

Identifying Coping Strategies for Managing Intergenerational Tensions in Multigenerational Households

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to explore the coping strategies employed by individuals in multigenerational households to manage intergenerational tensions.

Methods and Materials: This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of individuals residing in multigenerational households. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 22 participants recruited via online platforms, ensuring diverse perspectives on intergenerational conflict resolution. The study employed a purposive sampling strategy, and interviews continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. NVivo software was used to facilitate thematic analysis, allowing for systematic identification of key coping mechanisms. The analysis involved open coding, axial coding, and thematic categorization to identify patterns and relationships within the data.

Findings: The thematic analysis revealed four major coping strategies: (1) communication strategies, including active listening, conflict mediation, humor, and digital communication adaptation; (2) emotional regulation techniques, such as emotional distancing, cognitive reframing, mindfulness, seeking social support, and expressing gratitude; (3) household management strategies, including role negotiation, financial contributions, time management, privacy arrangements, and household meetings; and (4) interpersonal adaptation, which encompassed respecting autonomy, negotiating values, engaging in intergenerational bonding activities, and encouraging mutual learning. The findings indicate that multigenerational households actively develop adaptive mechanisms to mitigate conflicts and enhance familial cohesion.

Conclusion: The results underscore the importance of structured communication, emotional regulation, and adaptive household management in fostering harmony in multigenerational households. The study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting practical coping strategies that facilitate positive intergenerational relationships and reduce conflict. These insights can inform interventions aimed at improving household dynamics through counseling, policy initiatives, and targeted support programs.

Keywords: multigenerational households, intergenerational conflict, coping strategies, family dynamics, emotional regulation, communication strategies, household management.

1 Introduction

Multigenerational households, where three or more generations live under one roof, have become increasingly common across diverse sociocultural and economic contexts. These living arrangements offer financial advantages, caregiving support, and a strengthened sense of familial connectedness; however, they also present unique challenges, particularly in the management of intergenerational tensions. Differences in values, communication styles, lifestyle choices, and expectations can lead to conflict, making the identification of effective coping strategies essential for fostering household harmony. As intergenerational living continues to rise due to shifting economic pressures, demographic changes, and cultural traditions, understanding the mechanisms by which families navigate these complexities is of growing significance (Bai et al., 2022).

Intergenerational tensions often stem from differences in upbringing, generational values, and life experiences, which shape perspectives on household responsibilities, financial contributions, parenting styles, and personal autonomy. Older generations may prioritize traditions, authority, and familial obligations, while younger generations emphasize independence, digital communication, and evolving societal norms (Pakbazi et al., 2024). These tensions are further influenced by historical and race-based trauma, as family members from different generations may have been shaped by distinct sociopolitical and economic experiences, affecting their coping mechanisms and expectations within the household (Fitzgerald et al., 2021). The psychological effects of intergenerational trauma, particularly in post-conflict societies, highlight how past experiences continue to influence family dynamics, requiring coping strategies that facilitate emotional healing and constructive communication (Perlleshi, 2025).

Research on intergenerational family relations has explored various theoretical perspectives, including the family systems model, which emphasizes the interconnected nature of relationships and the importance of adaptive coping strategies in maintaining equilibrium (Bai et al., 2022). Systemic family counseling approaches have been particularly useful in addressing intergenerational conflict, providing structured frameworks for communication, boundary-setting, and emotional regulation (Erbil & Duyan, 2024). The literature also suggests that the effectiveness of coping strategies is shaped by the cultural and socioeconomic context in which multigenerational

households operate. In collectivist societies, for instance, there is a stronger emphasis on communal living, shared financial responsibilities, and interdependent decision-making, which can both alleviate and exacerbate tensions depending on the household dynamics (Wu et al., 2023).

One of the most significant areas of tension within multigenerational households revolves around communication. Effective communication strategies are crucial in mitigating misunderstandings and fostering mutual respect across generations. Studies on intergenerational integration in community settings have demonstrated that structured dialogues and shared social spaces improve the mental health and cohesion of multigenerational residents, highlighting the role of clear and empathetic communication (Wu et al., 2023). Generational differences in preferred modes of communication, such as the reliance of younger individuals on digital platforms versus the preference of older generations for face-to-face conversations, further complicate interactions within the household (Li et al., 2024). Coping strategies that bridge this gap, such as digital communication adaptation and active listening, have been identified as effective in reducing conflict and fostering understanding (Jannah et al., 2023).

Emotional regulation techniques also play a critical role in managing intergenerational tensions. Research on stress and coping among older adults has highlighted the importance of cognitive reframing, mindfulness, and social support in mitigating the emotional toll of familial conflict (Hu et al., 2023). Emotional distancing, in particular, has been recognized as a valuable strategy in moments of heightened tension, allowing family members to step away from conflict before engaging in resolution-oriented discussions (Timmers & Lengeler, 2022). Additionally, expressing gratitude and appreciation within the household has been found to strengthen emotional bonds and reduce perceived stress, contributing to a more harmonious living environment (Syropoulos et al., 2023).

Household management strategies provide another avenue for addressing intergenerational conflict. Research on intergenerational coparenting within family systems underscores the importance of clearly defined roles and responsibilities in minimizing power struggles and promoting collaboration (Bai et al., 2022). Role negotiation, in which family members collectively determine and adjust household duties, has been found to significantly reduce tension (Matějka & Kořán, 2024). Privacy arrangements and shared financial planning also contribute to improved

household dynamics, as they help establish boundaries and prevent disputes over resources (Fenner et al., 2024). These findings align with broader studies on the coping mechanisms of the "sandwich generation"—individuals balancing the care of both younger and older family members—which emphasize the necessity of structured time management and support networks to prevent caregiver burnout (Timmers & Lengeler, 2022).

In addition to structured communication and household management, interpersonal adaptation strategies facilitate smoother intergenerational cohabitation. Research on intergenerational exchange has demonstrated that fostering mutual learning and shared activities strengthens familial bonds and reduces conflict (Matějka & Kořán, 2024). Storytelling, collaborative projects, and intergenerational mentorship are particularly effective in fostering appreciation and understanding between generations (Jarrott et al., 2022). Encouraging autonomy and flexibility in decision-making further helps family members navigate differences without compromising individual identity (Össbo, 2021). The ability to adapt to evolving family dynamics and negotiate values and beliefs is a key factor in the long-term success of multigenerational households (Essiz & Mandrik, 2021).

Beyond individual coping strategies, community and policy interventions also play a crucial role in supporting multigenerational families. Studies on integrated community planning have highlighted the importance of mixed-age housing models and intergenerational support networks in fostering social cohesion and reducing household tensions (Wang & Tsai, 2022). Policies that promote financial stability, flexible caregiving arrangements, and access to intergenerational counseling services can further alleviate stressors that contribute to family conflict (Passmore & Mandryk, 2020). Research on coping mechanisms among forced migrants has similarly emphasized the value of external support systems in facilitating emotional adjustment and household stability (Tesfai et al., 2023).

The need for effective coping strategies is particularly relevant in the context of global demographic shifts. As populations age and economic challenges necessitate extended family living arrangements, multigenerational households will continue to be a prominent feature of contemporary family life (Holley, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the trend of intergenerational cohabitation, highlighting both the resilience and the vulnerabilities of such living arrangements (Simpson et al., 2021). Understanding how families navigate these dynamics

is critical for developing targeted interventions that enhance household well-being and mitigate intergenerational conflict (Montesanti et al., 2021).

This study seeks to contribute to the growing body of research on intergenerational family relations by identifying the coping strategies that multigenerational households employ to manage tensions. Through a qualitative exploration of lived experiences, the study examines communication strategies, emotional regulation techniques, household management approaches, and interpersonal adaptation methods that facilitate harmonious coexistence.

2 Methods and Materials

2.1 Study Design and Participants

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore coping strategies for managing intergenerational tensions in multigenerational households. Given the complexity of familial relationships across generations, a qualitative approach provides an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences, perspectives, and coping mechanisms. The study adopts a phenomenological framework to capture the subjective meanings and shared experiences of individuals living in multigenerational settings. The research sample consists of 22 participants, recruited through online platforms to ensure diverse representation. The inclusion criteria required participants to be active members of multigenerational households, meaning they cohabited with at least two different generations of family members. The study follows a purposive sampling strategy, and data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached, indicating that no new themes emerged in subsequent interviews.

2.2 Measure

2.2.1 Semi-Structured Interview

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method, allowing participants to articulate their experiences and strategies for managing intergenerational tensions. The interview guide was developed based on existing literature and expert input, ensuring its relevance to the research objectives. The questions focused on daily interactions, sources of conflict, emotional responses, and specific coping strategies employed within the household. Interviews were conducted via video conferencing or voice calls, depending on the participants' preferences, and lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. All interviews were audio-

recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a thematic approach using NVivo software, which facilitated systematic coding and pattern recognition. The analysis process consisted of multiple stages, beginning with an initial familiarization phase, where transcripts were read repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. This was followed by open coding, in which significant statements and recurring concepts were identified. Axial coding was then applied to establish relationships between emerging themes, leading to the development of core categories that encapsulated the various coping strategies employed by participants. Throughout the analysis, researcher reflexivity was maintained to ensure that interpretations were grounded in participants' narratives rather than pre-existing assumptions. The findings were validated through member checking, where selected participants reviewed the identified themes to confirm their accuracy and relevance.

3 Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of the 22 participants in this study reflected a diverse range of backgrounds, ages,

and household compositions. The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 76 years, with an average age of 48. Among them, 10 participants (45.5%) were aged between 25 and 40, 7 participants (31.8%) were between 41 and 60, and 5 participants (22.7%) were aged 61 and above. In terms of gender distribution, 12 participants (54.5%) were female, while 10 participants (45.5%) were male. The household structure varied, with 13 participants (59.1%) residing in three-generation households, 6 participants (27.3%) living in two-generation households with extended family members, and 3 participants (13.6%) in households consisting of multiple nuclear families. Regarding employment status, 8 participants (36.4%) were employed full-time, 5 participants (22.7%) were employed part-time, 4 participants (18.2%) were retired, and 5 participants (22.7%) were unemployed or homemakers. Marital status varied among the participants, with 14 individuals (63.6%) being married, 5 participants (22.7%) single, and 3 participants (13.6%) widowed or divorced. The length of time living in a multigenerational household ranged from 2 to 35 years, with an average of 12.3 years. This diversity in demographic characteristics provided a rich and varied perspective on the coping strategies employed in managing intergenerational tensions within multigenerational households.

Table 1

The Results of Thematic Analysis

Category	Subcategory	Concepts (Open Codes)
Communication Strategies	Active Listening	Reflective responses, paraphrasing, nonverbal cues, patience
	Conflict Mediation	Clarification, de-escalation, third-party involvement
	Generational Sensitivity	Awareness of age-based differences, empathy, historical context
	Humor and Positivity	Using jokes, lightening the mood, diffusing tension
Emotional Regulation Techniques	Digital Communication Adaptation	Using text messages, video calls, social media to communicate
	Emotional Distancing	Walking away, taking time to cool down, avoiding escalation
	Cognitive Reframing	Changing perspective, finding positive meaning, reframing events
	Mindfulness and Stress Reduction	Deep breathing, meditation, journaling
	Seeking Social Support	Talking to friends, consulting extended family, professional help
Household Management Strategies	Establishing Personal Boundaries	Setting limits, defining personal space, enforcing rules
	Expressing Gratitude and Appreciation	Acknowledging efforts, verbal affirmations, small gestures
	Role Negotiation	Delegating tasks, agreeing on responsibilities, revising roles
	Time Management	Scheduling shared time, respecting individual routines
	Financial Contributions	Cost-sharing, financial planning, budgeting
	Privacy Arrangements	Dedicated spaces, quiet hours, shared vs. personal zones
Interpersonal Adaptation	Household Meetings	Regular check-ins, structured discussions, democratic decisions
	Cultural and Religious Practices	Observing traditions, shared rituals, moral teachings
	Respecting Autonomy	Allowing independence, recognizing individual choices
	Negotiating Values and Beliefs	Compromising, agreeing to disagree, finding middle ground
	Adaptability and Flexibility	Adjusting to others' needs, modifying expectations
	Intergenerational Bonding Activities	Shared hobbies, storytelling, celebrating milestones
	Encouraging Mutual Learning	Teaching each other skills, exchanging knowledge, mentoring

The qualitative analysis of coping strategies for managing intergenerational tensions in multigenerational households revealed four overarching themes: communication strategies, emotional regulation techniques, household management strategies, and interpersonal adaptation. Each of these themes encompasses specific subcategories that reflect the diverse approaches participants employed to maintain harmony within their households.

Communication Strategies emerged as a fundamental coping mechanism, with participants emphasizing the role of active listening in reducing misunderstandings. Several individuals highlighted the importance of acknowledging each other's perspectives through reflective responses and nonverbal cues. One participant described, "I've learned to repeat what my father says before responding, just to make sure I understand him correctly". Another key approach was conflict mediation, where family members sought to clarify disagreements before they escalated. Strategies included de-escalation techniques and, in some cases, third-party involvement, such as a neutral family member stepping in. Generational sensitivity was also crucial, as participants noted the necessity of understanding age-related differences. As one interviewee put it, "My grandmother grew up in a different time, so I try to remember that her views are shaped by a different world". In some cases, tensions were alleviated through humor and positivity, with respondents mentioning how lighthearted jokes helped defuse conflicts. Lastly, digital communication adaptation emerged as an important strategy, particularly among younger family members who used text messages and social media to communicate sensitive topics. One participant explained, "It's easier to send a text when emotions are high. That way, we avoid unnecessary arguments".

Emotional Regulation Techniques were commonly employed to maintain psychological well-being within the household. Many participants practiced emotional distancing by temporarily stepping away from a heated situation to prevent escalation. One participant shared, "When my mother and I argue, I just go for a walk and come back later when we're both calm". Cognitive reframing was another technique, where individuals sought to reinterpret stressful situations in a more positive light. This often involved recognizing generational gaps and adjusting expectations accordingly. Some respondents also engaged in mindfulness and stress reduction practices, such as deep breathing and meditation, to manage their emotions. Seeking

social support from friends, extended family, or even professional counselors was another effective coping mechanism. As one participant noted, "Sometimes, just venting to my best friend helps me gain perspective". Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of establishing personal boundaries, including setting limits on discussions and defining personal space. Finally, expressing gratitude and appreciation played a key role in fostering emotional resilience, with many participants making an effort to acknowledge their relatives' contributions. One interviewee remarked, "A simple 'thank you' can make a big difference in how we relate to each other".

Household Management Strategies were essential in maintaining order and reducing conflict in shared living spaces. Role negotiation was a significant approach, where family members actively delegated household tasks and revised responsibilities to ensure fairness. One participant described, "We sat down and agreed on who does what so that no one feels overburdened". Time management was another coping mechanism, as families scheduled shared activities while respecting individual routines. Several participants found that clear agreements on daily schedules minimized tension. Financial contributions also emerged as a point of discussion, with some households engaging in cost-sharing or budgeting strategies to prevent disputes over money. In addition, privacy arrangements were crucial in maintaining individual autonomy within shared spaces. One interviewee stated, "We established quiet hours and agreed on which areas are private so that everyone feels comfortable". Some families relied on household meetings to facilitate open discussions and make collective decisions about household matters. Finally, participants highlighted the role of cultural and religious practices in maintaining unity, as shared traditions and moral teachings often reinforced familial bonds.

Interpersonal Adaptation strategies helped family members navigate differences and foster mutual respect. Respecting autonomy was a critical aspect, with participants recognizing the importance of allowing each individual to make their own choices. One participant explained, "I remind myself that just because we live together doesn't mean we have to control each other". Another commonly reported approach was negotiating values and beliefs, as family members sought to find compromises or agree to disagree on sensitive topics. Adaptability and flexibility also played a crucial role, as participants acknowledged the need

to adjust their expectations and behaviors in response to different generational needs. Some households engaged in intergenerational bonding activities, such as storytelling, playing games, or celebrating milestones together. One interviewee shared, "Cooking together has become our way of bonding—it's one thing we all enjoy". Additionally, encouraging mutual learning strengthened relationships, as younger and older family members exchanged knowledge and skills. Finally, strengthening family identity through collective decision-making and shared experiences reinforced a sense of belonging within the household.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the complex and multifaceted strategies that multigenerational households employ to manage intergenerational tensions. Through semi-structured interviews with 22 participants, four major themes emerged: communication strategies, emotional regulation techniques, household management strategies, and interpersonal adaptation. Each of these themes encompassed specific coping mechanisms that facilitated conflict resolution, improved emotional well-being, and strengthened familial bonds. The results indicate that while intergenerational tensions are an inherent part of cohabitation, families actively develop adaptive strategies to navigate these challenges, often drawing upon cultural values, personal experiences, and learned behaviors.

One of the most prominent coping mechanisms identified was communication strategies, where active listening, conflict mediation, humor, and digital communication adaptation were reported as key tools for reducing misunderstandings. Participants emphasized that effective communication played a critical role in fostering mutual understanding and preventing conflicts from escalating. These findings align with research emphasizing the importance of structured communication practices in intergenerational settings (Jannah et al., 2023). Prior studies have demonstrated that generational differences in communication styles can contribute to tensions, particularly when older family members rely on face-to-face discussions while younger individuals prefer digital communication methods (Li et al., 2024). The use of humor to diffuse tension has also been identified as an effective strategy for maintaining emotional balance in familial relationships (Wu et al., 2023). Furthermore, research on intergenerational workplace communication supports the notion that active

listening and conflict mediation enhance relational harmony and cooperation across generations (Lazaro et al., 2024).

Emotional regulation techniques emerged as another crucial coping strategy, with participants reporting that emotional distancing, cognitive reframing, and mindfulness practices helped mitigate stress and prevent conflicts from escalating. These findings align with studies on stress and coping, which suggest that individuals who employ adaptive emotional regulation techniques experience lower levels of conflict in multigenerational households (Hu et al., 2023). Cognitive reframing, in particular, was found to be instrumental in managing intergenerational differences, as it enabled family members to view conflicts from alternative perspectives and adopt a more empathetic stance (Timmers & Lengeler, 2022). Expressing gratitude and appreciation was also a key emotional regulation strategy identified in this study, echoing prior research demonstrating that gratitude fosters positive family dynamics and enhances emotional resilience (Syropoulos et al., 2023).

Beyond individual coping strategies, the study found that household management strategies were integral to maintaining equilibrium in multigenerational living arrangements. Role negotiation, financial contributions, time management, and privacy arrangements were frequently cited as effective means of preventing conflicts related to household responsibilities. These findings are supported by previous research on intergenerational family systems, which indicates that clearly defined roles and responsibilities contribute to household stability and reduce power struggles (Bai et al., 2022). Studies on intergenerational coparenting have similarly emphasized the importance of negotiating caregiving duties and financial contributions to maintain household harmony (Bai et al., 2022). Additionally, research on the working "sandwich generation" highlights that time management is a critical factor in balancing multigenerational responsibilities without experiencing burnout (Timmers & Lengeler, 2022).

The final major theme that emerged from the findings was interpersonal adaptation, where participants reported that respecting autonomy, negotiating values, engaging in intergenerational bonding activities, and encouraging mutual learning facilitated harmonious relationships. These findings align with research suggesting that families who emphasize flexibility and adaptability experience lower levels of intergenerational conflict (Essiz & Mandrik, 2021). Previous studies have found that intergenerational learning—where younger and older family members exchange knowledge and skills—plays a crucial role in

fostering appreciation and reducing generational misunderstandings (Matějka & Kořán, 2024). Moreover, shared activities such as storytelling and joint hobbies have been identified as effective tools for strengthening intergenerational bonds (Jarrott et al., 2022). This study further supports findings from research on Indigenous coping mechanisms, which emphasize the importance of cultural practices and storytelling in intergenerational healing and resilience (Montesanti et al., 2021).

Overall, the results of this study align with existing literature on coping mechanisms in multigenerational households and contribute to the growing body of research on intergenerational dynamics. The findings reinforce previous studies that emphasize the necessity of structured communication, emotional regulation, household management, and adaptive interpersonal strategies to mitigate intergenerational tensions. By integrating insights from family systems theory, intergenerational learning frameworks, and stress-coping models, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how families navigate the complexities of multigenerational cohabitation.

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size was limited to 22 participants, which may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across different cultural, socioeconomic, and familial contexts. While the study sought to recruit participants from a variety of backgrounds, the reliance on online platforms for participant recruitment may have inadvertently excluded individuals from lower-income or technologically disadvantaged households. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the study means that findings cannot be generalized to broader populations; rather, they provide in-depth insights into lived experiences. Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data, which may be subject to recall bias or social desirability bias, as participants may have presented their coping strategies in a more favorable light. Lastly, the study did not explicitly examine the impact of external factors such as economic stress, caregiving demands, or health-related challenges on intergenerational tensions, which could be important areas for future research.

Future research should consider expanding the scope of study populations by incorporating larger and more diverse samples to ensure a broader representation of intergenerational household experiences. Longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into how coping strategies evolve over time and in response to changing family dynamics. Additionally, comparative studies across

different cultural and socioeconomic contexts could enhance our understanding of how cultural values influence coping mechanisms. Future research could also explore the role of digital communication in greater depth, particularly as technology continues to shape intergenerational interactions. Another promising avenue for research is examining the impact of external stressors, such as economic hardship, caregiving responsibilities, and health crises, on intergenerational tensions and the effectiveness of coping strategies. Finally, intervention-based studies that assess the efficacy of structured family communication programs, intergenerational counseling, or mindfulness-based interventions could provide practical recommendations for families experiencing intergenerational conflicts.

The findings of this study offer several practical recommendations for families, mental health professionals, and policymakers seeking to improve intergenerational relationships in multigenerational households. Families can benefit from implementing structured communication practices, such as regular family meetings and active listening exercises, to prevent conflicts and promote understanding. Encouraging emotional regulation techniques, such as mindfulness, cognitive reframing, and gratitude expression, can help family members manage stress and improve emotional resilience. Household management strategies, including clearly defined roles, financial planning, and privacy arrangements, should be established to reduce disputes over responsibilities. Intergenerational bonding activities, such as storytelling, shared hobbies, and skill-sharing, can foster stronger connections and promote mutual appreciation. Mental health professionals can develop targeted interventions, such as family counseling programs, to support families in navigating intergenerational conflicts. Additionally, policymakers should consider initiatives that support multigenerational living arrangements, such as housing policies that accommodate intergenerational needs, caregiver support programs, and intergenerational education initiatives. By integrating these practical recommendations, families can cultivate healthier and more harmonious intergenerational relationships.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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