

Study finds parents serve as a safety net as grown kids navigate the workforce

February 21 2023, by Matt Shipman

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		Employed	NEET	Education
t-1	Employed	3,223	359	265
		37.48%	4.17%	3.08%
	NEET	426	406	109
		4.95%	4.72%	1.27%
	Education	1,010	204	2,597
		11.75%	2.37%	30.20%

Notes: N: 8,599 cases.

Descriptive statistics on labor force status transitions at the case level, 3-categorical labor force status variable. Credit: *European Sociological Review* (2023). DOI: 10.1093/esr/jcad006

A new study underscores the role that parents play as a safety net for their young adult children as those children navigate the labor market,

and highlights the challenges facing young adults who do not have access to parental support.

"In recent decades, we've seen a lot of changes in the [labor market](#), from the decline of lifetime [employment](#) at one job to the rise of the so-called 'gig economy,'" says Anna Manzoni, corresponding author of the study and an associate professor of sociology at North Carolina State University.

"We wanted to see what role parents are playing in supporting their adult children as those children go through transitions in employment, from [full-time](#) to part-time work, pursuing further education, and so on. We focused specifically on the children as [young adults](#), between the ages of 18 and 35."

For this study, the researchers drew on data from a long-term survey of families in Germany. Ultimately, the study drew on survey response data from 4,199 people between the ages of 18 and 35.

Specifically, the researchers looked at how changes in the employment status of adult children affected three kinds of [parental support](#): emotional, material and instrumental. Instrumental support includes assistance with day-to-day activities, such as helping out around the house. Material support refers to things like [financial support](#) and gifts. Emotional support refers to things like personal advice.

The researchers found that parents were more likely to provide material support to their adult children when their children were leaving the labor market—especially if they left the labor market to pursue additional education. Conversely, when adult children transitioned from education into employment, parents were less likely to provide material support.

"Our work reveals that parents are responding to the needs of their

children—but they also appear to be driven, at least in part, by [social norms](#)," Manzoni says.

"For example, adult children leaving the workforce to pursue additional education are likely to receive material support from their parents. Adult children who have been laid off are not as likely to receive material support from their parents. But both groups would benefit from the additional help. This suggests that parents view education as 'good,' and thus more deserving of material assistance."

Instrumental support—help with day-to-day activities—only increased when adult children left the workforce altogether. This effect was driven almost entirely by adult children who left employment because they had a child.

The researchers found no relationship between employment transitions and [emotional support](#).

"Our findings drive home the extent to which parents can provide meaningful support to their [adult children](#) as those children navigate the working world," Manzoni says.

"While this is a valuable resource for many people, it also illustrates one way that existing inequalities can be reinforced. Young adults who don't have access to that kind of family support are at a significant disadvantage that can have significant consequences for them socially and professionally."

The paper, "Young adults' labour market transitions and intergenerational support in Germany," is published in the journal *European Sociological Review*.

More information: Anna Manzoni et al, Young adults' labour market

transitions and intergenerational support in Germany, *European Sociological Review* (2023). [DOI: 10.1093/esr/jcad006](https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcad006)

Provided by North Carolina State University

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