

Coresidence with Aging Parents in Contemporary Rural and Urban China: Attitudes and Behaviors

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Background

Coresidence with elder parents has been a traditional cultural norm in China. It has also been the primary means through which aging parents' material, physical, and emotional needs were met (Cooney & Shi, 1999; Logan, Bian, & Bian, 1998; Treas & Chen, 2000; Tsui, He, & Huang, 1995; Zimmer, 2005). Previous research in this area was largely based on data sets collected in the 1980s and early 1990s in urban areas (e.g., the 1987 Nine-City Aging Survey and the 1994 Survey on Aging and Intergenerational Relations in Baoding). Yet little is known about the current attitudes towards coresidence as well as the determinants of coresidence in rural and urban China after decades of rapid economic development, declining fertility, housing market reforms, healthcare and pension reforms.

Specifically, our research will address two major questions:

1. What percentage of adult children still agree with the view that married sons should live with their parents? How does adult children's socioeconomic status (SES) influence their attitude towards coresidence?
2. How are children's characteristics, attitudes towards coresidence, and parental characteristics associated with coresidence in rural and urban China?

Our paper will contribute to the extant literature in several ways. First, we take advantage of two current data sets: the 2002 Chinese Longitudinal Healthy Longevity Survey (parents' questionnaire) and its companion data set- the 2002 Dynamic Family Social Survey (adult children's questionnaire), and will be able to assess whether further economic reforms carried out in the late 1990s have any impact on the attitudes towards coresidence as well as the actual behaviors. Second, unlike previous research that mainly relied on samples collected in large cities (Bian, Logan, & Bian, 1998; Logan & Bian, 1999), our sample covers both rural and urban areas, as most Chinese elderly are still living in rural areas. Third, we created 4,003 matched parent-child pairs with detailed SES, health, demographic information from both parents and children. To our knowledge, there is no study using dyadic data to investigate the intergenerational coresidence in China and most prior studies have used parents as the unit of analysis (Cooney & Shi, 1999; Zimmer, 2005). Therefore, we do not know what types of children tend to coreside with their parents. Finally, we examine whether attitude towards coresidence is associated with coresidence with parents in the presence of various covariates of both children and parents.

Data and Methods

Data

The Chinese Longitudinal Healthy Longevity Survey (CLHLS) has a panel design with baseline data collected in 1998 and follow-up surveys in 2000, 2002, and

2005 so far. The CLHLS was conducted in 631 randomly selected counties/cities of 22 Chinese provinces and originally was designed to focus on the determinants of healthy longevity of the oldest old (80 years and older). The survey areas covered about 85% of the total population in China. For each centenarian with a pre-designated random code, one nearby octogenarian and one nearby nonagenarian with pre-designated age and sex were randomly selected and interviewed. The term ‘nearby’ refers to the same village or street, or the same town, county or city, when applicable. This sampling strategy is designed to ensure comparable numbers of randomly selected male and female octogenarians and nonagenarians at each age from 80 to 99. In the 2002 wave, the survey was expanded and included those who were aged between 65 and 79. A more detailed description of the sampling design and data quality of the CLHLS can be found in elsewhere (Zeng et al. 2001). With support from Taiwan Academia Sinica and Mainland China Social Sciences Academy, a sub-sample of adult children (aged 35-65) of the 4,600 elderly interviewees aged 65-110 in eight provinces in eastern coast areas among the 22 provinces of the CLHLS were interviewed in order to examine the intergenerational transfer patterns from the children’s perspective. Each adult child was randomly selected from the pool of eligible children of the elderly parent (N=4,364) (see http://www.geri.duke.edu/china_study). Our analytic sample focus on married adult children (N=4,003) and their parents. Data assessments indicate that both the elderly core dataset and the adult children’s dataset are quite good (Gu, in press; Zhang 2002).

Measures

The study considers two dependent variables. The first variable, attitude towards coresidence, derives from adult children’s answer to the question, “A son should live with his parents after he gets married. Do you strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, disagree or strongly disagree with this statement?” We code the variable 1 if the respondent indicated any type of agreement with the statement, and 0 otherwise. The second variable, whether the randomly selected child coresides with the parent, is based on the child’s answer on their parents’ living arrangements.

The independent variables include children’s characteristics (e.g., education, whether they own the house/apartment, occupation, health, age, sex, the number of siblings, relationship with their parents, etc), children’s attitude towards coresidence, and parent’s characteristics (e.g., education, pension, health, age, and marital status).

Methods

First, there will be a general description of the children’s and parents characteristics. We then will use logistic regression to model 1) the likelihood that the adult child agrees with the view that married sons should coresidence with parents; 2) the likelihood that the randomly selected child lives with the parent. We will run the analysis separately for rural and urban areas.

Preliminary Results

Our preliminary results show that about 68% adult children somewhat agreed with the statement that married sons should live with their parents. We found some support for the modernization theory (Logan & Bian, 1999) which suggests that with

industrialization and rising standards of living, preference for coresidence will decline. For example, adult children who are more educated and who own their house/apartment are more likely to disagree with patrilocal residence. We also find that the preference for patrilocal residence seems to be stronger among sons, those who do not have brothers, those who have good relationship with their parent(s), and those who have older parents.

We find that a similar proportion (about 45%) of adult children coreside with their parents in urban and rural China. As for correlates of coresidence, those who own their houses/apartments are significantly less likely to coreside with their parents in both urban and rural areas; those who have higher income and live in larger houses/apartments in urban areas are more likely to coreside. Education is not associated with the odds of coresidence in urban areas. However, in rural areas, contrary to modernization theory, those children who are more educated are more likely to live with their parents and income is not a significant predictor. Consistent with prior studies, in both urban and rural China, married sons and those who do not have brothers are more likely to coreside with parents, reflecting the strong power of patrilineal tradition. A few parents' characteristics are also associated with the likelihood of coresidence in both urban and rural areas. Adult children are more likely to coreside with parents who are widowed, older, and who have good relationship with the adult child. Interestingly, after controlling for all possible confounders, whether the elder parent has pension is not associated with coresidence in urban China. In rural China, children are less likely to live with a parent who has pension. After controlling for parents and children's characteristics, we find that children's attitudes towards coresidence are significantly associated with whether they are coresiding with their parents in both rural and urban areas.

We are now exploring interactions between children's SES and children's gender on the odds of coresidence because previous research found significant interaction effect in urban China.

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