

Which Sons Live with their Parents: How do Sons' and their Male Siblings' Exchanges with Parents Matter?

Abstract: This article investigates in rural China how migrant sons, through their “time-for-money” exchanges with parents, influence the odds that parents coreside with other non-migrant sons, and how non-migrant sons’ previous migration experience influences their odds of coresiding with parents after they return to the village through their previous exchanges with parents. Based on a two-wave longitudinal study in Anhui Province, China, collected in 2001 and 2003, our working sample included 662 elders who had at least one non-migrant son, corresponding to 994 observations, each representing one non-migrant son, but with migrant siblings’ information embedded. Using clustered logistic regression, we found “time-for-money” exchanges with migrant sons reduced elders’ odds to coreside with any non-migrant son. Providing help to a non-migrant son increased elders’ odds to coreside with this child, but whether the child had previous migration experience does not make a difference in the odds increased.

In rural China, coresidence with children, particularly married sons, is strongly endorsed by cultural values and forms a basis for promoting intergenerational exchanges. In addition, when intergenerational coresidence is an important manifestation of filial piety, it substantially improves elders’ psychological well-being as well as physical health.

But coresidence rate has decreased substantially in rural China, partly because of the labor force migration from rural to urban area, which has geographically separated many adult children from their aging parents and substantially reduced the number of children who stayed in the same village with their parents, and only these children are feasible providers of coresidence. Because of the uxorilocal marriage practice in patrilineal family system, almost all these children are in fact sons.

But reducing the availability of kin is not the only way that the rural to urban labor force migration influences elders’ possibility of coresidence with children. Guided by “corporate/mutual aid” framework, which describes cooperation within families based on reciprocity to maximize each member’s benefit, we propose that there are at least another two mechanisms that the migration of children, particularly sons, will influence their parents’ living arrangements.

First, migrants usually provide more financial support to their parents, particularly when their parents are taking care of migrants' minor children, described as "time-for-money" exchanges. If the "corporate/mutual aid" model is applicable in the extended family and children cooperate to provide different resources to their parents based on what they can provide, migrant children's increased financial support to parents may help their parents to "buy" coresidence with non-migrant children.

Second, in China, because the household registration systems creates barriers for rural to urban migration, e.g., rural migrants have difficulties take their children with them because of the high education expenses, migration strengthens migrant children's dependence on their parents to provide grandchildren care and sometimes financial help to cover initial migration costs. Based on principle of reciprocity of "corporate/mutual aid" framework, the services elders' provide may form the basis of children's felt obligation to coreside with their parents after they return. However, elders do not only provide help to migrant children, they also provide help to non-migrant children. Compared with non-migrant children, migrants' stronger dependence on parents for help may increase elders' bargaining power for future coresidence when migrant children finally return from urban areas.

Therefore, this article investigates how migration of adult children, through their "time-for-money" exchanges with parents, influences the odds that parents coreside with other non-migrant siblings who are possible providers for coresidence, and how migration of adult children influences their own chances of coresiding with parents after they return to the village through their own previous exchanges with parents. Because of the strong patrilineal family tradition, only 3% of elders lived with any daughter in this sample, and very few daughters received grandchildren care from their parents. Practically, we needed only to consider parents' possibility to coreside with a son and "time-for-money" exchanges with a son. Our research questions are:

1. Will providing grandchildren care to and receiving financial support from migrant sons increase parents' odds of coresiding with a non-migrant son?
2. Will parents' previous help to a non-migrant son in grandchildren care, money and instrumental support, increase parents' odds to coreside with this child?
3. Will sons who returned from migration have greater increased odds to coreside with parents than never migrated sons for the same amount help they previously received from parents?

Data and research methods

We analyzed data collected from a random sample of adults aged 60 and older living in rural townships within Chaohu, a primarily agricultural municipal district of 4.5 million people located on the north bank of the Yangtze River in the central part of

Anhui Province. Using a stratified multistage method, we selected eligible respondents from 72 randomly selected villages within six rural townships in the Chaohu region. The survey was originally fielded in April 2001 as a joint project between Xi'an Jiaotong University and the University of Southern California. Of 1,800 eligible participants selected at baseline, 1,715 completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 95.3%. In November 2003, a follow-up survey was conducted with 1,368 respondents, or 79.8% of the original participants, who reported exchanges and relationship with 5624 children.

In our analysis, each observation corresponded to one parent-child dyad. Therefore a complete dataset included 5624 observations, which reflected information of 5264 children and 1368 parents. But we constrained our working data to accommodate to the purpose of our analysis. First, we constrained our working data to parent-child dyads when the child was a son. In addition, because only proximate sons can provide coresidence, we further constrained our sample to include parent-child dyads when the son was living in the same village with parents. These sons are defined as non-migrant sons. After these constraints, the resulting analytic file constituted 994 parent & non-migrant son dyads, corresponding to 662 parents. But migrant son's information was included as family level variables, which were matched into each parent & non-migrant son dyad.

Clustered logistic regression was used to predict the odds of elders' living with a specific non-migrant son. Software Stata was used to carry out this analysis. We had two levels of variables, i.e., individual-level variables referring to each non-migrant son's characteristics and family-level variables including characteristics of parents and parents' exchanges with all migrant sons. The family-level variables were shared for non-migrant siblings with the same parent.

Dependent variable

Our dependent variable was an individual level variable indicating whether a non-migrant son coresided with the parent (1 = coresiding) in the second wave.

Independent variables

1. Our first group of independent variables reflected parents' current "time-for-money exchanges" with migrant sons. These variables included the sum of grandchildren care parents provided to all migrant sons, and the sum of monetary support from all migrant sons in the second wave. These variables are family level variables.
2. We measured non-migrant son's previous migration experience with a dummy variable, representing whether this non-migrant son was a migrant at baseline, i.e., return migrant, or this non-migrant son was

non-migrant at baseline, i.e., never migrated child. We used “1” to represent a return migrant son, “0” represent a never migrated son. This variable was an individual level variable.

3. Then we had variables reflecting parents’ previous help to each non-migrant son, including parents’ previous help in grandchildren care, monetary support and instrumental help at baseline. These variables were individual level variables.
4. We interacted each non-migrant son’s migration status and previous help from parents to test whether being return migrants increased the odds of coresiding with parents for the same amount of previous help they received.

Results

We found that providing grandchildren care and receiving financial support from migrant sons (two dimensions of “time-for-money” exchanges between parents and migrant sons) significantly reduced elders’ odds to coreside with any non-migrant son. Receiving previous helps from parents in grandchildren care, financial help, and instrumental help increased the odds of a non-migrant son to coreside with parents. The increased odds are practically the same for return migrants and never migrated sons.

Discussion

These results do not support a corporate/mutual aid explanation within the extended family. Migrants’ financial support to parents has not bought coresidence from non-migrant children. On the contrary when elders have “time-for-money” exchanges with migrant children, i.e., providing grandchildren care and receiving financial support, non-migrant children withdraw from providing coresidence. This may reflected elders’ increased economic capacity make them prefer independent living arrangement. These results support a corporate/mutual aid explanation of intergenerational relationship that children pay back parents’ previous help in the form of coresidence. But parents did not to a greater extent increase their odds of coresidence with return migrants through previous help. The results in this article provides evidences that in rural China, the decision of coresidence is made within the extended family setting based on parents’ previous and current exchanges with each of them.