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Extended abstract

Migration for co-residence in Denmark: the role of family ties and family complexity

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Introduction

When two romantic partners decide to live together, one of the most important decisions they have to make is where to live: who moves in with whom, or what will be the new destination for both? This decision has a particularly great impact on those partners who live some distance away from each other. That is, in these couples, the partner who moves not only changes residence, but also changes his or her geography of daily life, leaving behind local ties to work, family and friends. Long-distance moves within a country are also referred to as internal migration. Research on the migration of families has shown that long-distance moves tend to deter the labour market position of the so-called tied or trailing migrant (e.g. Taylor, 2007), i.e. the one who follows his or her partner, but who would not have migrated if single. A key explanation for this deterring effect is the severing of local ties by migrating. In like manner to persons migrating with their partner, such negative consequences can be expected for persons migrating towards their partner.

While there is ample research on the migration of couples and families (reviewed by Cooke, 2008), only very few studies have investigated migration to form a co-residential couple. An exception is a recently published study by Brandén and Haandrikman (2018), which shows that women in Sweden are more likely to move and over a longer distance than men at the start of co-residence, especially when the partners live far apart before co-residence. In addition, Schnor and Mulder (2018) studied where Belgian couples form their first joint household (in his, her, both or neither partner's municipality), and how this is influenced by assortative mating. They, too, show that it is more common for women to move to the municipality of their male partner than vice versa. However, the influence of ties to family members outside the household and the influence of elements of family complexity on migration for co-residence are largely left unexplored in these prior studies.

This paper addresses the issue of who migrates at the start of co-residence: he, she or both. We contribute to the literature by (1) describing the gendered patterns of migration for co-residence; (2) identifying the role of ties to children, siblings and parents and prior partnership experiences; and (3) examining how the effects of ties to family members and family complexity differ between men and women.

Data, measures and methods

We use data from several Danish population-based national registers, which provide longitudinal information on the entire population of Denmark, including information on locations, distances, and family ties. Our study population comprises all heterosexual couples aged 18-70 who entered co-residence between 2009 and 2018 and who were living apart with a distance of 60 kilometers or more prior to co-residence. Our final dataset contains 54,979 couples and co-residence events.

The dependent variable has three outcomes: he migrated, she migrated, or both migrated during the year of entering co-residence. This particular year t is identified through partners living at separate addresses on 1 January of year t and living at the same address on 1 January of year t+1. In this paper, we define internal migration as a change of address over at least 30 kilometers within the national borders of Denmark. We focus on these long-distance moves because they result in a clear disruption of local ties and therefore have a greater impact on daily life than short-distance moves. The outcome is revealed by each partner's distance between their address on 1 January of year t and t+1. Since we use yearly data, we do not account for multiple migration events within one year. Any migration event that occurred during the year is therefore assumed to be related to the event of co-residence. The result of defining migration as moves over 30 kilometers and selecting couples who lived at least 60 kilometers apart is that at least one of the partners had to migrate at the start of co-residence. That is, even when both partners moved to a location precisely in the middle between them, they needed to move over a distance of at least 30 kilometers to do so.

Our main independent variables are measures of family complexity and ties to family members. The first is one's union history, with the following categories: never in a union before, in a union on 1 January, separated, divorced, widowed, separated but still married, and unknown. Within the groups of separated, divorced and widowed persons we make a further distinction between those who stayed in the prior joint home and those who moved out in the year of separation/divorce/widowhood. The second and third variable convey information on children born before the current union. The second variable concerns resident children and distinguishes between children of school-going age (6-17) and children who are younger or older. The third variable concerns non-resident children living nearby (at 5 kilometers or less) and distinguishes between minor and adult children. In addition, we include information on the proximity to parents and siblings. Other independent variables are age, duration since separation, whether living in municipality of birth, years lived in current municipality, whether ever lived in partner's municipality, international migrant status, previous year's disposable income, educational attainment, employment status and distance to the workplace.

We conduct multinomial logistic regression, estimating two models. In one model, we include separate variables for the female and male partner. In the other model, we specify the variables on the couple-level and use relative measures.

Preliminary results

Our preliminary findings show that it is more common for the female partner to migrate towards the male partner (51%), than the other way around (41%). This is in line with the findings of Brandén and Haandrikman (2018) for Sweden. In about 8% of the couples, both partners migrated – either to a place that is geographically somewhere in the middle between them, or to a new area entirely.

Table 1 shows preliminary regression results on the outcome of her migrating instead of him, using separate variables for the female and male partner. For women, having had (a) prior union experience(s) rather than none lowers the risk of her migrating towards him, rather than him towards her. These women may be less keen to make sacrifices for a new partner by disrupting local ties, having experienced that partnerships can realistically end. Women are particularly less likely to be the one to migrate if she stayed in the prior joint home when her prior union ended. Her staying may be indicative of strong ties to the house or locality. The exceptions are when she was still in a union with a different partner at the start of the year, in which case she is more likely to migrate than her new partner, or

when she had separated from a cohabiting union and moved out of that prior joint home at the time of separation.

The effect of union history is not the same for men as it is for women. For men, the effect of prior union experiences on the risk of migrating depends strongly on whether he stayed in or moved out of the home at the time of the prior union dissolution. If he stayed in the prior joint home at the time of separation, divorce or widowhood, it strongly lowers the likelihood of him migrating towards her rather than the other way around. However, if he moved out of the prior joint home at time of separation, divorce or widowhood, it raises the likelihood of him migrating towards her as compared to if he had never been in a union before.

Resident children of school-going age as well as minor non-resident children living nearby lower the risk of migrating towards one's partner for both men and women. Adult non-resident children living nearby and younger (<6) or older resident (18+) children lower the risk of migrating only for women, not for men. Finally, having a parent or a sibling in close proximity lowers the risk of migrating towards one's partner, while living together with a parent or sibling increases this risk.

Table 1. Multinomial logistic regression results on the outcome of her migrating instead of him at the start of couple co-residence; individual-level variables.

	She migrated vs he migrated					
	Female			**Male**		
	B		Z	B		Z
Partnership history (ref. never in union before)						
In union on 1 January	0.42	***	10.14	-0.28	***	-6.58
Separated - moved out	0.09	*	2.27	-0.17	***	-4.17
Separated - stayed	-0.13	**	-2.82	0.26	***	6.08
Divorced from spouse - moved out	0.02		0.30	-0.20	**	-3.12
Divorced from spouse - stayed	-0.16	*	-2.18	0.37	***	5.60
Widowed from spouse - moved out	-0.26		-1.60	0.55	*	2.17
Widowed from spouse - stayed	-0.47	***	-4.57	0.42	***	3.92
Separated still married - moved out	-0.10		-1.51	-0.08		-1.12
Separated still married - stayed	-0.08		-0.92	0.27	***	3.67
Unknown, previously not in register	0.03		0.59	-0.08		-1.47
Resident child(ren) (ref. none)						
A school-going child (age 6-17)	-0.69	***	-19.02	0.63	***	10.63
Only resident child(ren) age <6 or 18-24	-0.35	***	-8.49	0.16	*	2.56
Local ties to non-resident child(ren) (ref. none <5 km)						
A minor child <5 km	-0.43	***	-5.05	0.59	***	12.67
Only adult child(ren) <5 km	-0.12	*	-2.30	0.06		0.86
Local ties to siblings (ref. none <50 km or resident)						
A resident sibling	0.19	***	4.07	-0.12	**	-2.75
A sibling <5 km, none resident	-0.35	***	-10.99	0.34	***	10.56
A sibling <50 km, none <5 km or resident	-0.19	***	-6.66	0.25	***	9.09

Local ties to parents (ref. none <50 km or resident)						
A resident parent	1.04	***	24.75	-1.01	***	-26.26
A parent <5 km, none resident	-0.17	***	-5.12	0.29	***	8.36
A parent <50 km, none <5 km or resident	-0.06		-1.91	0.13	***	4.26

Source: population register Denmark (own calculations)

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

[a] only for those who have been in a union before

Note: control variables not shown

References

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