

Family relations in adulthood



Elke Murdock & Meike Smyk, Luxemburg/ Germany	Family rituals in long-distance families – are analog practices transferred to the virtual world?
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Family rituals in long-distance families – are analog practices transferred to the virtual world?

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- Definition – Family Rituals
- Why are these important?
- Social Media -Modes of communication

- The study
 - Sample
 - Method
 - Results
 - Limitations

- Discussion

- Family rituals have their own **symbolic** meaning and **emotional** significance (Fiese, 2006)
- **Specific** to families – difficult to access by outsiders
- Rituals can be characterized by three dimensions :
 - Continuity (can be remembered)
 - Commitment (symbolic & affective component)
 - Communication (message)
- Rituals represent a recurring, emotional commitment that gives participants a sense of belonging
- Rituals ≠ Routines (functional, unreflected) but
- Routines can turn into rituals – if they are repeated and acquire emotional significance – the reverse is also possible

- Family rituals are influenced by socio-economic, cultural and family-specific factors (Viere, 2001). Four ritual types can be observed in almost all families (Wolin & Bennett, 1984).
 - **Family celebrations:** sequence and scheduling are largely determined by culture-specific influences (i.e. Christmas and the Pascha festival)
 - **Family traditions:** reflect also culture-specific influences but are mainly shaped by family-specific factors (i.e. birthdays, anniversaries and family holidays).
 - **Life-cycle rituals:** Mark transitions to different life phases (i.e. baptisms, school graduations or retirement ceremonies).
 - **Daily cycle rituals:** most common - they require the least planning and have the greatest family-specific differences, as families define their own roles, rules and expectations (i.e. shared meals and evening rituals such as bedtime stories).
 - Focus here – mainly core family involved

Abel et al. (2021) – Review Social media, rituals, and long-distance family relationship maintenance:

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- Mutually supportive families play a vital role in the psychological and physical health of members and can lead to heightened **well-being** and life satisfaction (Denny et al., 2014; Houltberg et al., 2011).
- Participating in family rituals strengthens bonds between members (Crespo et al., 2011).
- Distanced families can use social media to engage in family practices that shape their family identity, show their affection, and fulfill their roles (Morgan, 2011).
- Studies among transnational families – with varying geographical distance & length of separation – but

=> Few studies focus on shorter geographical distance

- Recent study – media use by young people in Germany:
 - 98% of households own smartphones; 97% own a laptop (MPFS, 2021)
 - Households “equipped” for use of social media
 - New opportunities for family maintenance across distances

Modes of communication

- Synchronous – Videocalls – real-time – auditive & visual
- Asynchronous – SMS / Messenger Services – exchanges of text but also images and photos (TM)

- If, and to what extent are family rituals maintained virtually after young adults leave the parental home?
 - Focus on **gender** of parents – does gender play a role in how family relationships are maintained virtually?
 - Role of geographic **proximity**

- $N = 219$
 - Inclusion criteria: Min. 18 years & having left the parental home and still having at least one living parent
 - $M_{Age} = 29.04$ ($SD = 10.57$), Range 18 – 69.
 - 150 (68.5 %) female, 65 (29.7 %) male, 4 other
 - 84.5 % living in Germany, 4.6 % in Luxemburg, 1.8 % in France and 9.1 % in other countries – within or outside of the EU
 - Majority completed the questionnaire in German ($n = 201$)

- Age of parents:
 - Mothers $M_{Age} = 58.31$ ($SD = 9.05$), Range 39 - 85.
 - Fathers $M_{Age} = 59.67$ ($SD = 8.47$), Range 39 - 91.

- Parents
 - $n = 33$ – one parent deceased, majority of cases the father ($n = 21$)
 - If both parents were still alive, the respondents were asked whether the virtual contact with their mother and father was more or less the **same** in terms of type and frequency or **different**.
 - If different, the ritual types (special occasions, weekends, shared meals) were asked separately for mother and father.
 - If more or less the same, the questions on virtual rituals related to both parents.
 - Analysis in terms of
 - Mother
 - Father
 - Parents

Geographic Proximity	Mothers	Fathers
Same city	24.5%	22.2%
Other city same county	34.6%	34.8%
Other county (Bundesland)	27.4%	29.3%
Other country - EU	9.1%	10.1%
Other country – outside EU	4.3%	3.5%

Almost 60% - same county

Almost 85% - Germany

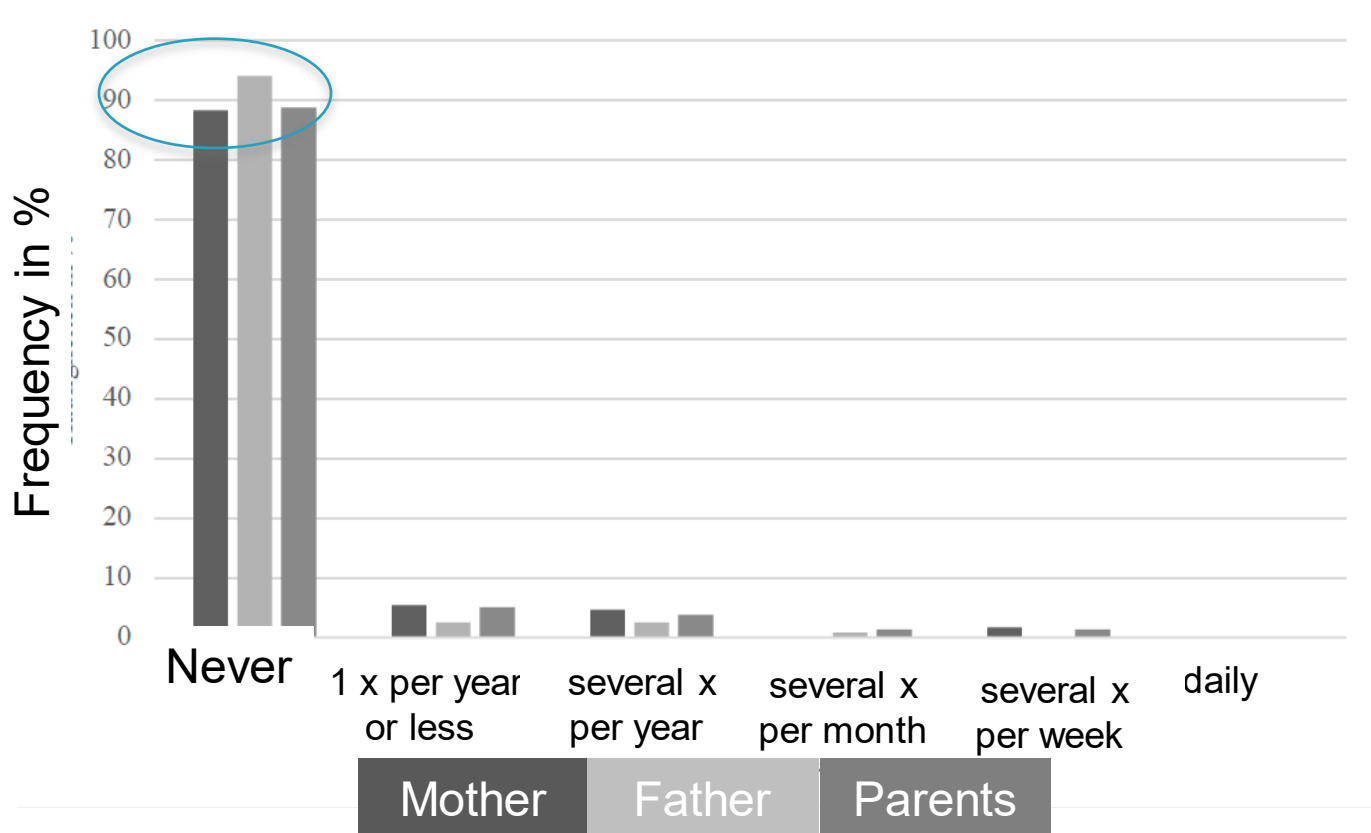
- **Family Ritual Questionnaires (FRQ, Fiese, 2022)** – Rituals while still living at home – then adapted to the virtual world.
- Based on FRQ (Fiese & Kline, 1993) $k = 52$ Items forced-choice-format -> revised
- $k = 21$ Items – Likert Scale format 1 = not true at all - 5 = very true
- Items cover 3 areas – 7 items each
 - *Weekends*
 - Our family rarely spent weekends together.
 - In our family, there were set routines and regular events on weekends.
 - *Special occasions*
 - Our family had regular and several annual celebrations.
 - In our family, everyone had a certain job to do during annual celebrations.
 - *Typical meal*
 - In our family, people felt strongly about having meals together.
 - In our family, mealtimes were just for getting food.

- FRQ (2022) – Adapted to the virtual world (5-point Likert scale)*):
 1. To my parents, it is very important that I keep them updated on my weekend via text messenger.
 2. If I don't see my parents in person on the weekends, we usually stay in touch over text messages or video calls.
 3. Via video call, we try to maintain the weekend activities we used to spend time on when we lived together.
 4. My parents expect me to send them pictures of my weekend activities.
 5. My parents expect me to video call them on the weekends.
 6. On the weekends, I am usually the one to initiate a video call or to start a conversation via text messenger.
 7. My parents are pretty relaxed about weekends. Thus they don't think it is necessary for me to text or video call them.
 8. If I can't see my parents in person on the weekends, we plan in advance how to get together via video call.

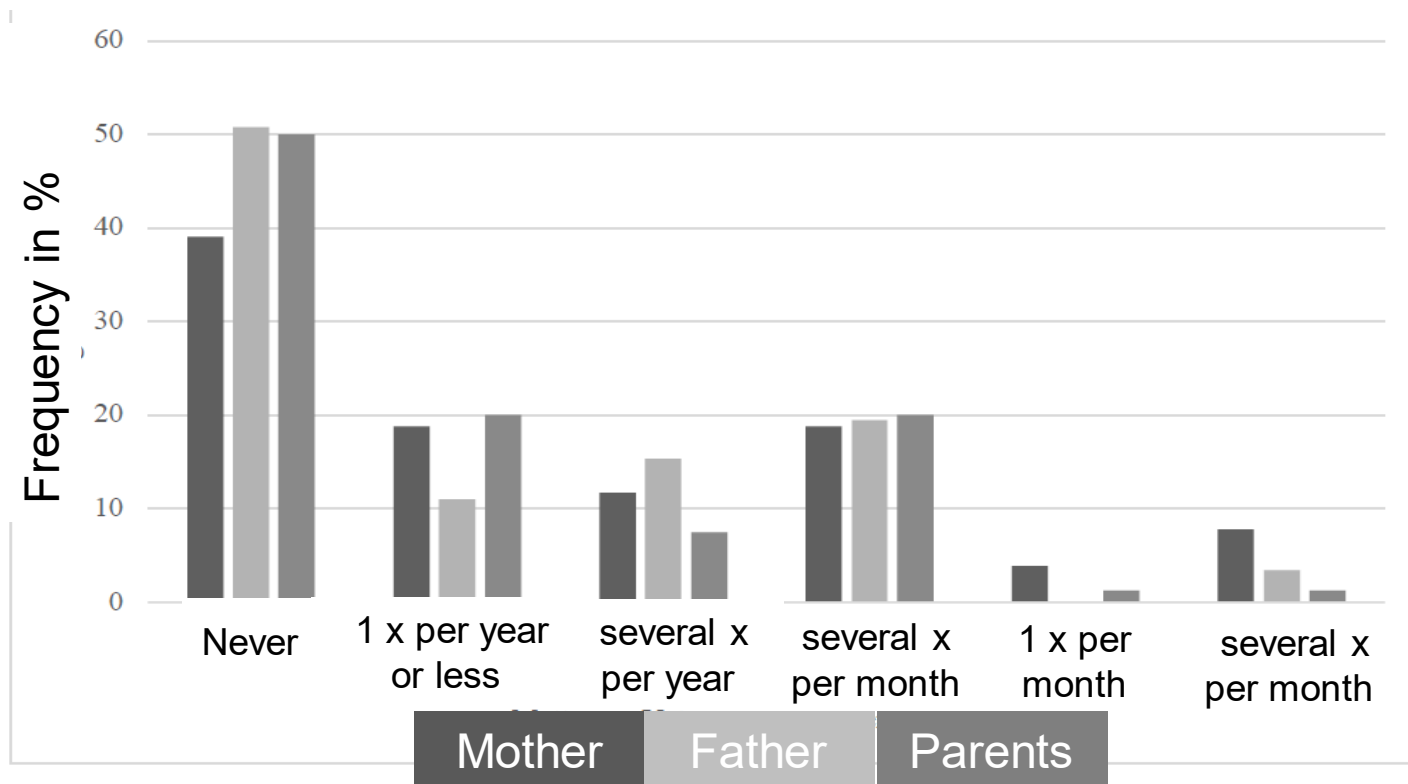
*) – If always seeing parents in person – please indicate does not apply

- **Contact frequency** (6-point – never to every weekend, adapted to content and context)
 - Meals, family occasions, weekend activities
 - Videocall (synchronous)
 - Text messages (asynchronous)
 - Personal visit

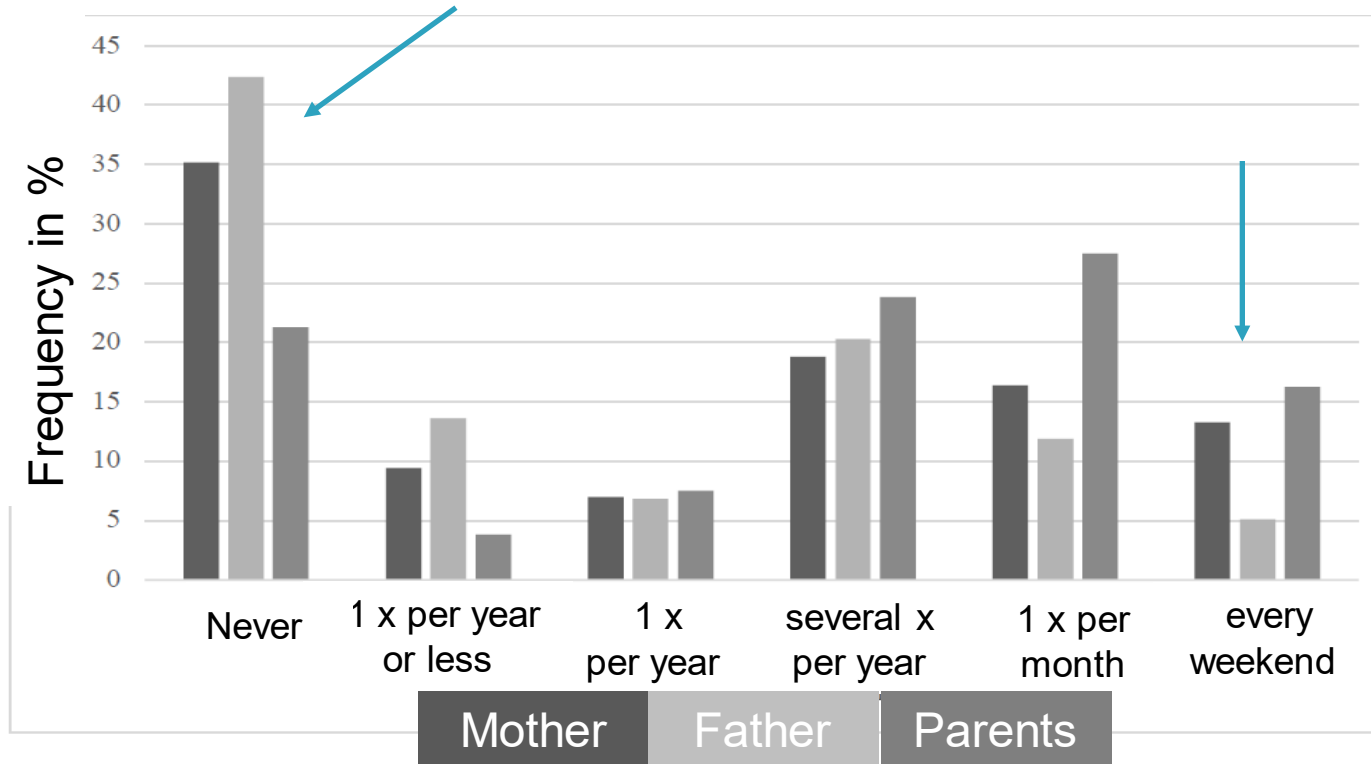
- Participation in **virtual meals**



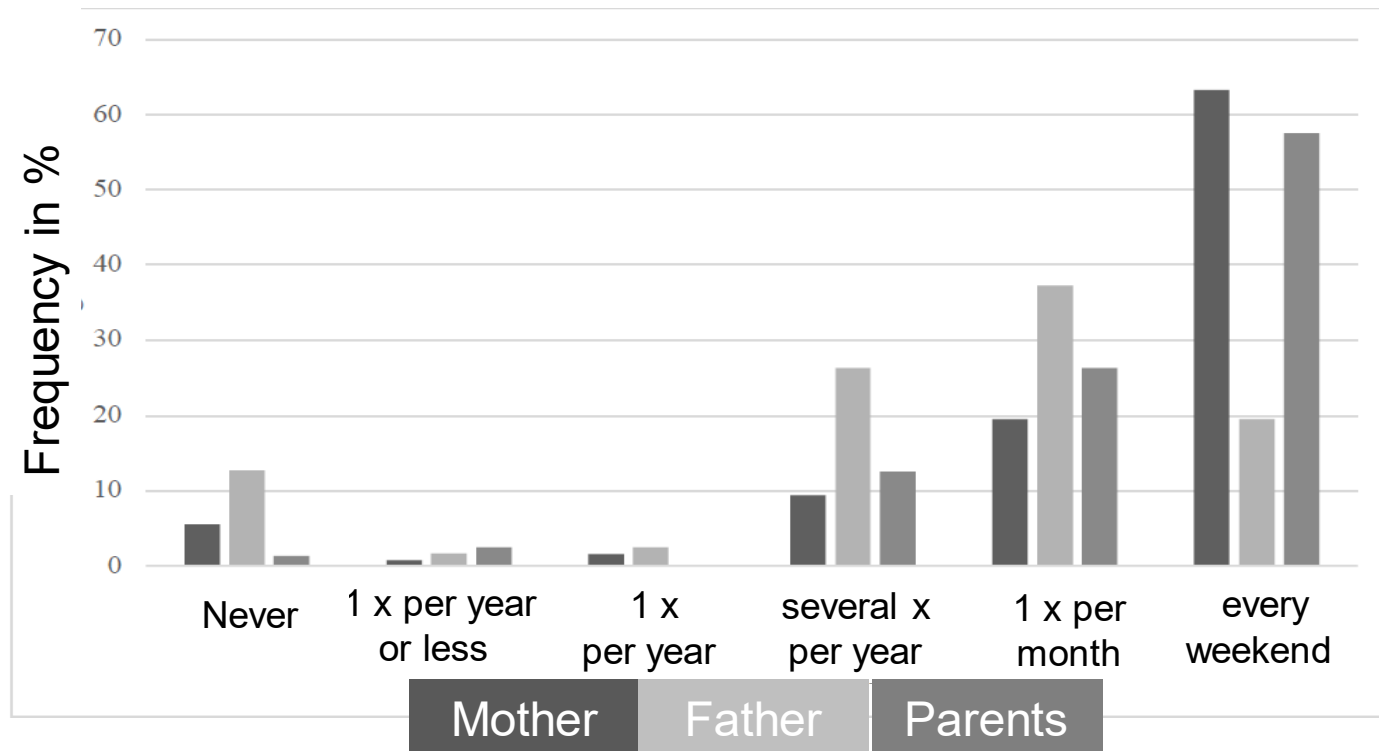
■ Participation in virtual family occasions



Virtual contact – weekend - Video



Weekend contact - TM

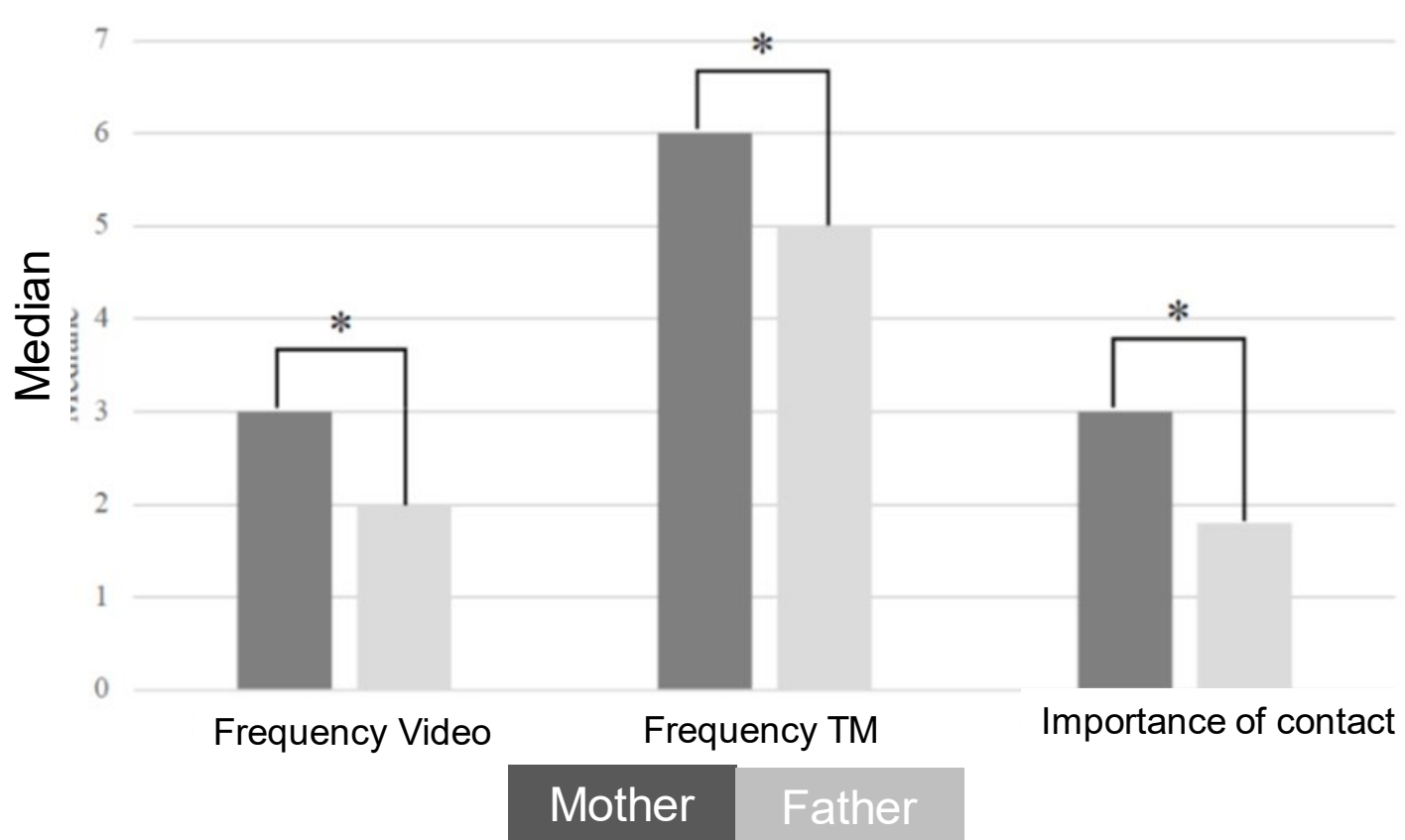


- Relationship between **geographic proximity** & contact (Spearman-Rho correlation):
 - The further the distance, the higher the **Video** contact:
 - Mother – **Video**: $r_s [126] = .33, p = .001$ => pos. relationship
 - Mother –**TM**: $r_s [126] = .13, p = .540$
 - Father – **Video**: $r_s [116] = .28, p = .002$ => pos. relationship
 - Father –**TM**: $r_s [116] = .10, p = .834$
- Distance has no effect on TM

- **Gender and weekend contact:**
- **Videos:** Significantly higher contact with **mothers** than fathers:
 - Mother (*Mdn* = 3.00) Father (*Mdn* = 2.00)
 - ($z = -4.284$, $p = .001$, $n = 111$, $r = .29$).
- **TM:** : Significantly higher contact with **mothers** than fathers:
 - Mother (*Mdn* = 6.00) Father (*Mdn* = 5.00)
 - ($z = -7.267$, $p = < .001$, $n = 111$, $r = .48$).

- **Importance** and Contact (from the perspective of the child)
- Importance is rated significantly higher for mothers than fathers.
 - Mothers: $M = 3.03$ ($SD = .93$) Median = 3.00 (5 point Likert scale)
 - Fathers: $M = 1.98$ ($SD = .79$). Median = 2.00.
 - Difference is significant ($z = -7.611$, $p < .001$, $n = 101$, $r = .54$).
- Mothers have more frequent contact – and the importance of the contact is also judged as more important by the adult children.

- Summary – Gender differences



- Relationship **between importance of analog family rituals** and contact frequency – for **father** relationship.
- The greater the importance of shared weekends during cohabitation, the more frequently adult children stayed in contact with their fathers on weekends via TM and video calls
- No effect for mothers
 - Videos: $r_s [116] = .25, p = .004$
 - TM: $r_s [116] = .17, p = .03$

- Sample
 - Size
 - Gender
 - Academic
- Cross-sectional
- No information on *content* or *context* of communication
- Modes of contact - no focus on audio or other forms i.e. reels
- Age range – younger vs. older cohort

- Are analog practices transferred to the virtual world?
 - NO
 - But analog practices impact virtual communication
 - Virtual meals – virtually don't exist
 - Participation in family occasions – rare.
 - Weekend – asynchronous communication dominates
- High incidence of asynchronous communication
 - Control
 - Response / timing
 - Content
- Gender differences in communication – transferred to the virtual world

- Perspective of the parents
- Negotiation of rules – etiquette -> explicit?
- Pressure to respond – Expectations
- Satisfaction with communication
- Elaboration of length & content & function of communication

- Include siblings – and communication among siblings
- Include grandparents – preferred mode and frequency?

- Emergence of new rituals/ routines?

- Compare those with “similar” with both parents to those with different relationship with parents.

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Thank you for your attention

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Any questions?

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