

Chapter 6

Family Dynamics

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Abstract

Gen Zers are immensely family-oriented, valuing the connections they have with their parents and siblings. Growing up, Gen Zers were often supervised by their caregivers and grew up becoming more reliant on the attachment figures in their lives. In turn, they often have significant influence on their families, especially in terms of finance- and education-related decision-making. This can be attributed to the tech-savvy nature that enables them to efficiently seek out information online. Overall, Generation Z values having a loving family, and many desire a fulfilling life with a partner and children.

Keywords: Family dynamics; relationships; parenting; family influence; households; connection

Given the role they often play, family members often influence the mindsets, values, and decision-making processes of a generational cohort. And, this influence is no different among those in Generation Z. Prior global research (Broadbent et al., 2017) has found that having positive relationships with family members is a significant contributor to the happiness of Gen Zers.

Changing Perceptions of Families

Changes in parenting styles, values, and beliefs have led to the evolution of family dynamics for Generation Z, particularly in domestic chores, caregiving, multi-generational households, and divorce.

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Domestic Chores

Schneider et al. (2021) explained that for heterosexual couples, structural factors like working hours and the number of children were predictors of the division of household labor. This did not apply to same-sex couples, who subscribed more to egalitarian ideals (Schneider et al., 2021). When it comes to domestic chores, same-sex couples are found to have distributed the housework more equally than their heterosexual counterparts (Schneider et al., 2021). It is possible that heteronormative family values and ideals have a stronger influence on heterosexual couples than same-sex couples, although the trends observed in this generation have shown a movement toward more egalitarian ideals. With the continued acceptance and legalization of same-sex marriage in many countries around the world (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022), children growing up in these households may more readily experience this egalitarianism.

Caregiving

Despite the rise of maternal employment over the past few decades, mothers still hold more responsibility for childcare and other household duties, although fathers have gradually taken on more of the household workload (Craig & Mullan, 2011). Fathers are also more involved in the child-rearing of their Generation Z children compared to parents of kids from preceding generations (Huerta et al., 2014). This greater role for fathers aligns with the rise in the more recent rise in paternity leave for men (Kuo et al., 2018; Tamm, 2019). Thus, it isn't surprising that Generation Z preteen children with good relationships with their fathers have been found to have higher self-esteem, fewer injuries, and fewer behavioral problems (Oerther & Oerther, 2021).

Further, many Generation Z children grew up with high-levels of adult involvement, becoming reliant on these attachment figures in their lives (Malone, 2007). But, rather than these adults being "helicopter parents," where they hover over their children's every move, parents of Gen Zers are more similar to "co-pilots," where they play more of a coaching and mentoring role (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). This type of support is critical in that Gen Zers' perception of parental and family support has been found to contribute to the life satisfaction and psychosocial well-being of Generation Z adolescents (Oberle et al., 2011).

Multigenerational Households

With declining birth rates across the globe (Alvarez, 2023) and people having fewer children than they did in the past (Skirbekk, 2022), most Gen Zers have grown up in smaller households than kids from preceding generations. Despite some having fewer siblings, many Gen Zers have lived in multigenerational households in which more than two (i.e., parent/guardian and child) generations live in the same residence.

Multigenerational households allow for greater kin support and are often more common among fragile families (Pilkaukas, 2012). The global increase in

multigenerational households aligns with the increase in dual-income families (OCSE, 2011), which then involves grandparents taking on the role of caretaker for many Generation Z children. A multigenerational household structure appears to be more present in households with young mothers or first-time parents, who may require more support and guidance in child-rearing (Pilkauskas, 2012). Grandparents may also serve as providers of stability for grandchildren during family crises, such as divorce or separation, incarceration, or the death of a parent (Goodman, 2007; Masfety et al., 2019). Hence, multigenerational households may have offered Gen Zers a larger support system growing up, possibly contributing to their family-oriented spirit.

In recent years, the number of children around the globe raised in three-generation households has increased significantly, especially in some English-speaking countries (Goodman, 2007; Masfety et al., 2019) and in Africa (Hall & Mokomane, 2018). Conversely, three-generation households in some Confucian as well as West and South Asian countries, like Japan and Singapore, have been on the decline (Lin, 2021; Miyazaki, 2021). Nonetheless, the proportion of multigenerational households remains high among these nations.

Divorce

Another characteristic of Generation Z is that many tend to hold an accepting view of the topic of divorce (Sumari et al., 2020). In such circumstances, Gen Zers still wish to maintain a good connection with both parents, often claiming that the divorce “was their parents’ choice and they did not wish to question their decision” (Sumari et al., 2020, p. 201). This can also be an attempt for them to stay out of the parental conflict and continue having a positive relationship with their parents. Sumari et al. (2020) found that while many adolescents were shocked by the dissolving of their parent’s marriage, they ultimately adapted well because they were able to receive counseling, which may have contributed to their openness to tending to their mental well-being, in general (Seemiller & Grace, 2019).

Collaborative Decision-Making

Parents and family members of Gen Zers play a large role in impacting this cohort’s behaviors, particularly when it comes to decision-making. Based on findings from the Global Gen Z Study, a large proportion of the Gen Zers reported that their family members greatly influence their decision-making. Table 6.1 outlines the three family groupings that serve as influencers for Generation Z.

Gen Zers from English-Speaking (57%), Latin American (52%), and African-Islamic (51%) regions tended to be more influenced by their parents, when it comes to the decisions that they make. These findings are consistent with those from Mabile and Alom (2021) global study in which it was found that Gen Zers consider mothers as the most influential people in their lives, followed by friends, and then fathers.

Table 6.1. Influences on Decision-Making.

	Slightly Influences	Somewhat Influences	Greatly Influences
Parents/Guardians	14%	36%	47%
Siblings	24%	32%	21%
Other family members	33%	24%	10%

Table 6.2. Sources of Financial Information.

	Greatly Influences
Parents/guardians	84%
Online resources	39%
Friends/peers	31%
Social media	30%
Financial institutions	26%
Class	20%
Other family members	19%
Financial professional	11%

Note: The percentages do not total 100 as participants could select all that apply.

While they seek out advice from their family members on a variety of topics, parents, in particular, are the go-to for most Gen Zers (84%) when it comes to seeking financial information. As outlined in [Table 6.2](#), parents, over all other people and places, are the number one resource for Gen Zers in acquiring financial information.

This is in alignment with the research from [Mabille and Alom \(2021\)](#) who note that 37% of Gen Zers talk to their fathers about money, and 30% get financial advice from their mothers.

As illuminated by the Global Gen Z Study, when looking at every region of the world, it is apparent that more Gen Zers seek financial advice from parents/guardians than any other source. While a slightly greater number of those are from English-speaking countries (90%), even the lowest percentage was just 74% in Africa.

Further, more Gen Zers seek out their mothers, specifically, than any other group of people to ask advice on religion, academics, feelings of meaninglessness, and future plans. A good number also get guidance on sexuality-related problems from their moms, only somewhat fewer than ask friends or physicians. Far fewer Gen Zers talk to either their fathers or siblings about any of these same issues ([Mabille & Alom, 2021](#)).

Gen Zers also play a role in influencing the decisions made by their families (Cruz et al., 2017; Puiu, 2016). Due to their tech-savvy nature, Gen Zers are adept at retrieving information (Tjiptono et al., 2020). They educate themselves about products and services, going deeper than acquiring just a superficial level of understanding (Puiu, 2016). With their technology-boosted knowledge and high expectations, Generation Z has the power to influence their parents, siblings, and friends in the consumption of goods and services such as with clothes, shoes, electronics, and food choices (Puiu, 2016). However, this does not extend to traveling decisions as they tend to be guided by the choices made by adults (Haddouche & Salomone, 2018). Overall, there appears to be a reciprocal relationship among Generation Z and their family, both influencing each other in making financial decisions.

Family Connection

According to Moral and Chimpén (2021), a healthy family is one in which members are interconnected while still having unique ideas, visions, and dreams. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic illuminated the role and importance of a healthy family for Gen Zers. Twenty-eight percent of participants in the Global Gen Z Study reported moving in or remaining living with their family during the pandemic, which had the ability to foster closer connections among those in the household. In addition, many Gen Zers felt useful as they helped family members with technologies like digital media and new electronic gadgets (Mabille & Alom, 2021).

As for their future families, many in the Global Gen Z Study described a good life as one that would consist of happiness brought about by being part of a loving family. One Gen Zer wrote, “having a loyal partner who genuinely loves me, having a safe and healthy family. . . , [and] family to care about and love each other.”

Conclusion

Family members are often the primary educators for children, being the first to socialize with them and protect them from harm. For Generation Z, family members have an immense influence on their decision-making and beliefs. Given this immense influence, parents and guardians, specifically, must continue to provide care and emotional warmth so as to foster life satisfaction and positive effect with their Generation Z children (Suldo & Fefer, 2013). But, it isn't just Gen Zers that want to receive this supportive parenting; they also want to give it. In the words of a Gen Zer from the Global Gen Z Study, a good life involves “having children and passing on my family name along with a long time generational family farm. . . knowing I left something behind when I go, but also being able to have enough memories to cherish when I am rocking in my chair gazing at [the lake] in my log cabin.”

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