

Nonresident Family as a Motive for Migration

Brian J. Gillespie and Clara H. Mulder

Extended Abstract for the 2020 European Population Conference, Padova

Introduction

Researchers often infer that long-distance moves within countries (also referred to as internal migration) are undertaken for employment and educational reasons. However, survey research indicates that a large proportion of those who move long distances do so for social reasons (Morrison and Clark 2011; Niedomysl 2011). In fact, a recent comparison of migration in three countries found that individuals cited family as an important reason for migration regardless of the distance moved (Thomas et al. 2019). In this paper, we identify nonresident family as an important resource that motivates individuals to migrate to specific locations. Using survey data on primary and subsequent (secondary; location-based) motives from internal migrants in Sweden aged 18-74 ($N=4,909$), we address three research questions: How prevalent are migration motives related to nonresident family—also distinguishing between primary, secondary and location-based motives—and to what extent are such motives related to moving away from family rather than towards them? Among those who lived far from their family prior to moving, how are nonresident family motives associated with individuals' proximity to their closest family member after migration? What are the sociodemographic characteristics of those who report family as a motive for migration compared with those who do not?

Several broad expectations frame our study, rooted in theoretical perspectives on gender roles and the life course. Because women tend to attach more importance to family than men (Rossi & Rossi 1990), we expect women to be more likely than men to mention family motives for migrating. We also expect situations associated with support needs to play a role: low income, unemployment, divorce and widowhood, but also having children in the household (compare Smits's [2010] findings from a study of moving close to parents and adult children). Furthermore, retirement represents a situation in which people are 'freed up' from work obligations and migration motives could be related to moving closer to children and grandchildren.

Data, measures and methods

The data were derived from the Swedish Motives for Moving survey (see Niedomysl and Malmberg 2009; Niedomysl 2011). They are based on a stratified sample of 10,000 migrants in 2007 from the population of 244,704 migrants who had moved at least 20km in the prior year, derived from the Swedish population register. The sample was stratified by gender, age (four groups between 18 and 74 years old), and migration distance (four categories). After two reminders, 4,909 migrants returned completed questionnaires. Selected information from register data was matched to the survey data on the level of individuals.

Measures of motives for moving. The analyses are based on responses to three open-ended items in the survey, designed to capture individuals' migration motives. The first free-response question (Q1) asked: "What was the most important reason for your move?" A second question (Q2) asked respondents "Were there also other important reasons for you moving?" Those who selected yes were asked, "which ones?" A follow-up later in the survey asked, "Was there any particular reason you moved to this specific place/region?" Another question asked about motives to move "from this specific place/region", but the answers were frequently

vague, and the remarks indicated it was often misunderstood so we did not use it in our analyses. However, we did use the item to assess how frequently respondents reported moving to get away from family.

Measures of other characteristics of the respondents. We use information on the respondents' gender, age, immigrant status (whether Swedish-born), highest completed level of education (elementary school, high school, some college, college or more), income in 10,000s of Swedish crowns, whether children were living in the respondents' household, and marital status (unmarried, married, divorced, widowed). All these characteristics were measured before migration. We furthermore used information on migration distance, and on distance to parents and children before and after the move derived from geo-coded population register data. Descriptive statistics of the variables of interest are given in the Appendix.

Methods. Besides descriptive statistics and quotes to illustrate what respondents reported, we present logistic regression models of mentioning nonresident family as a motive for migration as a tool for sophisticated description. In the full paper, we also present other logistic regression models for the same purpose.

Findings

We find that, although only 7% of migrants mention nonresident family as a primary motive for moving, no less than 23% mention it as any motive. Of those who mention nonresident family, 38% report it as a primary motive, 31% as a secondary motive, and 31% as a motive for choosing a specific destination.

Among those who lived over 50 km from their closest child or parent before the move and within 20 km afterwards, 54% mentioned family as a motive. Although this implies that, as one would expect, family motives are reported more frequently by those moving closer to family than by those remaining at a long distance, the relationship between post-migration distance to family and the likelihood of mentioning family motives was not found to be monotone: at the shortest distance, this likelihood was smaller than at 0-2km distance. The data do not allow us to distinguish between moving very close and moving into the same residence, but one might speculate that some of those who move in with family might not explicitly mention family, for example because it is too obvious.

Although nonresidential family might be a draw to move closer, family relationships can also be a reason to move *away*. However, this was reported infrequently. In fact, only three individuals explicitly mentioned getting away from family among their reasons for migrating. One respondent reported their primary reason for moving was "to get away from parents." Two others reported family avoidance among their secondary migration motives: "Found a nice house that both of us were comfortable in. Avoided parents" and "To find work and also avoid the conflict among my relatives." One explanation for why migration away from family might be underreported is that the reason is perceived as personal and/or sensitive, such as escaping domestic violence (Bowstead 2015), which was implied in only two responses: "violence at home" and "My parents are abusers so I wanted to get away from that atmosphere." Far more often, individuals reported moving to get away from an ex – for example: "Became a grandmother. And to get away from the ex", "Needed to get distance from my former husband", "My former partner made it impossible to keep working at our mutual workplace."

As can be seen from Table 1, the likelihood of mentioning a nonresident family motive increases with age, is higher for women, students, retired people, those with children, and the widowed. These findings are mostly in line with the ideas summarized in the Background

section, although the finding for students was unexpected. Many of these could have returned upon graduation.

Table 1: Logistic Regression for Any Family Report (N = 4,601)	
Age	1.01*
Female	1.37**
Immigrant	0.79
Highest Education Level	
Elementary School (Reference)	
High School	0.90
Some College	0.99
College or More	1.23
Pre-Move Employment Status	
Employed (Reference)	
Student	1.46*
Retired	1.54**
Unemployed	1.33†
Income in 2005	1.00
Any Children	1.40**
Marital Status	
Unmarried (Reference)	
Married	1.35†
Divorced	1.29
Widowed	1.83*

Table Notes: Weighted and Unimputed Data.

† $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Concluding remark

The findings suggest that common assumptions that internal migration is related to employment and education underestimate the importance of family. Moreover, if respondents are prompted to mention more than one migration motive, many do, and nonresident family is among the considerations for many more migrants than data on only primary motives might suggest.

Acknowledgment

This paper forms part of the FamilyTies project. The FamilyTies project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 740113).

References

- Bowstead, J.C. (2015). Forced migration in the United Kingdom: Women’s journeys to escape domestic violence. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 40 (3): 307–320. doi:10.1111/tran.12096.
- Morrison, P. S., & Clark, W. A. V. (2011). Internal migration and employment: Macro flows and micro motives. *Environment and Planning A*, 43(8), 1948-1964. doi:10.1068/a43531
- Niedomysl, T., & Malmberg, B. (2009). Do open-ended survey questions on migration motives create coder variability problems? *Population, Space and Place*, 15(1), 79-87. doi:10.1002/psp.493

- Niedomysl, T. (2011). How migration motives change over migration distance: Evidence on variation across socio-economic and demographic groups. *Regional Studies*, 45(6), 843-855. doi:10.1080/00343401003614266
- Rossi, A. S., & Rossi, P. H. (1990). *Of human bonding: Parent-child relations across the life course*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Smits, A. W. M. (2010). Moving close to parents and adult children in the Netherlands: The influence of support needs. *Demographic Research*, 22(31), 985-1014. doi:10.4054/DemRes.2010.22.31
- Thomas, M., Gillespie, B., & Lomax, N. (2019). Variations in migration motives over distance. *Demographic Research*, 40, 1097-1110. [38]. [doi:10.4054/DemRes.2019.40.38](https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2019.40.38)

Appendix: Sample Characteristics: Mean (SD) or Percentage (N = 4,909)	
Female	55,7
Age	44.3 (17.8)
Immigrant	12,2
Highest Education Level	
Elementary School	22,5
High School	33,5
Some College	14,4
College or More	29,7
Employment Status	
Employed	55,1
Student	15,2
Retired	19,3
Unemployed	10,5
Income in 2005 (10,000s)	17.1 (19.5)
Children in Household	21,1
Marital Status	
Unmarried	44,7
Married	34,1
Divorced	16,6
Widowed	4,6
Migration Distance in km (Median = 57)	111.4 (150.4)
<i>Pre-Migration: All Family > 50 km</i>	28,2
Post-Migration Proximity to Family	
All Family > 50 km	35,1
Family 20-49 km	18,3
Family 6-19 km	7,7
Family 2-5 km	5,8
Family 0-2 km	33,1
Migration Motives	
Family as Primary Reason	6,8
Any Family Reasons (Across All Questions)	23,0
Table Notes: Unimputed and Unweighted Data.	