



Returns home by children and changes in parents' well-being in Europe

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ABSTRACT

Co-resident adult children may be a source of emotional and instrumental support for older parents, but also a source of conflict and stress. Results from previous research are far from conclusive and indicate that inter-generational co-residence may have both negative and positive effects on parents' depressive symptoms and physical health. We analyse longitudinal data from four waves of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (2007–2015) to examine whether returns to the parental home by adult children are associated with *changes* in the quality of life of parents aged 50–75. Results from fixed effects linear regression models show that returns to the parental home by adult children were associated with decreases in parents' quality of life and that this largely reflected declines associated with the return of a child to an 'empty nest' where no other children were still co-resident. In line with previous research which has indicated differing effects of co-residence on parents' depressive symptoms by cultural tradition, this effect was largely driven by decreases in parents' quality of life in a grouping of Nordic/social-democratic. There were no associations between changes in parental quality of life and the returning child's characteristics, although unemployment of a child was negatively, and new partnership of a child, positively associated with changes in parental quality of life.

1. Introduction

Over the past half century, intergenerational co-residence has declined dramatically in Western countries (Da Vanzo and Goldscheider, 1990; Grundy, 2000). However, this pattern has recently altered, and in some countries multigenerational co-residence has increased; a shift interpreted as a family response to high unemployment rates, poor job prospects and financial hardship among young adults (Mykyta and Macartney, 2012). Adult children's increasing need for family support has led to renewed interest in causes of and trends in intergenerational co-residence. Many studies have examined the determinants of leaving and returning to the parental home (Billari and Liefbroer, 2007; Stone et al., 2014) and there is also a large and growing literature on possible implications of intergenerational co-residence for the well-being of both younger and older generations (Russell, 2009; Silverstein et al., 2006). With some exceptions (Aranda, 2015; Maruyama, 2012) most of these previous studies are cross-sectional and focus on the effects of inter-generational co-residence on older parents' depressive symptoms or physical health status. Some indicate a positive impact of co-residence with adult children on parents' well-being (Aranda, 2015; Courtin and Avendano, 2016 [Europe]; Do and Malhotra, 2012 [South Korea]; Teerawichitchainan et al., 2015 [Vietnam and Thailand]; Zunzunegui et al., 2001 [Spain]), whereas others have found that older parents

living with children have worse physical health (Johar and Maruyama, 2014 [Indonesia]; Maruyama, 2012 [Japan]) and more depressive symptoms (Lowenstein and Katz, 2005 [Israel]; Aquilino and Supple, 1991; Mitchell and Gee, 1996; Russell and Taylor, 2009; Silverstein and Bengtson, 1994; Umberson and Gove, 1989 [U.S.]). These varying findings suggest that implications of intergenerational co-residence for parental well-being may vary considerably depending on whether co-residence is a response to parental or to children's needs, whether it reflects continuation of an existing living arrangement or a change for one or other generation, as well as by cultural and institutional context.

There are several alternative pathways to intergenerational co-residence between older parents and adult children. Adult children may have never left home, may have returned home because of their own needs for support or in some cases returned to meet the support needs of parents in need of help and care. In this paper we focus on one of these pathways— returns by an adult child to the parental home when parents are relatively young. We use longitudinal data to examine how this impacts *changes* in parents' Quality of Life (QoL) as a broader indicator of parents' well-being including feelings of control, autonomy, pleasure and self-realization in everyday life (Connell et al., 2014; Hyde et al., 2003).

Apart from any intrinsic effect of intergenerational co-residence, returns to the parental home – also known as boomerang moves

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(Mitchell, 2006) – may be associated with declines in parents' QoL, because of a violation of normative expectations that children should be successfully launched into adulthood (Aquilino and Supple, 1991; Pillemer et al., 2012; South and Lei, 2015; Shanahan, 2000). Ward and Spitze (2007) suggest that such counter-transitions may have negative consequences for parent-child relationships when they are perceived by parents as indicating a lack of autonomy or unwarranted dependency by children.

Returns to the parental home may be especially stressful for parents, when they result in a disruption of the normative empty nest. Previous studies have shown that parental life satisfaction increases as adult children leave the family nest and achieve adult status (White and Edwards, 1990; Pillemer et al., 2012; VanLaningham et al., 2001). A reverse (negative) effect might be exerted by adult children refilling an empty nest (Ward and Spitze, 2004). Home returning may thus be related to a decline in parents' QoL to a greater extent, or only, when all other children have also left home. However, some parents may welcome adult children returning home and enjoy sharing experiences and daily activities under the same roof (Aquilino and Supple, 1991). Boomerang children may be an important source of support and company for parents living in an empty nest, which would suggest a positive association between returns in the parental home and parents' QoL.

1.1. Processes behind boomerang moves

Home returning behaviours are often affected by other life course transitions, including changes in economic resources, such as unemployment; changes in family circumstances, such as partnership breakdown; or deterioration in the physical or mental health of the child (South and Lei, 2015). New economic constraints, such as job loss or income reduction, increase the need for intergenerational support and are related to children's decision to move back to the parental home (Kleinepiper et al., 2017; Sandberg-Thoma et al., 2015; Smits et al., 2010; Wiemers, 2014). Economic difficulties and temporary instability prompt returns to the parental home, particularly among young adults who leave education to find a position in the labour market (Stone et al., 2011, 2014). Similarly, union dissolution may prompt a return to the parental home as a possible solution to economic, housing, and emotional problems arising from the event (Arundel and Lennartz, 2017; Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen, 2008; Guzzo, 2016; Michielin et al., 2008; South and Lei, 2015). Emotional distress and mental health problems per se make the transition to adulthood more difficult and are correlated with boomerang moves (Sandberg-Thoma et al., 2015).

For parents these events in a child's life may be distressing in themselves, regardless of whether or not they result in the child's return home. The notion of linked lives suggests that parents tend to suffer when they see their children suffer, and previous studies have indicated that children's exposure to problematic and stressful experiences are associated with a decline in parents' well-being and mental health (Elder et al., 2003; Fingermaier et al., 2012; Greenfield and Marks, 2006; Kalmijn and De Graaf, 2012; Knoester, 2003; Milkie et al., 2008; Pillemer et al., 2017). It has been also shown that job loss and family break-ups are factors that exacerbate the negative consequences of living together on parents' well-being, life satisfaction and marital relationship quality (Aquilino and Supple, 1991; Copp et al., 2017; Davis et al., 2016).

1.2. European context

Variations in preferences, attitudes and family norms across European regions suggest that returns to the parental home may have diverse impacts on parents' well-being (Grundy and Murphy, 2017). Returning home may countervail expectations about a normal developmental path, especially in some Western and Nordic societies where self-achievement and autonomy are valued. However, this may be not

the case in Southern and Eastern European countries where family attitudes are more conservative and are linked to values stressing family interdependence and traditional roles (Inglehart, 2015; Duncan and Pfau-Effinger, 2012; Jappens and Van Bavel, 2012; Reher, 1998).

Cultural traditions interact with political and economic institutions. In Nordic countries, and other countries deemed 'social-democratic' in some discourses on welfare state typologies, welfare systems provide services and supports that cushion some of the impact of events such as illness or unemployment arguably making practical support from the family less critical (Anttonen et al., 2003; Esping-Andersen, 1990). State or state facilitated provision of income, housing and care support systems facilitates the residential independence of young and old generations (Oinonen, 2008). In Southern and Eastern Europe, by comparison, the supply of state support is much less generous and parents may expect to provide support to adult children who need it through co-residence. For example, there is evidence for some Southern countries that weak public support systems along with high levels of homeownership and restricted rental markets are associated with delays in home leaving and with returns home (Albertini et al., 2017; Tosi, 2017; Mulder and Billari, 2010). In former Eastern bloc countries the erosion of welfare states following the collapse of the Soviet Union has been associated with an increase in intergenerational co-residence; and, it is argued, a resurgence of familistic values (Mair, 2013).

The economic recession of the last decade has increased young adults' needs for family support and in some countries has been associated with higher rates of intergenerational co-residence (Aassve et al., 2013). Economic hardship which generally has negative impacts on people' QoL, may affect young adults' decision to return home, particularly in countries such as Greece where the crisis had more severe consequences.

In this paper we investigate whether there is a negative (adverse) association between boomerang moves and parent's QoL; whether any such association varies across European regions and varies according to whether the adult child returns to an 'empty nest' or a household including other co-resident children. We also analyse whether antecedent or concomitant transitions by the child into unemployment and divorce/separation moderate any association between boomerang moves and changes in parent's QoL.

2. Data and methods

2.1. Data and sample

We used data from four waves of the *Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe* (SHARE). This is a cross-national population representative longitudinal survey. Information about individuals aged fifty years or older and their partner – independently of his/her age – were gathered in 2007 (wave 2), 2011 (wave 4), 2013 (wave 5) and 2015 (wave 6). Respondents were interviewed in multiple waves, but the sample was also refreshed to keep it representative of the ageing population at each wave. Although representative, the sample size is not proportional to the population living in each country (weighted results available upon request). We excluded the first wave from the analysis because indicators of parents' QoL were collected through a self-completion ("drop off") questionnaire including a high proportion of missing values (about 36%) and a low response rate (less than 50%). The third wave collected retrospective life history data and lacked information on variables of interest here. The initial household response rate in wave 2 was 54% (Börsch-Supan et al., 2013) and only 61% of these respondents also participated in the last interview. The attrition rate was 33% between waves 2 and 4, 21% between waves 4 and 5, and 20% between waves 5 and 6. Attrition was particularly high in Germany and the Czech Republic (about 60%), and low in Denmark (about 30%), while the household response rate was particularly low (< 40%) in Belgium and Switzerland.

SHARE gathered detailed information for up to five children living

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