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TITLE

Home is Where the Child is: Has Dual-caring Decreased Mobility among Separated Fathers and Mothers?

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ABSTRACT

‘Family ties’ to relatives living outside the household have been largely neglected in studies on internal migration and mobility. In this paper, we examine a new and emerging family form that, as we shall argue, has the potentially largest effects yet on mobility decisions: joint physical custody (JPC) of children following parental separation. Indeed, JPC, a family form in which children share their weekdays between the homes of their father and mother, has exploded in some contexts over the last decade, leading to an estimate of almost two-thirds of Swedish 0-4 year olds with separated parents living in both their parents’ homes. Because JPC creates residential ties from the child to each of its parents, we hypothesize that JPC reduces mobility of fathers *as well as* mothers. We use administrative register data including all cohorts of children born in Sweden 1968-2013. We follow the mobility of parents, both local moves and moves across labor market regions, from the separation and up until age 18 of the child.

INTRODUCTION

Family ties to family members living outside the household have been largely neglected in studies on internal migration and mobility (Mulder 2018). In a call for the use of a ‘family ties perspective’ in migration research, Mulder (2018) urges for studies on how the role of ties to family living outside the household - such as siblings, older parents and non-resident children - may affect mobility decisions. In this paper, we answer this call by carefully examining a new and emerging family form that, as we shall argue, has the potentially largest effects yet on mobility decisions: joint physical custody (JPC) of children following parental separation. Indeed, JPC, a family form in which children share their weekdays between the homes of their father and mother¹, has exploded in some contexts over the last decade, leading to an estimate of almost two-thirds of Swedish 0-4 year olds with separated parents living in both their parents’ homes (Fransson et al. 2016). As around 40 percent of all 15-year olds in Sweden have separated parents (Thomson & Eriksson 2013), this new family form already has the potential to affect overall mobility rates of the Swedish population. Of course, as the family form has already begun growing in other contexts, the phenomenon has the potential to also affect future mobility rates of other Western countries.

¹ In the current study we will be defining JPC as separated fathers’ active participation in the weekday care of their children. Rather than defining it as a strict 50/50 division of time between each parents’ homes, we use it as a broader term capturing how mobility decisions are affected as soon as the father actively participates in the child’s weekday care (thus linking him to the child’s residential area).

BACKGROUND

Theoretically, JPC provides a new constellation of residential ties within the mother-father-child triad. Figure 1 provides a schematic image of residential and emotional ties and their resulting primary location decisions. We differentiate between intact and separated families under two different family regimes: the ‘traditional family regime’ with the father breadwinner/mother caregiver model and the ‘gender egalitarian regime’, with the dual-earner/dual-carer model (Korpi, Ferrarini & Englund 2013). The JPC is the family form of separated parents under the gender egalitarian regime.

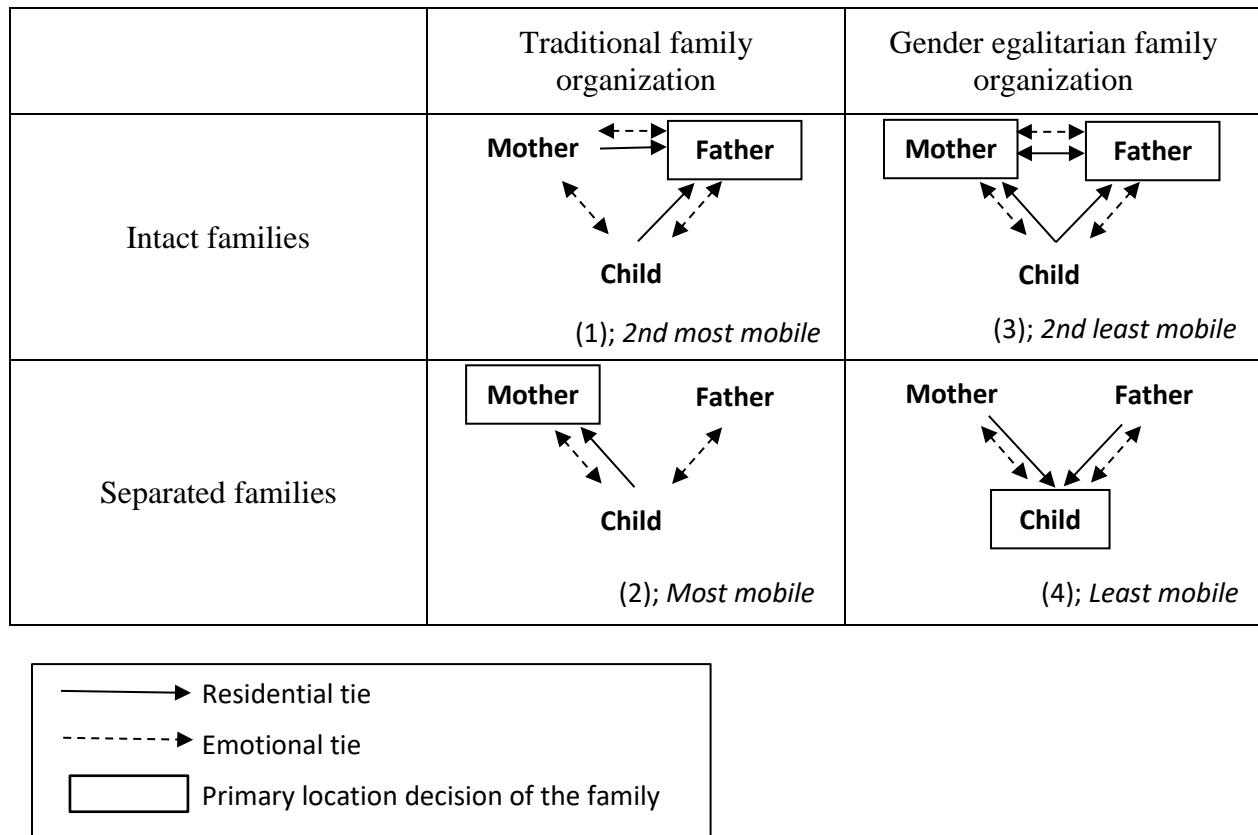


Figure 1: Residential and emotional ties under different family regimes

Starting with the intact family under the father breadwinner/mother caregiver regime (1), location decisions have mainly been based on the fathers’ labor market prospect, making the mother (and the children) ‘tied movers’ (Cooke 2001). Residential ties under this family form have been directed from the mother and the child to the father, making the father the primary location decision. For separated parents under this family regime however (2), the link between the father and the mother is broken. Because the child is under the purview of the mother, the ‘family unit’ now consists of the mother and the child and the location decisions of the unit is typically tied to the mother. Under this regime, a separation may have a positive impact on mobility, both labor market mobility (Mincer 1974) and family mobility as demonstrated by moves to mothers’ own parents for child-care support (Wall & von Reichert 2013).

Under the gender egalitarian regime, the intact family (3) exhibits similar residential and emotional ties as under the traditional family organization. In comparison with the intact family under the traditional family regime, mothers' influence on location decisions is typically strengthened as a result of her participation in the labor market, a fact with well-cited negative consequences on mobility (Mincer 1978). Finally arriving at the focus of this study, the gender egalitarian separated family (4), the JPC, is the least mobile of all family forms. In contrast to the others, the JPC is driven by the requirement for both parents to live in geographical proximity to the locus of the child's everyday life, i.e. the preschool or school in which the child spends its weekdays. While living with a non-residential father every other weekend does not require strict geographical proximity, the JPC requires the everyday commute between the home and preschools/schools to be possible. Under this family form, the primary location decision is therefore shifted to that of the child, reverting the residential ties that previously connected the child with its parents to residential ties connecting each parent with the child. Although moves of the JPC family unit would be possible, it would require separated parents to jointly agree on a new residential location. As the emotional ties between JPC parents are broken, often replaced by at least some degree of parental conflict (Turunen 2017), it would arguably be difficult for the parent wishing to move to convince the other parent to do so as well.

Turning to a comparison between residential ties of separated parents under the two family regimes, the most profound shift in mobility patterns is revealed. As already speculated in previous studies, involvement of fathers limits the mobility of the father after parental separation (Feijten and van Ham 2010). As an unforeseen consequence however, the mobility of the mother may also be restricted. This is the most profound change resulting from the shift between family forms: while a separation under the traditional regime made the mother go from a strong residential tie to the father to no residential tie, a separation under the dual-earner/dual-carer regime makes the mother go from a semi-strong residential tie to the father to an even stronger, via their respective ties to the child. The emergence of the dual-earner/dual-carer regime has therefore reverted the strength of mother's residential tie to the father as she goes from an intact to a separated family.

All in all, as the parent-child link is the strongest emotional link between family members (Bengtson 2001) and a move of a mother or a father under the dual-earner/dual-carer regime would imply that the everyday link is broken, the deterring effects of the JPC on migration decisions and the resulting immobility is potentially far stronger than for any other family tie. Moreover, while the father under the 'traditional family regime' of course maintained an emotional tie with the child, the increasing involvement of fathers in the everyday lives of their children has complemented the emotional tie with a strong residential tie under the JPC family form. We therefore hypothesize that as the JPC family form decrease mobility of *fathers as well as mothers*. To the best of our knowledge, no study has previously been able to empirically address the impact from of JPC on both separated mothers' and fathers' mobility patterns over time.

DATA AND METHODS

We use administrative register data including all cohorts of children born in Sweden 1968-2013. We follow the mobility of parents, distinguishing between local moves and moves across labor market regions, from the separation and up until age 18 of all children with separated parents and, all children in intact unions. We measure JPC through the uptake of temporary parental leave

following the separation. Temporary parental leave may only be claimed when the parent has to stay home from work to take care of a sick child. If claimed by one parent, the other parent must be at their workplace and the claimant must be the sole caregiver of the child at that given point in time. Temporary parental leave has previously been validated as a successful proxy for sharing housework (Eriksson and Neremo 2010), and is likely to be a valid proxy also for sharing child care after a union dissolution. Of course, an indicator of the time spent in each parent's home would be preferred to the current set-up. These can however only be found in small-scale surveys that provide no opportunities for following groups over such an extended period of time. Our complementary aim is also to estimate the impact of family forms on general mobility patterns in Sweden, making small-scale surveys of separated parents unsatisfactory.

We distinguish between two types of moves: local moves and moves across labor market regions. These are likely to reflect two different processes. Local moves reflect the disrupting effect that the separation has on the housing career, in which the parent often need to move downward on the housing ladder and often need to move several times until adequate long-term housing is found. Theoretically, moves across labor market regions are more interesting from the immobility perspective. If our hypothesis is correct, that the child's current environment to an increasing extent determine both parents' residential options, a reduction in moves across labor market regions will reflect the impact of new family forms on labor market outcomes of the parents. As fatherhood in most contexts is awarded a 'fatherhood premium' in the labor market, these results would suggest that the dual-earner/dual-carer regime has made fathers' more similar to mothers and the 'motherhood penalty' they incur in the labor market.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

As a crude illustration of mobility patterns by family type over time, Figure 2 describes mobility of the years 1990-2012 for women and men who have ever experienced a divorce compared to women and men who have not experience a divorce. The figure shows the share of individuals who move to a new municipality a given year by divorce status, separately for women and men.

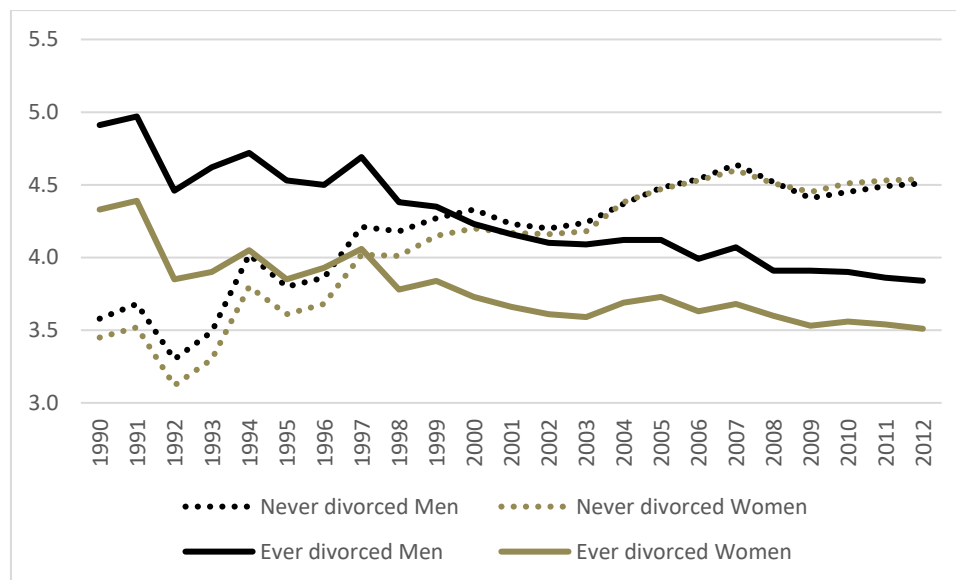


Figure 2. Percentage women and men moving across municipality border, by ever divorced. Swedish population registers, authors' calculations.

Interestingly, we find that in the beginning of our studied period, divorced mothers and fathers were substantially more mobile than non-divorced. However, whereas the mobility rates for never divorced increases over the studied period, the mobility for the divorced continues to decrease, so that in the late 1990s, we even observe a cross-over, where the non-divorced are more mobile than the divorced. Although this is just a first crude analysis, we believe that these results merits further investigation. For the full paper, our data analysis will be extended to years 1968-2017, fathers and mothers will be distinguished by union status and father involvement, and a number of controls for demographic changes over the study period will be added.

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