

Extended Abstract

DINKs vs. DIPs: Gender and parenthood in journey to work distances

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Abstract:

There has been a consistent finding for several decades and in many urban areas that women, as a group, have shorter commute distances than men, yet, the role of parenthood in this gap remains understudied. Furthermore, important recent changes in America's labor force, families, and urban economic geography, suggest that the subject deserves continued attention. This paper addresses the correspondence of household and family structure to commute distances. I compare the commutes for each partner in dual-income households with children (DIPs – Dual Income Parents) and in dual-income households without children (DINKs – Dual Income No Kids). The paper focuses on the gendered differences of parenthood, and examines how this holds over race/ethnicity, skill/education, occupation/industry, number/age of the children, and neighborhood variance. It looks at the specific case of Los Angeles in 2000-2002, using the LA F.A.N.S. Wave One dataset.

Introduction and Background:

There has been a consistent finding for several decades and in many urban areas that women, as a group, have shorter commute distances than men (Hanson and Pratt 1995; Turner and Niemeier 1997). The specific role parenthood plays in this gendered commute gap remains understudied. Furthermore, important recent changes in America's labor force, families, and urban economic geography, suggest that continued attention to the subject is merited.

Clark and Wang (2005), looking at commute patterns in Los Angeles in 2000-2002, find evidence that the gendered commute gap persists and suggest that this may be due to intra-household efforts to balance work and residence. This argument, related to what is elsewhere called the household responsibility hypothesis (HRH), has had mixed support in past studies (Turner and Niemeier 1997). Here, we can take a cue from the literature on the gender wage gap. The wage gap in the United States is not evenly distributed over all women. Research shows that the wage gap varies by age and by motherhood status (Anderson, Binder and Krause 2002; Avellar and Smock 2003; Budig and England 2001; Crittenden 2001; Hanson and Pratt 1995). Insights about motherhood and the gender wage gap suggest that motherhood will also be an important variable for the commute gap. This paper tests the assumption that dual-income households with- and without children negotiate time use tradeoffs differently.

Beyond the insights suggested in the wage gap literature, examining household structure and motherhood is also particularly interesting in the context of important demographic

trends in the US. According to the National Marriage Project, there has been a “recent and dramatic change in the adult life course” as the proportion of adult years, as well as the absolute number of years, spent raising children has grown smaller (The National Marriage Project 2006, 6).¹ Studying the HRH for couples without children sheds light on the residence-work negotiations in an increasingly common type of household. However, comparing households with and without children also gives some sense of the challenges faced by households with children as childless households become the norm. As the National Marriage Project summarizes the situation, “...adults are less likely to be living with children... neighborhoods are less likely to contain children, and... children are less likely to be a consideration in daily life. It suggests that the needs and concerns of children - especially young children - gradually may be receding from our national consciousness” (The National Marriage Project 2006, 23). This also suggests that the challenges faced by parents in negotiating work-residence decisions may also be receding from our national consciousness.

Turner and Niemeier suggest several important follow up questions after providing empirical support for the HRH (Turner and Niemeier 1997). This paper contributes to this body of research by looking at the particular case of Los Angeles in 2000-2002. These areas take into account race/ethnicity differences, education/skill level differences, industry/occupation differences, and the connections to income.

This paper examines differences in patterns of home to work commuting for each partner in dual-income households with children (DIPs – Dual Income Parents) and in dual-income households without children (DINKs – Dual Income No Kids). The paper focuses on the gendered differences of parenthood, and examines how this holds over race/ethnicity, skill/education, occupation/industry, number/age of the children, and neighborhood variance.

Data and Methods:

I use the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey (LA F.A.N.S.) Wave One dataset (RAND, data collected 2000-2002, released 2003). This dataset has been used extensively to look at questions of health, but also can be used to answer important questions about mobility, families and work (Clark and Wang 2005). I examine the effects of family/household structure, captured in primary caregiver status, households with or without children, and spouse/partner present on the commuting distances between home and work in Los Angeles. With detailed information on household structure, employment and income, race/ethnicity, education and skill level, as well as geocoded residence and work locations, this dataset provides an excellent source in which these

¹ The proportion of adult years, and absolute number of years, spent raising children are shrinking for several reasons. According to the National Marriage Project, these include a lengthening of the years before having children as women postpone marriage and first child, and after marriage couples wait longer to have their first child. There is also a lengthening of the years after the children are grown, as lower fertility rates and more twins born mean less cumulative time spent raising children, and as adult life expectancy lengthens. Furthermore, the number of childless women, who are likely never to have children, is growing. The National Marriage Project. 2006. "The State of Our Unions 2006: The Social Health of Marriage in America." Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey..

questions can be explored. A further advantage of this dataset is that Wave Two data (scheduled for release in 2008) will allow for follow up studies.

The geocoded work and residence location data allow for precise measurements of commute distance. Journeys to work are, of course, experienced as commute time, not just as a frictionless distance. However, for the particular case of Los Angeles, I argue that mode of transportation is by far the most important factor in skewing time-distance relationships. Hypothetically, a bus rider with a shorter commute distance could still have a longer commute time than someone with a car. Because the LA F.A.N.S. data include a marker for public transportation, I am able to address the cases such as these.

Expected Findings:

This paper starts with the basic question: Is there a difference in commuting patterns for each income earner between households with (DIPs) and without children (DINKs)? I expect that parenthood will affect the commute of both partners, in opposite directions. I expect mothers to have shorter commutes than their male partners (in holding with the broad finding that women commute shorter distances than men), but also shorter commutes than women without children.

Building upon this basic question, I examine what effects race/ethnicity, education/skill level, industry/occupation, number/age of the children, and neighborhood have on these differences. My conclusions include a consideration of the connections of commute differences and intrahousehold work-residence location negotiations to income.

Works Cited:

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