LESS HELP FOR MOTHER: THE DECLINE IN CORESIDENTIAL FEMALE SUPPORT FOR THE MOTHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN, 1880–2000*

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Research on changes in women's parenting has focused primarily on their increased likelihood of combining parenthood with paid employment, exploring the pressures that result from this "second shift" or "double burden." This article complements this approach by focusing instead on the likely reduction in the help that mothers of small children have received as declines both in fertility and the coresidence of nonnuclear adults have reduced the number of other women in the household. Using national census data for the period 1880 to 2000, we show a substantial decline in the presence and availability of other females in the household, as fewer are coresident and more of those who are coresident are employed or in school. Although all mothers experience this decline, it is most acute for mothers working for pay in nonagricultural activities.

Research on changes in women's parenting has focused primarily on their increased likelihood of combining parenthood with paid employment, exploring the pressures that result from this "second shift" or "double burden"—more work for mother, as it were (Hochschild 1989). Often, attention has centered on the problems posed by the traditional division of labor with respect to housework and child care within the family, the lack of affordable, quality alternative care, and employers' reluctance to provide flexible hours and on-site daycare. A much less considered dimension of changes in women's parenting burden, as it intersects with increased female employment, is the availability of support from others in the household.[1] Our understanding of the changing landscape of parenting, however, depends on the broader family context, including changes in the coresidential experiences of mothers of young children.

In this research, we use data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) to investigate patterns of coresidence for mothers of young children over the period 1880–2000, focusing on changes in the presence and availability of those who traditionally eased the child care burden of parents, especially of mothers with preschoolers: their mothers and mothers-in-law, other female relatives and perhaps nonrelatives, and daughters beyond the early years of childhood who are old enough to be helpful. A strength of our analysis is the ability to examine more than a century of change. Of course, direct measures of domestic engagement are not available for the United States over this period, so our approach is necessarily indirect. First, we ask, are coresident females 10 years and older present? Second, we ask, if they are present, are they potentially available to help as indicated by their work and school involvement? Finally, we ask, does the change in the presence and availability of coresident females differ by mothers' productive activities over the century? By detailing changes in the coresidential experience of mothers of young children over a 120-year period, our study complements and

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1. When coresidential support is considered, it is most often that provided by the fathers of children.

contextualizes existing scholarship on child care for recent periods based on time-use data (e.g., Bianchi et al. 2000; Sandberg and Hofferth 2001; Sayer 2005).

Our analysis of the change in the coresidential experience of mothers of young children pulls together three trends. Trends in fertility have meant that mothers of young children are less likely to have older daughters in the household than in the past. Trends in living arrangements suggest that mothers may be less likely to live with their own mothers, mothers-in-law, grown daughters, or with other female relatives or nonrelatives than in the past. Trends in schooling and work further suggest that these women may be less likely to be available to help with child care even when they coreside. In short, it seems likely that mothers of young children have experienced a substantial decline in the presence and availability of other women in the household over the century, as fewer are coresident and more of those who are coresident are employed or in school.

BACKGROUND

Fertility and mortality can affect coresidence patterns. Previous research has suggested that a major force reducing the availability of support to the mothers of young children is fertility decline (Hacker 2003), which decreased the likelihood that older daughters live in the household with mothers of young children generally, although the baby boom of the mid-twentieth century distorts any simple picture. In contrast, increases in life expectancy over the century increased the likelihood that older mothers are alive when their children are parenting preschoolers. For example, Watkins, Menken, and Bongaarts (1987) estimated that at age 40, approximately 85% of women had at least one surviving parent in 1900, compared with nearly 100% by 1980. Nonetheless, age patterns of fertility and intergenerational change complicate any simple translation of fertility and mortality trends into implications regarding coresidence.

Increased survivorship of parents does not necessarily translate into increased coresidence between parents and adult children. The shift in patterns of living arrangements toward greater residential independence over the last half-century is well documented (e.g., Kobrin 1976; Santi 1990). Unmarried adults are increasingly living separately, normally in one-adult households. This trend was particularly marked among the elderly, who in the past mostly lived with their grandchildren (Ruggles 1996). The proportion of the unmarried, noninstitutionalized population aged 65 and older who lived alone more than tripled from 20% in 1940 to 62% in 1985 (Sandefur and Tuma 1987). Although not all elderly persons who lived with others lived with their children, most did (Kramarow 1995).

Similarly, mothers' coresidence with older daughters is affected not only by fertility patterns but also by the propensity of these daughters to coreside (e.g., Sassler 1996). Over the century, older daughters were less likely to be in the household. Our analysis of IPUMS data indicates that between 1940 and 2000, the proportions of unmarried women living with their parents (and often younger siblings) declined from 80% to 50% for those aged 18 to 24 and from 63% to 25% for unmarried women aged 25 to 29.

The implications of such changes in coresidence patterns over the century, however, depend on time-use patterns. Even when they remained at home, not all females aged 10 and older were able to help domestically. The long-term increase in school attendance, and particularly secondary school attendance, constrained older girls' availability in the home. At the end of the nineteenth century, less than 10% of children attended secondary school; those who attended were generally children of the elite. By 1970, however, secondary school attendance was nearly universal (Walters 1984).

A second factor affecting the availability of females to help with child care was their involvement in work outside the home. Over the century, women's participation in work outside the home greatly increased. These increases occurred for older, "empty nest" women, many of whom were grandmothers, as well as for current mothers (Goldin 1990). Hence, increases in women's employment affected not only mothers' need for child care

assistance but also the "supply" of child care from coresident females aged 10 and older who might otherwise have been able to help.

It is also reasonable to expect that trends in the presence and availability of females aged 10 years and older might differ for employed and nonemployed mothers. Prior research has documented a positive association between the presence of an extended relative and mothers' labor force participation, suggesting that extended female family members can help to alleviate child care demands (Rosenbaum and Gilbertson 1995; Tienda and Glass 1985). Similarly, Wong and Levine (1992) found that for Mexican mothers with young children, the presence of a female in the household (in addition to the mother) who was unemployed increased the likelihood that the mother would be employed. Mason and Kuhlthau (1992), in a survey of Detroit area mothers, found that women who reported that their labor force participation was constrained by child care conflicts were less likely to be living near relatives.

As suggested by the previous review, the literature on coresidence is substantial. Nonetheless, we know relatively little about changes in the living arrangements of parents of young children over the century because most such analyses have focused on changes in the coresidential experiences of older adults and of unmarried persons. Our study begins to fill this gap.

DATA, MEASURES, AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS

We analyze data that cover most of the period from 1880 to 2000 drawn from the IPUMS (Ruggles et al. 2004). The IPUMS provides a series of compatible-format individual-level samples of the census populations. In our analysis, we use data from 10 census years: 1880, 1900, 1920, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000. All of these years allow an analysis of 1% samples.[2] We do not include 1890 because the data are not available. For ease of presentation, we highlight four years that provide a good summary of trends: 1880, 1940, 1960, and 2000. The year 1880 provides a historical anchor, and the years 1940, 1960, and 2000 allow us to capture periods that roughly correspond to pre–baby boom (1880–1940), baby boom (1940–1960), and post–baby boom periods (1960–2000).

The IPUMS file for each census year provides a cross-sectional sample that is representative of men and women for that year. Although census data are subject to undercounting, in no year is the undercount greater than 6.7% (King and Magnuson 1995; Robinson 1988; U.S. Census Bureau 2001). The population coverage for each census prior to 1960 is of all persons in the United States, the District of Colombia, and all territories that now compose the contiguous United States. Since 1960, Alaska and Hawaii have been included (Ruggles et al. 2004). Given the small size of the populations in these states, overall statistics for the nation are largely unaffected by their inclusion.

Our sample in each census year includes mothers of young children, defined as women living with at least one own child 0–5 years old.[3] After describing basic patterns of coresidential female support, we explore the extent to which change in support across periods is due to a change in the population of coresidential females versus a change in their activities. Our analysis draws on the approach of Das Gupta (1993) and, similar to other decomposition analyses in family demography (e.g., Gershuny and Robinson 1988; Raley 2001; Sandberg and Hofferth 2001), decomposes change into what might be construed as a change in family composition (in this case, coresidential females) and a change in behavior (in

2. The currently available files for 1910 and 1930 provide only 0.4% and 0.2% samples, respectively.

3. *Own child* reflects a biological child, stepchild, or adopted child. The variable is available in the IPUMS and is based on census information, including relationship to head, age, sex, and children ever born, as available. Ruggles and Brower (2003:74) explained that a particularly significant innovation of the IPUMS is "a set of consistently constructed family interrelationship variables…that were designed to be as consistent as possible across all years." For additional information on the IPUMS, see Ruggles et al. (2004). For additional information on the comparability of the census and IPUMS on family relationships across years, see Ruggles and Brower (2003).

this case, school enrollment and employment of coresidential females). When we examine change, we define the change between two time points ($t1$, $t2$) to be the sum of the difference with coresidence held constant, and the difference with availability (employment or school enrollment) held constant, evaluated at the mean value between the two endpoints of the period examined. The decomposition is represented by the expression below:

$$\frac{A_1}{W_1}-\frac{A_2}{W_2}=\left[\left(\frac{A_1}{C_1}-\frac{A_2}{C_2}\right)\times\left(\frac{C_1}{W_1}\right)\right]+\left[\left(\frac{C_1}{W_1}-\frac{C_2}{W_2}\right)\times\left(\frac{A_1}{C_1}\right)\right]$$
$$+\left[\left(\frac{C_1}{W_1}\right)\times\left(\frac{A_2}{C_2}-\frac{A_1}{C_1}\right)\right]+\left[\left(\frac{C_2}{W_2}\right)\times\left(\frac{A_1}{C_2}-\frac{A_2}{C_2}\right)\right]. \quad (1)$$

Eq. (1) reduces to

$$\frac{A_1}{W_1}-\frac{A_2}{W_2}=\left[\left(\frac{A_1}{C_1}-\frac{A_2}{C_2}\right)\times\left(\frac{\left(\frac{C_1}{W_1}+\frac{C_2}{W_2}\right)}{2}\right)\right]+\left[\left(\frac{C_1}{W_1}-\frac{C_2}{W_2}\right)\times\left(\frac{\left(\frac{A_1}{C_1}+\frac{A_2}{C_2}\right)}{2}\right)\right], \quad (2)$$

where A_1/W_1 is the proportion of all mothers living with an available female aged 10 or older at $t1$; A_2/W_2 is the proportion of all mothers living with an available female aged 10 or older at $t2$; A_1/C_1 is the proportion of mothers living with a female aged 10 or older who live with at least one available female aged 10 or older at $t1$; A_2/C_2 is the proportion of mothers living with a female aged 10 or older who live with at least one available female aged 10 or older at $t2$; C_1/W_1 is the proportion of all mothers living with at least one female aged 10 or older at $t1$; C_2/W_2 and is the proportion of all mothers living with at least one female aged 10 or older at $t2$.

RESULTS

As shown in Table 1, whereas nearly half of the mothers of young children lived with another female who was likely able to help with housework and child care late in the nineteenth century, only about 20% did so at the end of the twentieth century. Further, among mothers who did live with other females, the average number of such females declined over time. Nonetheless, in all years, the majority of mothers lived with only one coresidential female aged 10 or older.

Because we would expect that close kin such as mothers, mothers-in-law, and older daughters would be more likely than other relatives and nonrelatives to engage in activities that would most directly help mothers of young children, we explore how coresidence varies by kin connection. For mothers with young children, the most common type of female coresidence is that of a daughter aged 10–17. In 1880, just over one quarter of mothers of young children lived with a daughter in this age group. As would be expected, given changes in fertility over the century, this figure declined to about 11% by 2000. Despite the dramatic decline in living with daughters aged 10–17, these younger daughters remained the most likely females to share a home with the mothers of children aged 5 and younger.

Over this same period, the trend in living with a mother or mother-in-law was remarkably stable. Roughly 8% of mothers of young children shared a household with a mother or mother-in-law in 1880 *and* 2000, reflecting little overall change. Contrary to the usual story of decline, coresidence with mothers and mothers-in-law increased between 1880 and 1940. This increase was likely affected by numerous factors. Among demographic trends, mortality decline increased the survivorship of grandmothers, and fertility decline decreased the number of adult children with whom older women might live. In addition, factors such as marriage and birth timing, as well as preferences regarding coresidence, likely played a role. After 1940, however, coresidence with mothers and mothers-in-law declined. It has

Table 1. Proportion of Mothers of Children Aged 0–5 Living With Other Females Aged 10 or Older by Selected Characteristics, 1880–2000

Characteristics	1880	1940	1960	2000
At least one female aged 10+	0.451	0.385	0.272	0.215
Number among those with at least one female aged 10+				
1	0.587	0.579	0.687	0.766
2	0.265	0.261	0.226	0.180
3+	0.148	0.160	0.087	0.054
Kin connections				
At least one mother or mother-in-law	0.082	0.115	0.069	0.076
At least one daughter aged 10–17	0.269	0.209	0.176	0.106
At least one daughter aged 18+	0.054	0.043	0.016	0.012
At least one other relative or nonrelative aged 10+	0.129	0.101	0.045	0.044

been argued that increased preferences for residential independence, among other factors, contributed to this decline (Pampel 1983).

There is little evidence that adult daughters were a major presence in any period. However, mothers of young children were more likely to live with a daughter aged 18 or older in the pre–baby boom period, when roughly 5% did so. Between 1940 and 1960 this figure declined to less than 2%. One of several factors that may have contributed to this decline is the decline in the age at leaving home both for marriage and for residential independence that occurred during this period (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1994). Lastly, coresidence with other females who are not mothers or daughters declined over this period as well (from 13% in 1880 to less than 5% by 2000).

The "Availability" of Coresident Females

At the same time that changes in coresidence were taking place, so too were changes in how females 10 and older spent their time. Here we focus on extrahousehold activities, specifically formal work involvement and school attendance. For coresident females aged 10 and older, we ask, how "available" might they have been to help with domestic activities?

The first row of Table 2 shows the proportion of mothers living with a female aged 10 or older not attending school or employed outside the home. Whereas in 1880, 24% of mothers did so, by 2000, only 5% did—a decline of 19 percentage points, or nearly 80%. This pattern, when taken together with the results reported above, indicates that not only did the likelihood of living with a female aged 10 or older decrease between 1880 and 2000, but given coresidence with at least one female aged 10 or older, the likelihood that this female was not in school or employed also decreased.

To investigate the intersection of these two trends in greater detail we decompose the decline in living with at least one female aged 10 or older not in school or employed to explore the relative contributions of changes in coresidence and changes in school enrollment and employment. Just under half the decline over the entire period 1880–2000 is explained by mothers' reduced likelihood of coresiding with at least one other female, while just over half the decline is due to the increased likelihood that coresident females were in school or employed outside the home.

Patterns of decline by relationship to the mother across historical periods reveal differences in the relative importance of coresidence and availability by kinship. The likelihood

Table 2. Proportion of Mothers of Children Aged 0–5 Living With at Least One Female Aged 10 or Older Who Is Not in School or Employed, and the Decomposition of Change Into the Proportion Due to Coresidence and the Proportion Due to School Enrollment or Employment

	Year (proportion)				Decomposition of Change			
Characteristics of Coresident Females	1880	1940	1960	2000	Pre–Baby Boom 1880–1940	Baby Boom 1940–1960	Post–Baby Boom 1960–2000	Total Change 1880–2000
Living with at least one female aged 10+ not in school or employed	0.242	0.168	0.076	0.051	–0.074	–0.092	–0.025	–0.191
Proportion of difference due to coresidence					0.429	0.444	0.582	0.478
Proportion of difference due to employment or school enrollment					0.573	0.555	0.416	0.522
Living with at least one mother or mother-in-law not employed	0.075	0.100	0.048	0.034	0.025	–0.052	–0.014	–0.041
Proportion of difference due to coresidence					1.169	0.696	–0.301	0.099
Proportion of difference due to employment					–0.172	0.304	1.298	0.902
Living with at least one daughter aged 10–17 not in school	0.098	0.034	0.010	0.002	–0.064	–0.024	–0.008	–0.096
Proportion of difference due to coresidence					0.252	0.150	0.366	0.330
Proportion difference due to school enrollment					0.748	0.848	0.640	0.670
Living with at least one daughter aged 18+ not in school or employed	0.034	0.016	0.004	0.002	–0.018	–0.012	–0.002	–0.032
Proportion of difference due to coresidence					0.300	0.728	0.483	0.544
Proportion of difference due to employment or school enrollment					0.698	0.275	0.538	0.458
Living with at least one other relative or nonrelative not in school or employed	0.068	0.041	0.020	0.015	–0.027	–0.021	–0.005	–0.053
Proportion of difference due to coresidence					0.498	1.101	0.040	0.687
Proportion of difference due to employment or school enrollment					0.503	–0.102	0.966	0.314

Note: Due to rounding, the components of the decomposition do not sum to exactly 1.0.

that mothers of young children lived with at least one mother or mother-in-law who was not employed decreased by about half over the century. Nearly the entire decline is due to the increased likelihood that these coresident mothers and mothers-in-law were employed. In the earlier periods, however, changes in coresidence among mothers and mothers-in-law were much more important than changes in employment. In the pre–baby boom period, the likelihood that mothers of young children lived with a mother or mother-in-law who was not employed grew by 25%. This increase is the result of the increased likelihood that mothers of young children lived with at least one of their young children's grandmothers, which more than offset the growth in employment.

The pattern of changes in the availability of mothers and mothers-in-law was very different, however, in the two later periods. A substantial decline in living with a mother or mother-in-law who was not employed occurred during the baby boom period, due primarily to a decline in coresidence, and was accompanied by a substantial increase in the likelihood of employment for coresident females in this category. In the post–baby boom period, an increase in the likelihood of employment for coresident females was the most important factor in the decline.

Similarly, the decline in the likelihood of living with at least one daughter aged 10–17 who was not in school (from 10% to less than 1%) is mostly a story about changes in activity among coresident daughters, although changes in coresidence played a role as well. About two-thirds of the overall decline (between 1880 and 2000) can be explained by the increasing likelihood that daughters who were coresident were in school; about a third of the decline was due to fewer mothers of young children having a coresident daughter in this age range. Much of the decline occurred by 1940, but the greater contribution of schooling persists over all periods.

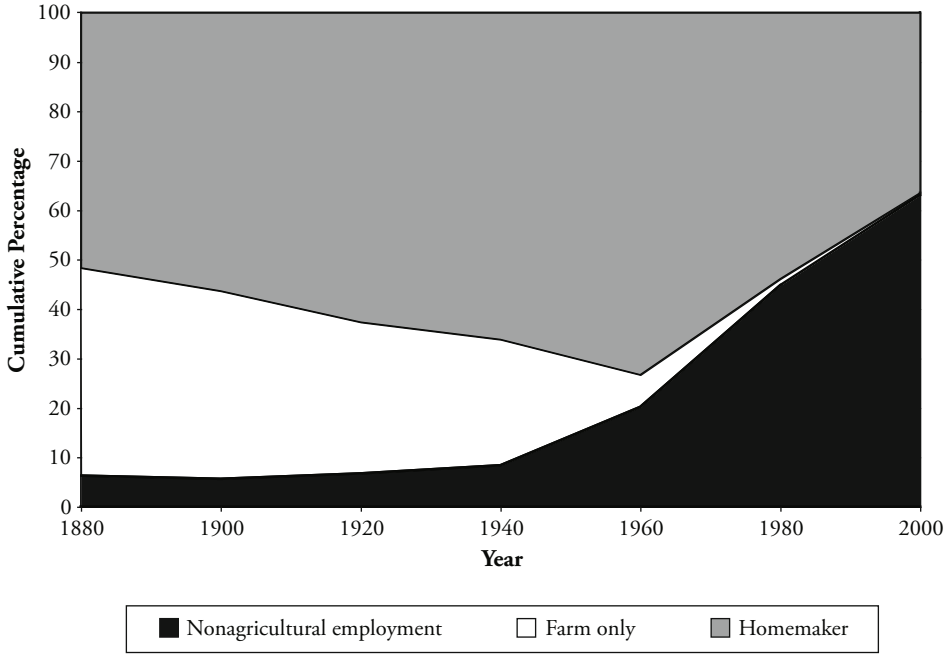
In contrast, more than half of the decline in living with at least one older daughter (aged 18 or older) who was not employed or in school can be explained by the decreasing likelihood that mothers had coresident older daughters. The rest of the decline is due to the greater likelihood that these coresident older daughters were employed or in school. A closer look at change over time reveals that most of the decline took place by 1960, with the decline in the pre–baby boom period largely reflecting increases in employment and school enrollment and the decline during the baby boom being characterized more by decline in coresidence with an older daughter.

As with older daughters, the decline in the likelihood of living with at least one other relative or nonrelative aged 10 or older who was not in school or employed is shaped more by coresidence than by changes in availability. Two-thirds of the overall decline can be accounted for by a change in the likelihood that mothers lived with another relative or nonrelative; about one-third of the decline is due to the increased likelihood that these other females had commitments to school or employment. Most of the decrease in availability due to the decline in coresidence occurred in the pre–baby boom and baby boom periods.

Coresidential Support and Mothers' Work Activity

Finally, we examine whether the changes in the presence and availability of females aged 10 and older intersect with the changing activities of the mothers of children aged 5 and younger. It is possible that both higher fertility and coresidence with older children and extended kin were primarily characteristic of agricultural families, while school attendance and paid employment were characteristic of nonagricultural families, so that the declines in coresidence and availability we observe mostly reflect women's move away from the farm and into paid employment. Certainly the shifts have been dramatic. Figure 1 summarizes mothers' productive activities over the century with three categories: engaging in nonagricultural employment (whether living on a farm or not), living in a farm household (but not engaging in nonagricultural employment), and neither living on a farm nor engaging in

Figure 1. Changing Activities of Mothers of Young Children, 1880–2000



nonagricultural employment. We label mothers who neither lived on a farm nor were engaged in nonagricultural work "homemakers" to highlight their specialization in domestic activities and for ease of discussion.

Between 1880 and 1960 (pre–baby boom and baby boom), the percentage of mothers who lived on farms and had no outside employment decreased markedly, from 42% to 7%. Over this period, participation in nonagricultural employment increased, but only from 6% to 20%. Notably, this period saw an increase in the percentage of mothers who had young children and were homemakers. Whereas only 52% were homemakers in 1880, this percentage rose to 73% by 1960.

Thus, over the same period that mothers were decreasingly likely to experience the coresidential support of available females, they were increasingly likely to be homemakers. The processes that underlie these changes are complex, and we do not mean to suggest that change in one drove change in the other; however, the pattern of coincident change is relevant. One might reasonably observe that just as the likelihood of living with an available female aged 10 or older decreased, fewer mothers "needed" such females because they were able to focus their energies more fully on their homes and children.

By this same logic, however, the post–1960 (post–baby boom) pattern is also of note. Between 1960 and 2000, the likelihood that mothers of young children were homemakers dropped from 73% to 37%, while the percentage of mothers who were in nonagricultural work increased from 20% to 63%. Despite mothers' return to economic activities in this more recent period, coresidence with females who might provide domestic assistance did not increase.

Figure 2. Percentage of Mothers of Children Aged 0–5 With an Available Female Aged 10 or Older, by Mother's Work Involvement

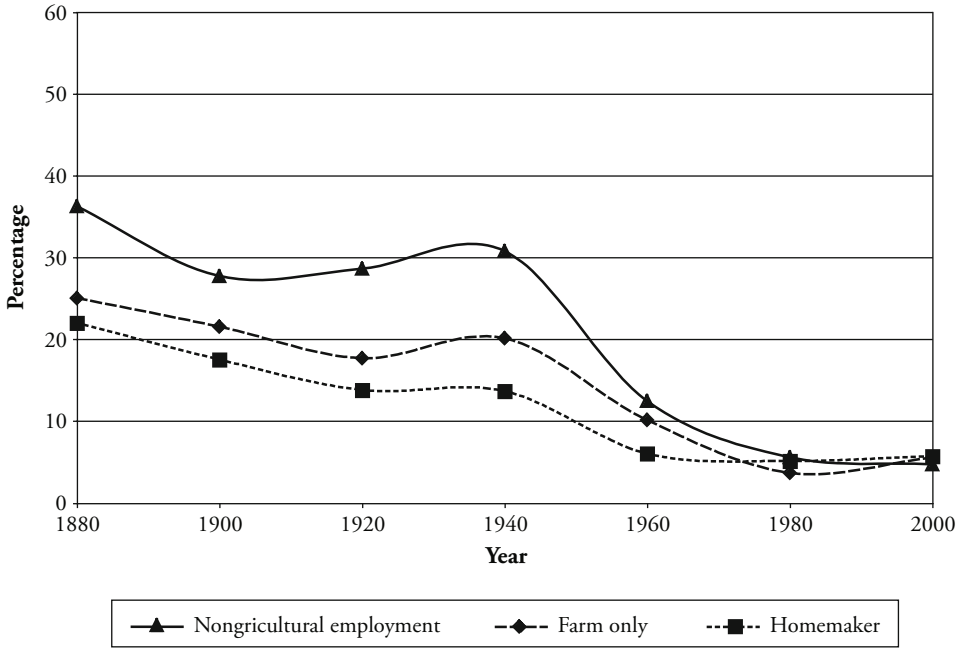


Figure 2 shows the trends in living with at least one available female aged 10 or older, by mothers' work involvement. Over this period, homemakers were indeed the least likely to live with other females who were not in school or employed, while women employed in nonagricultural activities were the most likely to live with such females; women in farming fell between these two groups, although the percentage of farm women living with an available female converged with that of women in nonagricultural work by 1960.

The most dramatic decline in living with an available female occurred for mothers employed in nonagricultural activities after 1940. Between 1880 and 1940, 28%–36% of mothers employed in market work coresided with at least one female who was not in school or employed. Indeed, most coresided with at least one female aged 10 or older (data not shown). After 1940, nonagriculturally employed mothers became much less likely to share their home with other females aged 10 and older, experiencing a much sharper decline than that experienced by mothers in agriculture or homemaking. In sum, while all mothers, regardless of work status, experienced a decrease in coresidential support that might have been provided by other women, this decline was particularly dramatic for nonagriculturally employed women.[4]

4. In addition to the analyses presented, as suggested by a reviewer, we also explored pooled regressions, regressing living with a female aged 10 or older (making distinctions between mothers, older daughters, relatives, and nonrelatives) on age, race, education, marital status, employment, farming, number of preschoolers, marital status, and other factors. Net of these factors, the substantive story of decline in coresident females persists, and year interactions confirm differences by work status of mothers across periods.

DISCUSSION

The shift of women into formal employment has generated considerable scholarship in recent years. The time crunch experienced by working women is now familiar—they experience a double burden or a triple day, or they do a "second shift" of domestic work when they are not at work. While men's participation in domestic activities has increased over recent decades (Bianchi et al. 2000), women, and particularly mothers, continue to do most housework and child care.

Our research builds on this scholarship by suggesting that changes in coresidence have also shaped the landscape of parenting over time. Although most current research on work and motherhood focuses on the post–baby boom period, the available data on coresidence allow an examination of patterns and change over more than a century. We show that potential coresidential support for parenting as indicated by the presence of females aged 10 and older has declined markedly since 1880. Moreover, over time, not only were fewer females aged 10 and older present, but of those who were, more were employed or in school, rendering them less available in the household. The decline in coresidential support is particularly acute for mothers employed in nonagricultural work.

Our approach, based on census data covering a 120-year period, is necessarily indirect. How plausible is it that coresiding females who were not in school or employed provided domestic assistance to the mothers of young children? Numerous studies have pointed to the difficulties inherent in measuring time spent in child care and domestic activities (e.g., Budig and Folbre 2004; Folbre et al. 2005; Raley, Harris, and Rindfuss 2000; Sandberg and Hofferth 2001; Short et al. 2002). Nonetheless, given norms regarding caregiving and domestic work over the century, we expect that participation in child care and domestic work is most likely among coresident females, who are very likely to be the grandmothers or older sisters of young children in a household.

At the same time, we also need to consider the possibility that the quality of available coresident caregivers has changed over the period under study. With increasing school enrollment and employment over time, the daughters, mothers, and others who coreside but do not attend school or work outside the home may be less capable caregivers, and perhaps in need of assistance or support themselves. Unfortunately, our data do not allow us to assess changes in health or the need for care among coresident females. Daughters aged 10–17 who were not in school, even if they were not more in need of care over time, may also have become less involved in household tasks (Goldscheider and Waite 1991), as a whole host of social, economic, and demographic changes transformed children from "useful" to "priceless" (Zelizer 1985).[5]

The need for care among coresident, nonemployed mothers and mothers-in-law may also have increased over time. However, we do know that the average age of both employed and nonemployed mothers and mothers-in-law declined between 1880 and 2000.[6] Still, we cannot rule out that those coresiding and not employed, even if they were younger on average, were needier. To the extent that coresident females—whether daughters, mothers, or others—do grow needier over time, our depiction of the reduction in mothers' coresidential support is conservative.

Related to the demand for caregiving, the decline in mothers' coresidential support over the century may have been coincident with a decline in the need for such support. Analysis reveals that the mean number of children aged 0–5 fluctuated over the period: 1.6 in 1880, 1.4 in 1940, 1.5 in 1960, and 1.3 in 2000. The need for child supervision time does not double with a shift from one to two preschoolers, but children's laundry and other tasks

5. Notably, after 1960, less than 1% of mothers lived with a daughter aged 10–17 who was not in school.

6. The mean age for mothers declined from 58 in 1880 to 53 in 2000, and the mean age for mothers-in-law declined from 63 to 58 over the same period.

may well do so. Thus, we might expect some decline in demand for assistance, but not a dramatic difference, given that all mothers in our sample had at least one preschooler.[7] On the other hand, if we consider that boarders and others may both create household demand and provide support, we must be cautious not to overinterpret the patterns we observe.

With respect to potential caregivers, we would be remiss not to revisit the place of men in this story. Given lack of data on time spent in domestic activities and a literature that emphasizes the much greater contributions of women compared with men in domestic production, we simplified our presentation by focusing on changes in mothers' experience of coresident females. In making this choice, we do not mean to suggest that the domestic activities and caregiving burdens shouldered by men are unimportant or irrelevant. Indeed, we know that fathers historically have taken an important role in teaching their children (Griswold 1993), and in recent periods, time-use data show that men have increased the hours they spend in household tasks from 5 to 10 hours per week between 1960 and 1995 (Bianchi et al. 2000). Nevertheless, despite the great decline in women's time in household tasks since 1960, men spend only about half the time that women do on such tasks (Bianchi et al. 2000; Sayer 2005). We assume that men were not replacing the domestic contributions of the vanishing females aged 10 and older, particularly between 1940 and 1960, given how few hours of housework men performed in 1960. Despite men's greater domestic participation in recent periods, we think this assumption is reasonable.

Finally, we return to the differences in the decline in female coresidential support by the work status of the mother. We describe coresidence patterns by the work status of mothers because they are relevant to current discussions regarding mothers' lives, working mothers' lives, and changed experience over the century. We emphasize that we do not suggest a causal story. While one interpretation might be that working mothers have less support, working women may well have the resources today to choose to live more independently. With our data and analysis, we can say little about how these changes have come to be or how women themselves perceive them. Nonetheless, we can say that until the organization of child care in the United States changes, the work-parenthood trade-offs will continue to fall to the mothers of young children, who, our research shows, may have less female support available in their homes than did mothers in the past.

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7. On the suggestion of a reviewer, we also explored change in the ratio of females aged 10 or older to children aged 0–5. Including mothers in the count of females, the ratio of females to preschoolers declined from 1.33 to 1.12 between 1880 and 2000. This ratio suggests that although the number of preschoolers fluctuated over time and declined between 1880 and 2000, the decline in coresident females aged 10 or older more than offsets this decline. Put another way, in 1880, two-thirds of sample households had a ratio of females to preschoolers of 1.0 or lower. By 2000, 82% of households could be characterized this way.

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