



# Failures to Launch and Boomerang Kids: Contemporary Determinants of Leaving and Returning to the Parental Home



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## Background

- Between 2000 and 2011, the percentage of men ages 25 to 34 living with their parents rose from 12.9% to 18.6% (Mather 2011). The corresponding percentage of young women living at home increased from 8.3% to 9.7%
- This trend has evoked new concerns and terminology dealing with the “failure to launch,” “boomerang kids,” “the crowded nest,” and “accordion families”
- Co-residence with parents is thought by some to signal a period of developmental immaturity that delays the transition to adulthood
- For others, however, living with parents is thought to provide economic security and social support that enhance the search for meaning in life and allow for a better planned transition to adulthood
- We know little about the contemporary dynamics and determinants of young adults’ propensity to move out of and, especially, back into the parental home
- Most existing studies of young adults’ decisions to leave and/or return home in America are dated and many focus on only a subset of possible determinants

## Potential Determinants

- Life-course Transitions.** Moves out of the parental home are consequences of normative transitions in the young adult life course, including **starting college, getting a job, getting married or entering a cohabitation union.** Conversely, moving back home is often caused by “failure” transitions, such as losing a job or dissolving a romantic partnership. Such moves are also facilitated by the successful completion of transitory roles, such as graduating from college or finishing military service
- Socioeconomic Resources.** Economic independence and the potential for such, as indicated by higher incomes and educational attainment, are likely to facilitate residential independence, increasing the likelihood of moving out of the parental home but reducing the likelihood of moving back
- Parental Family and Household Characteristics.** Growing up in an alternative or disrupted family is likely to hasten home-leaving, and could impede returning home. Higher **parental income** and other transferable resources tend to increase young adults’ home-leaving, but their impact on home-returning is not clear. **Household crowding** and **homeownership** might also shape the relative attractiveness of the parents’ dwelling
- Family Connectivity.** Young adults who receive **financial support** from their parents may be better able to sustain an independent living situation and therefore be less likely to move back home. To more easily receive care from family members, young adults in poor **physical health** may be less likely than their healthier counterparts to leave the parental home and more likely to move back. Similarly, some young adults may opt to remain in or return to the parental home in order to care for **parents in poor health.** Among those living independently, experiencing a traumatic **physical victimization** may encourage young adults to seek the comfort and safety of the parental home
- Temporal and Geographic Context.** We anticipate seeing **declines** in the rate at which young adults leave the parental home but increases in the rate at which they return. These trends may be driven by the observed covariates or by changes in attitudes and norms regarding the acceptability of parent-child co-residence. Rates of leaving and returning to the parental home are also likely to vary geographically, mainly as a function of the **affordability of independent living**

## Data and Methods

- Panel Study of Income Dynamic’s Transition into Adulthood project (PSID-TA), 2005-2011**
- Our sample includes all PSID-TA respondents who were interviewed in at least two consecutive waves in 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2011 (N = 1,521). Respondents are between the ages of 18 and 26
- Dependent variables:** Binary variables indicating whether the respondent moved out or back to the parental home between successive interviews. Over the typical migration interval, 44% of the respondents initially living with their parents moved out to live independently. Among those initially living independently, 19% returned to the parental home over the subsequent two-year period
- Independent variables:** Measures of respondents’ demographic characteristics, the occurrence of critical life-course transitions, access to socioeconomic resources, characteristics of the parental family, household, and dwelling, multiple dimensions of family connectivity, and the temporal and geographic context
- Analytic strategy:** Bivariate and multivariate discrete-time event history models estimated using logistic regression

Table 1: Bivariate and Multivariate Logistic Regression Models of the Timing of Moving Out of the Parental Home: Transition to Adulthood Study, 2005-2011

Independent Variable	Bivariate Models		Multivariate Model	
	b	s.e.	b	s.e.
<i>Demographic characteristics</i>				
Age				
18 (reference)				
19	-.33*	.15	-.19	.18
20	-.23	.15	-.24	.19
21	-.20	.18	-.17	.22
22	-.08	.20	.01	.25
23	-.12	.25	-.07	.31
24	-.33	.30	-.15	.36
25	-.22*	1.05	-2.13†	1.12
Female	-.34**	.10	.21†	.12
Race				
White (reference)				
Black	-.44***	.11	.06	.16
Hispanic or other races	-.35*	.16	.25	.21
<i>Life-course transitions</i>				
Primary activity transitions				
High school to college (reference)				
Stable college student	-.69***	.20	-.88***	.25
Stable working	-.70***	.17	-1.30***	.23
Stable idle	-1.33***	.27	-1.48***	.33
Student to working	-.93***	.19	-1.37***	.23
Student/working to idle	-.85***	.22	-1.14***	.27
Working/idle to student	-.97***	.22	-1.31***	.26
Idle to working	-.72**	.24	-.92**	.29
Relationship status transitions				
Stable non-partnered (reference)				
Newly partnered	1.01***	.15	1.17***	.17
Partnership dissolution	.53†	.31	.55	.34
Stable partnered	1.67***	.23	1.64***	.26
Parenthood	.32*	.14	.30†	.17
<i>Socioeconomic resources</i>				
High school graduation or GED	.39*	.16	.11	.20
Income	.10*	.05	.07	.06
Receiving Welfare	-.15	.23	-.18	.27
<i>Parental household and family characteristics</i>				
Household structure at age 12				
Intact family (reference)				
Biological and step parent	.19	.20	.20	.22
Unmarried biological parent	-.15	.11	.04	.15
Mother’s education	-.09***	.02	-.08*	.03
Family income	.13*	.06	.03	.09
Homeowner	.13	.11	-.21	.14
Household crowding	-.25***	.06	.17*	.07
<i>Family connectivity</i>				
Help from family	.14**	.05	.17**	.06
Personal responsibility scale	-.17***	.05	-.33***	.07
Closeness to mother	-.10*	.04	-.09†	.05
Closeness to father	-.02	.03	-.01	.03
Mother or father in poor health	-.15	.13	.00	.15
Respondent in poor health	-.10	.19	-.00	.21
Physical victimization	.53*	.23	.65*	.26
Sexual victimization	.15	.42	-.17	.47
<i>Temporal and geographic context</i>				
Year of observation				
2005 (reference)				
2007	-.24†	.14	-.38*	.16
2009	-.36**	.13	-.47**	.15
Urbanization scale	-.04†	.02	-.04	.03
Region				
Northeast (reference)				
North Central	-.58**	.18	.47*	.20
South	.11	.17	.19	.19
West	.19	.20	.31	.22
Constant			-1.53*	.73
F(44, 824263)				4.55***
N of person-periods		1,506		1,506
N of persons		1,068		1,068

Table 2: Bivariate and Multivariate Logistic Regression Models of the Timing of Moving Back into the Parental Home: Transition to Adulthood Study, 2005-2011

Independent Variable	Bivariate Models		Multivariate Model	
	b	s.e.	b	s.e.
<i>Demographic characteristics</i>				
Age				
18 (reference)				
19	-.08	.24	.02	.26
20	-.50*	.23	-.32	.26
21	-.10	.24	-.02	.28
22	-.44†	.24	-.33	.29
23	-.87**	.32	-1.03**	.38
24	-1.25***	.35	-1.24***	.41
25	-.195†	1.04	-1.65	1.07
Female	-.04	.13	-.11	.15
Race				
White (reference)				
Black	.60***	.14	.18	.20
Hispanic or other races	.81***	.20	.42†	.25
<i>Life-course transitions</i>				
Primary activity transitions				
High school to college (reference)				
Stable college student (reference)	.73	.55	.55	.60
Stable working	-.06	.19	.52*	.24
Stable idle	1.22***	.31	1.16**	.37
Student to working	.23	.21	.43†	.23
Student/working to idle	.34	.27	.37	.31
Working/idle to student	.21	.26	.51†	.29
Idle to working	.40	.28	.54†	.33
Relationship status transitions				
Stable non-partnered (reference)				
Newly partnered	-.30	.20	-.27	.21
Partnership dissolution	.01	.25	-.05	.28
Stable partnered	-1.24***	.23	-1.33***	.27
Parenthood	.00	.15	.07	.20
<i>Socioeconomic resources</i>				
High school graduation or GED	-.55**	.21	-.31	.26
Income	-.12*	.05	.07	.07
Receiving Welfare	.10	.36	-.10	.40
<i>Parental household and family characteristics</i>				
Household structure at age 12				
Intact family (reference)				
Biological and step parent	-.21	.26	-.18	.28
Unmarried biological parent	-.33*	.14	-.12	.19
Mother’s education	-.09***	.03	-.03	.04
Family income	-.19**	.07	-.08	.10
Homeowner	-.27†	.15	.23	.19
Household crowding	-.26***	.05	-.21***	.06
<i>Family connectivity</i>				
Help from family	.04	.05	.03	.07
Personal responsibility scale	-.16**	.06	-.19*	.08
Closeness to mother	-.13*	.05	-.13*	.06
Closeness to father	.01	.04	-.01	.04
Mother or father in poor health	.49**	.17	.39†	.21
Respondent in poor health	.15	.25	-.20	.27
Physical victimization	.03	.26	-.30	.30
Sexual victimization	1.15**	.40	1.46**	.47
<i>Temporal and geographic context</i>				
Year of observation				
2005 (reference)				
2007	.10	.20	.28	.22
2009	.20	.19	.59**	.22
Urbanization scale	.04	.03	.01	.03
Region				
Northeast (reference)				
North Central	-.37	.23	-.20	.25
South	.06	.20	-.03	.23
West	-.16	.23	-.09	.26
Constant			-.70	.88
F(44, 437273)				2.81***
N of person-periods		1,491		1,491
N of persons		918		918

## Key Findings

### Determinants of Moving Out

- Life-course transitions:** Respondents in all other categories of primary activity transitions are significantly less likely than respondents entering college from high school to leave the parental home. Relative to respondents who remain non-partnered (i.e., neither married nor cohabiting), young adults who begin or maintain a partnership are significantly more likely to leave the parental home
- Socioeconomic resources:** At the bivariate level, both having a high school degree and personal income are positively and significantly associated with the risk of leaving the parental home
- Parental household and family characteristics:** At the bivariate level, family income, mother’s educational attainment, and household crowding are all significantly and positively associated with moving out, with the coefficients for the latter two predictors remaining significant in the multivariate model
- Family connectivity:** Young adults are likely to leave the parental home when they receive financial help from their parents, but also when the young adults themselves report being primarily responsible for their own day-to-day living. Emotional closeness to mother, but not father, inhibits leaving the parental home. Having been physically victimized in the two years preceding the migration interval almost doubles the risk of moving out
- Temporal and Geographic Context:** There is a monotonic decline between 2005 and 2011 in the risk of leaving the parental home. The risk of leaving the parental home is significantly higher in the North Central region than in the Northeast

### Determinants of Moving Back

- Life-course transitions:** Young adults who were consistently idle are significantly more likely than stable college students to move back to the parental home. Being consistently partnered reduces the risk of returning home, relative to being stably non-partnered. Young adults who dissolve a romantic partnership are more likely than those who remain partnered to move back
- Socioeconomic resources:** At the bivariate level, having a high school degree and higher personal income are both inversely associated with the likelihood of moving back home
- Parental household and family characteristics:** Having lived with an unmarried parent at age 12 is positively associated with moving back, while mother’s educational attainment, family income, home ownership, and household crowding are all inversely related to this risk. However, only the coefficient for household crowding remains significant in the multivariate model
- Family connectivity:** Youth who report taking greater responsibility for their own financial management are less likely than others to return. Emotional closeness to one’s mother is positively associated with the odds of returning home, net of the other covariates. Young adults whose parents report being in relatively poor health are more likely than other youth to move back home. Having recently been sexually victimized is strongly associated with the risk of moving back home
- Temporal and Geographic Context:** The risk of returning between 2009 and 2011 is about 80% greater than the risk between 2005 and 2007

Figure 1: Predicted Biennial Probabilities of Moving Out of the Parental Home, by Selected Characteristics

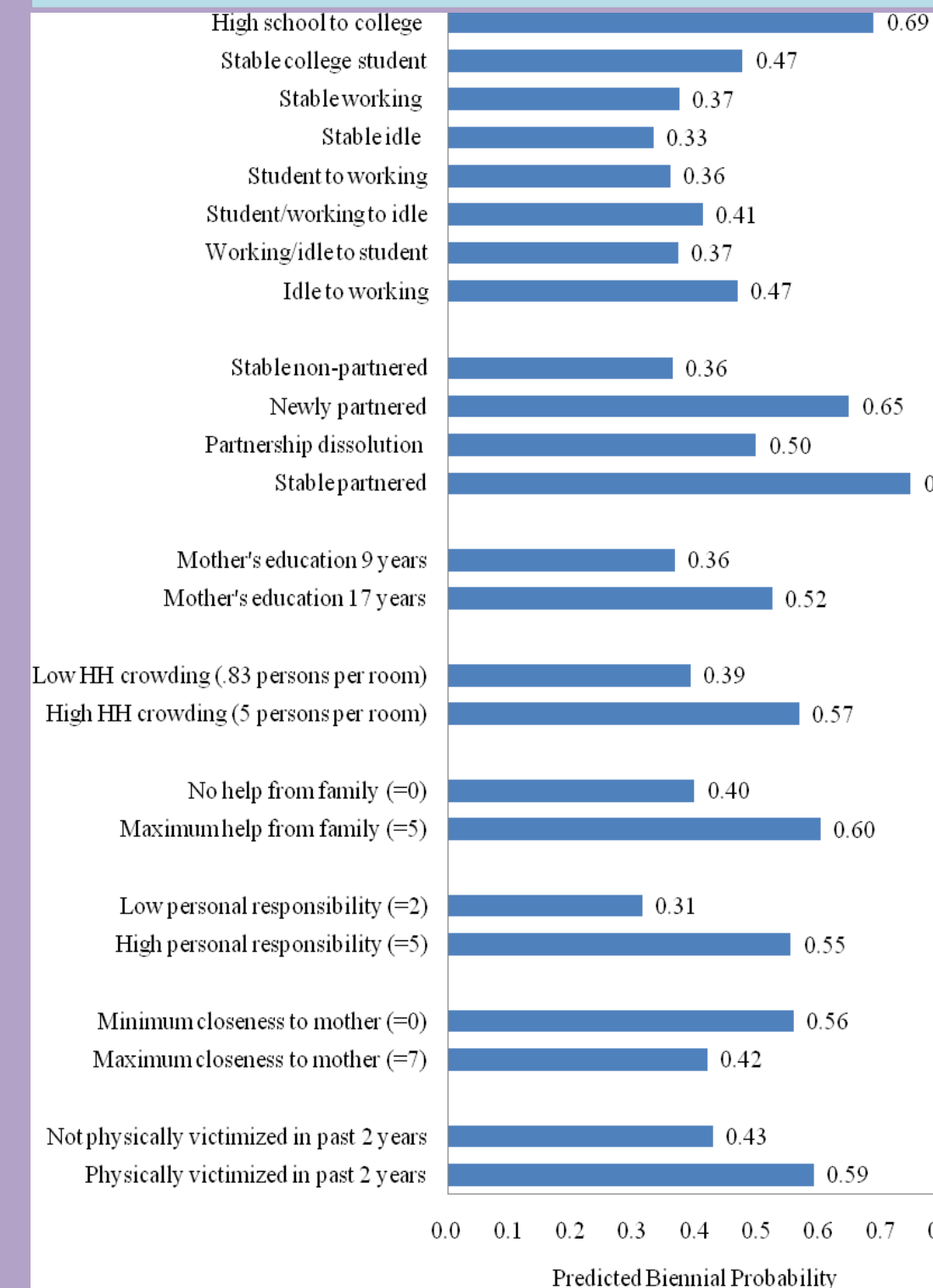
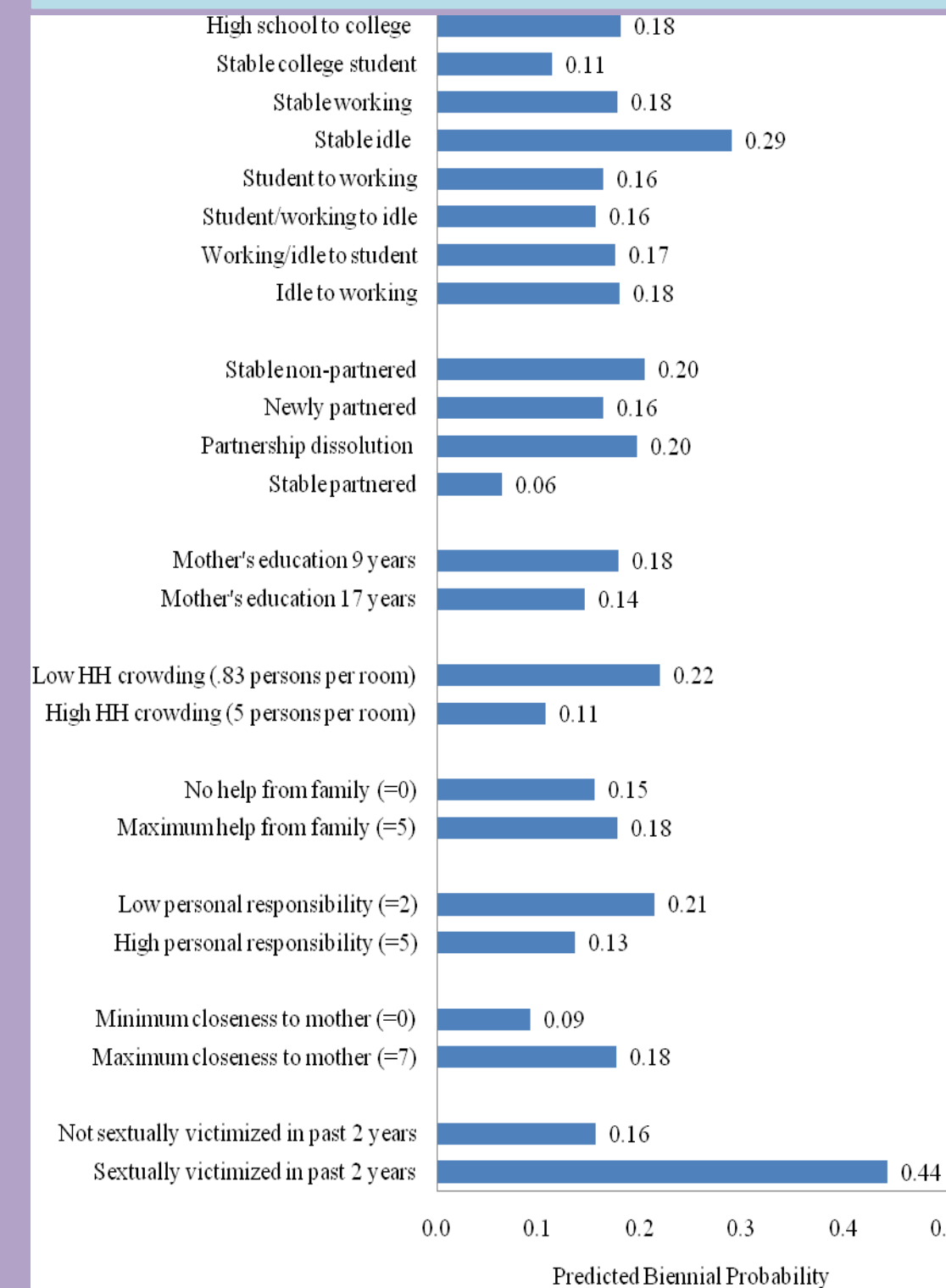


Figure 2: Predicted Biennial Probabilities of Moving Back to the Parental Home, by Selected Characteristics



## Conclusions

- A broad array of characteristics, statuses, and events shape young adults’ decision to leave and/or return to the parental home
- Although there is considerable symmetry in the predictors of home-leaving and home-returning, the factors that drive young adults out of the parental home are not always the same as the factors that drive them back
- Recent trends in the timing of leaving and returning home cannot be easily explained by trends in young adults’ likelihood of experiencing various employment or relationship transitions, their socioeconomic status, or the other measured covariates. Secular trends in the timing of home-leaving and home-returning may be driven by changing attitudes and norms regarding the desirability and attractiveness of living in the parental home

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