

2.6 Intergenerational cohabitation at older ages

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2.6.1 Motivation

In the retrospective questionnaire of Wave 7, respondents answered questions about episodes of intergenerational co-residence. In particular, they reported whether and when they lived together with their parents or parents-in-law after they left the parental home to set up their own household. Further, if their children lived with them at the time of the interview, respondents recorded whether and when they came back to the parental nest after they had left it to set up their own household. Therefore, the intergenerational perspective in SHARE is covered in two directions by including the younger generation (living with children) and the older generation (living with parents) of the respondent. The research issues behind this set of questions are as follows:

- a) To what extent do particular trajectories in family composition affect outcomes at older ages, such as socio-economic status, wealth, health, social engagement and social support?
- b) What is the mechanism by which such effects operate? Does a larger family provide economic support and/or help with family chores that allow its members to be more involved in the labour market?
- c) What kind of welfare changes in the twentieth century shaped the size and composition of households? Did the expansion of the welfare state (social housing, childcare, maternity leave and health care) crowd out the need for insurance within the family? Or, was it the transformation of household size and composition that led to the need for such policies?

We stress that evidence on current co-residence is available from standard SHARE waves, but standard waves are silent on intergenerational cohabitation (co-residence) back in time and the reasons for it. Therefore, the retrospective questionnaire of Wave 7 includes a set of questions on household structure that should overcome this limitation; these questions ask for the first and last period of cohabitation with parents/parents-in-law and the motivation for cohabitation (“to help them, to receive help, both, none of them”). Similar questions were asked about children currently living with the respondents, that is, if they had previously left the parental nest.

In this chapter, we present some descriptive statistics based on SHARE Wave 7 data (Release 0). We start with questions about the co-residence of the respondents with their parents/parents-in-law. Section 2.6.2 looks at cohabitation of respondents with their parents and parents-in-law; Section 2.6.3 examines cohabitation with their children. We draw conclusions in the last section.

2.6.2 Parents and parents-in-law

Table 2.8 reports the number of respondents who report having co-resided with their mother, father, mother-in-law or father-in-law. We see that over three-quarters report never having lived with any of these individuals, while almost 12 percent have co-resided with their mother, 10 percent with their mother-in-law, and smaller percentages with their father (8 percent) or father-in-law (7 percent), which is consistent with the tendency for women to survive their husbands. The most interesting feature that emerges from the table is the very low number of item nonresponses (items marked “don’t know”, refusals and missing values account for just 0.1 percent of all responses).

Table 2.8: Who lived in the household (parents of the respondent)

	Mother		Father		Mother-in-law		Father-in-law		None of these	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Not selected	52010	88,1	54217	91,8	53069	89,9	54767	92,8	13359	22,6
Selected	6955	11,8	4748	8,0	5896	10,0	4198	7,1	45606	77,3
Missing	42	0,1	42	0,1	42	0,1	42	0,1	42	0,1
Don't know	24	0,0	24	0,0	24	0,0	24	0,0	24	0,0
Refusal	8	0,0	8	0,0	8	0,0	8	0,0	8	0,0
Total	59039	100,0	59039	100,0	59039	100,0	59039	100,0	59039	100,0

Note: SHARE Wave 7 data (Release 0).

In Table 2.9, we display the most common types of co-residence. We see that living with both parents is the most common type (reported by almost 7 percent), followed by living with both in-laws (6 percent) and living with the mother (4 percent) or mother-in-law (3 percent) alone. Other types of co-residence are less common. The table also shows (absolute) frequencies by gender and current age.

Table 2.9: Who lived with the respondent, by gender and age

	Overall		Gender		Age	
	n	%	Males	Females	70+	50-69
			n		n	
Mother alone	2522	4,3	951	1571	1162	1360
Father alone	476	0,8	225	251	204	271
Mother and father	4021	6,8	1967	2054	1595	2426
Mother-in-law alone	1949	3,3	762	1187	886	1063
Father-in-law-alone	413	0,7	126	287	166	246
Mother- and father-in-law	3554	6,0	1226	2328	1508	2045
Two parents, not couple	160	0,3	65	95	87	73
3 or 4 parents	264	0,5	102	162	104	160
None of these	45606	77,3	19754	25851	17666	27919
Missing	74	0,1	34	40	37	36
Total	59039	100,0	25212	33826	23415	35599

Note: SHARE Wave 7 data (Release 0).

A possible concern with retrospective information is that respondents may provide inaccurate information on the exact timing of the episodes they report. In the case of co-residence, for instance, some individuals may fail to report dates or state that a co-residence period ended before it started.

Table 2.10 addresses this issue by reporting the number of cases in which both the start and end years are reported and for which the end year is strictly after the start year. It does so separately for the first co-residence period and then for the last (if different). The consistency variable takes a value of 1 if the condition is met and a value of 0 otherwise.

Table 2.10: Consistency of year information

First co-residence period								
	Mother		Father		Mother-in-law		Father-in-law	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1	6729	95,6	4528	94,3	5798	97,9	4112	97,6
0	307	4,4	272	5,7	124	2,1	101	2,4
Total	7036	100,0	4800	100,0	5922	100,0	4213	100,0
Last co-residence period, if more than one								
	Mother		Father		Mother-in-law		Father-in-law	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1	607	91,4	306	93,3	401	89,3	189	90,0
0	57	8,6	22	6,7	48	10,7	21	10,0
Total	664	100,0	328	100,0	449	100,0	210	100,0

Note: SHARE Wave 7 data (Release 0).

1 = consistent information (end year is strictly greater than start year); 0 = inconsistent information on start and end year of co-residence.

We see that in over 94 percent of all cases, the consistency check is passed for the first co-residence period; the percentage falls by a few points for the last co-residence period, probably reflecting respondent fatigue.

In Table 2.11, we provide evidence on the number of cases in which parents co-resided with the respondent at least twice and in which there is a gap of more than one year between the end of the first and the beginning of the last cohabitation period. In this case, there might be further episodes of co-residence that were not reported because the respondent was only asked about first and last co-residence periods. The variable takes a value of 1 if there is a period in which the respondent might have been co-residing with a given parent. We see that this could have happened in 15 percent of the cases for co-residence with the mother, 12 percent for co-residence with the mother-in-law, and in less than 10 percent of cases for co-residence with the father or father-in-law.

Table 2.11: Gaps in information about co-residing parents

	Mother		Father		Mother-in-law		Father-in-law	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
No gap years	5884	84,6	4300	90,6	5209	88,4	3920	93,4
Gap years	1071	15,4	448	9,4	687	11,7	278	6,6
Total	6955	100,0		100,0	5896	100,0	4198	100,0

Note: SHARE Wave 7 data (Release 0).

The questionnaire also elicited information on the reasons why such co-residence took place. A respondent had to choose among four mutually exclusive possibilities. Co-residence could take place to help the respondent, to help the other named person (mother, father, mother-in-law, father-in-law), to help both or to help neither. Table 2.12 lists the absolute and relative frequencies for each type of person and for the current, first and last episodes.

Table 2.12: Reasons for cohabitation with parents/parents-in-law

Mother	Current help		First help		Last help	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Help mother	226	35,4	1526	23,7	224	36,1
Help respondent	15	2,4	705	11,0	38	6,1
Help both	326	51,0	3129	48,6	286	46,1
Help neither	69	10,8	1054	16,4	69	11,1
Don't know	2	0,3	22	0,3	4	0,6
Refusal	1	0,2	4	0,1		
Total	639	100,0	6440	100,0	621	100,0

Father	Current help		First help		Last help	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Help father	45	19,9	752	16,4	98	30,8
Help respondent	5	2,2	544	11,9	20	6,3
Help both	133	58,9	2355	51,4	158	49,7
Help neither	40	17,7	895	19,5	40	12,6
Missing			1	0,0		
Don't know	2	0,9	30	0,7	2	0,6
Refusal	1	0,4	7	0,2		
Total	226	100,0	4584	100,0	318	100,0

Mother-in-law	Current help		First help		Last help	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Help mother-in-law	109	28,6	1092	19,6	163	37,8
Help respondent	7	1,8	557	10,0	27	6,3
Help both	226	59,3	2904	52,2	188	43,6
Help neither	39	10,2	999	18,0	50	11,6
Don't know			7	0,1	3	0,7
Total	381	100,0	5559	100,0	431	100,0

Father-in-law	Current help		First help		Last help	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Help father-in-law	25	17,86	592	14,51	63	31,03
Help respondent	4	2,86	435	10,66	11	5,42
Help both	94	67,14	2272	55,69	99	48,77
Help neither	17	12,14	771	18,90	28	13,79
Don't know			9	0,22	2	0,99
Refusal			1	0,02		
Total	140	100,0	4080	100,0	203	100,0

Note: SHARE Wave 7 data (Release 0).

Three general features emerge from the table. First, in all cases, mutual help is the modal answer. This finding is not surprising, given that co-residence affords major savings, as there are economies of scale in the production of household services (shelter, heating, utilities, food, etc.). However, we also see that if the respondent states that co-residence helps only one person, this person is someone else. This finding is in line with expectations, given that respondents are aged 50 years and older, and their parents and parents-in-law will tend to be some 25-35 years older. However, there may also be some reporting bias due to the natural reluctance to admit one's own dependence on others. Finally, there is a time (or age) gradient: the last episodes of co-residence are more often intended to help the named person than are the first episodes.

2.6.3 Children

Respondents who lived with children at the time of the interview were asked since when the co-residence was taking place, and when (if at all) each cohabiting child left the parental home for the first time to establish his/her own household. Moreover, respondents reported the motive for co-residence in exactly the same way as for parents and parents-in-law.

In Table 2.13, we check for consistency of dates. The variable takes a value of 0 if dates are correctly reported, that is, if the co-residing child never left the parents' household, or if the date on which he/she established his/her own household preceded the date on which the child started the current cohabitation period. We show the consistency variable separately for each child (up to the fifth natural child) and collectively for the remaining natural children on the one hand and for adopted and foster children on the other. The results show that over 92 percent of the information about cohabiting children is correct.

Table 2.13: Consistency of years

	1 st child		2 nd child		3 rd child		4 th child		5 th child	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1	5113	93,1	4833	94,5	2325	94,7	830	93,8	287	92,9
0	379	6,9	280	5,5	129	5,3	55	6,2	22	7,1
Total	5492	100,0	5113	100,0	2454	100,0	885	100,0	309	100,0

	Other natural children		Adopted or foster children	
	n	%	n	%
1	253	96,9	127	96,9
0	8	3,1	4	3,1
Total	261	100,0	131	100,0

Note: SHARE Wave 7 data (Release 0).

1 = consistent information (end year is strictly greater than start year);
0 = inconsistent information on start and end year of co-residence

Table 2.14 further elaborates on these data. We now consider only the "valid responses", i.e., those for which the child is currently cohabiting and information on dates is usable (value "1" in previous table). We check for observations for which we do not have enough information to cover the entire life span. There are no gap years if the child either always lived in the household or left the household and returned the subsequent year. There are gap years if the child established his/her own household at least two years prior to the year in which the current cohabitation with parents started. In this case, we do not know whether there were other cohabiting periods besides the current one or whether the child lived continuously on his/her own. We see from Table 2.14 that for the vast majority of cohabiting children, there are no gap years.

Table 2.14: Gaps in information about co-residing children

	1 st child		2 nd child		3 rd child		4 th child		5 th child	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
No gap years	4796	93,5	4581	94,7	2205	94,7	795	95,2	275	95,2
Gap years	331	6,5	258	5,3	124	5,3	40	4,8	14	4,8
Total	5127	100,0	4839	100,0	2329	100,0	835	100,0	289	100,0

	Other natural children		Adopted or foster children	
	n	%	n	%
No gap years	232	91,7	118	92,9
Gap years	21	8,3	9	7,1
Total	253	100,0	127	100,0

Note: SHARE Wave 7 data (Release 0).

Finally, Table 2.15 reports the motive for cohabiting with a given child. As we already saw in Table 2.12, mutual help is the modal answer. However, the fraction of respondents who report that they are cohabiting to help the named child is substantial. This finding is in line with the evidence about the most recent cohabitation of respondents with their parents and parents-in-law reported in Table 2.12. In that case, the respondents more often claim they are co-residing in order to help their parents rather than to receive help. This situation is perfectly possible, given that we are focusing on the middle generation (which is expected to provide help to both the older and the younger generations). However, another explanation is that the perception of the respondents suffers from a “warm glow” bias: respondents over-report playing the active role in the helping relationship.

Table 2.15: Reasons for cohabitation with child/children

	1 st child		2 nd child		3 rd child		4 th child		5 th child	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Help child	1555	27,7	1524	29,3	766	49,2	279	30,9	86	27,4
Help respondent	154	2,7	131	2,5	62	4,0	33	3,7	17	5,4
Help both	2544	45,3	2324	44,6	105	6,7	350	38,7	116	36,9
Help neither	1359	24,2	1231	23,6	624	40,1	242	26,8	95	30,3
Total	5612	100,0	5210	100,0	1557	100,0	904	100,0	314	100,0

	Other natural children		Adopted and foster children	
	n	%	n	%
Help child	70	25,5	48	35,8
Help respondent	7	2,5	2	1,5
Help both	124	45,1	47	35,1
Help neither	74	26,9	37	27,6
Total	275	100,0	134	100,0

Note: SHARE Wave 7 data (Release 0).

2.6.4 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, we evaluated the quality of the data collected with the new questions in Wave 7 designed to reconstruct the cohabitation history of respondents with their parents and children to evaluate their potential for future research. Data quality is remarkably high: item nonresponse is negligible, and respondents report dates correctly in the vast majority of cases. Data quality is a prerequisite for usefulness in research, but even from this brief analysis, some further indications emerge. First, for most respondents, we are in the position of reconstructing the exact composition of their households for their entire lives, meaning that various indicators of family composition, such as number of members, average age of members and number of cohabiting generations, can be constructed, added to SHARELIFE in its retrospective panel format and used as a determinant of outcomes at older ages, as explained in Section 2.6.1. Second, the prevalence of “boomerang children” (Mitchell & Gee, 1996), i.e., adult children returning to the parental home, is lower than one might expect. This evidence deserves further investigation, for example, to answer the question of whether there are differences across cohorts and/or countries. Finally, the evidence for the direction of assistance among generations is consistent with the notion of a “sandwich generation” that provides help to members of both elderly and younger generations (Miller, 1981). However, it may also point to a “warm glow” response bias, as noticed in the literature on inter vivos gifts (Alessie et al., 2014).

References

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