

Who leaves the marital residence after divorce? The role played by homogamy and heterogamy

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Abstract

In case of a union dissolution, at least one partner has to leave the joint family home. We investigated the role of heterogamy between two former partners on the likelihood that the female partner has left the marital residence around separation between 1981 and 2010. Many demographic and social trends point to changes in spouses' relative positions with respect to age, education, earnings, labor force participation, preferences for mates, childcare and housework. These trends may also have led to changes in the relative positions of men and women in their likelihood of leaving the joint home. We used data of 2948 divorcees from the "Divorce in Flanders" survey and logistic regression models. Heterogamy was measured by constructing two indicators of relative resources: the age difference and the difference in education between the two former partners. Changes through time were estimated by making a distinction between three separation cohorts: 1981-1990, 1991-2000 and 2001-2010. Preliminary results suggest a changed relationship between the types of heterogamy and whether the woman versus the man moved out around separation. During all three separation cohorts, the woman moved out particularly frequently if the man was considerably older than she was. Only in the most recent cohort, women had a lower likelihood to move out if they were older than their husbands. Educational differences were significant in the two first cohorts, but in a different way: women with lower educational resources than their husbands had a slightly lower chance to move out in the oldest cohort, while in the next cohort the woman had a higher chance to move out if the man was more educated than equally educated. In the next version of the paper, we will apply diagonal reference models that have been shown to yield better estimates of the effects of homogamy and heterogamy.

Background

In case of a union dissolution, at least one partner has to leave the joint family home. Subsequently, experiencing a divorce is one of the major events in life predicting residential mobility and movement out of homeownership (Dewilde, 2008; Feijten, 2005; Feijten & van Ham, 2007). Leaving the marital residence due to a separation is often accompanied by a downward move in the housing career (ex. from owning to renting) and/or a severe loss in housing quality (Feijten & Mulder, 2005; Feijten & Mulder, 2010).

The literature addressing the issue of who stays in the house and who moves out is small but recently has been growing recently (Mulder & Wagner, 2012; Mulder, 2013). Both monetary and nonmonetary aspects have already been associated with the question of who moves out: the man, the woman, or both ex-partners. Variables that have been documented to play a role include whether the couple has children and the residence arrangements of these children, whether it was the husband or the wife who initiated the decision to separate or who switched to a new partner, age and socio-economic resources of both ex-partners, the local social network and the migrant status of both ex-partners and, the ownership, the house value and the location of the joint home (Gram-Hanssen & Bech-Danielsen, 2008; Feijten & Mulder, 2010; Holmans, 2000; Mulder & Malmberg, 2011; Mulder & Wagner 2010; Mulder & Wagner, 2012).

Mulder and Wagner (2010, 2012) assume that who moves out of the joint home upon separation and who stays is a consequence of the costs of staying and moving that each partner confronts. They start their theoretical argumentation from the principle that any separating person for whom the monetary and nonmonetary costs of moving are lower than the costs of staying will move. If both ex-partners are confronted with insufficient resources to bear the costs of paying for the joint home on her or his own, negotiation by using rules of fairness or justice will be necessary. One such rule could be that the partner whose costs of moving are greater moves out or both move. Therefore, also spouses' relative resources, or differences between partners with respect to labor market participation, income, age, education and/or the local social network, need to be taken into account while studying moves around separation.

There is already some evidence that relative resources matter in the decision of who moves out and who does not. Mulder and Wagner's (2010) study on 1 537 separated men and women from the Divorce in the Netherlands 1998 dataset, showed that a partner who was employed (when the other partner was not) or who was older, was less likely to move out. Educational differences could not be associated with the likelihood of women versus men to move out. Other recent studies by Mulder and Malmberg (2011) and Mulder et al. (2012), based on administrative data from Sweden and The Netherlands respectively, found (again) strong evidence that individuals who have more resources than their ex-partner (with respect to income, employment, age and the local network) are less likely to move.

The impact of relative education has not been examined in the latter studies. In addition, no single study examined changes over time. Yet, many demographic and social trends (like the rising employment of women, the reversal of the gender gap in education,...) point to changes in spouses' relative positions with respect to age, earnings, labor force participation, preferences (for mates), childcare, housework, and education (Schwartz & Han, 2012; Van Bavel, 2012). These trends may also have led to changes in the relative positions of men and women in their likelihood of leaving the joint home (Mulder & Wagner, 2010). This motivates the research question for this paper: *Has the changed bargaining position of women in the process of separation caused a changing relationship between spouses' relative resources and their chance of having left the marital residence after separation?*

Data and method

We used data from the "Divorce in Flanders" (DiF) survey, (Mortelmans et al., 2012) conducted in the Dutch speaking part of Belgium during the period September 2009 – December 2010. The DiF survey contains information on 6365 men and women who got married for the first time between January 1971 and December 2008 and could have experienced a divorce by the time of interview. The intact and dissolved marriages were as two separate groups and proportionally to the wedding year selected from the National Register. In this paper we only work with the

men and women from marriages dissolved between 1981 and 2010. If two ex-partners from one dissolved marriage participated to the survey, only one ex-partner was randomly selected to be included in our analyses to avoid interdependency between observations (N=3493).

Till now, we used logistic regression analyses to estimate the likelihood of who moved out after the *de facto* separation: (0) the male partner or (1) the female partner. Respondents who reported that both ex-partners had left the marital residence (n=99; 3.0%) were excluded because the number of cases in which this happened was too small to permit multinomial logistic regression analyses with sufficient statistical power.

To investigate the role of heterogamy between two former partners on their chance of having left the joint home, we used two indicators of relative resources. The first measures the age difference between both partners with the following categories: (1) 0 – 1 year, (2) woman older than man, (3) man 2 – 4 years older than woman and (4) man \geq 5 years older than woman. The second measures the former spouses' relative education with three categories: (1) man and woman have equal educational levels (*homogamy*), (2) man has more education than woman (*hypergamy*) and (3) woman has more education than man (*hypogamy*). The relative education measure is constructed using a 3-category representation of man and woman's highest educational level at time of interview (up to lower secondary education, higher secondary education and higher non-university or university education).

We used seven variables to measure other monetary and nonmonetary costs of staying or leaving the marital residence after separation: who made the decision to separate (man, woman or both), whether a new relationship of the male and the female partner was a reason for the separation, whether the couple has joint children and the residence arrangement of these children (no child, always to mostly with mother, always to mostly with father, shared residence or other), the duration of the marriage (0 – 4 years, 5 – 12 years, more than 12 years), whether the couple ever seek professional help for the difficulties in their marriage (man, woman, both or no one) and the ownership of the joint home (man, woman, both, home was rented or other).

After excluding all cases with missing values on the dependent variable and the independent variables, 2948 cases remained for inclusion in the analyses. First, we present a model in which all these separated men and women are included. We accounted for changes through historical time by adding a 3-categorical variable for the separation year (1981 – 1990, 1991 – 2000 or 2001 – 2010). Afterwards, we present three models – one for each separation cohort – to look after the possible changes in more detail. We weighted the data by a variable that reproduces the distribution of marriages in the Flemish population according to the year of marriage and the year of divorce.

Preliminary results

The logistic regression model of who moves out for all men and women separated between 1981 and 2010 (Table 1, column 1) is consistent with what has been found in an earlier Dutch study in which the association between relative resources and who moves out has been investigated (see Mulder & Wagner, 2010): the woman moved out particularly frequently if the man was considerably older than she was and almost no significant association between differences in the level of education and the likelihood of women versus men to move out was found. However, this almost nonexistent effect of educational differences can be partly explained by differences within this group of separated men and women. In the cohort 1981 – 1990 (Table 1, column 2), women with lower educational resources than their husbands had a slightly lower chance to move out of the joint home. In the next separation cohort (Table 1, column 3), the reverse was true: if the male partner was more educated, the female partner was significantly more likely to move out as when partners were equally educated. In the most recent separation cohort (Table 1, column 4) educationally heterogamous couples no longer differed from educationally homogamous couples in their likelihood of the female partner moving out. We did find significant evidence for women having a lower chance to move out if they were older than their husbands.

Table 1: Odds ratio's for predictors of whether woman (versus man) moved out after separation (unweighted N, weighted coefficients)

	All cohorts	1981 – 1990	1991 – 2000	2001 – 2010
Age difference (ref.: 0 – 1 year)				
Woman older	0.783	1.131	0.932	0.591 [†]
Man 2 – 4 years older	1.163	1.066	0.972	1.467*
Man ≥ 5 years older	2.015***	2.076*	2.022**	1.979**
Difference in education (ref.: Equally educated)				
Man more educated	1.232 [†]	0.579 [†]	1.472*	1.336
Woman more educated	0.888	0.742	1.065	0.782
Decision to separate (ref.: Both)				
Woman	2.696***	2.882***	3.365***	2.187***
Man	0.474***	0.381**	0.624*	0.375***
New relationship woman (ref.: No)	2.031***	2.962***	2.768***	1.292
New relationship man (ref.: No)	0.518***	0.584 [†]	0.521***	0.483***
Residence arrangement joint children (ref.: no child)				
Always to mostly with mother	0.435***	0.502**	0.455***	0.387***
Always to mostly with father	4.236***	3.316 [†]	3.367***	6.504***
Shared residence	1.420**	1.424	1.216	1.608 [†]
Other	0.677**	0.522	0.743	0.657
Duration marriage (ref.: 0 – 4 years)				
5 – 12 years	0.800 [†]	0.867	0.892	0.677 [†]
≥ 13	0.577***	0.650	0.635*	0.470**
Ever seek professional help (ref.: Both)				
Woman	1.287	0.545	1.570	1.487
Man	0.933	1.212	1.245	0.780
No	1.364**	0.839	1.658**	1.230
Ownership of joint home (ref.: Both)				
Woman	0.215***	0.431	0.205***	0.094***
Man	4.530***	4.071*	3.022**	8.036***
Rented	1.045	1.009	0.964	1.304
Other	1.048	1.114	1.268	0.676
Separation cohort (ref.: 1991 – 2000)				
1981 – 1990	1.294*			
2001 – 2010	1.037			
Constant	0.921	1.796	0.565 [†]	1.439
χ^2 (df)	921.251(24)	135.716(22)	370.947(22)	458.107(22)
Nagelkerke R^2	0.358	0.343	0.346	0.410
N	2948	431	1245	1272
% woman moved out	52.5	59.8	50.8	51.4

Note: ref. = reference category. From DiF data (2012).

[†] < 0.10. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Future plans

In the future, we propose to apply diagonal reference models (DRMs) (Sobel, 1981) instead of the generally used (multinomial) logistic regression models. This theoretically founded technique promises to be a valuable alternative for examining the effect of age and educational differences on who moves out, as it offers a parsimonious and interpretable approach to analyze the simultaneous effect of both partner's characteristics (Eeckhaut, 2012; Eeckhaut et al., 2013). Previous research on marital satisfaction has already shown that DRMs yield better estimates for educational differences than the classical linear regression analyses (Eeckhaut et al., 2013).

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