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Gender differentiation in intergenerational care-giving and migration choices [☆]

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ABSTRACT

We weave together care-giving, gender, and migration. We hypothesize that daughters who are mothers have a stronger incentive than sons who are fathers to demonstrate to their children the appropriate way of caring for one's parents. The reason underlying this hypothesis is that women on average live longer than men, they tend to marry men who are older than they are and, thus, they are more likely than men to spend their last years without a spouse. Because it is more effective and less costly to care for parents if they live nearby, daughters with children do not move as far away from the parental home as sons with children or childless offspring. Data on the distance between the children's location and the parents' location extracted from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), in conjunction with data on selected demographic characteristics and institutional indicators taken from Eurostat, the OECD, and the World Bank, lend support to our hypothesis: compared to childless daughters, childless sons, and sons who are fathers, daughters who are mothers choose to live closer to their parents' home.

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1. Introduction

In this paper we present a new hypothesis that links together three themes: intergenerational care-giving, gender differences in intergenerational care-giving, and gender differences in migration (location) choices. The link is formed by the demonstration effect. In a nutshell, the idea behind this is that care-giving is influenced by a desire for future receipt of care. Because women on average live longer than men and tend to marry men who are older than they are, they are more likely than men to spend their last years without a spouse. If care given by parents, P, to their parents, G, serves to demonstrate to children, K, desired future care-giving behavior to P when K become P and P become G, then daughters who are mothers are more likely to engage in demonstration effect activities than sons who are fathers: daughters stand to gain more than sons from instilling the desired behavior in their children. And because it is more effective and less costly to demonstrate care-giving to parents when they and their children live near to each

other, we conjecture that daughters who have children will migrate less far from the parental home than sons who have children, less far than childless sons, and less far than childless daughters.

In the US in 2013, for example, women's life expectancy was about five years greater than men's.² And in 2014, women married men that, on average, were two years older.³ Therefore, on average, a man has his wife beside him as he ages, but a woman risks spending her last years alone. In the absence of a husband (partner), elderly women may have to rely on their children for support. Consequently, women may be more motivated to engage in demonstration effect activities. Empirical evidence that in the US daughters look after aging parents more intensively than sons is consistent with this reasoning (Finley, 1989; Lee et al., 1993; Ettner, 1996; Hiedemann and Stern, 1999; Stark, 1999; Engers and Stern, 2002; Cox and Stark, 2005). For example, using data from the 1987 National Survey of Families and Households, Ettner (1996, p. 201) finds that "... caregiving [for parents] appears to have a

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² According to National Center for Health Statistics (Xu et al., 2016), in the US in 2013 women's life expectancy was 81.2, whereas men's was 76.4. In the EU in 2013 a 5.6 year difference in life expectancy was observed (Eurostat on-line database available at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>).

³ According to the US Census Bureau (2014), in 2014 the median age at first marriage of women was 27.6, and of men 29.5. The data were retrieved by the authors of this paper using American FactFinder <<http://factfinder.census.gov>>, (4 April 2016).

larger impact on female work hours than on male work hours.” Drawing on data from the 1982 to 1984 waves of the National Long-Term Care Survey, [Hiedemann and Stern \(1999, p. 55\)](#) observe that daughters are more likely than sons to care for their parents. On the basis of the same dataset for the year 1984, [Engers and Stern \(2002, p. 92\)](#) conclude that “daughters are more likely to provide care than sons . . . and married children are more likely to provide care than single children.”

Many cultures and religions encourage adult children to be, or assign adult children to act as, care-givers to their parents. Confucian writings and the Old Testament tell children they have a duty to take care of their parents. In general, there is no gender-specificity in this regard; it is children rather than sons or daughters who are held responsible. The predominance in many cultures of adult daughters as primary care-givers could be an extension of the natural task of childcare into adult-care in conjunction with an optimal division of labor under the constraints and opportunities prevailing at the time.⁴ However, in present day societies, it is quite often the case that calculation rather than religious teachings and moral traditions guide individuals’ behavior. The hypothesis advanced in this paper is in line with this premise.

Our hypothesis does not contradict other ways of thinking about the optimal migration distance of daughters. Many different mechanisms governing this could be at work. For example, single motherhood, which is more prevalent than single fatherhood, means that daughters find it valuable to live near their parents so they have a sense of belonging and are better able to cope. A grandparent’s potential help with childcare can affect the choice of how far the daughter will migrate.

In Sections 2 and 3 we present the components that add up to the hypothesis that daughters who have children live closer to their parents than childless daughters, childless sons, and sons who have children. A model that yields a negative relationship between the optimal migration distance and the importance attached to the care to be received from children in the future is presented in [Appendix A](#). Complementary considerations are brought up in section 4. In section 5 we use data on the distance between the children’s and the parents’ locations extracted from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) to test for differences in migration behavior by gender and by parenthood status. We draw on data for four European countries – two northern countries, Denmark and Sweden, and two more southern countries, Belgium and France – collected in four waves 1, 2, 4, and 5 taken, respectively, in 2004, 2006/2007, 2011/2012, and 2013.⁵ Specific coefficients obtained from estimation of the econometric models related to each of the four countries are presented in [Appendix B](#). We find that the patterns of migration are in line with our hypothesis: daughters who are mothers live closer to their parents’ home than comparable childless daughters, childless sons, and sons who are fathers. The difference between the migration pattern of daughters who are mothers and sons who are fathers varies by country, and appears to be influenced by the institutional context, especially the extent to which elderly care is provided by the state. The difference between the location of daughters who are mothers and the location of sons who are fathers is significant in Belgium and France where state-provided elderly care is relatively weak, but not in Denmark and Sweden where state-provided elderly care is generous. Women residing in European countries with weaker elderly care are more likely

⁴ There are a good number of studies on gender differences in the provision of care for parents in their old age. For example, [Finley \(1989\)](#) reports that daughters provide more care for elderly mothers than sons do, regardless of the time constraints, external resources, and attitudes towards obligations. [Lee et al. \(1993\)](#) complement this finding by showing that a parent is more likely to receive care from a child of the same sex. Similar observations are reported, for example, by [Arber and Ginn \(1995\)](#) who examine the degree of men’s and women’s provision of various forms of informal care.

⁵ These are SHARE Waves 10.6103/SHARE.w1.600, 10.6103/SHARE.w2.600, 10.6103/SHARE.w4.600, and 10.6103/SHARE.w5.600.

to demonstrate to their children how to care for parents, leading to differentiation in the migration behavior by gender. In section 6 we discuss limitations of the empirical analysis and present complementary reflections. In section 7 we conclude.

2. The demonstration effect

The “demonstration effect in intergenerational transfers” is an approach that seeks to explain why adult children provide care, companionship, and other forms of assistance and attention to their parents.

The demonstration effect perspective is based on the premise that adult children seek to shape the attitudes and preferences of their children so that in due course the latter will provide the former with the attention and care they desire: adult children who are parents inculcate in their children, by demonstration, the type of behavior that the parents want their children to replicate in the future. This perspective expands the domain of analysis of intergenerational interaction from two to three generations. It focuses on the perception that a child’s conduct is conditioned by parental example, and it assumes that adult children as parents take advantage of their children’s learning potential by showing attention to and caring for their own parents when the children are present so that they observe and are impressed. In [Stark \(1999\)](#) the demonstration effect idea was developed formally and tested empirically. Additional evidence in support of the demonstration effect is in [Cox and Stark \(2005\)](#), and in [Mitrut and Wolff \(2009\)](#).

More concretely, consider a family consisting of members of three generations: a child, K, a parent, P, and a grandparent, G. Each person lives for three periods: first as K, then as P, and finally as G. P wants to receive help from K in the next period when P becomes G and K becomes P. To demonstrate to K the appropriate way of behaving in the next period, P provides visible help to G when K is around to watch and learn. It follows that attention and care from P to G depend positively on the presence of children of an impressionable age.⁶ In [Appendix A](#) we present a model that links these considerations with optimal migration choices.

The idea that attention and care given to parents (G) is aimed at instilling appropriate conduct in children (K) generates an array of insights, including gender differentiation and migration choices.

3. Migration choices

Because daughters who are mothers are more inclined to engage in demonstration effect activities than sons who are fathers, the former will have a stronger preference to live near their parents than the latter. This is so for three interrelated reasons: effectiveness, cost, and the inherent value of demonstration.

Effectiveness

Parents typically teach children appropriate behavior by setting an example. To be effective, the example has to be vivid, and repeated. Such acts might well be costly to parents who need to behave differently than they would if they were not concerned with shaping their children’s preferences.

By way of illustration, suppose that care can be provided in a lump form or in installments that amount to the same total. If repeated and regular small-scale acts of care have a greater influence in shaping behavior than a single large-scale act, the presence and age of children will affect the *distribution* of care-giving. Experimental evidence from cognitive psychology indicates that distributed repetition is better than

⁶ Conventional theories of the allocation of time and money within the family could well predict the opposite effect because young children place demands on their parents’ time and income, so that the competing presence of young children will reduce the assistance that P gives to G.

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