

Paper presented at the 16th Nordic Demographic Symposium in Helsinki, 5-7 June 2008

Family Forerunners? Families and Demographic Processes in Northern Europe

Geographical Distance to Parents and the Likelihood of Having Children

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We shall investigate the reciprocal relationship between (a) the geographical distance of parents to their adult children and (b) having grandchildren. Two contradictory hypotheses are tested. First, physical proximity is generally assumed to increase the likelihood of having children. Adult children living close to parents are likely to have children, because they expect that their parents will help them in childcare. Parents or adult children also move closer to each other when the younger generation has children. On the other hand, Louis Chauvel's (2002, 2006) evidence from France indicates that geographical proximity between parents and adult children *lowers* the likelihood of having children.

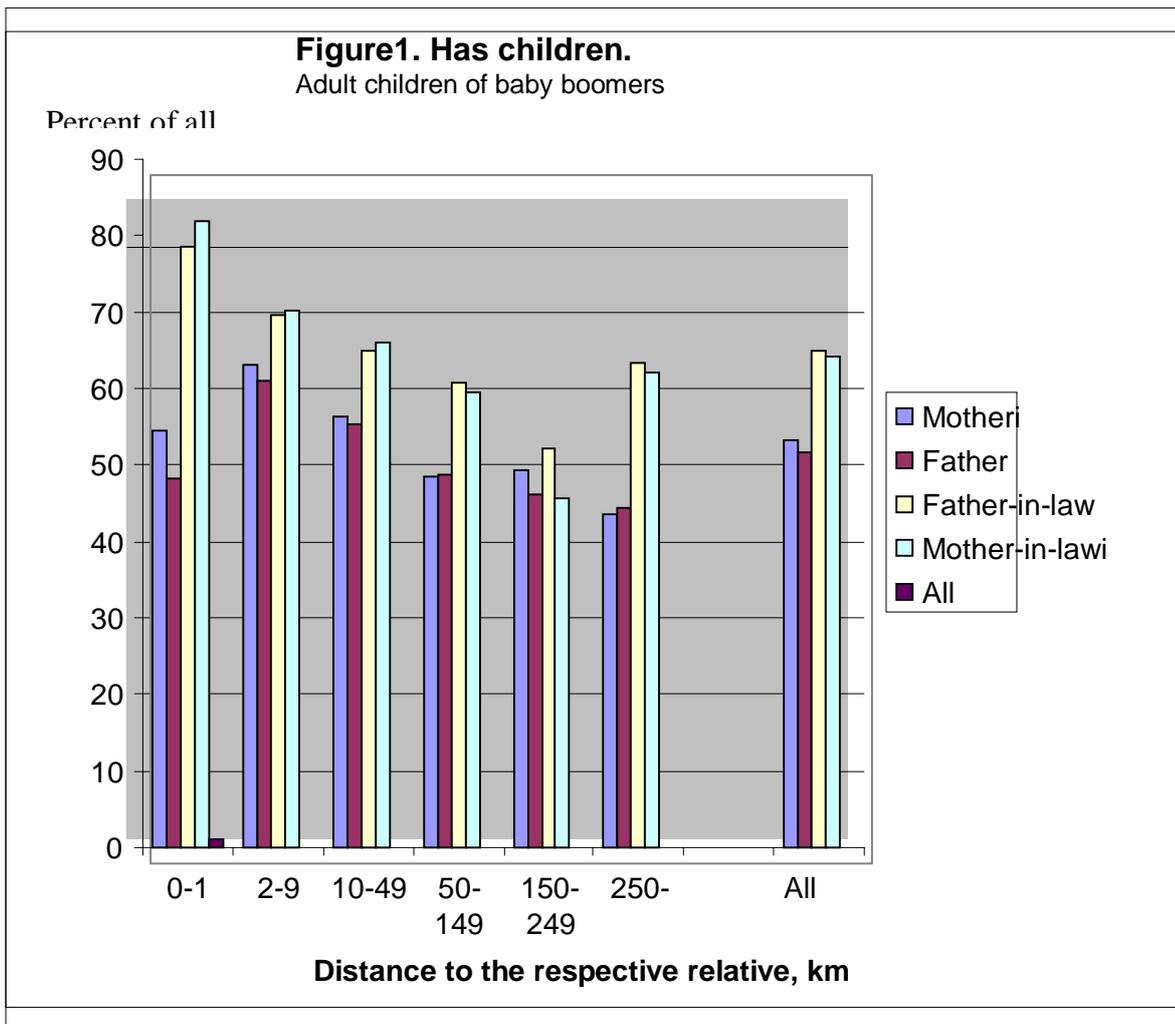
The data consists of questionnaires filled by 1,115 Finns born in 1945–50 and their 1,435 adult children born in 1962–88. The data was collected by Statistics Finland in 2007. The response rate for baby boomers was 56% and for their children 42%. The average age of baby boomers is 60 years and of their children 32 years.

Reproduction and distance to parents

Living close to parents increases the likelihood of having children. Among adult children of baby boomers, the correlation between having children and distance to the mother is $-.11^{***}$ ($N=1\ 338$) and to the father $-.07^{**}$ ($N=1251$) (Table 1, Figure 1). The relationship is slightly curvilinear (Table 1). Adult children living very close, only 0–1 kilometers from their own parents, relatively seldom (50%) have children. This is in concordance with the French results mentioned above. We return to this result later in this paper.

Table 1. Having children according to distance to parents and parents-in-law.
Adult children of baby boomers.

Distance, km	Relative		Mother-in-law	Father-in-law
	Mother	Father		
0–1	53	48	72	73
2–9	60	59	68	69
10–49	53	51	56	59
50–149	46	46	60	60
150–249	46	45	48	41
250–	41	40	60	60
Total	50	49	61	61



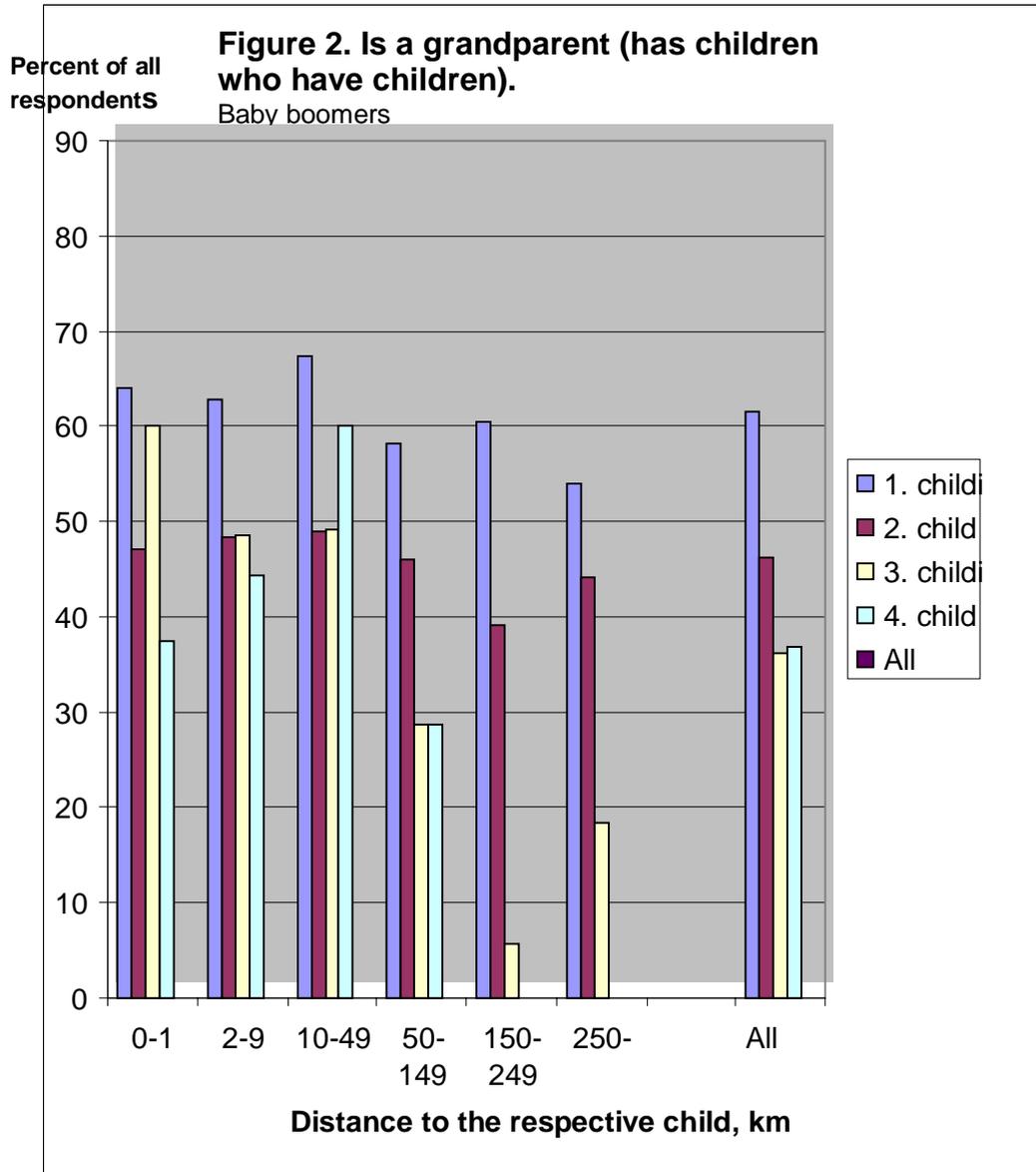
If the parent(s) live at a distance of 2-9 kilometers from their children, 60% of their adult children have children. When the distance is 10–49 kilometers, the likelihood is 52%, when they live 50–249 kilometers away, it is 46%, and when they live at least 250 kilometers away, 40%. The connection between having children and distance to parents-in-law is similar except that adult children living very close to parents-in-law very often have children.

We also looked at the reproduction behaviour of the baby boomers who are now in their sixties (Figure 2). Being a grandparent is the more common the closer the adult child lives. This is very remarkable in the case of the third and fourth child. If the child lives at the distance of 150 kilometers or more, he or she has no children.

Report

Lives in the same household with	Has children %	N
Spouse, no children	4	372
Spouse and children	94	647

Alone	5	281
Children	96	54
Spouse and parents	(100)	2
Parents	0	76
Total	48	1432

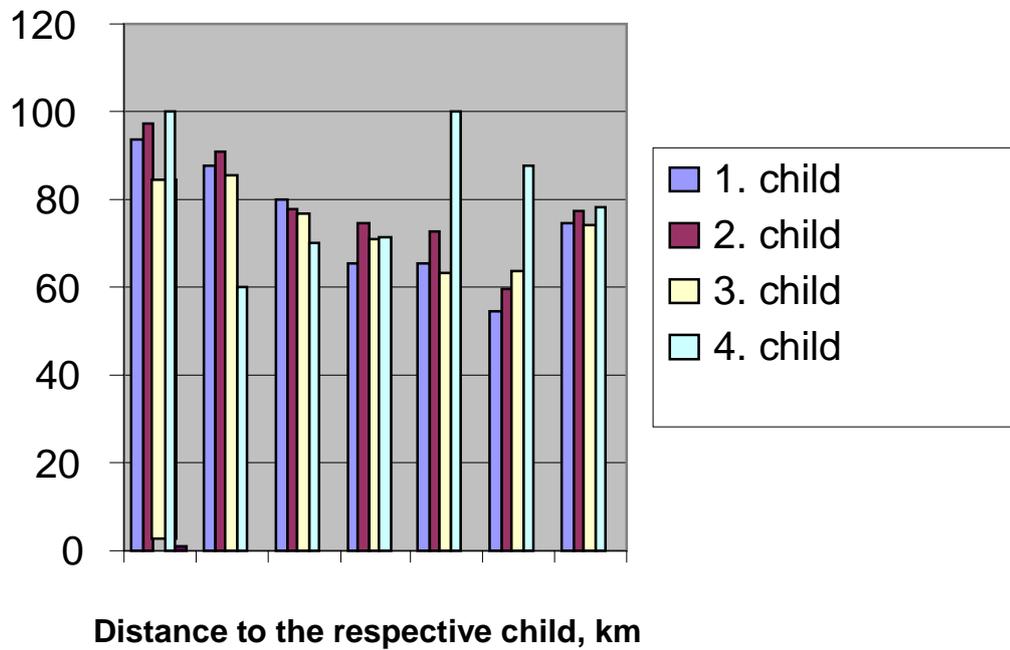


Contacts with children and distance

It is self-evident that living near each other increases the likelihood of having weekly contacts with adult children (Figure 3). Contacts with the fourth child are, nevertheless, frequent even when this child lives far-away.

Figure 3. Contacts with children at least once a week.

Baby boomers



Childcare and distance to parents

The hypothesis that the possibility to get help in childcare from parents living nearby is an incentive to having children is supported by the data (Table 2, Figure 3). More than 80% of mothers and mothers-in-law living very near their children(in-law) have helped the children in childcare in past 12 months, whereas only about 70% of those who live at least 250 kilometers away, have done so. Among fathers and fathers-in-law the percentages range from about 70 to about 50.

Table 2. Received help in childcare in past 12 months from parents and parents-in-law, percent. Adult children of baby boomers.

Distance, km	Childcare provider			
	Mother	Father	Mother-in-law	Father-in-law
0–1	89	77	84	69
2–9	83	77	87	67
10–49	86	69	81	61
50–149	75	58	70	56
150–249	83	65	65	39
250-	76	58	69	47
Total	82	67	78	58

In addition to childcare help, also transportation and repairs help is given by the father the more the closer the adult child lives (Table 3). Distance has no effect on the likelihood of helping in other household chores than childcare, new technology or financially.

Table 3. Correlations between practical help received and distance to the respective relative.

Adult children of baby boomers who have children

Type of help received	Distance to the respective relative			
	Mother	Father	Mother-in-law	Father-in-law
Child care help	-.05**	-.12**	-.15***	-.12**
Help in transport and repairs	-.03	-.18***	-.02	-.08

Parents and parents-in-law help their adult children who have children somewhat more than they help their childless children (Table 4). Housework

- Help with household chores e.g. with making food, cleaning, shopping, gardening
- Help with childcare
- Help with caring pets
- Personal care or help e.g. help with washing, eating and dressing
-

Transportation and repairs

- Help with home repairs
- Help with transportation
- Help with repairs and care of car, domestic appliances etc.

Modern help

- Help concerning vacation
- Help with paperwork such as filling forms, settling financial or legal matters
- Other kind of help which is related to the helper's professional skills

- Other help

Table 4. Type of practical help received from parents and parents-in-law.

Adult children of baby boomers who have the respective relative alive.

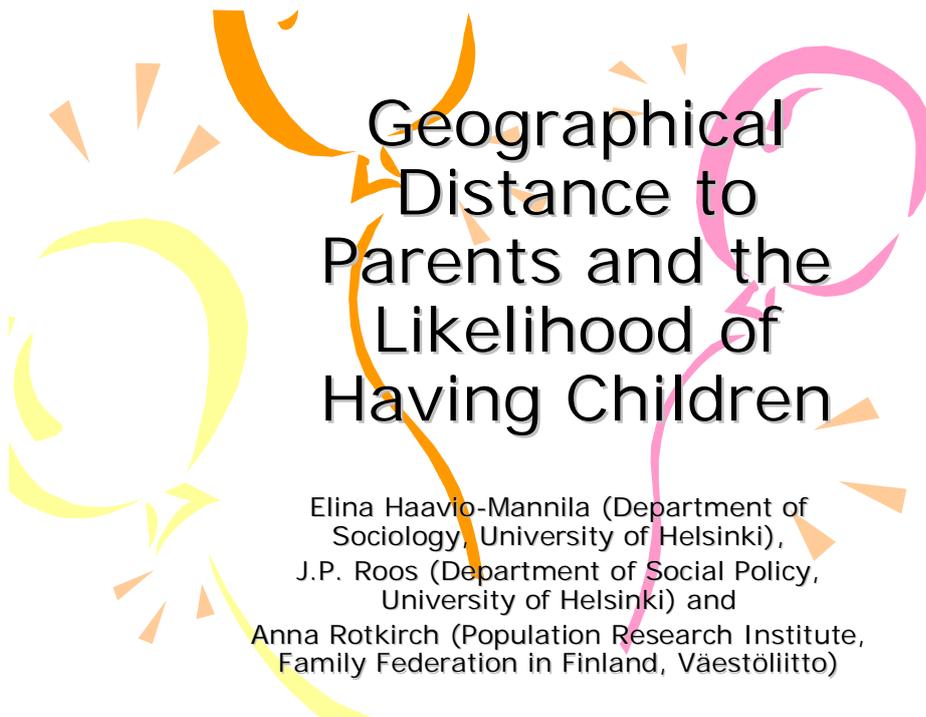
Has children	Household help	Help in transportation and repairs	Modern technology help	Financial help	Euro of financial help
	From father-in-law				
No	15	51	31	14	631
Yes	11	60	32	17	531
	From mother-in-law				
No	23	18	37	13	583
Yes	36	16	41	22	487
	From father				
No	20	97	44	47	736
Yes	19	93	47	30	784
	From mother				
No	42	32	59	53	723
Yes	52	24	60	36	650

Conclusion

The association between geographical closeness of parents(in-law) and their adult children and the latter breeding children has some practical implications. If the society wants to increase fertility, it should make it easier for parents and their adult children to live near each other. The geographical proximity of generations seems to divide the “burden” of childcare between parents and grandparents. This probably enhances the quality of life of all three generations including small children. We shall examine these connections closer in our presentation.

CHAUVEL, Louis (2002) Destin des générations. Paris: Puf.

CHAUVEL, Louis (2006) Les classes moyennes à la dérive. Paris: Seuil.

A decorative graphic on the left side of the page consists of several overlapping, colorful swirls and triangles. The colors include yellow, orange, and pink. The swirls are of varying thickness and are arranged in a way that they appear to be part of a larger, abstract design. The triangles are small and scattered around the swirls, adding to the overall decorative effect.

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