

Moving back to “mamma”? Divorce and intergenerational co-residence in Sweden¹

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The historical roots of cross-country differences in intergenerational co-residence

Already in 1988 in his study of the relation between the nuclear hardship hypothesis and support systems in pre-industrial Europe, Laslett (1988) suggested that family solidarity was particularly strong among the stem-family systems of eastern and (some areas) of southern Europe, while the role of collectivity prevailed among the Nordic European countries. The argument was based on empirical evidence showing that intergenerational co-residence was much more widespread among Mediterranean societies than in UK and Scandinavia. Ten years after, in his well-known article on family ties in Europe, David Reher (1998) suggested that “in the western world it is not difficult to identify areas where families and family ties are relatively ‘strong’ and others where they are relatively ‘weak’” – with the former being identified with southern European countries and the latter with continental and Nordic ones. Once more the evidence supporting the argument was based on family living arrangements. Reher noted that intergenerational co-residence was frequently utilized in southern Europe to support its most vulnerable members – i.e. the young adults and the elderly – while it was almost non-existent in Scandinavia. Recent research based on cross-national comparable surveys has added some complexity to this picture. Differently than it has been suggested in previous literature the likelihood of intergenerational exchange of support is higher in Nordic Europe than in Mediterranean countries, on the other hand it has to be noted that the intensity of support (i.e. the amount of transferred resources) follows a reverse gradient (Albertini et al. 2007). Next, it has been confirmed that intergenerational co-residence, living proximity and contacts are higher in southern Europe than in Scandinavian countries (Hank 2007). Thus, these results suggest that in southern Europe parents support their children mainly through co-residence whereas in continental and Nordic societies co-residence is a non-normative support strategy: it is accepted and preferred that children and parents exchange support while not living under the same roof.

Co-residence as a strategy to cope with divorce

Studies on intergenerational relations have provided abundant empirical evidence showing that while parental divorce negatively affects parent-child relations, children’s divorce prompts parental support. This finding is common to all western European societies, but what is generally maintained is that support strategies follow prevalent social norms and thus it is expected that a large quota of divorced children in southern Europe go back living with their parents, whereas most of the divorced children in Nordic countries obtain social and economic support both from non-resident parents and the welfare state.

Contrary to the expectations, some preliminary analyses on strategies adopted by Swedish parents to support their divorced children reveal that the marginal effect of children’s marital dissolution on intergenerational co-residence is significant and even larger than what is found for

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Italy and Spain. These analyses, however, were based on the data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE); thus, the small size and the age representativeness of the sample cast some doubts on the obtained results.

Aim of the paper

The aim of the paper is twofold. Firstly, we want to investigate if, and to what extent, children's divorce in Sweden has a positive and significant effect on intergenerational co-residence. Both marginal and absolute effects will be analyzed. Secondly, further characteristics of the phenomenon will be investigated: demographic and economic characteristics affecting the likelihood of re-entering the parental home after divorce (e.g. children's age, gender, income, occupation and parenthood status, parent's age, gender, civil status, home ownership, income and employment), the length of the period of co-residence, and living arrangements adopted when the child (re-)exit the parental home (e.g.: partnership status; proximity to parental home).

Data & preliminary results

The analyses in this paper are based on a compilation of Swedish register data, consisting of the entire Swedish population during the period 1968-2007. Data from different sources were matched in the *Sweden in Time – Activities and Relations (STAR) database*. For the purpose of this paper we use the multi-generation register, the register on changes in civil status, the Sickness Insurance and Labor Market Studies Database (LISA), and annual total population registers.

Preliminary analyses on co-residence patterns in the 2007 population register provide several interesting insights on the relation between children's divorce and intergenerational co-residence. Firstly, among adult individuals aged 18 to 50 years, the frequency of intergenerational co-residence is higher for divorced than for married individuals – i.e., 2.67 vs. 1.63%. Secondly, the likelihood of living with own parents after divorce is higher among the Swedish-born adult children than among immigrants – an effect which is likely to be due to the latter not having parents living in Sweden. Next, it is found that those individuals who married and divorced early in their life course are also more likely to co-reside with their parents. In other words, similarly to what is observed for the general population, also among the divorced children there is a negative correlation between age and intergenerational co-residence. Fourthly, while we expected to observe that intergenerational co-residence is a temporary solution adopted for a short period following children's divorce, the results do not reveal a clear negative association between time since divorce and the likelihood of co-residing with parents. Finally, the data show that the positive effect of divorce on intergenerational co-residence is much stronger among the Swedish-born young men than among women (table 1).

In future analyses, we will create a follow-up file that enables analyzing trajectories into and out of the parental home following divorce and family dissolution (partnerships with children), with covariates of the individual, but also of their parents.

Table 1. Percentage of individuals between age 25 and 45 living with their parents by civil status and gender.

<i>Males</i>	<i>% co-residing (N)</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>% co-residing (N)</i>
Married	1.62 (5042)	Married	1.45 (5184)
Not married	8.61 (53216)	Not married	5.49 (27216)
Divorced	4.03 (1875)	Divorced	2.83 (1887)
Widow(er)	2.5 (17)	Widow(er)	1.41 (25)

Source: Authors' calculation from Swedish 2007 Register data

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