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by Samuel Maclsaac, Yuri Ostrovsky and Grant Schellenberg

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How far adult children live from their aging parents can shape family support, caregiving, and job choices. But most data focus on people living in the same home—like with their parents—and rarely track them across long periods, missing key moments when they move out or return to help, or receive grandparent help from, an aging parent. This means that information on family members who no longer reside in the same household is scarce. Moreover, despite numerous international studies on what keeps families residing nearby (Michielin and Mulder 2007; Isengard, 2013; Compton and Pollak, 2015; Choi et al., 2020), less is known about how childhood circumstances could affect residential decisions later in life.

A new article, entitled “[Geographic proximity between adult children and their parents in Canada: The role of childhood parental income](#),” addresses these issues. The study, published in the journal *Population, Space and Place*, uses Canadian tax data to identify cohorts of individuals who lived with their parents in the 1980s as teenagers, tracking their residential distance from their parents as adults from 1997 to 2019 based on their postal codes. This offers both a linkage of Canadian adult children and their parents and a novel window back in time to study how childhood socio-economic factors – specifically family income during one’s teenage years – is tied to residential parent-child distances over their life course, including several decades later when adult children are in their 50s. This summary provides many of the main takeaways from the article and a more focused look at differences across provinces.

Over half of adult children lived within 20 kilometres of their parents in their 50s

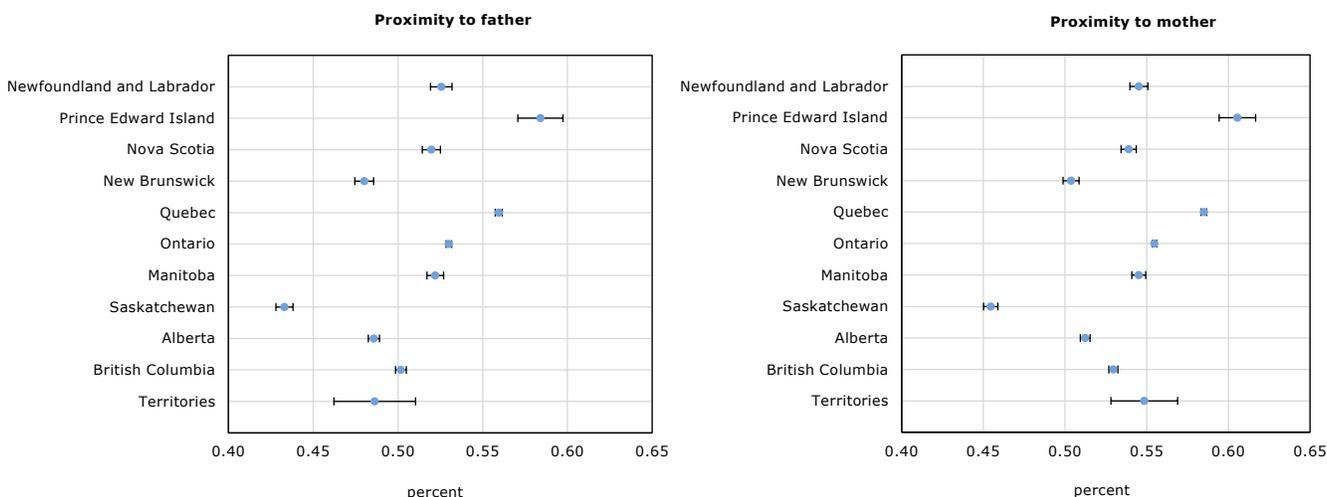
Despite Canada’s size, adult children typically continued to live close to their parents well into their 50s. For the studied child-parent combinations who resided in Canada, almost three-quarters lived within 100 kilometres of each other, and closer yet, just over half lived within 20 kilometres. Among those adult children living furthest from their parents, approximately 10% to 12% of child-parent combinations lived 500 kilometres or more away from each other, and another 14% to 16% lived 100 to 499 kilometres apart. These results were consistent with evidence showing that adult children and parents tend to live close to one another in many countries (Michielin and Mulder 2007; Isengard, 2013; Compton and Pollak, 2015; Choi et al., 2020). Adult children, especially daughters, lived closer to their mother than their father.¹ This aligns with prior research about daughters residing closer to their aging parents than sons, and how it could be associated with the higher provision of eldercare by daughters (Bookman and Kimbrel, 2011) or the higher provision of childcare by maternal grandparents (Thomese and Liefbroer 2013).

1 Sex was based on information available in T1 administrative tax files, and defined as either male or female. Note that aging parents may not reside together, such as in the case of separations, divorces or deaths that occurred at any point during the studied period from the 1980s to 2016-2019.

Adult children were most likely to live within 20 kilometres of their parents in Prince Edward Island and least likely in Saskatchewan

Intergenerational distance also differed based on the province of residence in the 1980s. Multivariate models provide estimates of both the predicted probability of living within 20 kilometres of individuals’ parents (Chart 1) and the predicted average distance among those who lived more than 20 kilometres away (Chart 2), independent of other characteristics (e.g., age of parents, family income). This regression model specification captures two distinct residential decisions: the binary choice to live nearby their parents (also called the “extensive margin”) and how far away they live conditional on living further away (also called the “intensive margin”). Though the probability of living within 20 kilometres of one’s mother was generally higher, the average distance between adult children living more than 20 kilometres away from their parents was similar for both mothers and fathers.

Chart 1
Predicted probability of adult children living within 20 kilometres of their parents, 2016 to 2019



Notes: Predicted probability of adult children living within 20 kilometres of their parents in 2016 to 2019, based on models accounting for sex of adult child, number of siblings, family income of adult child, parental income during teenage years, presence of spouse, presence of children, rural residency of adult child, parent’s age, presence of parent’s spouse, and whether parent is a rural resident. See MacIsaac, Ostrovsky and Schellenberg (2025) for details.
Source: Statistics Canada, Intergenerational Income Database, authors’ calculations.

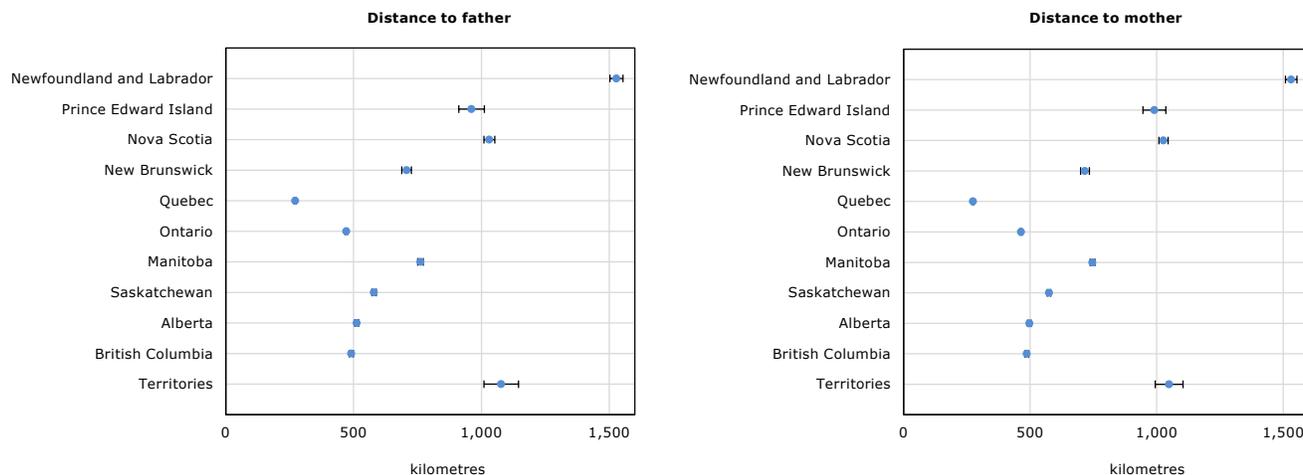
Around half or more of adult children who lived in Atlantic Canada in their teens were predicted to live 20 kilometres or less from of their parents in 2016-2019. Yet, among those who lived more than 20 kilometres away in 2016-2019, they tended to reside especially far away, on average. For those adult children residing more than 20 kilometres away, those from Newfoundland and Labrador (1,530 kilometres), Nova Scotia (1,030 kilometres) or Prince Edward Island (960 to 990 kilometres) lived substantially further away from their parents once in their 50s compared with those from other provinces. This is despite the fact that around 6 in 10 (58% to 61%) of those who lived in Prince Edward Island resided within 20 kilometres of their parents, the highest share of any province.

Individuals from Quebec lived much closer to their parents. Quebecers had a high likelihood of living within 20 kilometres of their parents (56 to 58% for their father and their mother, respectively). Among those who lived farther away, the distance from their parents remained the shortest in the country, averaging around 270 kilometres.

Adult children from Saskatchewan were the least likely of any province to live within 20 kilometres of their fathers (43%) and mothers (45%). But, for those who did reside further away, they lived an average of 570 to 580 kilometres apart. New Brunswick (48% to 50%), Alberta (49% to 53%), British Columbia (50% to 53%) and the Territories (49% to 55%) also had lower likelihoods of adult children living within

20 kilometres of their parents. For those residing further away, individuals from the Territories lived an average of 1,050 to 1,080 kilometres from their mothers and fathers, respectively.

Chart 2
Predicted geographic distance between adult children and their parents in 2016-2019 if they reside more than 20 kilometres away



Notes: Predicted geographic distance (in kilometres) between adult children and their parents in 2016 to 2019 conditional upon living more than 20 kilometres away, based on models accounting for sex of adult child, number of siblings, family income of adult child, parental income during teenage years, presence of spouse, presence of children, rural residency of adult child, parent’s age, presence of parent’s spouse, and whether parent is a rural resident. See MacIsaac, Ostrovsky and Schellenberg (2025) for details.
Source: Statistics Canada, Intergenerational Income Database, authors’ calculations.

A window back in time: how parental income during one’s teens matters decades later

The study finds that, independent of adult children’s own household incomes, their parents’ income during their teenage years remained tied to greater distance between them and their parents later in life when they are in their 50s. The effect varied substantially across the income distribution.

Adult children from the top of the parental income distribution were significantly less likely to reside within 20 kilometres of their parents. Higher parental income in adult children’s teens were tied to a lower likelihood of residential proximity to parents, particularly fathers. For sons, those from the top 75% of the parental income distribution were 1.5 to 7.4 percentage points less likely to live within 20 kilometres of their fathers compared with those from the lowest 5% by parental income. By comparison, sons from the top half of the parental income distribution were 1.3 to 4.4 percentage points less likely to live nearby their mothers than those from the lowest 5% by parental income.

Additionally, adult children in their 50s with a lower household income, who had children living with them, whose parents were older, and whose parents lived rurally in 2016-2019 were more likely to live within 20 kilometres of their parents.

Discussion

The distance between aging parents and their adult children can affect families' ability to provide care (Schoeni, Cho and Choi, 2022) and family ties (Gillespie and Treas, 2017). At the same time, more young adults are living with their parents, with the share of 20- to 34-year-olds living with at least one parent increasing from 31% to 35% between 2001 and 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022; Galbraith and Laflamme 2025). Meanwhile, evidence from other countries has shown that intergenerational proximity declined from 1940 to 1990 (Kalmijn, 2021), which underscores the dynamism of changing residential and mobility patterns over time. Such trends make it crucial to understand where family members live, how intergenerational distance has evolved over time, and how these choices can matter for family ties as well as employment and caregiving decisions.

Though the Canadian landscape is vast, individuals typically live close by to their parents, even as they get older. Yet substantial differences across provinces imply that the effects of geographic distance on family ties may similarly vary. This could have varied effects for care decisions across regions, including the possibility of younger families benefiting from grandparents' help caring for children or aging parents benefiting from their children's informal care.

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