

Extending residence at the parental home for single, childless young adults: a cohort analysis of the transition to adulthood in Spain

This theoretical analysis delves into the phenomenon of single and childless individuals choosing to prolong their residence in their parental home during challenging and uncertain periods. It seeks to uncover the intricate dynamics governing this decision and elucidate the complex web of sociological and economic factors influencing this choice. The theoretical framework explores concepts such as emerging adulthood, evolving family structures, and the interplay of individual agency and societal influences. By scrutinising these elements, the analysis aims to provide a deeper understanding of the motivations and consequences of remaining in the parental home during turbulent times.

Prior research has emphasised the significance of emerging adulthood as a life stage characterised by extended transitions into independence (Arnett, 2000), the impact of shifting family structures on housing choices (Aassve et al., 2012; Del Rey, 2022), and the interplay of individual agency and societal forces in housing decisions (Furstenberg, 2010). Furthermore, studies have highlighted the role of age norms in the decision to leave the parental home (Billari & Liefbroer, 2007).

One indicator of the transition to adulthood is the formation of an independent household or an autonomous family separate from that of origin. This process involves separating from the original family nucleus and establishing an independent nucleus or a non-family household, which can be achieved through various means such as marriage, non-marital cohabitation, becoming a single parent, or leaving the parental home to form an independent non-family household. These paths may occur together or separately at different points in an individual's life course. It is important to note that family transition is not universal, as a percentage of the population either never leaves the parental home or does so much later in life, and most transitions can be reversed, such as returning to the parental home after a period of independence.

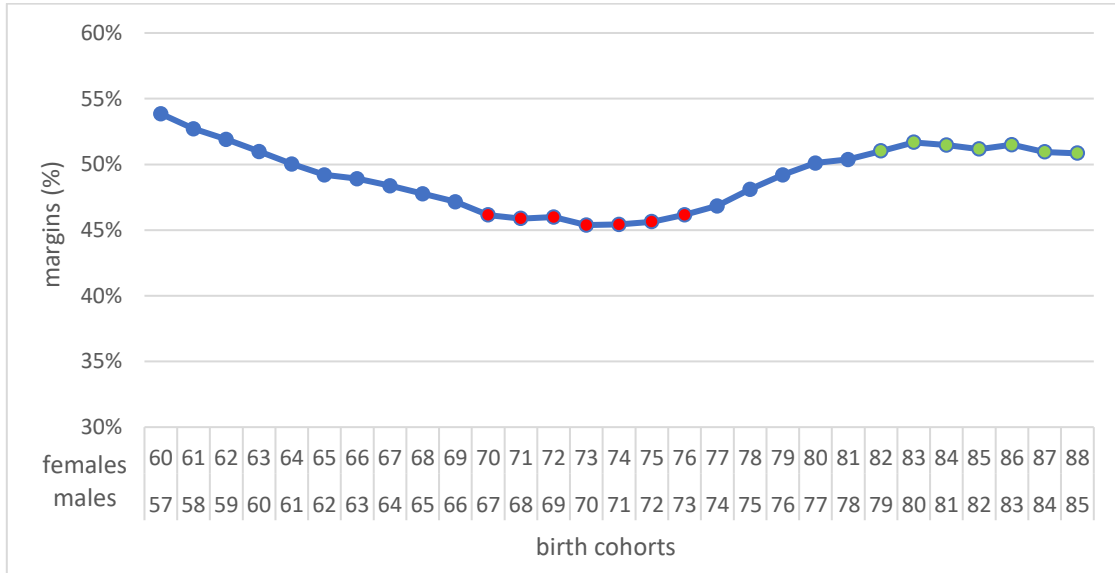
The delay in young people leaving home over the last half-century is often attributed to the challenging circumstances they face, including the high cost of housing, job instability, and the absence of public support, necessitating intergenerational family support to leave home. The central hypothesis guiding this research is that the delay in young people forming independent households or families is not primarily a result of the proliferation of alternative pathways to adulthood but rather a consequence of increased vulnerability during this life stage.

To investigate this, we utilise data from the Spanish Labour Force Survey (SLFS), which includes essential demographic variables, educational attainment, and labour market positions. We define a family-dependent child as an individual living with their father, mother, or both parents, without a partner or offspring in the household. The study primarily focuses on the persistence of residence in the parental home without experiencing family or household formation. Our analysis adopts a cohort-based perspective, aligning with the life course framework.

In the process of making an increasingly parsimonious model, we have found that the female age patterns are indistinguishable from the male age patterns of men three years older, so that the probability of having initiated a family or household of one's own is very, very similar between women of a given birth-cohort and the male one born three years earlier. In addition,

the age pattern can be summarised in two continuous factors, indicating simple and quadratic age effects.

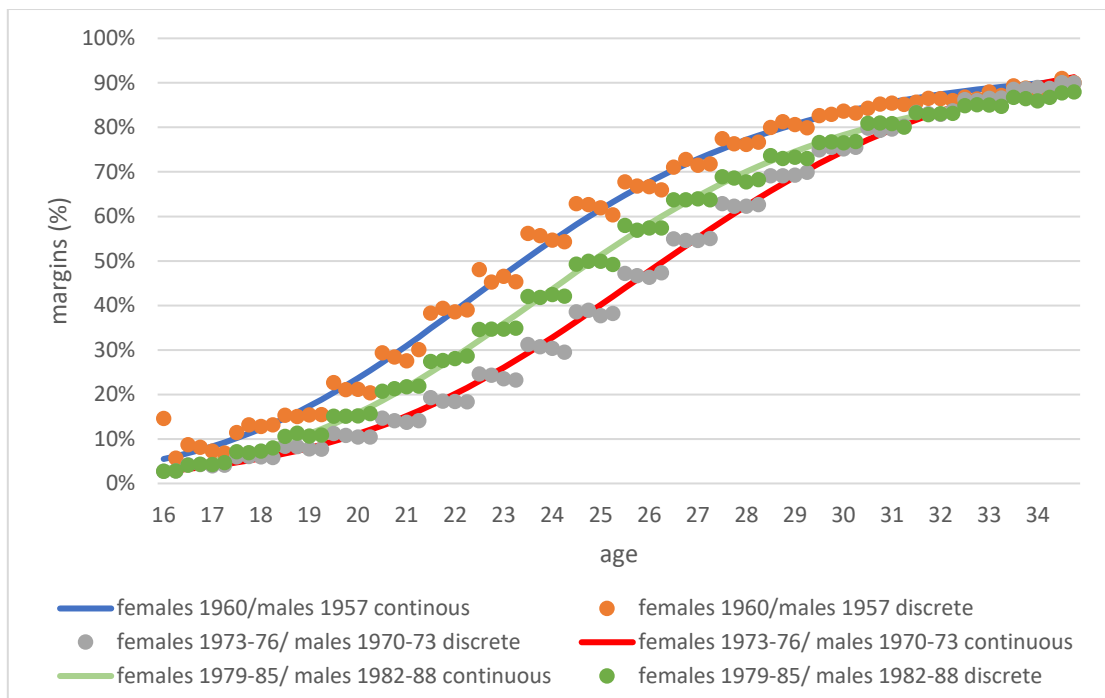
Figure 1. Probability of having left parental home or/and form a family by calendar time.



Source: Elaborated from the Spanish Labour Force Survey

Note: controlling by age, educational level & labour status; independent for sex

Figure 2. Probability of having left parental home or/and form a family by age and birth cohort.



Source: Elaborated from the Spanish Labour Force Survey

So, family or household formation of young people begins to be significant at the age of 16 for women and at 19 for men, and the gap between sexes is maintained in the calendar in the nineteen years that follow: thus, we analyse transitions among women aged 16-35 and men aged 19-38. Having the first photograph between mid-1976 and mid-1977, the first female birth cohort will be that of 1960, which we can follow until the age of 35, which they reached in 1995. The last pattern will be that of those born in 1988, who turned 35 in the latest data available. Following the same analytical logic, we reconstruct the complete pattern between the ages of 19 and 38 for males born between 1957 and 1985, discovering the pattern of these in 76 quarterly photographs that reflect a first family stage in which one lives with one's parents, without having formed one's own family nucleus or an autonomous household.

Considering the structure by sex and age, the evolution of the event calendar between generations appears (figure 1). The earliest was undoubtedly that of the oldest, with women born in 1960 and men in 1957. The latest, however, is not the youngest, but that of women born between 1967 and 1973 and men born three years earlier. The younger generations exhibit an intermediate pattern, which has remained largely unchanged from women born in 1982 and men in 1979 onwards, i.e., the generations born in the early 1980s. In short, after a period of delay, there has been a process of advancement in the transition to the adulthood.

Different groups of cohorts can be seen whose family transition to adulthood was not only related to economic circumstances but also to the size of the generations, since the larger they were, the later their family or household formation was, and, conversely, the smaller they were, the earlier they were. Thus, those born in the first half of the 1960s, the first boomers, were the earliest (in relation to later cohorts) to form a family or household of their own. Those who did so later were the most numerous, born in the early 1970s. In contrast, the baby boomers show an earlier departure from the family household, like the first observed.

On this grid, we are going to check to what extent the patterns in the age of leaving the family home were related to the level of education and the employment relationship of young people. In principle, the former should not have much effect, as all generations have increased their educational attainment. In contrast, the second is very likely to be linked to the cohort effect, as periods of economic crisis have followed periods of recovery. From here on, we must be aware of gender patterns, as neither education nor - especially - the relationship with activity affects men and women in the same way, particularly in the issue that concerns us here, namely in relation to their effect on youth independence.

In the process of making an increasingly parsimonious model, we have found that the female age patterns are indistinguishable from the male age patterns of men three years older, so that the probability of having started a family or household of one's own is very similar between women of a given generation and the male cohort born three years earlier. In addition, the age pattern can be summarised in two continuous factors, indicating simple and quadratic age effects (figure 2).

Education is divided into three levels, depending on whether one has attained at most a compulsory school certificate, upper secondary education, or university education. The relationship with work activity is divided into four categories: outside the labour market, unemployed, full-time, or part-time employment. The aim is to verify that the higher the level of education, the longer the stay in the parental home, both for men and women. On the other hand, we do expect gender to be a defining factor in the relationship between the labour market

and the age of leaving the parental home: the greater the link, the earlier it is for men and the later it is for women.

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