

Age and cohort effects in intergenerational co-residence among elderly adults in Catalonia.

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Abstract

Introduction: Intergenerational co-residence is still common among elderly people in Southern European countries and especially in Spain, where such proportion is higher. Most studies focused on living arrangements at old age in Spain are driven from a cross-sectional perspective. Aim: This paper examines parent-child co-residence in the transition to old age from a longitudinal perspective in Catalonia, the North-East region of Spain. The main objective is to explore to what extent the high proportion of older people living with children is due to age or cohort effects. Data and methods: The three most recent Spanish censuses (1981, 1991 and 2001) are the data source of this study. Living arrangements are analyzed by observing same cohorts at different stages of their life course. Although such comparison has its constraints, it sheds light on the evolution of living arrangements at old ages. Results: The preliminary findings suggest a decreasing cohort trend in living with children when a longitudinal perspective is applied that smoothes the effect of age. A logistic regression must be set in order to standardize and quantify the age and cohort effects in living arrangements in old age.

Introduction

Living with children is more common among elderly in Spain than in other European countries, even other Southern European countries. Usually this has been explained appealing to strong family ties or either to certain characteristics of the Spanish welfare state. Although the increasing proportion in recent decades of old people who live alone or just with a partner, parent-child co-residence is still higher for the older old.

Previous research in elderly living arrangements in Catalonia found that age maintains an important effect on residential dependency for those aged 80 and over, once controlled for marital status, educational level, place of residence, health and functional dependency. On the one hand, the increase in living with children among the older old may be due to age effects, i.e. older people rejoining their adult children since they experience widowhood, health deterioration or problems to cope with daily life. On the other hand, such higher proportion among the oldest may be a cohort effect. In the past, multigenerational cohabitation was quite frequent in Catalonia and other regions of northern Spain. Specifically because it had to do with transfer rules based on indivisibility of inheritance. This social norm might still be valid in small villages and rural areas because it is linked to the land tenure. Besides, earlier cohorts who have been living in more traditional arrangements may do so when they reach their old age.

Aim

This paper analyzes parent-child co-residence in the transition to old age from a longitudinal perspective. Its aim is to contribute to further understanding of the trends in living with children by exploring age and cohort effects. Some observed trends are related to age and family life course but the higher proportion of people living with children in their old age might be due to cohort effects as well. Age, period and cohort are always related and it is pretty difficult to disentangle their net effects. The paper addresses two research questions: Is it possible to identify cohort effects in trends in living arrangements in old age? and, To what extent living with children is due to cohort and age effects?

Data and methods

The analysis is based on Spanish census micro-data (1981, 1991 and 2001). Census data allow the analysis of living arrangements by observing the same cohorts at different stages of their life course. The main caveats involved are comparability of census concepts and variables through time, as well as implications of following up cohorts through cross-sectional data. Although such a comparison has its restrictions, it paves the way to the understanding of the evolution of living arrangements at old ages.

The study focuses on the cohorts born between 1901 and 1950 in their transition to old age from 50 to 90 years old. Cohorts are grouped into ten year cohorts (1901-10, 1911-20, 1921-30, 1931-40, and 1941-50) and age in ten year intervals (51-60, 61-70, 71-80 and 81-90).

Firstly, cohort trends in parent-child co-residence are analyzed through the comparison of living arrangements from different cohorts at the same age intervals. The age effect is considered by observing the cohort trends along their transition to old age. The effect of sex, marital status, availability of children (only for women), educational level and place of residence on parent-child co-residence is examined.

Secondly, in order to quantify the observed differences a logistic regression must be set to standardize the composition of the population considering that covariates. First of all, the results for A-P, P-C and A-C models are explored. The same model for different age intervals allows comparing different cohorts at the same age and should help to identify cohort effects. The same model for different cohorts should show the age effect for any standardize group of cohorts.

Preliminary results

When a longitudinal approach is applied the bivariate analysis sheds new light on the general discourse on the elderly moving in with their adult children in late life, which is usually based in cross-sectional analysis. Results show that among early birth cohorts, being widowed was a great differentiating factor that promotes living with children. However widowhood impact diminishes for later cohorts.

Widowhood at older ages appears to be related to co residence, which would be an age effect. Meanwhile, after controlling by marital status, the longitudinal perspective shows that parent-child co-residence decreases with age for all cohorts. The fact that we found a decreasing trend of living with children for late birth cohorts and, conversely, an increasing proportion of living alone for all cohorts at all age intervals suggests that multigenerational co-residence in old age reflects traditional patterns that appear to be changing, rather than the result of intergenerational solidarity in late life.

A very different and stable pattern of women who have had just one child was found that could reflect widow women and their adult child moving in together in older age. On the contrary, widow women who have had 2, 3 or 4 children show a decreasing proportion of parent-child co-residence with age and no significant disparities between them.

In a second stage of the research, a model is needed to standardize and quantify cohort and age differences among married and formerly married people taking in account educational level and place of residence. A specific model will be carried for women including fertility information when available.