



# Adults who co-reside and the young adulthood factors that lead them there

Michael J. Merten<sup>a,\*</sup>, Amanda L. Williams<sup>b</sup>, Ashley N. Harvey<sup>a</sup>, Leslie Haughey<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Center for Family Resilience, Department of Human Development & Family Science, Oklahoma State University, 700 N. Greenwood Avenue, Tulsa, OK 74106, United States

<sup>b</sup> Department of Child and Family Studies, University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5035, Hattiesburg, MS 39406, United States

<sup>c</sup> Department of Human Development & Family Science, Oklahoma State University, 700 N. Greenwood Avenue, Tulsa, OK 74106, United States

## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Young adulthood  
Families  
Co-residence  
Mental health  
Parent-child relationships  
Attainment

## ABSTRACT

It has become common for young people to continue living with their parents into adulthood. While there are a number of social, economic, and cultural factors contributing to this dynamic, less is known about how individual behaviors, mental health, and family relationships across the life course contribute to parent/adult child coresidence. The present study used data from 9268 participants of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health to examine pathways connecting early economic hardship and “rushing to adulthood” during the teenage years with young adult constrained resources, mental health, and parent-child relationships to predict adult residency with parents. Results suggest that family economic hardship sets into motion cumulative disadvantages through adolescent precocious events that constrain resources in young adulthood, deteriorate mental health through increased depressive symptoms, and damage relationships with parents contributing to indirect pathways leading to parent-adult child coresidence.

## 1. Introduction

Over the last few decades, it has become increasingly common for young adults to co-reside with their parents – whether they are returning home or never moved out (Settersten, Furstenberg, & Rumbaut, 2005). In the United States, roughly 11% of individuals over the age of 18 are living in their parents’ home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015) and, for the first time, this is the “most common living arrangement” among unmarried young adults (Fry, 2016, p. 10). An adult’s decision to live with their parents, or inability to sustain residential independence, could be due to changing social, economic, and cultural factors, such as completion of higher education (Kins & Beyers, 2010; Mitchell, Wister, & Gee, 2004); decreased job opportunities and income (Mitchell, 2006); lack of psychological resources (Bynner, 2000); and immediate family structure (Cooney & Mortimer, 1999; Seiffge-Krenke, 2006). One possible pathway through these factors stems from early family economic hardship and off-time or “adult like” events during adolescence, which affect relationships with parents, an ability to acquire resources, and mental health during young adulthood. The purpose of the present work is to explore these direct and indirect pathways to co-residence with parents in adulthood.

Individuals who experience off time life events are more likely to lack resources, come from families living in poverty, and experience poor parent-adolescent relationships (Uhlenberg & Mueller, 2003).

Research on impoverished adolescents has identified increased risks such as teenage pregnancy (Hobcraft & Kiernan, 2001), a lifetime of poverty (Mollborn, 2007), high school dropout, young adult unemployment (Alexander, 2001), and higher-conflict family dynamics (Mallett & Rosenthal, 2009). Furthermore, precocious events combined with family economic hardship may greatly increase families’ reliance on shared resources extending into children’s adult years.

While past research has found associations between recent life changes and moving back to the parental home, pathways between adolescent precocious events and co-residency in adulthood have yet to be examined (Lewis, West, Roberts, & Noden, 2016; Mallett & Rosenthal, 2009; Sandberg-Thoma, Snyder, & Jang, 2015). This study will examine how precocious life events during adolescence shape the life course trajectory in a way that delays sustained residential independence in adulthood. The goal of the current study is address the following research question. Using a life course lens, what are the long-term implications and potential pathways between precocious life events and parent-adult child co-residency in adulthood? Specifically, are there indirect pathways from family economic hardship and precocious life events to co-residency with parents in adulthood through access to resources (resource model), mental health (health model), and parent-young adult relationship quality (relational model)?

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [michael.merten@okstate.edu](mailto:michael.merten@okstate.edu) (M.J. Merten), [alw077@uark.edu](mailto:alw077@uark.edu) (A.L. Williams), [ashley.harvey10@okstate.edu](mailto:ashley.harvey10@okstate.edu) (A.N. Harvey).

### 1.1. Theoretical approach

The life course theoretical perspective emphasizes the critical implications of developmental transitions throughout the lifespan on future pathways (Elder, 1994). Precocious events, advancing through developmental stages prior to successful completion of appropriate milestones, increase the likelihood of negative outcomes in adulthood. Adolescent precocious life events include leaving home early (prior to being an adult—age 18), early pregnancy, cohabitation and/or marriage, high school drop-out, and full time employment (Cherlin, 2010; Mathews & Hamilton, 2002). Compared to national average ages for these life events, experiencing them in adolescence is off-time, making them precocious. In addition, although there are federal laws which restrict the number of hours that children work per week, findings from the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2000) indicate that an estimated 11% of youth aged 15–17 work full time during the school year and an estimated 34% work full time during the summer months.

Elder (1994) suggests that these off time events are not isolated, but a process of events. Speeding up the life course trajectory or skipping important developmental stages are more likely to be associated with negative outcomes. Research has found that adolescent mothers are susceptible to depression due to hormonal imbalances (Danziger et al., 2000), lack of material and psychological resources (Kalil & Kunz, 2002; Mollborn & Morningstar, 2009; Prater, 1995), and poor social support (Schulz et al., 2006). It has also been shown that adolescent parents are at a higher risk for depressive symptoms later in life because of their lack of opportunities (Webbink, Martin, & Visscher, 2008). Individuals with low educational attainment are more likely to experience depressive symptoms (Masten et al., 2005). Topitzes et al. (2009) conducted a longitudinal study that found, individuals who complete high school are less likely to suffer from depression as adults. In addition, Leadbeater and Way (2001) suggest an inverse association between family support and levels of physical and psychosocial problems.

Precocious life events tend to be more stressful because they occur too early (Wickrama, Merten, & Elder, 2005). Research suggests that precocious life events tend to be associated with poor mental and physical health (Ge, Conger, & Elder, 2001; Wickrama, Conger, Wallace, & Elder, 2003; Wickrama et al., 2005). Individuals who experience precocious life events have a greater probability for social, educational, and economic risks (Merten & Henry, 2011).

Precocious life events are linked with a range of adverse family conditions (Merten & Henry, 2011; Wickrama et al., 2005). Individuals who experience precocious life events are more likely to come from families living in poverty, disrupted family structures, lack resources, and experience poor parent-adolescent relationships (Uhlenberg & Mueller, 2003). Such events are often referred to as a “rush to adulthood” because they occur before the adolescent has matured enough to handle adult responsibilities (Wickrama et al., 2005). From the life course perspective, this rush strains an adolescent’s psychological and emotional resources and continues to affect them into adulthood (Lee, Harris, & Gordon-Larsen, 2009; Wickrama et al., 2005).

Developmental theory also plays an important role in understanding the mechanisms contributing to transitions in and out of the parental home. The transition to adulthood takes longer than it did in previous generations and is often framed as a distinct developmental period called emerging adulthood (roughly ages 18–29; Arnett, 2000; more broadly phrased as young adulthood). This elongated transition to adulthood creates a period of enhanced focus on the self, acquiring resources for independence, and managing existing or forging new interpersonal relationships (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, Žukauskien, & Sugimura, 2014). This period of activity is also strongly linked to the mental well-being of individuals “in between” adolescence and adulthood (Arnett et al., 2014). In fact, mental health problems such as anxiety and depression are highest among emerging adults compared to

other age groups (Kessler et al., 2005). Also highest among this age group is the rate of employment and residential transitions (Arnett, 2000; Arnett et al., 2014). When financial hardship is experienced during this transitional period, parents often continue or resume providing a “safety net” for their adult children (Swartz and O’Brien, 2017, p. 208).

Although many changes are taking place on multiple fronts during this time of instability, a key feature is that these changes are largely self-directed (Arnett et al., 2014). Recurring themes from the emerging adulthood literature suggest the following: 1) Attainment is a critical factor in residential transitions; 2) that, given the autonomous nature of residential transitions and how common it is for parents to provide instrumental support, it is reasonable to assume that decisions to return to the family home would be linked with the parent-child relationship (particularly in situations of multiple transitions in/out of parental home; De Marco & Berzin, 2008), and 3) that mental health is a paramount feature of emerging adulthood and contributes in some way to almost all developmental pathways. Thus, the following three “models of transition” are proposed to link mechanisms during adolescence and emerging adulthood with parent-adult child co-residence.

### 1.2. Resource model

Adolescents who experience precocious life events have more limited access to resources that support a smooth transition into adulthood (Mollborn, 2007), perpetuating insufficient resources and accumulating disadvantages over time. Precocious events (early sexual debut, pregnancy, high school drop-out, cohabitation and/or marriage, and full-time employment) have been linked with lower income, inadequate housing, and limited access to quality childcare (Chen & Kaplan, 1999; Mollborn, 2007). Chen and Kaplan (1999) conducted a longitudinal study that found, youth who experienced their first adult transitions during the teenage years often have lower academic achievement, live in poverty, and experience young adult unemployment. These disadvantages seemingly cascade (Wickrama, O’Neal, & Lee, 2016) across the life course, stemming from adolescent off-time events, in that lower-income youth may need to leave school to work full-time and help support their family (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2005). However, this puts their future occupational outlook in jeopardy as they will lack minimum qualifications (e.g. high school diploma/GED) for many stable, financially adequate employment opportunities.

Becoming a parent during the adolescent years compounds life course risks. Bradley, Cupples, and Irvine (2002) found a positive association between teenage motherhood, poor educational achievement and unemployment. In addition, their findings also indicate that adolescent parents experience increased difficulty obtaining employment due to their low education level. Utilizing a longitudinal design, Kiernan (1997) found, these young parents are notably less goal-driven than adolescents without children. This may be due to a perceived lack of options linked with low education levels, limited career paths, and feeling constrained by adult parenting responsibilities for which teenagers are not psychologically or emotionally prepared.

Sandberg-Thoma et al. (2015) found that economically disadvantaged individuals were more likely to move out of their parents’ home earlier in life compared to their more advantaged peers. The researchers explained this from the perspective of youth who thought they would fare better on their own, but that often these youth would continue to struggle through low-wage work that provided few tangible resources (Sandberg-Thoma et al., 2015). In contrast, other research suggests that economically disadvantaged individuals will remain in the home longer because of the scarce resources and family dependency (De Marco & Berzin, 2008). Taken together, these studies suggest that current and future resource constraints may be an important pathway linking adolescent hardship with later parent-adult child co-residence. However, remaining in or returning to the parental home may be dependent on other factors, such as youth mental health and quality of the

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6784728>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6784728>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)