The Living Arrangements of Young Parents and Their Children

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Background

Multigenerational households and "boomerang" children are a common phenomenon in the U.S. Moves in and out of the parental home seem particularly likely for young adults as the transition to adulthood has become more prolonged. One aspect of returning home that has yet to be explored, however, is the behavior of young parents. Such individuals have taken on an adult role (parenthood), but their lives tend to be unstable, making full residential independence unlikely.

Research Questions

Are young parents living independently?

- Of those living independently at birth or who subsequently move out, how many return home?
- Do the odds of returning home vary by
  - Socioeconomic and demographic factors?
  - Fertility and child-related characteristics?
  - Union status and stability?
- What are the family and household characteristics of those returning home?

Data

National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1997 (NLSY97)

- Individuals born 1980-84 & interviewed annually

Analytical sample:

- Participate yearly through age 24 (N = 5,584)
- Had at least 1 child by age 24 (N = 1,984)

Covariates include age, gender, race-ethnicity, family structure at age 12, multigenerational household in the past, mother's education & age at 1st birth, respondent's education & enrollment, receipt of aid, number & coresidence of children, & union status

Analytical Plan

1) Describe the living arrangements of young parents at birth through age 24. Living arrangements taken from yearly household rosters, linked to survey year of 1st birth:
   - Not living at home at 1st birth
   - Living at home at 1st birth, subsequently moved out
   - Living at home at 1st birth continuously through age 24
2) Identify characteristics associated with returning to the parental home among nonresident parents (N = 1,707)
   - Event history analysis using person-years
   - Enter analysis at 1st birth or when move out; censored at 1st parental coresidence or age 24 survey year
3) Examine the family & household characteristics of those who return home

Descriptive Results

Figure 1. Young Parents' Coresidence with Their Own Parents at 1st Birth Through Age 24

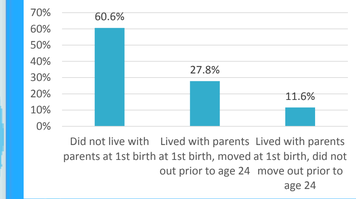
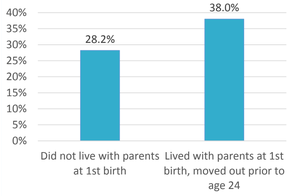


Figure 2. Percentage Returned Home By Age 24 among Nonresident Young Parents



- 40% of young parents live with their parents at 1st birth
- Including those who lived at home continuously from birth through age 24, 56.5% of young parents live with their own parents at some point
- Significant variation across three types of living arrangements in socioeconomic and demographic factors, child-related characteristics, and union status

Event History Results

Do the odds of returning home vary by socioeconomic and demographic factors? *Yes, but modestly*

- Odds increase with age and peak 2-3 years after birth or leaving the parental home the first time
- Foreign-born Hispanics, those whose mother had some college, and those whose own education was less than HS had higher odds
- Lower odds for those growing up in an "other" household

Do the odds of returning home vary by child-related characteristics? *Not really*

- Only those NOT living with their 1st child (a time-varying variable) are more likely to move home during the year

Do the odds of returning home vary by union status & stability? *Yes, strongly*

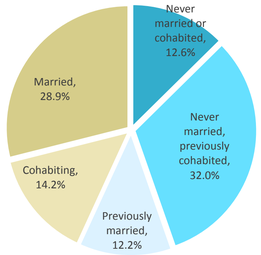
- Young parents with no coresidential union at either the prior or current survey are 2.4 times as likely to move home to their parents during the year than those stably partnered
- Those who experienced a break-up are highly likely to move home (OR = 8.3 for cohabitors & OR = 6.5 for married)

Descriptive Results for "Returners"

Complicated households for "returners" (N = 561):

- 70% have all their children living with them
- Nearly half are returning home to a single-parent family, with 21% returning to a stepfamily
- 6% report their own grandparent or other relative is also present

Figure 3. Union Status among Home-Returning Young Parents



Summary

Young parents often live with their own parents either at birth or at some point thereafter, with over half of young parents reporting parental coresidence at least once by age 24. Union instability seems to be a strong predictor of moving back home. Interestingly, *not* living with one's child also increases the odds of moving back home. For those who move back home, these multigenerational households are often complex, involving stepparents, the young parent's own partner, and young children.

Limitations

- Unable to more precisely define living arrangements at birth or between surveys
- Did not include income or employment status
- Parental coresidence definition excludes living with partner's family
- Possible (but unlikely) that parents move in with adult children rather than vice versa
- Not measuring other residential changes

Conclusions & Next Steps

This work demonstrates that young parents use their families as a safety net for many reasons. Research on adult children living with their own parents has largely focused on economic factors but should incorporate family behaviors. Similarly, work on young parents should expand beyond family structure instability to consider residential changes and instability in household composition.

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