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# International Social Work

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## **THE MISSING GROUP? SITUATING TRANSNATIONAL CONTACTS IN DEFAMILISATION RESEARCH**

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Keywords:	Chinese immigrants, Decommodification, Care, Overseas families, Government, UK
Abstract:	Defamilisation research is increasingly seen as an important component of studies of welfare and social work. It is concerned with people's vulnerability to defamilisation risks, which are caused by insufficient opportunities for people to choose whether and how they participate in the family. Despite an increasing emphasis on defamilisation research, there has been insufficient attention given to how studies of transnational contacts contribute to defamilisation research. This article argues for the need to expand the scope of defamilisation research to incorporate the concept of 'transnational contact led strategies' using evidence from focus groups with Chinese older people in the UK.

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## THE MISSING GROUP? SITUATING TRANSNATIONAL CONTACTS IN DEFAMILISATION RESEARCH

### Introduction

Over the past two decades there has been a growing volume of studies focusing on transnational family contacts and also on defamilisation (Esping-Andersen 1999; Bambra 2007; Lunt 2009; Dreby and Adkins 2010; Bernadi 2011; Daly 2011; Kroger 2011; Saxonberg 2013; Kilkey and Merla 2014; Mazzucato et al. 2015; Lohmann and Zagel 2016; Solari 2018; Acedera and Yeoh 2019; Bryceson 2019). **Both kinds of studies stress the importance of enhancing the welfare of individuals through creating favourable conditions to choose whether and how to participate in family relationships.** By emphasizing the links between these two kinds of studies, this article has three objectives. The first is to explore the diverse ways individuals attempt to improve their lives through making transnational family contacts. **The second is to show how the study of these diverse ways contributes to the discussion of defamilisation risks. The third is to explore the experiences of Chinese older people (aged 60 or above), who had migrated to the UK and are British citizens, in making transnational family contacts using eight focus groups.** These findings provide examples of the different forms of transnational family contacts made by older people. **Moreover, they shed light on the factors considered by older migrants when making decisions concerning transnational family contacts.** Furthermore, they show how the examination of the transnational family contacts contributes to the discussion of defamilisation risks.

**Initially this article discusses the notion of defamilisation risks and strategies that have been adopted to attempt to overcome these risks. This is followed by a discussion of**

**transnational contacts, before focusing on the findings and implications relating to Chinese older people in the UK.**

### **Defamilisation risks**

A number of defamilisation studies have raised concerns about the oppression caused by the involuntary participation in unwanted family relationships (Lister 1994; Bambra 2007; Kroger 2011; Lohmann and Zagel 2016). An example of this form of oppression are those women who take on the majority of unpaid care responsibilities in the family involuntarily because they are financially reliant on male members (Nyberg 2002; Saxonberg 2013). To deal with this oppression, some analysts suggest assisting women to take part in formal employment (Bambra 2007). **By doing so, women may be able to achieve financial autonomy in the family, which could result in them having stronger bargaining power over the allocation of unpaid care responsibilities in the family (Bambra 2004; Kroger 2011).** This suggestion is closely related to Lister's views on the relationship between the concept of defamilisation and decommodification:

‘(T)he dimension of the decommodification needs also to be complemented by that of what we might call ‘defamilisation’, if it is to provide a rounded measure of economic independence. Welfare regimes might then also be characterized according to the degree to which individual adults can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living, independently of family relationships, either through paid work or through the social security system’ (Lister 1994: 37).

**Lister's view on the concept of defamilisation provides important insights into defamilisation risks.** These risks are associated with the absence of one or both of two conditions that directly affect how people promote their well-being – the ‘material condition’

and the ‘relational condition’. The material condition refers to the availability of sufficient opportunities for individuals to secure a reasonable standard of living. The relational condition is associated with the extent to which there are opportunities to choose whether and how to participate in family relationships (**Chau et al. 2016**).

Defamilisation studies also contribute to the search for ways to tackle defamilisation risks (Esping-Andersen 1999; Bambra 2007; Kroger 2011; Saraceno and Keck 2011; Chau and Yu 2019). Analysts have drawn attention to different kinds of strategies – these include government-led, service-market-led and labour-market-led strategies. These strategies stress the importance of making use of the (potential and actual) ties between the family and important social institutions (the government, the service market and the labour market) to deal with defamilisation risks. These ties are maintained by the flow of resources, such as material goods, care support and information, between the family and these social institutions. An example of how the resources flow between social institutions and the family is when the family seeks financial assistance from the government. By doing so, the family not only gains material assistance from the government, but also reinforces ties with the government.

**Previous studies show that the service-market-led strategy stresses the importance of seeking support from the product market (Yu et al. 2015).** This strategy can be understood in people’s attempt to outsource care responsibilities from the family to the service market (Esping-Andersen 1999). By doing so, people may gain more freedom to choose whether or not to undertake the role of care provider in the family; and as a result, they may have more opportunities to choose to take part in formal employment and improve their standard of living. The government-led-strategy emphasizes the significance of seeking support from the government. It is associated with an individual’s attempt to shift care responsibilities from the

family to the government (Lohmann and Zagel 2016). An example of this strategy is to use public child care services instead of relying on the family to care for children. By doing so, individuals may gain more freedom to choose whether or not to undertake the role of care provider in the family (Michon 2008). As previously stated, if individuals can gain sufficient financial resources to achieve a reasonable standard of living through participating in the labour market, **they may not only gain a higher degree of financial autonomy in the family, but also have a greater say in how to participate in the family (Taylor-Gooby 1996; Bambra 2007).**

Despite a rising interest in the search for strategies to tackle defamilisation risks, the importance of transnational family contacts in reducing these risks is not given sufficient attention in defamilisation studies. This under-studied area is discussed in the next section.

### **Transnational family contacts**

As a result of economic globalisation, improved transportation and communication technologies, more and more individuals attach their life to more than one country (Lin et al. 2010; Solari 2018; Acedera and Yeoh 2019; Bryceson 2019). This phenomenon is highlighted by Portes et al. (1999: 217), who stated that there is a ‘growing number of persons who live dual lives; speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders’. In response to this phenomenon, there is a growing volume of studies about transnational family contacts (Shih 2016). **These studies have an important impact on migration research. Lunt (2009) points out that studies of transnational family go beyond the settler-immigrant paradigm.** In relation to this point, Dreby and Adkins (2010) argue that these studies shift the research focus on

immigrant families from the assimilation and adaption issues, to the ways the immigrants maintain their family relationships across national borders.

Different analysts study transnational family contacts with different foci. One of these is how families conduct transnational activities as a mechanism in an increasingly complex environment, where consumption and production opportunities are available in more than one physical place (Dreby and Adkins 2010; Yu 2018a). For example, Waters (2010) points out that migrant households are seen to deploy transnational dispersals and relocations with particular objectives in mind (such as improving the welfare and status of the family). Another approach focuses on the attempts made by individuals within the family to advance their welfare through making use of family networks. This approach stresses the importance of studying how individuals in the family located in the country of origin, and individuals in the family located in the host country, interact with each other in such activities as the exchange of information, material and immaterial goods (Bernardi 2011). In this approach, transnational families can be understood as ‘families where some members of the family network are anchored in one place, based either in home or overseas countries, but where family relationships transcend national boundaries and involve multi-directional and routine flows among these family members’ (Lunt 2009: 244). This article focuses on this kind of ‘individual-based approach’ as this provides greater insights into the ways individuals explore the opportunities to tackle defamilisation risks through making transnational family contacts. With reference to the labour-market-led, service-market-led and government-led strategies for tackling defamilisation risks, we use a framework (**termed ‘transnational family contact’ in this article**) which emphasizes the concept of ties to study the way individuals make transnational family contacts, and the factors they consider when making decisions concerning these contacts (see Diagram 1).

<Diagram 1>

The transnational family contact framework stresses that there are various (potential or actual) ties between family members living in different physical locations. As with the ties between family and other social institutions (the government, the service market and labour market), the ties between the family in the country of origin and the family in the host country are strengthened by the flows of resources. This point is supported by Bryceson (2019) who states that how transnational family members organize their productive and reproductive activities is key to the perpetuation of the transnational family unit. It is important to emphasize three points here. Firstly, the pool of resources circulating through the transnational family ties could be more than financial goods. As pointed out by Papadopoulos and Roumpakis (2019), family is an important generator of relational goods. It is thus reasonable to suggest that the pool of resources circulated through the transnational ties between family members could include non-material elements such as care and emotional support. Secondly, the flows of resources between members in transnational families can be conducted in the presence and/or the absence of proximity. This can be shown by the fact that the care arrangements made by individuals in transnational families can take different forms. One of these forms is marked by the situations in which proximate care is provided. This could be done via the mobility of caregivers or care-receivers (Zhou 2013). **For example, parents may make a short-term visit to their child's family living in another country to look after their grandchildren.** Care can also be provided across borders in the absence of geographical proximity (Kilkey and Merla 2014). The provision of this kind of 'distant care' can be achieved if care providers use ICT, and/or involve themselves in such activities as delegation and coordination of care (Zhou 2013; Baldassar et al. 2016). Thirdly, the flow of resources between members in transnational families can involve non-family sectors such as the service market and the government. For

example, in order to receive care from their family members living in their country of origin, individuals may need to apply to re-migrate from one country into another country. Whether they are able to do so may depend on the migration policies set by the government in their country of origin.

**The transnational family contact framework contributes to the studies of transnational family contacts in three ways.** Firstly, it sheds light on different types of transnational family contacts that individuals may make. The following are examples:

- a. Some individuals prefer to regularly visit their overseas family to provide emotional support, whereas others choose to provide that support through distant contact.
- b. Some individuals prefer to undertake the role of care receiver in their overseas family whereas some want to perform the role of care provider.

Secondly, it is possible that transnational family contacts can be made in an unplanned and passive way. However, it is equally possible that these contacts can be rationally planned. They may be in response to changing needs and a necessity. The transnational family contact framework makes us more aware of what kinds of factors individuals may need to consider when planning transnational family contact. For example, before making decisions on moving to live with their overseas family members, individuals may need to compare the welfare policy measures provided by the country where they currently live and the country where their overseas family members live. Before seeking care support from their overseas family members, individuals may need to find out whether their family members are willing to provide care to them.

**Thirdly, the framework draws attention to the possible difficulties in making transnational family contacts in the ways preferred by individuals.** Non-family sectors (such as the service market and the government) may not necessarily be able to provide sufficient support to individuals to make transnational family contacts. Some private services, such as ICT provision, may assist people to provide emotional support to their overseas family members, however, people may not necessarily have sufficient financial resources or knowledge to use these services. Furthermore, some people may not be able to move to other countries to provide proximate care to their overseas family members due to the government's migration policies (Lunt 2009; Bryceson 2019). **The study of Chinese older people in the UK discussed in the next section provides support for these points.**

### **Chinese people in the UK**

There are two reasons for studying Chinese older people in the UK. Firstly, Chinese migrants have a long history of living in the UK. Moreover, they often have rich experiences of making regular contacts with their families living in different countries (Shardlow and Rochelle 2017). Secondly, Chinese older people are not a homogeneous group (Rochelle and Marks 2010) as they are from different places of origin (such as China, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Vietnam) and speak different languages (such as Mandarin, Cantonese and Hakka). Hence, they provide a variety of examples of how transnational family contacts are made and how defamilisation risks are tackled.

For the purpose of exploring the ways Chinese older people make transnational family contacts, focus groups were employed. These provided the opportunity for participants to express their own views and interpretations regarding their care circumstances in detail, enabling us to gain a rich understanding of motivations, beliefs and attitudes towards care situations. This approach

can be especially useful in providing a detailed, contextual and multi-layered interpretation of a particular issue (Mason 2002). Data were collected from eight focus groups. **The targets of these focus groups were those Chinese older people with British citizenship who had migrated to the UK from Hong Kong, Malaysia, mainland China, Vietnam or Macau.** Seven focus group interviews were conducted in the UK. One focus group was conducted in Hong Kong. All members of the Hong Kong focus group were British citizens and had moved back from the UK to Hong Kong (their place of origin) before the interviews. While the participants in this group only accounted for a small proportion of the total number of participants (6 out of 69), they provided important information concerning why some Chinese older people in the UK choose to move back to their place of origin. All the participants of the study did not share the same mother-tongue. Despite this they were all able to communicate in Cantonese. Hence, each of the focus group discussions was conducted in Cantonese. The researchers conducting the focus groups speak English and several Chinese languages, so were in a position to provide clarification if required. **They have carried out several projects concerning the needs of Chinese older people in the UK over the past two decades.** In developing the interview schedule for the focus groups, the researchers consulted an existing advisory group consisting of Chinese older people and service providers. An information sheet was distributed to respondents beforehand and a consent form was signed at the beginning of each focus group meeting. **Principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity were strictly followed throughout the research process with pseudonyms employed. Table 1 provides a brief breakdown of the characteristics of the focus group respondents. As shown in this table, the majority of the respondents were those older people whose place of origin is Hong Kong.**

Potential respondents were recruited through churches and Chinese community centres. Those older people who were interested in the study were also asked to invite their friends who met the requirements of the study to participate in the focus groups. This approach meant that those older Chinese people with connections to churches and community centres were potentially over-represented in the sample, whereas those individuals without these connections who may be amongst the most socially isolated, were less likely to be involved in the study. The researchers facilitated the focus groups and had an important role in ensuring that those less vocal respondents were encouraged to participate (see Brinkman and Kvale 2014). This was achieved by specifically involving quieter participants, asking them questions and providing them with an opportunity to contribute. **In view of our sampling strategy, the sample size and the fact that most of the respondents had connections with Hong Kong,** theoretical saturation could not be assumed. As such the study is illustrative rather than extensive. However, the interpretation of meanings and actions of actors according to their own subjective frame of reference is still important. The strength of this approach is in ‘developing a much richer understanding of processes, motivations, beliefs and attitudes than can be gained from quantitative research’ (Rowlingson 2002: 632).

<Table 1>

## Findings

We identified several areas in relation to defamilisation risks and transnational contacts which informed the topic guide and fed into discussions. These areas included respondents’ caring and financial needs, their ways of dealing with care and financial issues, and whether and how they contacted their family members in the UK and overseas. The discussion of these areas enhances our understanding of three important issues: the diverse options participants explored

to make transnational family contacts; the active roles played by some participants in assessing the relative advantages and disadvantages of different kinds of transnational family contacts; and the difficulties faced by participants in making their preferred forms of transnational family contacts.

#### *Different types of transnational family contact*

The focus group findings provide empirical examples of different types of transnational family contacts made by older people. Some respondents sought assistance from their families in the country of their origin in order to improve their material standard of living. **Others wanted to be care recipients of their families in the country of their origin. It was apparent that some participants provided distant care to their overseas family members, whereas others chose to move back to the place of their origin and live with their family members.**

Ms Chan received assistance from her uncle in managing her properties in China so that she did not need to pay for the services provided by the private sector. She said:

*'I came to the UK from Hong Kong but my home town is Shenzhen where I still own some properties. My uncle helps to rent them to tenants. ... I am so far away Shenzhen and can't manage them myself. If there is need, my uncle will call me and I will go back to sign some documents. Family members are more reliable than commercial agents'.*

Ms Au asked their overseas family members to send them goods regularly. She stated that:

*'Chinese preserved sausages and Chinese medicines are the things that you may not find it easy to buy here (the UK). What you can get here are of poor quality at a high price'.*

Mr. Keung kept in regular contact with their overseas families which provided him with emotional support. He said, '*As a dad, I often make a long-distance call to them (the children of the respondents). They ask my purpose for calling and I tell them that I just want to hear their voices and keep in touch*'. Mr. Lam had a similar experience: '*My mum is still in Hong Kong. I call her and chat to her for half an hour every day. I feel warm and support from her*'. Instead of making regular distant contacts with their families as Mr. Keung and Mr. Lam did, Mr. Ting and Ms Ling moved to Hong Kong (their place of origin) to live with their overseas families.

#### *Playing an active role in assessing different options*

The interview findings showed that some respondents played an active role in assessing the relative advantages and disadvantages of different options concerning the transnational family contacts. Several respondents had seriously assessed the relationships with their family members before they decided whether and how to make their transnational family contacts. Ms Pang and Ms Tam were not very keen to maintain close contacts with their overseas families. Both of them thought that prolonged separation not only undermined the attachment relationships between family members, but also made it difficult for family members to understand each other. Ms Pang said: '*We only share good news, not worries. They (Ms Pang's overseas family members) can't help me anyway. I then preferred not to make contacts unless very necessary*'. This view was shared by Ms Tam: '*People are only interested in their own business. That is why the saying "people only sweep snow in front of their own houses" is still popular. There is no point to make any contact with family members living far away*'. Ms Qin initially wanted to live with her son in France. However, after her relationship with her daughter-in-law deteriorated, she moved back to the UK. She said:

*'I had moved to live with my son and my daughter-in-law in France. I did all sorts of cooking and put the food on the table for my daughter-in-law. ... However, my daughter-in-law accused me of sitting around. I swallowed my words and decided to move back to the UK.'*

After re-settling in the UK, Ms Qin decided not to move back to his son's family. However, instead of seeking total detachment from her son's family, she occasionally contacted them using ICT.

Some respondents such as Ms Sze-to, Mr. Nan-gong and Ms Hui saw the market as an important sector for meeting their needs. When they considered whether and how to make transnational family contacts, especially in moving to live with their family members in their place of origin, they paid attention to the availability of affordable private services. Ms Sze-to and Mr. Nan-gong had considered moving back to live with their family members in Hong Kong (their country of origin) when they grow older. **However, they were pessimistic that this plan could be implemented because they expected the properties in Hong Kong would remain expensive meaning they would be unable to afford to rent a flat.** Ms Hui also regarded the market as a significant sector for meeting her needs but developed a different plan. At the time of the focus group, Ms Hui was planning to move back to Hong Kong permanently. Ms Hui explained that this not only gave her more opportunities to see her family members in Hong Kong regularly, but also enabled her to hire a domestic maid to look after her.

Some respondents regarded the opportunity to receive government welfare as the main factor in deciding whether or not to join their overseas family. **Mr. Ling and Ms Ting chose to move back to Hong Kong and stay with their family members. Before they finalized their**

**decision, both considered how the move would affect their chance of accessing social welfare in Hong Kong and the UK.** Mr. Ling said:

*'Since I kept my Hong Kong identity card, I am eligible to apply for public housing and social security benefits in Hong Kong. The welfare benefits that I received in Hong Kong are no less than those that I got in the UK. In Hong Kong, most clinics are privately run and the fees are not particularly high. It is easier to get the clinic services in Hong Kong than the medical support from the NHS in the UK'.*

Ms Ting said:

*'An important reason for coming back to Hong Kong is the welfare support I can receive from the Hong Kong government. The welfare support for older people in Hong Kong is not bad. I receive travelling subsidies, free vouchers to use private health services and social security benefits. Most importantly, the staff in the elderly hostels speak Cantonese. It is easy to talk to them and express my needs'.*

Mr. Wan planned to move back to Hong Kong. However, he had some concerns about his life in Hong Kong and did not rule out the possibility of returning to the UK in the future. For this reason, he had no intention to sell his house in the UK. He said:

*'If everything is ok, I hope I could leave the UK and settle in Hong Kong. But in case I cannot apply for a public rental flat in Hong Kong, I will go back to the UK. Another option that I am considering is to move to live with my son in mainland China. I heard that the Hong Kong government financially subsidizes older people to live in mainland China. In order to get the subsidies, I need to live in Hong Kong for several years instead of directly moving back to mainland China from the UK. It is troublesome. But it is worth doing that'.*

Not all respondents spent time weighing up different options for their transnational family contacts. **As mentioned above, Mr. Keung and Mr. Lam contacted their overseas family members as a matter of routine.** They did not explore whether there were better alternative ways of making transnational family contacts.

#### *Difficulties in making transnational family contacts*

The focus groups provided an opportunity for respondents to share their difficulties in making transnational family contacts. Some respondents found it difficult to use ICT to communicate with their overseas family due to a lack of knowledge and expertise about different forms of communication. **For example, Ms Ying said: ‘People like my elderly mother (over 80 years old) have difficulties in using a mobile phone’.** Ms Chan said: ‘*There is no point in learning how to use these things (ICT). I have no computer and no Wi-Fi at home*’. Some respondents cited a lack of sufficient financial resources to maintain the kind of family relationships required. For example, Ms Au-yeung said that she wanted to regularly visit her family in Hong Kong but could not do so because both the travel insurance and air fare were expensive. The overseas family can also be a source of the defamilisation risks rather than a solution. Ms Bai found it hard to earn a living in the UK. Hence, initially she did not want to assist her brother in Hong Kong to pay his debts. However, out of obligation, she eventually changed her mind, and reluctantly gave him the financial support required. She said:

*My older brother was addicted to gambling. While I did not earn a lot here, I paid off his debts and told the loan company not to lend him any more money because no one will pay it back for him. My younger brother had credit card debts. My younger sister said if I did not help, he would never be able to clear the debts.*

Some respondents felt overburdened by the caring tasks in relation to both their local and overseas families. In addition to taking care of her family members in the UK, Miss Man contacted her mother in America regularly. Whilst she found it necessary to keep in touch with her mother on an almost a daily basis, she felt that making such contact was very time-consuming and represented an additional caring responsibility. Miss Man reported:

*My mum likes to talk a lot. She really enjoys it. That is why I let her talk for hours. My hand feels numb while my eyes are closing. We have five hours difference in time zone. She is in America. We call her at midnight while it is five or six pm there. We usually finish the call around one o'clock in the morning here.*

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, Ms Sze-to and Mr. Nan-gong found it difficult to move back to Hong Kong because they were worried that they would not receive the required welfare provision from the Hong Kong government.

## **Discussion**

Two important lessons can be learnt from the study findings. **Firstly, they provide insights into the diverse ways that older people improve life through making transnational family contacts and how these diverse approaches link to defamilisation research.** As mentioned, older people can make diverse types of transnational family contacts. The study provides a number of empirical examples – Mr. Keung made distant contacts with his overseas family, whereas Mr. Ting moved to live with his overseas families. Mr. Lam preferred to play the role of care receiver in their overseas family whereas Ms Qin had tried to fulfil the role of care provider to her overseas family. The diverse forms of transnational family contacts made by respondents, to a certain extent, reflected diverse considerations affecting their decisions. For example, Ms Sze-to and Mr. Nag-gong were concerned about the availability of affordable

private services, whereas **Mr. Ling and Ms Ting would only consider moving to join their transnational families if they received additional government benefits.**

**These diverse considerations imply that making transnational family contacts can be challenging and they may not necessarily bring benefits to older people.** In some cases the transnational family contacts led to difficult circumstances where relationships between older people and their transnational families became fractured. **As pointed out by Ms Pang and Mr. Tam, prolonged separation can undermine relationships between family members living in different locations.** Moreover, respondents faced the risk of receiving less social welfare after moving to join their family members in another country. Furthermore, some respondents lacked sufficient knowledge and financial resources to use the private services. It is also necessary to stress that some respondents were more vulnerable to the challenges associated with transnational family contact than others.

The findings also enhance our understanding of how older people react to defamilisation risks. As previously stated defamilisation risks involve two main concerns – a lack of sufficient opportunities to secure a reasonable standard of living, and a lack of sufficient freedom to choose whether and how to participate in family relationships. **Different respondents attached varying importance to these two concerns.** Through making transnational family contacts, Ms Chan and Ms Au focused on improving their standard of living, while Ms Qin and Ms Bai had explicit concerns about how the transnational family contacts affected their chance of choosing whether and how to participate in family relationships. **From the findings we also learn the strategies used by older people to reduce the defamilisation risks.** Some respondents outsourced the defamilisation risks to their family **members living in other**

**countries instead of seeking help from the government or the private sector. Alternatively, respondents attempted to use more than one strategy.**

**The second lesson we can learn is concerned with the role social workers can play in assisting older people to tackle defamilisation risks.** In order to enhance older people's welfare, social workers should consider not only raising public awareness of older people's diverse preferences for tackling defamilisation risks, but also try to create more favourable conditions so that older people can choose whether and how to take part in the family. Respondents faced diverse challenges when trying to reduce defamilisation risks through making transnational family contacts. As these challenges reflect the gaps between what older people in transnational families need and what the existing welfare arrangements offer, it is necessary for social workers to raise concerns about these challenges, and encourage the public to search for ways to deal with them. It is important not to under-estimate the difficulties faced by social workers in carrying out these tasks. Given that most social rights remain nation-based, it is not easy to develop international policies that are needed to help older people to migrate and/or re-migrate to other countries. However, social workers can have a role in highlighting the problems faced by older people, and the need to explore the potential of international policies and agreements in addressing these problems.

## **Conclusion**

**Based on the study of Chinese older people in the UK, this article has explored the attempts made by individuals to reduce defamilisation risks through making transnational family contacts. As the final part of this article, it is worth suggesting that social workers should play an active part in assisting individuals to make transnational family contacts. By doing so, they not only increase people's chance of tackling**

defamilisation risks but also contribute to the development of international social work practices. International social work stresses the importance of collaboration between agents (such as people and governments) in exchanging views on welfare and searching for solutions to shared problems (Lyons 2006; Mohan 2008; Trygged 2010; Yu 2018b). As we show, in order to create favourable conditions for effective transnational family contacts, it may be necessary to secure not only the co-operation between family members living in different countries, but also the co-operation between different governments. These kinds of co-operation in turn convey a message that we may not be able to meet social needs within a national boundary. Rather we may need to rely on international co-operation between governments and members of civil societies. Hence, in order to further extend the scope of defamilisation research needs and international social work practices, we take the opportunity to suggest that it is worth exploring how other groups, such as younger and middle-aged people, employ strategies relating to transnational contacts to deal with defamilisation risks, and how the effectiveness of these strategies can be enhanced by the conditions created jointly by governments.

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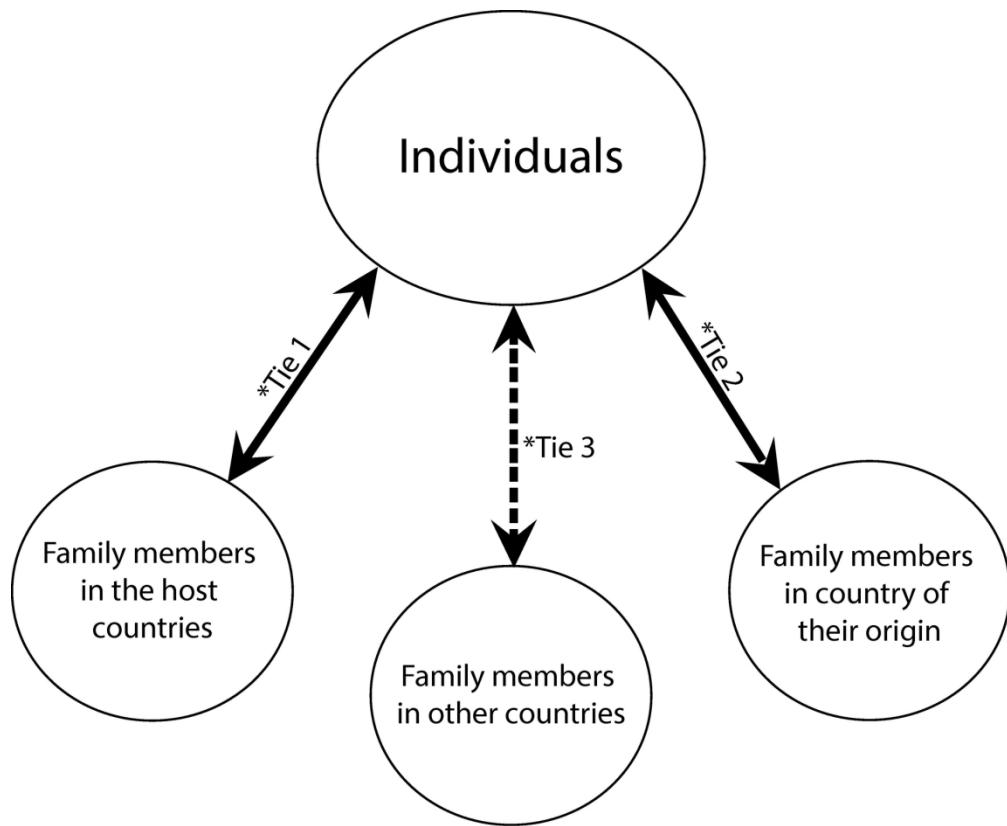
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**Table 1 Personal Characteristics of the Respondents**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>
• Male	18
• Female	45
<b>Age</b>	
• 60-69	32
• 70-79	29
• 80-89	8
<b>Years in the UK</b>	
• 10-19	6
• 20-29	11
• 30-39	22
• 40 or more	30
<b>Place of origin</b>	
• Hong Kong	51
• Malaysia	8
• Mainland China	5
• Vietnam	4
• Macau	1
<b>Living arrangements</b>	
• with spouse	33
• not with family	18
• with children	17
• not specified	1
<b>Current occupation or occupation before retirement</b>	
• catering industry	24
• housewife	10
• health professional	8
• management/business	5
• other professionals	4
• skilled worker	1
• farmer	1
• never been in employment	1
• not specified	15

**Diagram 1 Transnational Family Contact Framework**



Note:

\* Tie can be reinforced by one-off / routine flows of resources. The flow of resources a) can be multi-directional; b) can be conducted in the presence or absence of proximity; and c) can involve non-family sectors.

170x183mm (300 x 300 DPI)