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# Intergenerational Support for the Elderly in Rural Vietnamese Families: A Case Study in Bac Ninh Province

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**ABSTRACT :** This study examines the emotional support relationship between children and their parents in rural Vietnam, based on a quantitative survey of 150 elderly individuals aged 60 to 79. It examines three forms of support: facilitating access to comprehensive healthcare packages; providing recreational services and activities; and maintaining contact through regular visits (annually, monthly, and weekly). The results indicate that intergenerational support in rural areas remains predominantly emotional, with contact and visits to parents occurring significantly more frequently on a monthly and weekly basis. Conversely, support involving medical and recreational services is less common, reflecting constraints related to household finances, service accessibility, and the slow evolution of elderly care models in rural areas. The study shows that filial piety, family cohesion, and intergenerational responsibility remain vital in rural Vietnamese family life.

**KEYWORDS:** Older adults, emotional support, intergenerational relationships, parent–child relationships, Vietnam.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In traditional Vietnamese families, most elderly people live with their children and grandchildren in multigenerational households, relying on adult children and other family members for comprehensive care. For traditional family life to remain stable and sustainable, the relationship between the elderly and their descendants must be preserved and nurtured.

However, the traditional multigenerational family model is undergoing significant change driven by labor migration and urbanization. The migration of young people to urban areas has accelerated “aging in place” in rural communities, altering household structures and diminishing the traditional support roles inherent in multigenerational families. This has substantially transformed the nature of interaction and intergenerational bonding within Vietnamese families (Tran Thi Minh Thi, 2021). Amid rising migration, work pressures, and the fast pace of modern life, care provided by children is shifting from direct involvement—such as co-residence and daily hands-on care – to indirect support, including financial assistance, visits, and emotional and health-related concern. This shift also raises questions about the capacity of rural families to ensure the emotional well-being of their elderly members.

Old age is a period marked by profound changes in an individual’s life, affecting both physical and mental health. In this context, the family serves not only as a source of emotional support but also as a significant determinant of the elderly’s quality of life.

Given this context, this article examines the emotional support dynamics between children and parents in rural areas across three key dimensions: facilitating access to comprehensive healthcare packages; providing recreational services and activities; and maintaining regular contact and visits. These forms of support are examined across three timeframes: annual, monthly, and weekly.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in 2025 using a quantitative approach in rural areas of the Red River Delta, a key economic region of Vietnam. The sample consisted of 150 individuals aged 60 to 79, selected via random probability sampling to ensure representativeness.

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## 3. RESULTS

### *3.1. Emotional Support Provided by Children to Older Parents in Rural Areas by Year*

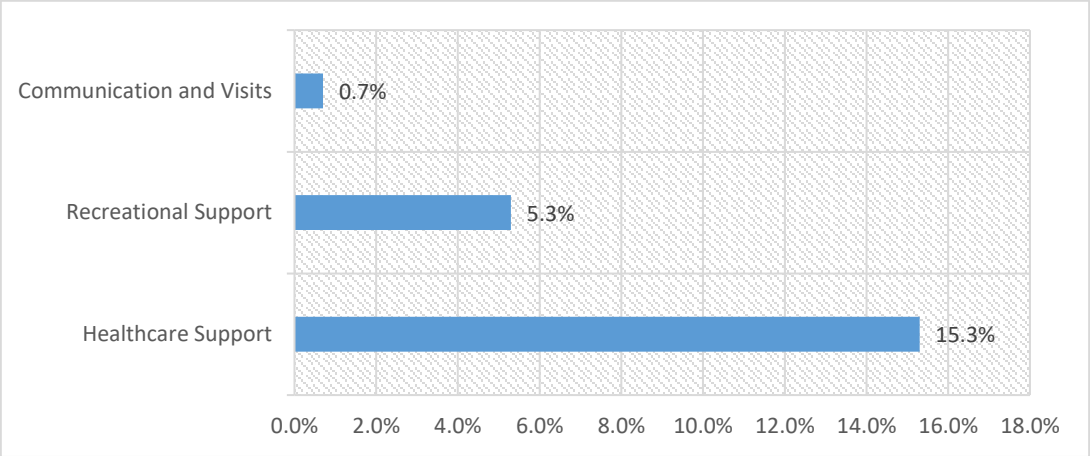



**Figure 1: Forms of support provided by children to Older Adults by Year (%)**
**Source: Survey data 2025**

The chart above illustrates significant disparities in the types of support adult children provide to the elderly. Assisting parents in accessing comprehensive healthcare packages accounts for the largest share at 15.3% – nearly three times the rate of providing recreational services or activities (5.3%) – while maintaining contact and making frequent visits stand at only 0.7%. This variation reflects the specific cultural and social dynamics of intergenerational relationships in rural areas, particularly given that the majority of elderly residents there lack pensions.

The high rate of assistance with comprehensive healthcare packages reflects a growing awareness of the medical needs of the rural elderly, who often face limited access to healthcare services; consequently, children demonstrate filial piety by investing in regular medical check-ups and treatment. This aligns with East Asian cultural norms, in which the family plays a central role in elderly care, including monitoring health and facilitating medical treatment.

Attentive care fosters a sense of security and peace of mind among the elderly. Conversely, a lack of family support can hinder their ability to care for themselves, thereby increasing the risk of illness.

The low level of support for recreational services and activities suggests that children prioritize basic needs over leisure. This may stem from the limited economic means of rural households, where resources are often directed toward essential healthcare before recreational needs are considered. Furthermore, recreational opportunities for the elderly are less developed in rural areas than in urban centers, resulting in lower demand and limited access.

The rate of maintaining contact and making frequent visits (0.7%) is notably lower than other forms of support. This reflects the reality of rural-to-urban labor migration, in which children often leave their hometowns to earn a living, resulting in geographic separation and limited time for in-person visits. A low frequency of visits does not imply a lack of concern for one's parents; rather, it reflects work-related pressures and the high cost of travel associated with working far from home.

It also indicates a shift from non-material to material forms of support amid the decline of multi-generational households and the growing number of elderly people living alone or only with a spouse; consequently, children compensate for their absence by providing specific services rather than through regular physical presence. This highlights changes in family structure and intergenerational support patterns within the surveyed area.

### *3.2. Emotional Support Provided by Children to Older Parents in Rural Areas by Month*

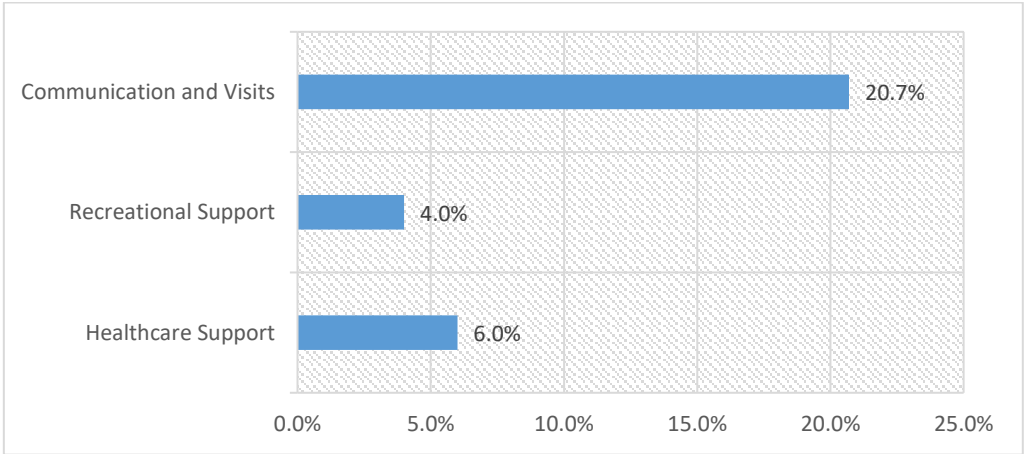



**Figure 2: Forms of support provided by children to Older Adults by Month (%)**
**Source: Survey data 2025**

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Statistical analysis of monthly support provided by children to the elderly reveals disparities across forms of assistance; maintaining contact and making frequent visits ranked highest at 20.7%, more than three times the rate of facilitating access to comprehensive healthcare packages (6.0%) and over five times that of providing recreational services or activities (4.0%). The prevalence of maintaining contact and frequent visits indicates that emotional support remains the most common form of interaction in parent-child relationships in rural areas. Older adults tend to be more emotionally sensitive; receiving love and attention from their families fosters happiness and a sense of purpose while reducing the risk of mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. This aligns with Vietnamese cultural traditions that emphasize filial piety and family cohesion.

Recent studies on intergenerational support in Vietnam (Tran Thi Minh Thi, 2016; ERIA, 2020) show that rural elderly individuals receive more frequent interaction and conversation from their children, particularly daughters, underscoring the vital role of emotional support in their lives. However, the fact that this form of support significantly outweighs others also reflects the reality that it is easier for children to maintain monthly visits than to fund expensive medical or recreational services.

The low level of assistance in accessing comprehensive healthcare packages (6.0%), compared with communication and visits, highlights economic barriers to regular medical care, even though rural elderly populations face numerous health issues and have a high need for medical care. This reflects the reality that many rural families have limited incomes and struggle to consistently afford monthly health check-up packages for their elderly parents, particularly when they must also raise young children and shoulder other responsibilities.

The low level of support for recreational services and activities (4.0%) indicates that this need is not prioritized given limited resources, as families focus on more fundamental necessities such as healthcare and daily living expenses. Furthermore, rural areas lack adequate infrastructure and recreational facilities for the elderly—resulting in both low demand and limited accessibility—which contrasts with trends observed in urban areas. This pattern of support illustrates the shifting dynamics of intergenerational care: while children strive to maintain regular emotional connections through visits, they face challenges in providing consistent material support due to economic pressures and the geographical distances created by rising labor migration.

### *3.3. Emotional Support Provided by Children to Older Parents in Rural Areas by Week*

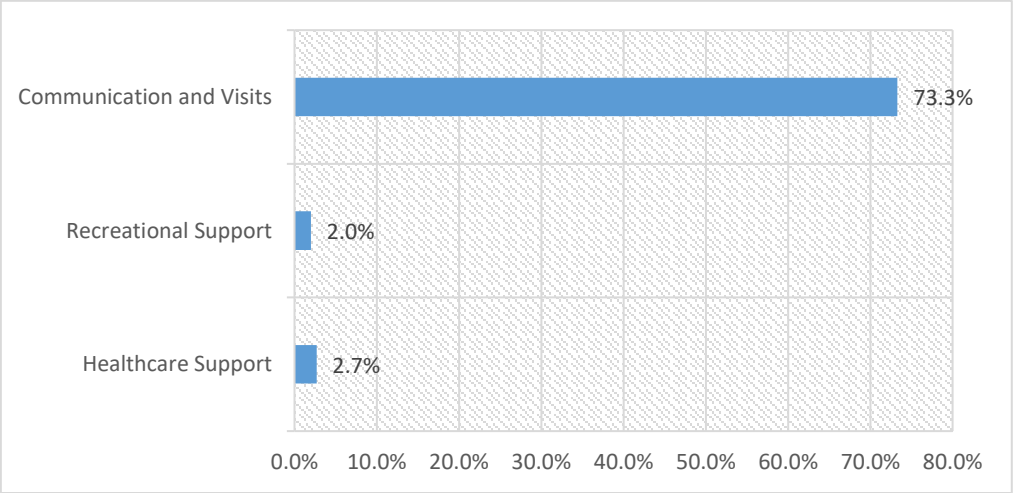



**Figure 3: Forms of support provided by children to Older Adults by Week (%)**
**Source: Survey data 2025**

Data on the weekly support children provide to the elderly clearly shows the primary forms of assistance in the study area. Statistics show that 73.3% of elderly individuals receive regular contact and visits from their children each week; in contrast, only 2.7% of children purchase comprehensive healthcare packages, and the provision of recreational services or activities is even lower, at just 2.0%.

This reality shows that emotional support conveyed through communication, visits, and the maintenance of emotional bonds remains the dominant form of intergenerational interaction in rural areas. Given the economic constraints of rural settings and limited access to formal healthcare or leisure services for the elderly, children often express their care through conversation and inquiries – a form of non-material support that holds profound psychosocial significance. Older adults deeply desire connection with their children and grandchildren; moments spent gathering, talking, and sharing with family help them feel they still play a meaningful role, fostering a positive outlook on life. Indeed, according to the Public Library of Science (PLOS), older adults who maintain strong social ties face a reduced risk of dementia. Family relationships are essential to the mental health and emotional well-being of the elderly.

Conversely, the low uptake of modern support forms, such as health check-up packages or recreational services, indicates that the shift in elderly care models in rural areas is still in its infancy, with reliance on tradition rather than formal social services.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Research indicates that supportive relationships between children and parents in rural areas are primarily maintained through frequent communication and visits. This support occurs most often on a weekly or monthly basis, whereas access to comprehensive healthcare packages and recreational services and activities remains limited. These findings highlight the vital role of emotional bonds and intergenerational responsibility within rural family life in the surveyed areas. When older adults maintain close ties with family members, they can more easily

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access support and assistance when most needed. Positive family relationships foster a sense of support and fulfillment among the elderly, while enhancing their sense of belonging and being loved.

However, labor migration, economic constraints, and a lack of services for the elderly are altering traditional caregiving practices. Therefore, alongside leveraging the role of the family, it is essential to strengthen healthcare services, social activities, and emotional support tailored to rural conditions in order to improve the quality of life for older adults.

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