

## **The Proximity of Adult Children to Their Mothers.**

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The proximity of adult children to their parents has implications for child care and for long-term care of the disabled elderly. The need for non-parental child care has increased with the increasing labor force participation of mothers; the ability of grandparents to provide hands-on care depends on proximity. The need for long-term care of the disabled elderly has increased with their increasing life expectancy; the ability of adult children to provide hands-on care for disabled elderly parents depends on proximity. The balance of benefits and burdens associated with proximity may vary over the life cycle: adult children may benefit from child care at early stages, and elderly parents from long-term care at later stages.

The child care and long-term care literatures generally focus on co-residence, which is the limiting case of close proximity. However, intergenerational co-residence has declined and intergenerational exchanges are now more likely to take place across households. As such, there is a need for careful analyses of the determinants of intergenerational proximity.

Previous analyses of proximity most often consider the distances between adult children and their mothers, with the adult child's marital status included as a control variable (Glaser and Tomassini (2000), Shelton and Grundy (2000), Lin and Rogerson (1995), Rogerson et al. (1993)). However, the location decisions of many adult children are made jointly with spouses. Moreover, due to increased average age at first marriage and increased migration rates, mothers and mothers-in-law are less likely to reside in the same locale, complicating location choice for couples. For a couple, the decision of whether to live close to his mother or her mother will depend on the relative costs and benefits of each situation. Since this calculation may differ for husband and wife, the outcome may also depend on the relative bargaining power of each spouse.

In this study we ask two questions. First, are couples more likely to live near either, one, or both mothers, and if one mother, than whose? (We focus on the proximity of adult children to their mothers rather than to their fathers for two reasons. First, grandmothers are more likely to provide child care than grandfathers. Second, the parent most likely to require long-term care is the mother because, on average, women live longer than men and, on average, women marry older men.) Second, do the relative distances of couples and their mothers reflect the characteristics of the mothers or of the couple, and is there a strong gender effect?

The economics and demographic literatures generally focus on migration rather than proximity. Although proximity patterns are the result of migration decisions of adult children and their parents, these migration decisions are usually studied separately and their implications for proximity left unexamined. Recent exceptions to this include Konrad et al. (2002) and Rainer and Seidler (2005), who consider the proximity of adult children and their parents in Germany and the U.S., and link the observed proximity to prior migration. Both papers focus is on the role of siblings in the choice of location, hypothesizing that adult children prefer to migrate away from their parents to avoid the burden of elderly care. The benefits of proximity, in terms of child care, are not discussed. Our study is most similar to that of Glaser and Tomassini (2000). Although they do not investigate proximity to both mothers and mothers-in-law, they use a similar

methodology to disentangle whether proximity of mothers and adults children is more a response to mothers' needs or children's needs. They find that the former is more important in determining proximity in Britain; the latter more important in determining proximity in Italy.

We use data from the three waves of the NSFH panel survey. The initial interview was administered in 1987-1988 with follow-up interviews conducted in 1992-1994 and 2001-2002. At each interview, information is collected about the parents and siblings of both the respondent and the respondent's partner. Mother's information includes distance from the respondent, marital status, health status and contact with the respondent. We compare two subsamples: all couples over the age of 30 in which both her mother and his mother are living in the United States; and all un-partnered individuals with the same characteristics.

We begin with descriptive regressions, documenting the proximity patterns in the data. Preliminary results comparing the proximity of couples to both mothers with the proximity of un-partnered men and women to their mothers suggest that there are gendered patterns of proximity that are linked with care of children and care of the elderly. For the sample of un-partnered individuals, we consider distance from mother using standard tobit regressions. For the sample of couples, we consider two regression models. In the first set of regressions, the dependent variable measures the distance to her mother, controlling for distance to his mother and vice versa. The system of equations is:

$$\begin{aligned} D_w &= \beta X_c + \lambda X_w + \delta S_w + D_h + \varepsilon_1 \\ D_h &= \beta X_c + \lambda X_h + \delta S_h + D_w + \varepsilon_2 \end{aligned}$$

Where  $D_w$  and  $D_h$  are distances to her mother and his mother, respectively;  $X_c$  is a vector of characteristics of the couple,  $X_w$  and  $X_h$  are vectors of mother characteristics;  $S_w$  and  $S_h$  are characteristics of the couple's siblings; and  $\varepsilon_1$  and  $\varepsilon_2$  are assumed to be jointly distributed.

We also use a multinomial logit regression in which  $D$  is a latent variable representing the relative proximity of the couple to each mother. Here distances are grouped so that the analysis focuses on whether or not the couple lives near each mother. Let  $D=d$  be the cutoff distance between near and far. Then,

$$D^* = \beta X_c + \lambda X_w + \lambda X_h + \delta S_w + S_h + \varepsilon; \quad \text{where}$$

$$D^* = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } D_w \leq d \text{ and } D_h \leq d \\ 1 & \text{if } D_w \leq d \text{ and } D_h > d \\ 2 & \text{if } D_w > d \text{ and } D_h \leq d \\ 3 & \text{if } D_w > d \text{ and } D_h > d \end{cases}$$

Table 1 presents proximity patterns of couples and their mothers. Couples are determined to live 'near' their mothers if they reside less than 25 miles away. This distance corresponds roughly to the median distance between couples and mothers. Initial robustness checks suggest that the patterns hold under small deviations of this cutoff point. The patterns suggest that although the proportions of couples living near her mother and near his mother are almost equal, there are some gendered patterns in terms of 'who lives near whom'. In particular, couples with young children are more likely to live near her mother compared to couples without young children. When both mothers are widowed or over 65 years of age, couples are also more likely to reside near

her mother, and less likely to reside near his. In contrast, when both mothers are in poor health, couples are more likely to reside closer to both mothers. Patterns of proximity for couples in which only one mother is widowed, in poor health or aged over 65 follow similar patterns and are omitted here due to space constraints. Preliminary regression results suggest that these patterns remain after controlling for other characteristics.

Are there similar patterns of proximity between mothers and daughters and mothers and sons when the adult children are not married? These patterns are shown in Table 2. The proximity of couples to her mother is positively correlated with characteristics that suggest both child-care and elderly care. In contrast, while the proximity of un-partnered women and their mothers is positively related to the presence of young children, it is unaffected by characteristics indicating a higher need for elderly care. The proximity of couples to his mother is positively correlated only with mother's poor health. In contrast with married men, un-partnered men are less likely to live near mothers in poor health, but are more likely to live near mothers who are widowed. Regression results again indicate that these patterns are sustained when other controls are included. Our preliminary results suggest that proximity patterns are responsive to both the child care needs of adult children and the long-term care needs of mothers, but that the gender of the adult child plays a crucial role in determining the geography of the family.

## References

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**Table 1: Distances between Couples and their Mothers (Row Percentages)**

	Near Both Moms	Near Her Mom Only	Near His Mom Only	Near Neither Mom
<b>All Couples</b>				
<b>Observations</b>	623	293	295	543
<b>Percentage</b>	34.9	17.4	15.3	32.5
<b>Presence of Young Children</b>				
<b>Yes</b>	35.3	18.8	15.4	30.6
<b>No</b>	34.3	15.2	15.1	35.4
<b>Mother is Widowed</b>				
<b>Neither Mother</b>	35.8	16.4	14.7	33.2
<b>Both Mothers</b>	37.5	28.3	9.1	25.2
<b>Mothers' Health Poor or Very Poor</b>				
<b>Neither Mother</b>	34.1	17.1	15.3	33.5
<b>Both Mothers</b>	45.9	16.7	21.1	16.3
<b>Mother is older than 65</b>				
<b>Neither Mother</b>	38.4	15.3	16.2	30.1
<b>Both Mothers</b>	33.1	18.7	12.8	35.4

Preliminary results. The sample includes all couples over the age of thirty in the first wave of the NSFH, in which both mothers are living in the U.S. Frequency weights are applied to the data.

**Table 2: Proximity Between Un-partnered Adult Children and their Mothers**

	Cumulative Percent, Miles Apart				
	Co- Reside	Less than 10 miles	Less than 30 miles	Less than 100 miles	All
<b>All</b>	18.1	49.8	59.8	69.5	100.0
<b>Gender</b>					
<b>Women</b>	13.5	50.2	60.0	70.3	100.0
<b>Men</b>	24.9	49.1	59.4	68.2	100.0
<b>MEN</b>					
<b>Young Children</b>	8.6	55.8	68.6	68.6	100.0
<b>Mother Widowed</b>	27.4	56.7	65.3	78.1	100.0
<b>Mother in Poor Health</b>	11.1	21.4	29.4	51.8	100.0
<b>Mother aged 65 and Older</b>	24.4	47.8	57.9	71.2	100.0
<b>WOMEN</b>					
<b>Young Children</b>	10.4	58.7	70.0	78.2	100.0
<b>Mother Widowed</b>	14.9	51.1	59.5	69.4	100.0
<b>Mother in Poor Health</b>	12.2	54.7	61.7	67.2	100.0
<b>Mother aged 65 and Older</b>	15.6	48.7	56.5	68.1	100.0

Preliminary Results. The sample includes all non-partnered respondents in the first wave of the NSFH over thirty years of age, whose mother is living in the U.S. Frequency weights are applied to the data.