closeness is positively associated with the frequency of providing help with chores. Significant interactions between educational attainment and marital status, shown in Figure 2, indicated that among married respondents as years of education increased, the frequency of providing help with chores to family members decreased. However, among divorced respondents, there was a weak positive association between education and providing relatives help with chores. For those who had never married, education was not associated with the provision of help with chores to family members.

Financial Help

Roughly 1 out of 10 respondents (11.7%) report that they receive financial help from their family members very often and 21.3% report that they receive help fairly often. Conversely, 43.9% of respondents report that they provide help to their family members either very or fairly often. Table 3 provides the results of the regression analyses for both receiving and providing financial help to family members. As noted in Table 3, age, education, employment status, marital status, region and subjective family closeness are all

significantly associated with receiving financial help from family members. Age and education are both inversely associated with the receipt of financial help. Respondents who are not in the labor force receive financial assistance more frequently than their employed counterparts and widowed and never married respondents receive financial help more frequently than married respondents. Respondents who reside in the West receive financial assistance from family members less frequently than Southerners. In addition, subjective family closeness is positively associated with receiving financial assistance from family members. Only one factor is significantly associated with providing financial assistance to family members—divorced respondents provide financial help to family members less frequently than married respondents.

Help when ill

Roughly 6 out of 10 respondents (58.5%) report that their family members helped them either very or fairly often when they were ill. Seven out of 10 respondents report that they helped family members when they were ill either very (36.1%) or fairly often (35.1%). Only 6.2% of respondents report that they never help family members when they were ill. Analyses for receiving and providing help during an illness are presented in Table 3. Employment status, region, frequency of family contact and degree of subjective closeness are significantly associated with frequency of receiving help from family members when ill. Respondents who are not in the labor force receive assistance during an illness more frequently than their employed counterparts. Southerners receive illness assistance more frequently than persons residing in the West. Those who reported higher levels of family contact and subjective closeness also received more assistance during illness. Interactions between education and marital status indicated that for married individuals, education was negatively associated with frequency of receiving help during illness (Figure 3). That is, married respondents with fewer years of education received assistance during illness more frequently than married respondents with more years of education. This negative association was also found among divorced respondents, but the magnitude of the association was much weaker. Among respondents who had never married, there was no association between education and receiving help during illness.

Age, gender, education, marital status, region, frequency of family contact and degree of subjective closeness are all significantly related to providing help to family members when they are ill. Age is positively associated and education is negatively associated with providing help when ill. Men are less likely than women to provide help to family members who are ill. Widowed respondents provide help less frequently than married respondents, however, never married respondents provide help more frequently than their married counterparts. Southerners provide help during an illness more frequently than respondents who reside in the Northeast. Lastly, frequency of family contact and the degree of subjective closeness are both positively related to receiving help when ill and providing help to family members who are ill.

Discussion

This study examined the provision and receipt of four different types of instrumental family support among African Americans, as well as demographic and family correlates of support exchanges. In the main, our findings indicate that individuals give and receive a substantial amount of family instrumental support. These findings are consistent with prior research highlighting the central role of extended kin in helping individuals meet the demands of daily life (Benin & Keith, 1995; Garrett-Peters & Burton, 2016; Stack, 1974; Gerstel, 2011; Taylor, Chatters, Woodward, & Brown, 2013; Taylor et al., 2016). Our research contributes to this body of work by investigating these issues using a nationally representative sample of African Americans, incorporating diverse indicators of instrumental family support, and focusing on both the provision and receipt of support. This study's focus on instrumental support, and further, the differentiation of various types of instrumental support exchanges helps us to better understand the specific demographic and family factors associated with assistance with finances, transportation, illness episodes and chores. As a result, the analysis revealed more nuanced information on the characteristics and contexts of instrumental support exchanges within African American families.

An examination of the frequencies for instrumental family support exchanges provides important information. First, help with illness is the most prevalent type of assistance either received or provided. Second, help with chores is the least prevalent type of assistance received. Third, respondents reported that they provided assistance more frequently than they received assistance for all four types of instrumental support. For instance, when combining the categories very or fairly often, 58.5% of African Americans reported that they received support during illness episodes, but 71.2% reported that they provided this type of support. For each type of instrumental assistance, there was roughly a 10% difference between providing and receiving support.

Several patterns emerged from the current analysis. The data indicated that resources tend to generally flow from the older generation to the younger generation. Younger adults received more monetary support and transportation from family members, and older adults provided more help during illness. This is consistent with prior research on intergenerational support, indicating that help tends to flow downstream from older generations to younger generations, as a means of investing in younger generations (Fingerman et al., 2009; Grundy, 2005). Further, older generations within the family often perceive that younger family members require assistance (Fingerman et al., 2009).

However, younger adults are not always the primary recipients of support from family members. In some instances, older adults received greater assistance, possibly as a result of physical limitations experienced by this group. For example, younger African Americans provided more help with chores to family members than did older adults. This may reflect age-related physical declines (e.g., mobility, range of motion) experienced by older adults that limit the performance of household tasks (Assari, 2016).

Instrumental support exchanges were also patterned by the availability of financial and social resources. Respondents who were not in the labor force or unemployed were more

likely to receive transportation, help during illness, and financial assistance from their extended family. Individuals who are not employed frequently experience financial strain and may require more assistance from their families (Ervasti & Venetoklis, 2010). In addition, because those not in the labor force include the disabled, retirees and students (Hipple, 2015), their families may perceive that they are in greater need of assistance (Cox & Fafchamps, 2007; Gottlieb et al., 2014; Sturm, Gresenz, Pacula, & Wells, 1999). Interestingly, family income and material hardship were unrelated to all measures of given and received instrumental support. In the multivariate context controlling for employment status, family income, and material hardship, only being out of the labor force was associated with receiving more assistance and receiving help with transportation needs. The finding that material hardship was not significant is noteworthy because so much of the qualitative research on social support among African Americans focuses on poor and economically struggling extended families (e.g., Garrett-Peters & Burton, 2016; Stack, 1974).

African Americans with fewer years of formal education received help with chores, transportation, and financial assistance more frequently than their higher educated counterparts. Additionally, African Americans with fewer years of formal education provided assistance when ill more frequently than their counterparts. Collectively, these findings reveal that less formally educated African Americans were more heavily involved in reciprocal support networks and more actively involved in the exchange of instrumental support than their counterparts. These findings are consistent with the qualitative research of Stack (1974) and others (Burton & Clark, 2005; Garrett-Peters & Burton, 2016) on support exchanges within poor African American families. This research indicates that family members are heavily involved in reciprocal support networks which actively exchange a variety of instrumental supports such as child care, financial assistance especially during emergencies, and help during an illness. The present findings are also concordant with recent research on the receipt and provision of instrumental support from church members among African Americans (Taylor et al., 2017), which found that African Americans with fewer years of education were more actively involved in church based reciprocal support exchanges. Similar to the findings of this study, respondents with fewer of education were more likely to receive financial assistance, transportation, help with chores and help during an illness from fellow church members. They were also more likely to provide all four types of these instrumental supports to church members. Collectively, the current findings and the previous work by Taylor et al., (2017) indicate that African Americans with fewer years of education are involved in support networks of family and non-kin.

Marital status differences in instrumental support exchanges revealed several nuanced relationships. Widowed respondents reported receiving help with chores, transportation, and financial aid more frequently than married respondents. However, they provided assistance to other family members during illness less frequently than their married counterparts. This pattern suggests that widowed persons have significant needs for support and thus, they receive more assistance than they provide to family members. Indeed, research on social support and widowhood has shown that widowed persons often have increased contact with family following the passing of a spouse, especially during the early periods of mourning, in order to receive assistance with managing the tasks and ceremonies associated with their

spouses' burial and to receive help with coping with their loss (Donnelly & Hinterlong, 2010; Lopata, 1996; Utz, Carr, & Nesse, 2002).

Never married respondents also reported receiving help with chores, transportation, and financial aid more frequently than married respondents. However, they reported providing illness assistance more frequently than did married respondents. This is a very different profile than was seen with widowed respondents and indicates that never married respondents both provide and receive more assistance from family than their married counterparts. Never married respondents, because they generally tend to be younger and have fewer commitments, may be more likely to be available to provide assistance to family members. However, they may be more likely to need assistance from extended family members for these same reasons (i.e., younger age and unmarried).

With regard to other marital status findings, the only significant difference between divorced and married African Americans was that divorced persons provided financial assistance to family members less frequently. Divorced respondents are more likely to have a single source of income and to experience financial constraints as compared to married individuals who are more likely to have two sources of income (Tach & Eads, 2015).

As noted earlier there were three significant interactions each between marital status and education for: 1) receiving help when ill, 2) providing help with chores, and 3) providing transportation. Previous research on the general population indicates that married adults tend to be less engaged in extended family social support networks than unmarried individuals. For example, Sarkisian & Gerstel (2015) find that unmarried individuals engage in less frequent conversations and visiting, as well as providing and receiving various types of care to extended family relatives. In particular, married adult children act as caregivers to their elderly parents less often than their unmarried siblings--they are less likely to provide them with transportation support or help out with household chores. However, this is not the case in our analysis.

Our findings are inconsistent with research by Sarkisian & Gerstel (2015) based on the general population and provide a much more nuanced picture of support exchanges. We find that married African Americans are more involved in their social support networks than their counterparts and this is especially the case for those who have lower levels of education. Married African Americans with fewer years of formal education were more involved in their extended family networks than both unmarried respondents and married respondents with fewer years of education. Married African Americans with fewer years of education received help when ill and provided both chores and transportation more frequently than their counterparts. Conversely, married respondents with higher levels of education had either the same or lower levels of involvement in social support exchanges.

Findings for gender differences in instrumental support exchanges are consistent with research on women's roles as 'kin keepers' who facilitate and maintain extended family relationships and support exchanges (Taylor & Chatters, 1991; Antonucci, 1994; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004). Specifically, women were more likely to receive help with transportation and chores and were more likely to provide help during illness to relatives. As kin keepers,

women tend to be more socially integrated within their extended family networks, have more frequent contact with family members, and higher levels of subjective closeness to family members (Nguyen, Chatters, & Taylor, 2016; Taylor, Lincoln & Chatters, 2003). Taken together, these relational qualities facilitate more frequent support exchanges among women (Lincoln, Taylor & Chatters, 2012).

The few regional differences indicated that people living in the Northeast provided less transportation assistance and help to family members who were ill relative to those living in the South. We might expect that due to regional differences in modes of transportation (i.e., more centralized public transportation systems), individuals living in the Northeast would provide less transportation assistance to family members than those in the South. Whereas Southerners rely more heavily on private transportation and are thus more likely to be able to offer a ride to relatives, Northeasterners rely more heavily on public transportation, and are thus less likely to provide transportation assistance. Additionally, respondents in the West were less likely to receive assistance when ill, financial help and assistance with chores than Southerners. Research on regional differences is mixed, but when significant differences are found, they tend to be consistent with the current findings, indicating that Southerners have a support advantage (Chatters, Taylor, & Jackson, 1985; 1986). For instance, Lincoln et al., (2012) did not find any regional differences in receipt of emotional support. They did find, however, that Southerners had less frequent negative interactions (criticisms, arguments) with their support networks than African Americans who resided in the Northeast and the North Central regions.

Aspects of family solidarity (i.e., frequency of contact and subjective closeness) were related to the provision and receipt of instrumental family support. As anticipated, family sentiments (i.e., feelings of closeness) were positively related to family support exchanges. Respondents who reported higher levels of subjective closeness were more likely to receive all four types of instrumental support and they are also more likely to provide transportation assistance, help with chores, and assistance during illness. These findings are concordant with previous research indicating that closeness is positively related to social support (Hatchett & Jackson, 1993; Lincoln et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2015). Collectively, the findings support assertions based on the family solidarity model and family systems theory that affective characteristics of family relationships (i.e., family cohesion) are associated with the types and levels of support exchanged between family members (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; McChesney & Bengtson, 1988).

Surprisingly though, frequency of contact was only positively associated with the provision and receipt of help during illness. Frequency of contact is generally a relatively strong and consistent correlate of various indicators of family support. Family contact is positively associated with reciprocal family support exchanges (Taylor et al., 2016) and frequency of receiving emotional support from family members (Lincoln et al., 2012). Collectively, these findings indicate that although family contact may be an important correlate of emotional support (Lincoln et al., 2012), overall support (Taylor et al., 2016) and anticipated support (Chatters et al., 1985), it is not a significant correlate of several distinct types of instrumental support. Frequency of family contact is, however, a correlate of providing and receiving help during illness, which was the most frequent type of the four instrumental supports examined

in this analysis. Familial contact is particularly important for help during illness because many caregiving activities require ongoing monitoring and can only be performed in person.

Finally, it is important to note that there was only one significant difference in providing financial assistance (divorced persons offered assistance less frequently than married persons). Providing financial assistance was the only regression model in which subjective family closeness was not significant. Providing financial assistance to family may be motivated more by psychological variables such as altruism and family norms (e.g., obligation) than by the familial and demographic variables included in our models. That is, regardless of their incomes or financial situation, individuals may be more likely to provide support to family members due to a sense of altruism or family obligation that is distinct from a feeling of family closeness.

Limitations and Conclusion

Due to the cross-sectional nature of the NSAL-RIW, causal inferences about the relationships between the sociodemographic and family correlates and instrumental support are not possible. Future studies using longitudinal data will permit more meaningful causal inferences. Further, the current findings are based on data from noninstitutionalized, community dwelling individuals and are thus, generalizable to this population only. Finally, all instrumental support measures were self-reported and subject to recall and social desirability biases.

In sum, this investigation which was guided by the family systems theory and family solidarity model, examined sociodemographic and family correlates of instrumental family support. The differential patterning of instrumental family support exchanges by sociodemographic characteristics indicates heterogeneity in the distribution of support among African Americans. In addition to the importance of family solidarity, study findings indicated that the distribution of instrumental family support was patterned by factors such as financial and social resources, generational expectations gender roles, and regional differences. Together, the findings underscore how features of family relationships and particular sociodemographic characteristics are associated with the provision and receipt of instrumental family support across diverse groups of African Americans.

Acknowledgments

The data collection for this study was supported by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH; U01-MH57716), with supplemental support from the Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the University of Michigan. The preparation of this manuscript was supported by grants from the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship to CJC (DGE 1256260), the National Institute on Aging to AWN (P30AG043073) and RJT (P30AG1528) and the National Institute for General Medical Sciences to LMC (R25GM05864).

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Figure 1.
Predicted value of providing transportation by education and marital status among African Americans

Figure 2.
Predicted value of providing chores by education and marital status among African Americans

Figure 3.
Predicted value of receiving help when ill by education and marital status among African Americans

Table 1.**Demographic Characteristics of the Sample and Distribution of Study Variables**

	%	N	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max
Family Support Variables						
Receive Assistance						
Transportation		2102	2.27	0.90	1	4
Chores		2101	2.04	0.90	1	4
Financial Help		2080	2.16	0.85	1	4
Help when Ill		2089	2.74	0.92	1	4
Provide Assistance						
Transportation		2084	2.38	0.91	1	4
Chores		2091	2.41	0.90	1	4
Financial Help		2080	2.43	0.81	1	4
Help when Ill		2093	3.01	0.81	1	4
Independent Variables						
Age		3570	42.33	14.50	18	93
Gender						
Male	44.03	1571				
Female	55.97	1999				
Years of Education		3570	12.43	2.23	0	17
Family Income		3570	7.37	6.61	0	104
Material Hardship		3528	0.89	1.31	0	7
Employment Status		3570	12.43	2.23	0	17
Employed	65.38	2334				
Unemployed	10.25	366				
Not In Labor Force	23.10	861				
Marital Status						
Married	32.91	960				
Cohabit	8.74	260				
Separated	7.16	286				
Divorced	11.75	524				
Widowed	7.90	353				
Never Married	31.55	1170				
Region						
Northeast	15.69	411				
North Central	18.81	595				
South	56.24	2330				
West	9.25	234				
Frequency of Family Contact		3538	6.07	1.17	1	7
Subjective Family Closeness		3537	3.64	0.58	1	4

Notes: Percents and N are presented for categorical variables and Means and Standard Deviations are presented for continuous variables. Percentages are weighted and frequencies are un-weighted.

Table 2.

Multivariate Analysis of the Correlates of Transportation and Chores Given to and Received from Family Members among African Americans

	Receive Transportation B(SE)	Provide Transportation B(SE)	Receive Chores B(SE)	Provide Chores B(SE)
Age	−0.01(0.00) **	−0.00(0.00)	−0.00(0.00)	−0.01(0.00) ***
Gender				
Male	−0.16(0.05) **	−0.01(0.05)	−0.13(0.04) **	0.04(0.06)
Female	0	0	0	0
Education	−0.06(0.01) ***	−0.02(0.01)	−0.06(0.01) ***	−0.04(0.01) **
Family Income	0.00(0.00)	0.00(0.01)	0.00(0.00)	−0.00(0.00)
Material Hardship	0.01(0.02)	0.01(0.02)	−0.02(0.02)	−0.01(0.02)
Employment Status				
Employed	0	0	0	0
Unemployed	0.21(0.07) **	−0.07(0.07)	0.10(0.11)	0.10(0.08)
Not in the Labor Force	0.17(0.06) **	−0.14(0.07) *	0.15(0.06)	−0.02(0.07)
Marital Status				
Married	0	0	0	0
Cohabit	0.06(0.11)	−0.10(0.10)	0.03(0.09)	0.19(0.10)
Separated	−0.02(0.08)	−0.13(0.09)	−0.03(0.09)	−0.11(0.09)
Divorced	−0.05(0.07)	−0.10(0.08)	0.08(0.07)	0.05(0.08)
Widowed	0.31(0.07) ***	−0.40(0.10) ***	0.27(0.09) **	−0.23(0.10) *
Never Married	0.38(0.06) ***	−0.18(0.09) *	0.35(0.08) ***	0.19(0.08) *
Region				
Northeast	0.02(0.06)	−0.20(0.07) *	0.04(0.06)	−0.08(0.06)
North Central	−0.08(0.05)	−0.08(0.06)	0.00(0.05)	−0.02(0.05)
South	0	0	0	0
West	−0.19(0.10)	−0.19(0.10)	−0.27(0.10) *	−0.11(0.07)
Frequency of Family Contact	0.03(0.02)	0.02(0.02)	0.01(0.02)	0.04(0.02)
Subjective Family Closeness	0.24(0.03) ***	0.23(0.04) ***	0.18(0.03) ***	0.11(0.03) **
R ²	0.14	0.06	0.09	0.10
F	44.54	8.8	15.83	21.64
Prob > F	<0.0001	<0.0001	<0.0001	<0.0001
N	2079	2062	2078	2069

B= regression coefficient; SE= standard error;

Note: Significance test of the individual parameter estimates were based on a complex design-corrected *t*-test.

*
 $p < .05$;

**
 $p < .01$;

 $p < .001$

Table 3.

Multivariate Analysis of the Correlates of Financial Help and Help when Ill Given to and Received from Family Members among African Americans

	Receive Financial Help B(SE)	Provide Financial Help B(SE)	Receive Help when Ill B(SE)	Provide Help when Ill B(SE)
Age	−0.01(0.00) ***	−0.00(0.00)	0.00(0.00)	0.00(0.00) *
Gender				
Male	−0.01(0.04)	−0.05(0.05)	−0.07(0.06)	−0.18(0.04) ***
Female	0	0	0	0
Education	−0.03(0.01) *	−0.01(0.01)	−0.04(0.01) ***	−0.04(0.01) ***
Family Income	0.00(0.00)	0.01(0.00)	−0.00(0.00)	−0.00(0.00)
Material Hardship	0.03(0.01)	−0.01(0.01)	−0.02(0.02)	−0.01(0.01)
Employment Status				
Employed	0	0	0	0
Unemployed	0.13(0.08)	−0.08(0.07)	0.02(0.08)	0.04(0.06)
Not in the Labor Force	0.15(0.06) *	−0.03(0.07)	0.18(0.06) **	−0.02(0.06)
Marital Status				
Married	0	0	0	0
Cohabit	0.16(0.09)	0.09(0.11)	−0.00(0.10)	0.03(0.08)
Separated	0.08(0.10)	−0.11(0.09)	0.01(0.08)	−0.12(0.10)
Divorced	0.11(0.07)	−0.15(0.07) *	0.05(0.09)	−0.16(0.08)
Widowed	0.29(0.11) *	−0.09(0.10)	0.24(0.11) *	−0.23(0.11) *
Never Married	0.36(0.07) ***	0.12(0.07)	0.33(0.08) ***	0.17(0.07) *
Region				
Northeast	0.01(0.06)	−0.02(0.10)	−0.11(0.09)	−0.13(0.05) **
North Central	0.03(0.06)	−0.07(0.05)	−0.06(0.05)	−0.04(0.06)
South	0	0	0	0
West	−0.27(0.05) ***	−0.15(0.08)	−0.36(0.13) **	−0.19(0.12)
Frequency of Family Contact	0.01(0.02)	0.05(0.03)	0.05(0.02) *	0.06(0.02) **
Subjective Family Closeness	0.24(0.04) ***	0.06(0.05)	0.40(0.04) ***	0.23(0.04) ***
R ²	0.14	0.03	0.14	0.09
F	52.24	4.44	48.49	22.99
Prob > F	<0.0001	0.0001	<0.0001	<0.0001
N	2057	2058	2066	2071

B= regression coefficient; SE= standard error;

Note: Significance test of the individual parameter estimates were based on a complex design-corrected *t*-test.

*
 $p < .05$;

**
 $p < .01$;

 $p < .001$