



Intergenerational cohesiveness and later geographic distance to parents in the Netherlands



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ABSTRACT

Although spatial proximity no doubt facilitates interaction and assistance, no research to date has addressed the extent to which children who are emotionally closer to parents choose to live nearby. Using the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study ($N = 1055$), this research evaluates the relationship between parent–child cohesion at age 15 (measured retrospectively among individuals 18–35 in 2002–2004) and later geographic distance between young adults and their parents in 2006–2007. Importantly, this research is the first to consider the relationship between intergenerational solidarity and young adult's later geographic proximity to parents, proximity known to contribute to exchanges of support between the generations. For both mothers and fathers, each model yielded qualified evidence of the cohesion–proximity relationship. These findings highlight a potential selection issue related to intergenerational support and contact as it is facilitated by geographic proximity.

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1. Introduction

Intergenerational exchanges between adult children and their parents are a critical resource for young and old (Allen, Blieszner, & Roberto, 2000). Residential proximity is the best predictor of these exchanges (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Treas & Gubernskaya, 2012). Although spatial proximity no doubt facilitates interaction and assistance, no research to date has addressed the extent to which children who are emotionally closer to parents choose to live nearby. In other words, we do not know whether parents and grown children who live close together are those with warm and enduring relationships that predispose them to help one another.

Using the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS), this paper evaluates the relationship between parent–child cohesion at age 15 (assessed retrospectively in 2002–2004) for individuals aged 18–35 and later geographic distance between young adults and their parents in 2006–2007. Addressing the factors that draw individuals toward the parental home and those that push them away, the analysis considers the implications of a host of theoretically important variables, particularly the mediating effects of early independence on the relationship between intergenerational cohesion and residential proximity.

The present study contributes to the research on residential choice and parent–child solidarity in several ways. Importantly, this paper is the first to consider the relationship between intergenerational solidarity and young adult's geographic proximity to parents, proximity known to contribute to exchanges of support between the generations (Allen et al., 2000; Schenk & Dykstra, 2012). By analyzing panel data on respondents spanning a wide age range, the implications of parent–child cohesion for

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proximity is studied in the context of multiple life course transitions, rather than merely nest-leaving. We examine this relationship in the Netherlands, a compact country where even “long distance” moves are relatively short, suggesting that moves will be less restricted by financial constraints and less consequential for resource exchanges.

2. Literature review and theoretical background

Classic theoretical formulations of migration emphasize labor migration and the equilibrating movement of workers to areas of higher wages and greater job opportunities (Cadwallader, 1992). While this is undoubtedly a driving force behind much geographic mobility, studies demonstrate that there are other motives that influence migration decisions. One is based on area characteristics and the desire to live close to amenities, such as pleasant landscapes and a favorable climate (Rappaport, 2007). Another is a preference to maintain and build on social ties (Palloni, Massey, Ceballos, Espinosa, & Spittel, 2001), an idea sometimes framed as “location-specific capital,” influencing decisions of where to relocate (DaVanzo, 1981). While acknowledging the importance of labor market considerations as a predictor of migration, this paper aims to understand to what extent migration also depends on intergenerational dynamics and subjective preference.

Following prior theorizing about migration (Longley, Clarke, & Williams 1991; Sjaastad, 1962), in deciding where to live, it is assumed that individuals seek to maximize economic (e.g., income) and noneconomic (e.g., life satisfaction) gains and to minimize costs within a structure of opportunities (e.g., jobs), constraints (e.g., housing), and cultural norms and personal preferences (e.g., familistic values). When young adults make a residential choice, distance to parents is one consideration they weigh. Importantly, the costs and gains associated with living nearby or far away will depend, in part, on the quality of the parent–child relationship. Although residential distance between parents and children is a “two actor problem,” we start with the assumption that the choice is largely the child’s, because young adults are much more mobile than older ones (Geist & McManus, 2008; Long, 1992).

Bengtson and Roberts (1991) distinguished six dimensions of family solidarity, including affective (psychological closeness), associational (contact), and structural (proximity). Spatial proximity to parents is highly predictive of contact (Rossi & Rossi, 1990), which is itself important for the intergenerational exchange of vital services and support (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991). Researchers recognize that the positive correlation of proximity and contact may be due, in part, to the fact that children who feel closer emotionally to parents choose to live closer to parents. Further, although there is some evidence that parent–child relationships influence the child’s departure from the parental home (Ward & Spitze, 2007), this hypothesis for proximity has not yet been tested.

Intergenerational geographic proximity plays a crucial role in determining the intensity and frequency of contact

between parents and children (Bian, Logan, & Bian, 1998; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). The distance an individual lives from parents determines contact and support and therefore has important implications for long-term care of aging parents, despite the development of cell phones and other communication technologies (Treas & Gubernskaya, 2012). Several studies have recently detailed the factors contributing to the spatial separation of adult children and their parents (e.g., Michielin & Mulder, 2007). Nevertheless, these studies have almost exclusively focused on individual characteristics, such as children’s educational attainment (Kalmijn, 2006); parental characteristics, such as age, marital status, and health (DeWit, Wister, & Burch, 1988); and household size and family composition (Klein Ikkink, van Tilburg, & Knipscheer, 1999). Drawing on the life course perspective (Elder, 1998), this study aims to expand the focus from the individual and household to include the broader family context.

2.1. The life course perspective

This study benefits from each of Elder’s (1987, 1994, 1998) four critical concepts of the life course perspective. “Linked lives” proposes that individual lives are lived interdependently and “typically embedded in social relationships with kin and friends across the life span” (Elder, 1994, p. 6). This concept inspires the research question about the consequences of parent–child cohesion that motivates the research. “Timing in lives” refers to the notion that certain life events will affect individuals differently depending on when they occur in their life. This concept motivates the hypothesis regarding young adults’ age at departure from the parental home.

Elder’s (1987, 1994, 1998) concept of “human agency” refers to individuals’ ability to navigate their lives within the constraints of their social circumstances. In other words, individuals are active agents in shaping their lives based on individual values and preferences but only within their reasoned ability. Thus, individuals may choose to move far from their parents, although their actions may be constrained if they have limited ability to do so. Last, drawing from Elder’s “historical time and place,” cross-national implications of this research are discussed.

2.2. Kin networks, intergenerational solidarity, and “linked lives”

“Linked lives” proposes that individuals’ lived experiences are situated within, and expressed through, networks of shared relationships (Elder, 1998). Massey’s (1990) review of the migration literature highlights how networks link individual and household decisions to macrosocial structures. In an economic and social context, Massey suggests that individuals are linked to one another through kinship and social networks rather than acting as singular rational beings. He shows that individuals, families, and communities are important elements of social structure that contribute to migration. These associations are important for migration for two reasons: (a) residential mobility is safer and more predictable because of information passed along social networks to

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