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# Geographical distances between separated parents: A longitudinal analysis

Linked lives and constrained mobility

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<https://partnerlifeproject.org/>

# Relevance

94%

of all inter-county migration events are by/for families

(U.S. Current Population Survey)

- Moves by family members
- Moves by non-family members "for family reasons"

# Changing family formation & mobility



Socio-demographic changes (i.e. SDT)

Male "breadwinner" model (1950s)

Increasing complexities

# Official divorce statistics

42%

... marriages end in divorce

27%

... couples that were cohabiting when their child was born will have separated by the child's 5th birthday

235,000

No. people divorced in 2011

≈ 1/2

divorces involve children <16

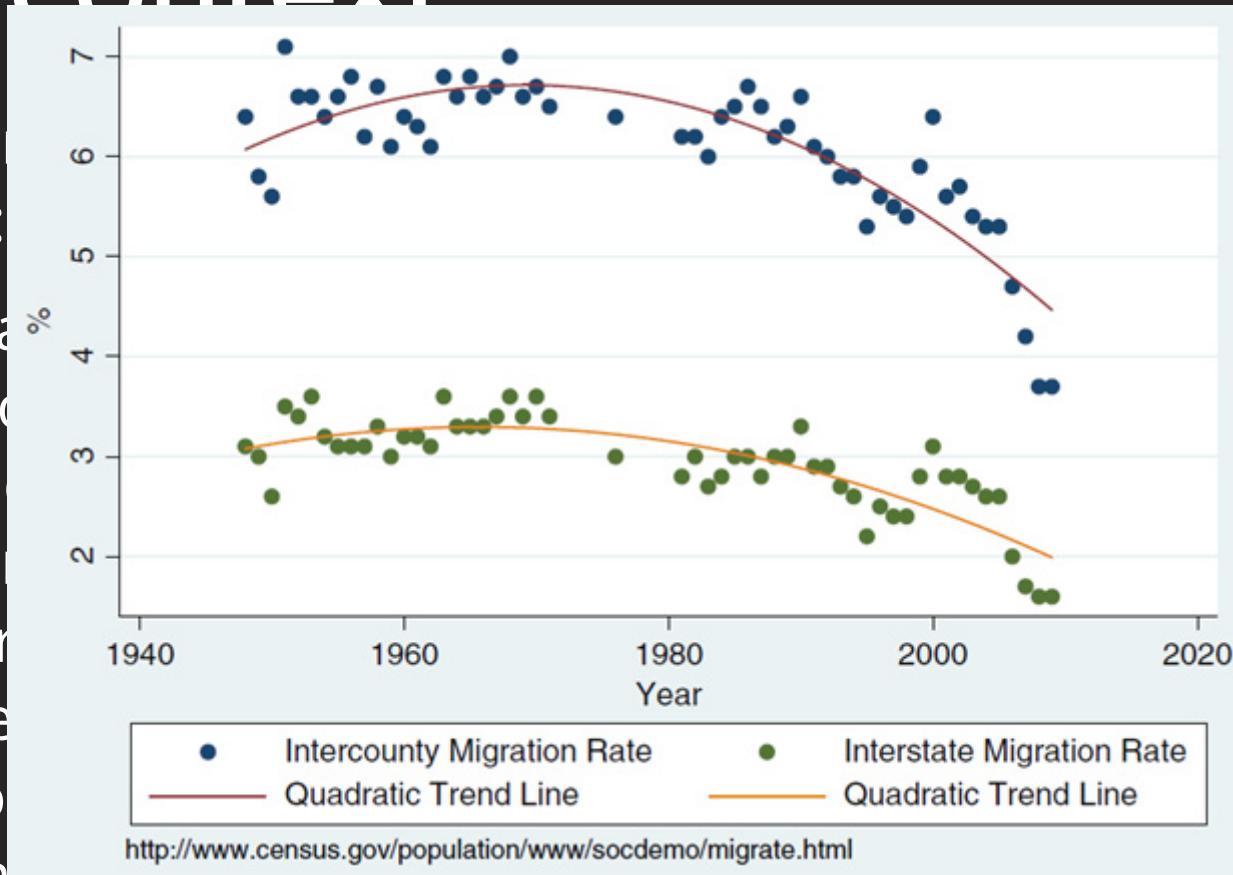
\* Data for England and Wales

# The context

- Micro implications (life course

Long-term  
towards:

1. Increase  
& diversification
2. Raise  
fatherhood  
in part
3. Share  
custody
4. Extended family  
complexity

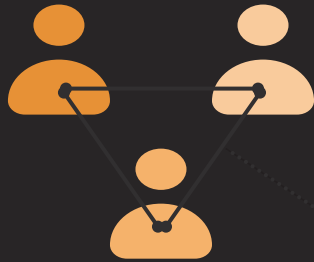


our &



# Competing spatial opportunities & lifecourse dimensions

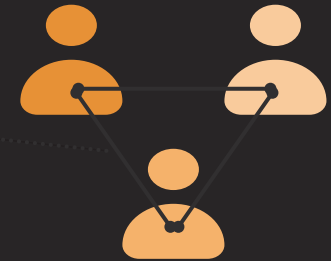
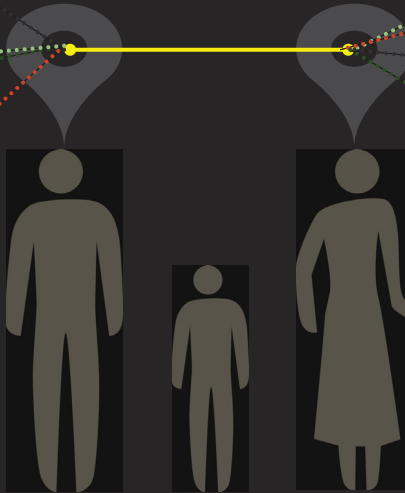
The location of wider social networks



Housing opportunities



Distance between separated parents



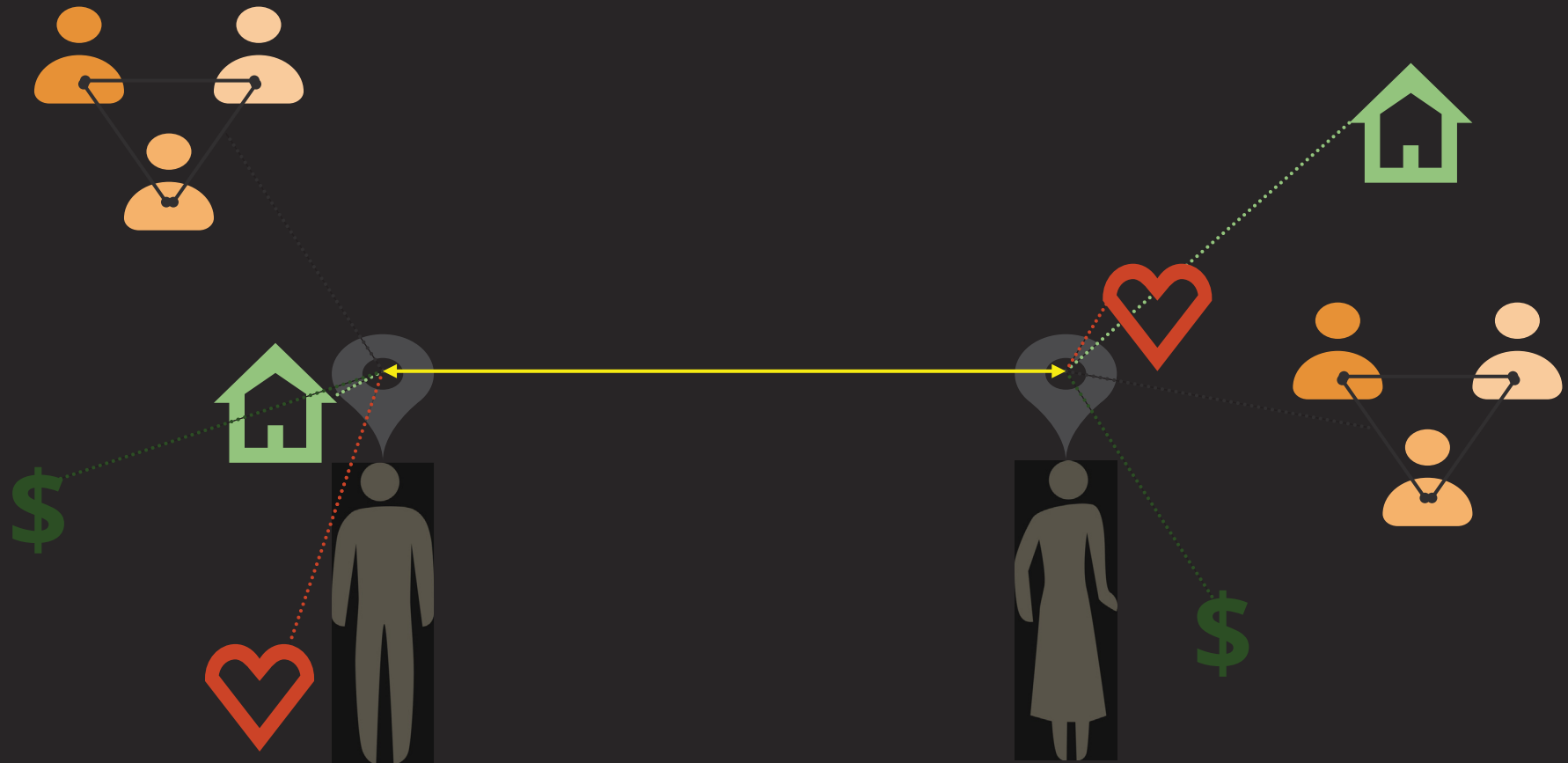
Occupational opportunities



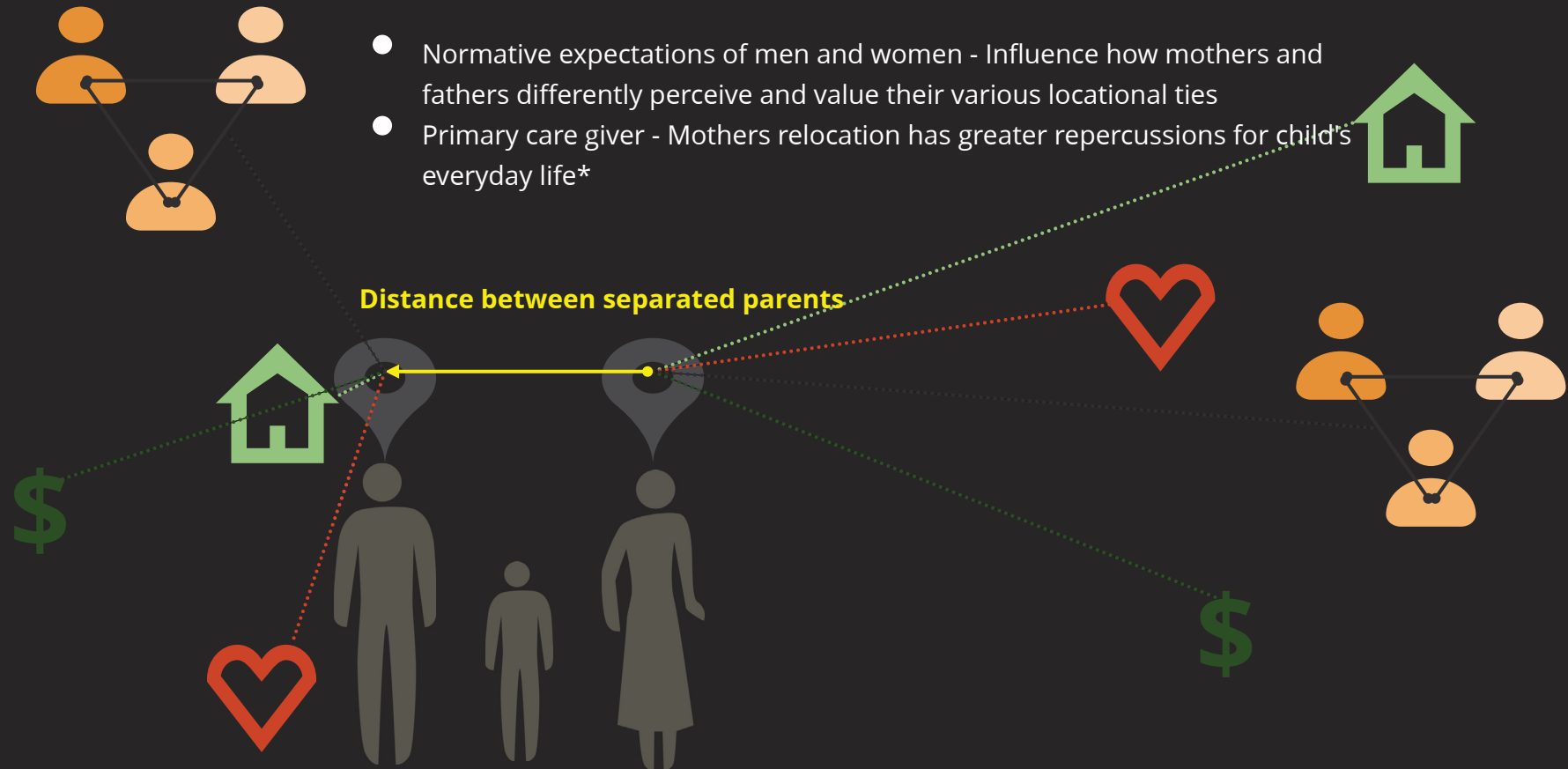
(Re)partnering opportunities



# Competing spatial opportunities & lifecourse dimensions



# Competing spatial opportunities & lifecourse dimensions



\*In the UK 91% of lone-parent households are headed by women (ONS, 2015).



# Data & Methods

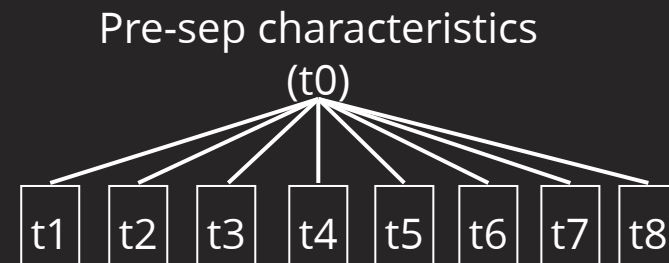
# Data

- Waves 1-18 (1991-2009)  
BHPS
- Socio-economic & demographic micro data
- Detailed geo-codes (approximate to n'hood)
  - calc km distance
- N 402 ex-couples; n 2,477 observations

# Methods

- Random effects models (within-between adjustment, Bell and Jones, 2015)

$$y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_{1j}(x_{ij} - \bar{x}_j) + \beta_2 \bar{x}_j + \beta_3 x_j + [u_{0j} + u_{1j}(x_{ij} - \bar{x}_j) + e_{ij}]$$
$$\begin{bmatrix} u_{0j} \\ u_{1j} \end{bmatrix} \sim N \left( 0, \begin{bmatrix} \sigma_{u0}^2 & \\ & \sigma_{u1}^2 \end{bmatrix} \right)$$
$$e_{ij} \sim N(0, \Omega_e)$$



# Variables

## Measured before separation

- Household (im)mobility
- Marital status
- Household employment configuration
- Household education configuration
- Tenure of home
- Household income
- Father's perceived childcare involvement
- Population density

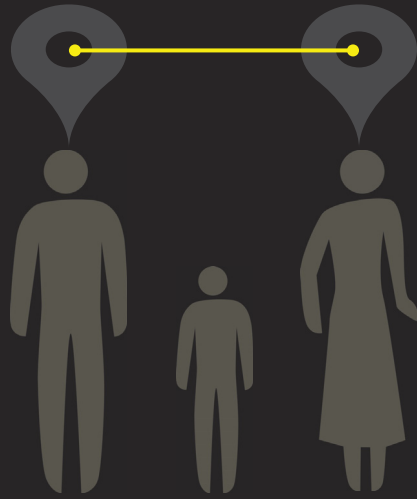
## Measured after separation

- New partnership configuration
- New child(ren) configuration
- Residence of pre-separation child(ren)
- Time since separation (years)
  - Effect allowed to vary between ex-couples

## Dependent variable measured after separation

- Distance separating ex-partners (log km)

# Results



# Existing family ties

The post-separation residence of shared (pre-separation) children

- The distance between separated parents is almost 3 times shorter when both have a child resident as compared to when only the mother has the shared child(ren)



## New post-sep family ties

- Distances are greater when separated parents spend a greater proportion of the post-separation period repartnered, as opposed to single
- New children increase distance to ex-partner, but only for fathers



## Personal resources

- Little evidence of any substantively important variations according to marital status, household employment status or household income
- There's a positive relationship between high human capital levels and distances between parents

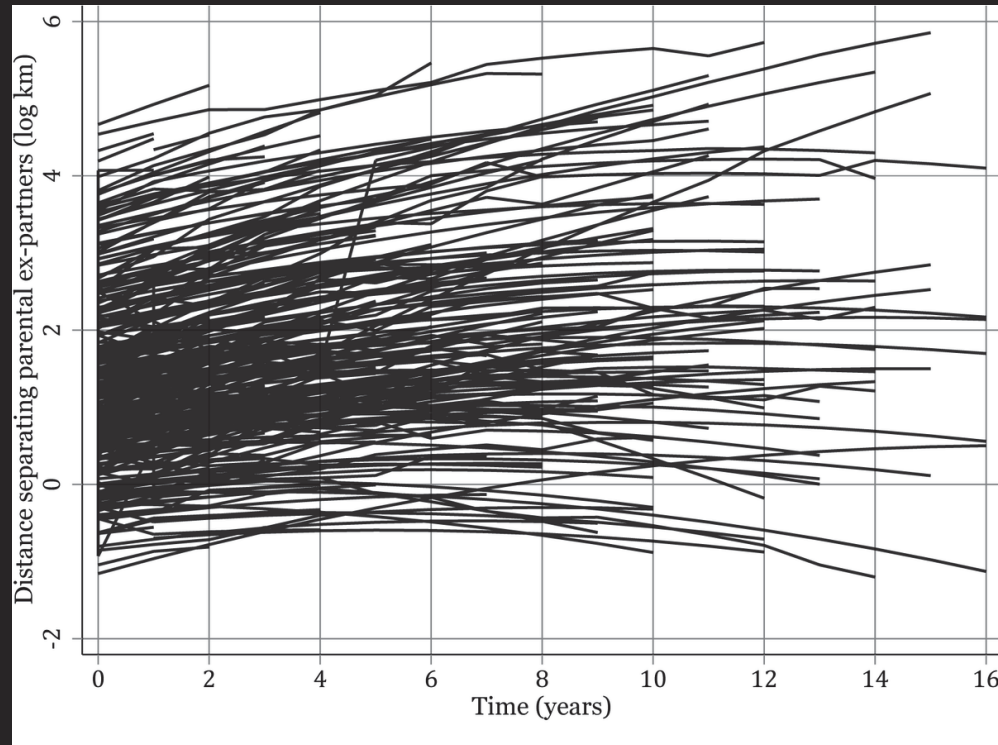


# Gender differences



- Some hint that separated fathers with higher educational attainment may be more likely to move away than otherwise similar mothers
- When the father perceived that childcare was performed jointly, the distance is found to be 1.5x shorter than when the mother was the main provider of care
- The formation of new family ties (partners and children) by fathers is found to be linked to moves over longer distances away from the ex-partner than is the case for mothers

# But also ...



- The initial moves appear to strongly determine the subsequent proximity in the period following
- Immediate circumstances under which people move around separation have strong and long-lasting impacts (types of family life, ties and contact subsequently experienced)



# Summary:

(Almost) All migration is family related, increasingly the post-separation family

- Increasingly recognising the role that various ties beyond the immediate household can have in forming and mediating (re)locational behaviours and outcomes
- Particular contexts in which these ties become particularly important - the post-separation family context as one such example
- For shared parenting, regular child visitation or to ensure their child's general wellbeing, ex-partners with shared children will often feel a need to maintain close geographical proximity

# Spatial constraints

A dark, semi-transparent image of a family silhouette is positioned in the background. It shows a man, a woman, and two children walking away from the viewer, holding hands. The scene is set against a light, hazy background, possibly a doorway or a bright area.

- Impacts separated parents' ability to find an optimal residential location suiting other key life-course domains
  - e.g. occupational careers and repartnering

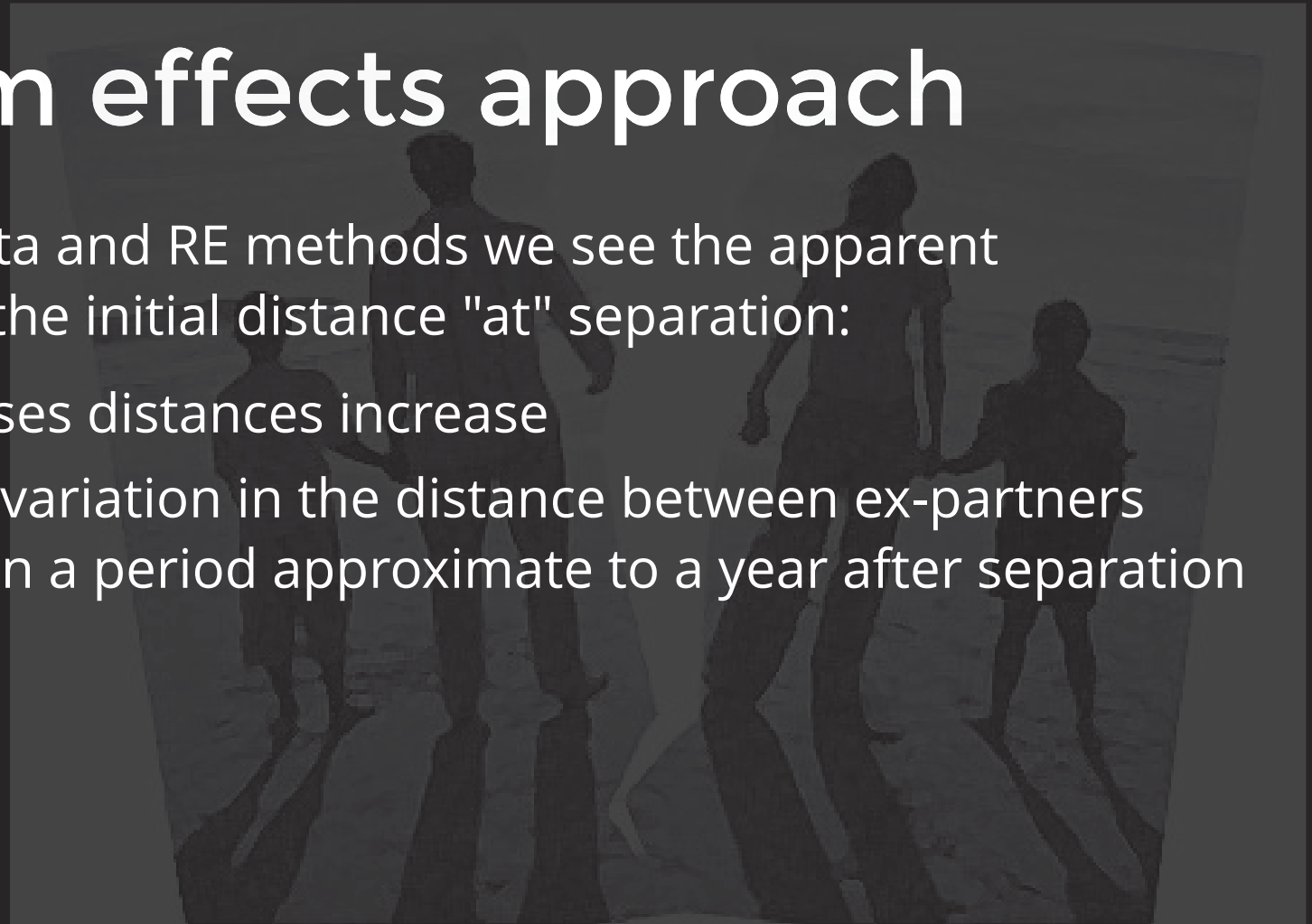
Women in the disbanded family context, appear to be disproportionately constrained (“tied”) in their relocational behaviours.  
Broader implications:

- Separated fathers appear more willing/able to compromise on maintained proximity to ex-partner (& child),
- Their greater relative ease of relocation could help in improving their potential for post-separation adjustment and recovery

# Random effects approach

Using panel data and RE methods we see the apparent persistence of the initial distance "at" separation:

- As time passes distances increase
- BUT... most variation in the distance between ex-partners occurs within a period approximate to a year after separation



# ... influences on daily mobility?

- How do separated parents balance different locational commitments (work, resident children, non-resident children with ex-partner etc.)?
  - Does this affect mode choice?
- Do people compromise on proximity to work in order to maintain proximity to the family?
  - Does this increase commute times?
- Many of these questions could be explored using UKHLS, a panel of 40k HHs & 100k individuals with detailed geocodes and variables measuring:
  - travel times to non-resident parents and children
  - commuting times and
  - frequency of use of different travel modes

# Thank you!

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