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**Linking the family context of migration during childhood to the wellbeing of young adults:  
Evidence from the UK and France**

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**Abstract**

Families often undergo separations during the migration process. A body of literature has explored the consequences of these separations for children 'left behind' and, more recently, children reunified with their parents at the destination. However little attention has been given to whether this experience during childhood is associated with wellbeing into adulthood. This paper adopts a life course perspective to explore wellbeing amongst youth (18-25 years) who migrated as children to the UK and France. Drawing on national household surveys, Understanding Society (UK) and Trajectories and Origins (France), we analyse whether which of the parents migrated and whether the young person migrated with them or experienced a period of separation are associated with self-rated health (both countries) and mental wellbeing (UK) or conflict with parents (France). Our findings show that whilst the majority of youth migrated with their parents (86% in the UK and 69% in France), those who did experience long-term parental separation (6+ years) have poorer psychosocial wellbeing in both destinations. This suggests that disruption to the parent-child relationship amplifies the risk of poorer outcomes in early adulthood and highlights that the context of family migration is not only important for understanding migrants' wellbeing during childhood, but also as they progress into adulthood.

**Keywords:** transnational families, wellbeing, young adults, United Kingdom, France

## Introduction

Migration flows include a significant number of children and youth, particularly flows to the global North: 20% of migrants residing in developed countries and 12% in developing countries are under the age of 20 (United Nations Children's Fund, 2010). In many cases, these migrations are family-related, with children accompanying or joining their migrant parents, although profiles tend to diversify with age at migration and vary by destination (McKenzie, 2006). Many families undergo separations during the migration process, giving rise to the phenomena of 'transnational families' and children 'left behind' (Parreñas, 2001; Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). In some contexts, international migration has become the primary reason for children living apart from their parents, surpassing mortality and parental separation (DeWaard, Nobles, & Donato in this issue). Generally these separations are a transitory phase in the families' lives with reunification eventually taking place either in the country of origin, following the migrant parents' return, or in the country of destination, with children joining the latter (Eremenko & González-Ferrer in this issue). Although they are often planned as short-term arrangements, particularly when the migratory project involves settlement abroad, some families end up separated for longer periods. Indeed, parents may encounter difficulties in reunifying their children at destination due to their precarious socio-economic and legal status upon arrival (Bernhard, Landolt, & Goldring, 2009) and restrictive family migration policies (Enchautegui & Menjívar, 2015).

Transnational family research has examined the consequences of these separations on the experiences of children left behind, while they are still living in the country of origin apart from one or both of their parents (Graham & Jordan, 2011; Mazzucato et al., 2015, Wu & Cebotari in this issue). Developing this line of research, studies of children having accompanied or joined their parents in the country of destination, i.e. the '*1.5 generation*', have explored how the families' socio-economic migratory characteristics, shape their experiences after migration (Schapiro et al., 2013). While qualitative studies have mainly focused on situations of children separated and reunited with their mothers (Phoenix, 2010; Bonizzoni & Leonini, 2013; Fresnoza-Flot, 2014), quantitative studies have included a broader set of family migration patterns (Suarez-Orosco, Todorov, & Louie, 2002; Gindling & Poggio, 2012). Results show that alongside 'traditional' migration characteristics, such as gender, social networks and neighbourhood contexts, understanding the family's migration background is important for the outcomes of child migrants.

In this paper, we seek to understand transnationalism as a process (Mazzucato & Dito in this issue) by examining the links between family migration characteristics during childhood and the wellbeing of young adults in the UK and France. Both countries experienced significant immigration flows in the last decades and have an important immigrant population today. However, they present differences in

terms of origins and patterns of family migration, allowing us to explore the possible effects of separation among different groups of child migrants and provide useful comparisons.

### **Wellbeing of young adult migrants in destination countries: the role of the family context of migration**

The potentially negative impacts of family separations on children's wellbeing and outcomes have been mainly theorised from a psychological perspective (Suarez-Orosco et al., 2002; Shapiro, Kools, Weiss, & Brindis, 2013). Disruptions in affective relationships caused by separations, first with parents in the case of children left behind, and later with caretakers when children migrate abroad, can have an impact on the children involved and their future development. Early research examining the experiences of transnational families living between the Global South and North mainly focused on maternal absence and identified negative impacts for children's wellbeing (Parreñas, 2001). However increasingly studies have shown the diversity of transnational family configurations across and within national contexts (Mazzucato, Schans, Caarls, & Beauchemin, 2015) and drawn attention to the importance of integrating other factors mediating these experiences (role of caretakers, socio-economic and legal resources). Although some left behind children face difficulties (poorer mental health, problems in school), these disadvantages are not systematic and tend to be linked to other factors of vulnerability, such as unstable family situations and fewer socio-economic or legal resources (Graham & Jordan, 2011; Mazzucato et al., 2015). This is particularly the case of transnational families with migrant mothers who often share fragile family characteristics: for example an analysis of African migrant mothers in Europe showed they are more often single or divorced than African migrant fathers (Caarls, Haagsman, Kraus & Mazzucato in this issue).

Recently, studies have examined the experiences of children left behind and later reunited with their parents, most often adopting a destination country perspective (for a review see Shapiro et al., 2013). From an initial focus on the emotional difficulties faced by these children, often recruiting respondents through therapy groups, the outcomes addressed have diversified to include children's mental wellbeing and behavioural problems, but also relationships with parents, adjustment to life in the destination country, education and work opportunities. Although some of the factors influencing the children's experiences were the same as for migrants in general (difficulties of moving to a new country, not speaking the language, facing discrimination and racism), the greater importance of their family background in understanding their experiences set them apart from other groups of migrants.

Separation from parents, particularly mothers, was one of the central topics regularly raised by respondents in qualitative studies, and identified as one of the main issues they had to deal with during their integration (Shapiro et al., 2015; Phoenix, 2010; Bonizzoni & Leonini, 2013; Fresnoza-Flot, 2014). A pioneer quantitative study on child migrants to the USA found that 85% of children had

been separated through the migration process from their parents (49% from both parents and 30% from only the father), and that these children reported more psychological symptoms (Suarez-Orosco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002).

Parenting behaviour during families' transnational phase can also affect experiences upon reunification. Fathers usually maintained less intimacy with children at a distance than mothers (Parreñas, 2008; Pribilsky, 2012), potentially leading to more distant or conflicting relations later on, although changing gender norms, but also greater resources could lead to more engaged parenting amongst fathers in some contexts (Jordan, Dito, Nobles, & Graham in this issue). Children's gender could also influence how they dealt with these issues. Girls and boys experience parental separation through migration differently (Wu & Cebotari in this issue), a fact which could impact the parent-child relationship upon reunification. Daughters generally felt closer to their parents and had a greater appreciation of the sacrifices made by them, whereas sons were less prone to communicate and could thus have more difficulties acknowledging and solving issues post-reunification (Schapiro et al., 2015). The experience of being left behind can be less traumatic in societies where relationships with (biological) parents are not as central to the child's development and other family members play an important role (Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa). However, after interiorizing values of attachment and physical closeness prevalent in the destination countries, some respondents re-evaluated their experience, coming to viewing it as more problematic (Schapiro et al., 2015; Wang, 2016).

The timing of separation and reunification in the children's lives also lead to different experiences of these events. For children left at an early age with a caregiver, arrival in the destination country and the (re-)discovery of their parents could sometimes be a traumatizing experience, especially if they were also experiencing a separation from their caregivers of many years left in the country of origin (Fresnoza-Flot, 2014). Inversely, for children who had already established close relationships with their parents prior to the separation, this experience could have a lesser impact, especially if the separation was short. Children migrating at younger ages generally had more facilities to adapt than adolescents had, although this was not systematic and for example, may depend on whether their age at arrival coincided with major changes in the school system (Ryan & Sales, 2013).

More generally, the individual's accounts of the experience of migration and eventual separation from parents seemed to evolve with time. Children interviewed shortly after arrival, grieving from separations from close family members at origin, (re-)discovering a parent that they did not know or knew very little, meeting new family members (parent's new spouse or siblings born in the destination country), as well as facing difficulties at school or with language acquisition, could be more critical of their parents and their choices (Fresnoza-Flot, 2014), with some intending or actually returning to their home countries (Bonizzoni & Leonini, 2013). However, migrants who arrived as children and had already been residing in the destination country for a few years nuanced the long-term impacts of these experiences (Phoenix, 2010). They experienced a decrease of anxiety with time,

had sometimes re-established the relationship with the parent and no longer intended to return to their country of origin. Similarly, more conflicts with parents upon reunification could retrospectively be viewed as a positive element as they allowed talking things out with their parents and redefining the relationship (Shapiro et al., 2015).

Families' socio-economic and legal resources were also important in understanding later outcomes. Possibilities of child reunification were largely dependent on parents' socio-economic and legal resources. Thus, longer separations could also indicate a family's more precarious situation, possibly leading to negative outcomes in other domains as well. For families in lower socio-economic positions in which parents were working long hours, reconstructing the parent-child relationship could be more difficult and the impacts of the separation long lasting. In addition, reunification in these families could have more often been *de facto* (outside of a legal family migration procedure) (Eremenko & González-Ferrer in this issue) and the family members, both parents and children, would more often be in precarious legal statuses. Youth in undocumented situations tended to report more anxiety and depression symptoms than those with a stable legal status (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010).

### **Family migration patterns in the UK and France**

The UK and France have different migration histories with distinct family migration patterns. Immigration to France is a long-standing phenomenon, and recent flows (since the 2000s) remained limited compared to other neighbouring countries. As a result, in the start of 2010s the share of the "*second generation*" was larger than that of the "*first generation*" (13,5% versus 11% of the working age population) (Bouvier, 2012). Despite the fact that the UK had also been receiving immigrants during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, net migration became positive only in the 1990s. The UK experienced a large increase in inflows in the 2000s, particularly after the EU enlargement in 2004, and the "*first generation*" outnumbered the "*second generation*" (11% versus 8,8%).

Until the 1990s, flows to France were predominantly composed of migrant workers and their families, originating from a limited number of countries, mainly in Southern Europe and Northern Africa. Children left behind by migrant parents, usually the father, arrived with their mother in family reunification procedure. Starting from the 1990s, as migration flows have diversified (geographical origins, migration motives), patterns of child migration have become more varied as well, with more children accompanying their parents and arriving through other legal channels (such as asylum seekers) (Eremenko, 2015).

Children of immigrants are a well-identified group in France (*descendants d'immigrés*) and existing studies have focused on their education trajectories, integration into the labour market, but also the discrimination and racism they face in the French society (Beauchemin, Hamel, & Simon, 2015). However the experiences of the "*1.5 generation*", particularly of more recent migration flows, are not

explicitly addressed in these studies. A study among asylum seekers showed that more chaotic and uncertain family migration patterns, with children left behind and separated from the rest of the family for longer periods of time, often lead to worse wellbeing for family members concerned (Barou, 2011). Stories of Filipino mothers and their children separated and reunited in France echo findings for other regions in terms of the issues they face (Fresnoza-Flot, 2014). Similarly, respondents having been left behind by their parents in China and later reunited with them in France, talked about their feelings of abandonment and resentment, as well as difficulties of reconnecting with parents upon reunification (Wang, 2016).

The UK hosts a diverse migrant population, who enter as study, work, asylum or family migrants. Possibilities for settlement and family reunification for migrants from outside of the European Economic Area (EEA) depend on a number of characteristics, but migrant groups are entitled to family unification with children in some form (Blinder, 2016). In the recent period, Asia, particularly Southern Asia, is the most common origin of family migrants coming to the UK (Home Office, 2016). Africa is also an important origin region, although there are more families with temporary visa arrangements than amongst Asian migrant families, which may mean that they may be less likely to continue living in the UK into adulthood (Home Office, 2016).

Contrary to France, female-led migrations to the UK have existed for a longer time, particularly from the Caribbean region, and the experiences of migrant mothers and left behind and reunited children have been prominent in studies of transnational families (Arnold, 2006; Smith, Lalonde, & Johnson, 2004; Phoenix, 2010). However, most recent studies on transnational families (Ryan & Sales, 2013; Kilkey, Plomien, & Perrons, 2014; Moskal & Tyrell, 2016) focus on intra-EU migration from Central and Eastern Europe to the UK after 2004.

### **Current study and research hypotheses**

This paper seeks to contribute to the literature on the influence of family migration on children by focusing on different aspects of wellbeing among young adults who migrated as children to the UK and France. Whereas existing qualitative studies have explored the influence of family migration on emotional wellbeing of parents and children in transnational families, these studies have focused on specific family configurations and have not always been able to differentiate the effects of the family's migration experience from their socio-economic resources more generally. The use of national household surveys in two major European destinations enables the inclusion of a variety of family migration patterns and controlling for a number of socio-economic and migratory characteristics of individuals and their families.

Bar education (see, for example, Gindling & Poggio, 2012), the influence of family migration characteristics in young adulthood has not been analysed for other wellbeing domains in quantitative studies. Our analysis explores the association between family migration characteristics and self-rated

health as well as indicators linked to psychosocial wellbeing: level of conflict with parents in France and mental wellbeing in the UK. Studies of physical health of adult migrants have described the mechanisms which influence immigrant health as linked to strength of social networks and access to opportunities (Leão, Sundquist, Johansson, & Sundquist, 2009; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000), factors which can in turn be linked to family migration characteristics. Children of immigrants generally show better mental health, in part due to their family structure and relations (Mood, Jonsson, & Låftman, 2017), but these analyses have not taken into account the specific experiences of the "1.5 generation". The outcomes used here are different but related – better self-rated health is associated with better mental wellbeing in the UK case and lower levels of conflict with parents in the French case. Based on previous studies, we formulate the following two hypotheses:

- H1: Differential impact of family migration characteristics on different dimensions of wellbeing. We expect a greater impact of these characteristics on conflict with parents in France and mental wellbeing in the UK than on self-rated health, as current studies suggest there is a strong link between family migration characteristics and aspects of psychosocial wellbeing.
- H2: Differential impact of family migration characteristics on wellbeing between the UK and France. Whereas family migration flows were predominantly male-lead in France and more mixed in the UK, the impact of separation from parents could be higher in the UK as it more often involves separation from mothers.

## **Methodology**

### *Data sources*

The surveys used in this paper – Understanding Society (US) survey in the UK and the Trajectories and Origins (TeO) survey in France – had similar designs and were carried out at a similar time, making them suited to comparative analyses. Understanding Society is a UK longitudinal survey, which includes a household questionnaire, an individual questionnaire for adults (16+ years) and self-completion questionnaires for adults (16+ years) and youth (10-15 years). The sample includes an Ethnic Minority Boost Sample to ensure adequate numbers of ethnic groups are included. The survey is funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council and various Government Departments, with scientific leadership by the Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex, and survey delivery by NatCen Social Research and Kantar Public. The research data are distributed by the UK Data Service. Data from the first wave (2009-2010) were used (University of Essex et al., 2015).

The Trajectories and Origins survey is a cross-sectional survey on population diversity in France. It was carried out by the National Institute for Demographic Studies (INED) and National Statistical Institute (INSEE) in 2008-2009 and over-sampled persons with a migratory background (Beauchemin



et al., 2015). Respondents were aged 18-59 years and residing in mainland France in ordinary households. The research data are distributed by the National Archive of Data from Official Statistics (ADISP).

### *Samples*

This paper examines the associations between family migration characteristics and wellbeing amongst young immigrants: respondents born abroad and aged 18-25 years at the time of observation. In order to ensure the analyses focused on youth with similar family migration experiences additional criteria were included: (i) that at least one parent had immigrated to the destination country prior or simultaneously to the respondent, (ii) that respondents were born prior to the first parent's migration, (iii) that respondents had migrated before the age of eighteen and (iv) that respondents had been enrolled in the destination country school system. Individuals with incomplete data on own or parent's country of birth, year of migration and the outcome variables were excluded from the analytic samples. The UK and French samples includes 172 and 210 respondents respectively.

### *Wellbeing measures*

Self-rated health was used for both countries. In the UK survey the question was phrased 'In general, would you say your health is excellent, very good, good, fair or poor?'. A binary variable was created for 'better health', coded '1' for individuals who reported 'excellent' or 'very good' health and '0' otherwise. In the French survey, the question was phrased 'What is your overall state of health?' with responses: very good, good, fair, poor or very poor. The binary variable 'better health' was coded '1' for individuals who reported 'very good' health and '0' otherwise. Research into the comparability of these measures has suggested that the two versions of the question are parallel assessments of the same latent health measure and whilst collapsing categories does not make the resultant variable identical, it is an acceptable approach for comparing self-rated health generally (Jürges, Avendano, & Mackenbach, 2008).

The second wellbeing indicator for the UK analyses was the 12-item General Household Questionnaire (GHQ-12): an aggregate measure of mental wellbeing comprised of responses to twelve questions covering happiness and mental anguish. Each question is ranked on a four point scale giving a total score between 0 (least distressed) and 36 (most distressed). The measure has been widely used in the UK and internationally (Hu, Stewart-Brown, Twigg, & Weich, 2007). The second wellbeing indicator for the French analyses was the level of conflict with parents at age eighteen. Respondents were asked 'When you were 18, did you argue with your parents about the following subjects: romantic relationships, going out/leisure, friends, school, professional projects'<sup>i</sup> with possible responses: often, rarely, never, avoided the issue. The existence of conflict on a specific issue

was coded '1' if the person responded 'often', 'rarely' or 'avoided the issue'. An aggregate measure was created by summing the number of issues on which there was conflict with a score between 0 (less conflict) to 5 (more conflict).

*Family migration, standard migration and socio-demographic characteristics*

The analyses focus on two family migration characteristics: which parent migrated (mother, father, both parents) and length of separation from migrant parent, defined as length of separation from the first parent to migrate (within 2 years, 2-5 years and 6+ years). Standard migration characteristics were also included: duration of residence in destination country (years), age at migration (<12 years, 12-17 years) and origin region. In the UK survey, the response categories for the main question on country of birth included 23 individual countries and an 'other' option. The aggregated variable used in the analyses distinguishes between migrants from listed Sub-Saharan African countries (Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda and South Africa), listed South Asia countries (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) and other countries. In the French sample, the aggregated variable distinguishes between migrants from Northern Africa (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia), Sub-Saharan Africa (mainly RDC, Ivory Coast, Cameroun, Congo and Gabon), Asia (mainly Turkey) and other regions (mainly European countries). Socio-demographic variables were also included: gender, living arrangements, highest level of education and subjective financial wellbeing, the latter two variables categorised into 'high', 'medium' or 'low' level (specific to each destination, details can be obtained from authors).

The distribution of all the variables are shown in table 1. An important result to highlight is that youth in both countries migrated an average of 13 years prior to the survey. This is particularly relevant for the UK as it indicates that the migration of the large majority of respondents was not linked to the accession of additional EU members in 2004, which has been the focus of the most recent family migration literature in the UK.

Table 1: Characteristics of migrant youth, UK and France

	UK (weighted column %)	France (weighted column %)
<b>Wellbeing outcomes</b>		
<i>Self-rated health</i>		
Poorer	31	37
Better	69	63
<i>Psychosocial wellbeing (mean)</i>		
GHQ-12 score	11	n/a
Conflict with parents score	n/a	2
<b>Family migration characteristics</b>		
<i>Which parent(s) migrated</i>		
Father only	12	6
Both parents	54	69
Mother only	34	27
<i>Length of separation</i>		
<2 years	86	69
2-5 years	8	17
6+ years	6	14
<b>Standard migration characteristics</b>		
<i>Age at migration (years)</i>		
<12	70	70
12-17	30	30
<i>Region of origin</i>		
Sub-Saharan Africa	13	17
South Asia (UK)/Asia (France)	14	26
Northern Africa (France only)		19
Other	73	39
<i>Years since migration (mean)</i>	13	13
<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>		
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	47	48
Female	53	53
<i>Highest level of education</i>		
Low	19	51
Medium	58	29
High	22	20
<i>Subjective financial status</i>		
Low	11	26
Medium	41	34
High	48	40
<i>Living arrangements</i>		
With parents	62	51
With partner and/or own children	13	24
Other	25	25
Total	100	100
N	172	210

### *Statistical methods*

Cross-tabulations were used to document the migration characteristics and socio-demographic characteristics of youth with different family migration experiences. Weights were applied to the descriptive analyses to account for the sampling structure and adjust for non-response. Chi-squared tests for independence were used to assess the associations between the family migration experience characteristics and the categorical variables. One-way ANOVA tests were used for continuous variables. Regression modelling was applied to examine the relationship between family migration experience and wellbeing after controlling for standard migration and socio-demographic characteristics. Binary logistic regression models were used for self-rated health, and linear regression models were used for GHQ-12 and level of conflict with parents.

### *Methodological challenges*

Migration research and cross-country comparative research commonly suffer from methodological challenges. This study faced a number of challenges which it is valuable to highlight before presenting the results. Firstly, possible selection effects. Selection mechanisms of children into migration, such as the transnational family's situation prior to the child's reunification (difficulties faced by the child, health issues, unexpected events), may contribute to differences in the experiences reported by different groups. The datasets do not include variables that could be used to control for wellbeing prior to migration. Inversely, children who had migrated but later faced more problems may have returned (Wu & Cebotari in this issue), and thus would not have been captured by the surveys at destination. Further, considering immigrants still residing at destination, it is unclear how well large household surveys capture migrants in the most vulnerable situations, such as undocumented migrants. Whilst small-scale surveys are able to use snowballing and other methods to access harder-to-reach migrants, by design, official surveys may not capture these groups or gain positive responses from these groups if sampled.

A second limitation is around the availability of comparable measures across the datasets. Our study design uses two variables to characterize the family migration process, which parent migrated and length of separation from first migrant parent. However, there may be other processes which could impact children's outcomes. For example, in the case of longer separations, other family changes may have taken place (e.g. new union of migrant parent) (Eremenko & González-Ferrer in this issue), which could also be a source of stress. Further, whilst both surveys capture self-rated health they do not have other comparable wellbeing measures. The indicators used in this study – mental wellbeing (UK) and conflict with parents (France) – capture different elements of psychosocial wellbeing but enable us to examine the long-term effects of family migration during childhood beyond self-rated health.

A third limitation is sample size. Although both surveys oversampled individuals with a migration background, when the samples were restricted to youth with similar family migration experiences the sizes were modest. This precluded more nuanced analyses. For example, it was not feasible to stratify the analysis by origin region, which may have shown different outcomes for young people from regions with distinct family and cultural norms or subject to different immigration regimes in Europe. Indeed, Lui, Riosmena, and Creighton in this issue highlight the need for further research which investigates origin and destination heterogeneity in migration patterns and family networks. Thus the results presented here should be interpreted with caution. However, they highlight the value of continued research on the long-term effects of family migration as data availability and suitability for cross-country migration research improves.

## **Results**

### *Characteristics of migrant youth in the UK and France*

Tables 2 and 3 describe characteristics of migrant youth in the UK and France respectively by characteristics of their family migration background. In the French case 69% of youth had two migrant parents, whilst in the UK case there was a more equitable split between youth with two migrant parents (54%) and a migrant mother only (34%). The proportion of migrant youth with a migrant father only was low in both the UK and France. Furthermore, in the French case the father was the initial migrant in 49% of cases, whilst in the UK this was the case for only 25% of children (results not shown). Thus, whereas in France the ‘classic’ model of step-wise male-led family migration appeared to be the dominant model, situations were more mixed in the UK.

Table 2: Wellbeing outcomes, standard migration characteristics and socio-demographic characteristics by family migration experience, UK (weighted row percentages)

	Which parent migrated					Length of separation				
	Father only	Both parents	Mother only	Total	Sig.	<2 years	2-5 years	6 or more years	Total	Sig.
<b>Wellbeing outcomes</b>										
<i>Self-rated health</i>										
Poorer	11	47	42	100		85	8	7	100	
Better	12	58	30	100		87	8	5	100	
<i>Mean GHQ-12 score</i>	12	10	10	11		11	8	14	11	**
<b>Family migration characteristics</b>										
<i>Which parent(s) migrated</i>										
Father only						94	0	6	100	
Both parents						83	11	6	100	
Mother only						89	7	4	100	
<i>Length of separation</i>										
<2 years	13	52	35	100						
2-5 years	0	72	28	100						
6+ years	12	62	26	100						
<b>Standard migration characteristics</b>										
<i>Age at migration (years)</i>										
<12	13	50	37	100		93	4	3	100	***
12-17	10	64	26	100		70	18	12	100	
<i>Region of origin</i>										
sub-Saharan Africa	8	42	50	100		66	20	15	100	**
South Asia	0	71	29	100		86	10	4	100	
Other	15	53	32	100		90	6	4	100	
<i>Years since migration (mean)</i>	15	12	15	13		14	9	8	13	***
<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>										
<i>Gender</i>										
Male	13	60	27	100		89	6	4	100	
Female	11	50	40	100		83	10	7	100	
<i>Highest level of education</i>										
Low	4	54	42	100		87	6	7	100	
Medium	15	49	36	100		86	8	5	100	
High	10	68	21	100		86	9	5	100	
<i>Subjective financial status</i>										
Low	8	68	25	100		84	7	9	100	
Medium	16	55	29	100		88	6	6	100	
High	9	51	40	100		85	10	5	100	
<i>Living arrangements</i>										
With parents	11	64	26	100		87	7	6	100	
With partner and/or own children	10	30	60	100		89	7	3	100	
Other	15	44	41	100		84	11	5	100	
Total	12	54	34	100		86	8	6	100	

P-values in parentheses: \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01.

Table 3: Wellbeing outcomes, standard migration characteristics and socio-demographic characteristics by family migration experience, France (weighted row percentages)

	Which parent migrated					Length of separation				
	Father only	Both parents	Mother only	Total	Sig.	<2 years	2-5 years	6 or more years	Total	Sig.
<b>Wellbeing outcomes</b>										
<i>Self-rated health</i>										
Poorer	4	73	24	100		73	13	14	100	
Better	7	65	29	100		66	19	15	100	
<i>Mean conflict with parents score</i>	0.7	2.2	1.6	2.0	*	2.0	1.8	2.1	2.0	
<b>Family migration characteristics</b>										
<i>Which parent(s) migrated</i>										
Father only						27	24	49	100	**
Both parents						69	18	13	100	
Mother only						77	12	11	100	
<i>Length of separation</i>										
<2 years	2	68	30	100	**					
2-5 years	8	73	19	100						
6+ years	19	60	21	100						
<b>Standard migration characteristics</b>										
<i>Age at migration (years)</i>										
<12	2	70	28	100	*	75	17	8	100	**
12-17	13	63	24	100		55	16	29	100	
<i>Region of origin</i>										
Northern Africa	6	55	39	100	**	71	12	16	100	**
sub-Saharan Africa	12	50	38	100		39	27	34	100	
Asia	2	83	15	100		61	23	16	100	
Other	5	71	24	100		86	10	4	100	
<i>Years since migration (mean)</i>	8	13	13	13	**	14	12	10	13	***
<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>										
<i>Gender</i>										
Male	6	74	20	100		73	20	7	100	**
Female	6	62	33	100		65	14	21	100	
<i>Highest level of education</i>										
Low	9	69	22	100	*	64	17	18	100	
Medium	4	53	43	100		65	22	14	100	
High	0	84	16	100		86	8	6	100	
<i>Subjective financial status</i>										
Low	4	54	43	100	***	65	21	13	100	
Medium	13	69	18	100		67	17	16	100	
High	1	76	23	100		73	13	14	100	
<i>Living arrangements</i>										
With parents	3	75	23	100	**	73	17	10	100	
With partner and/or own children	7	73	20	100		68	9	24	100	
Other	10	49	41	100		63	24	14	100	
Total	6	68	27	100		69	18	14	100	

P-values in parentheses: \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01.

Migrant youth with two migrant parents have higher socio-economic status, as measured by highest level of education and subjective financial wellbeing in France, although there are no statistically significant differences in the UK. In the French case, migrant youth with one migrant parent are concentrated amongst those from Africa, are more likely to have experienced a longer period of separation and to have migrated later in childhood.

Turning to the results on length of separation from migrant parent(s), it appears that the majority of migrant youth did not experience separation from migrant parents, higher for the UK (86%) than France (69%). In France, children with a migrant mother only are more likely to have migrated at the same time as their migrant parent, whereas in the UK there is not a significant association between which parents(s) migrated and length of separation. In both countries, migrant youth who came within two years of their parent(s) are also likely to have migrated when they were younger and thus migrated a longer time ago. Further, in both contexts there is a statistically significant association between region of origin and timing of migration, with young people from African countries particularly likely to have experienced a period of separation from their migrant parent(s). There is no statistically significant association between highest level of education or subjective financial wellbeing and length of separation for either destination.

The bivariate analyses for family migration characteristics and the wellbeing outcomes show that in the UK case that there is a statistically significant difference in mean GHQ-12 mental wellbeing score by length of separation from migrant parent(s) and in the French case there is a statistically significant difference in mean conflict with parents score by which parent migrated.

#### *Wellbeing outcomes amongst migrant youth in the UK*

Table 4 displays models for self-rated health and GHQ-12 score amongst migrant youth in the UK. It is evident that when controlling for other factors, family migration characteristics are not significantly associated with self-rated health. Further, none of the standard migration or socio-demographic characteristics are significantly associated with self-rated health. The results of the model for GHQ-12 indicate that long-term separation from migrant parent(s) (6+ years) is associated with an increased risk of poorer mental wellbeing, after controlling for other factors. Results also show that migrant youth who migrated later in childhood and from countries other than those in the sub-Saharan African or South Asian categories have elevated risks of poorer mental wellbeing. Further, migrant youth in 'other' living arrangements, commonly indicative of houseshares with non-relatives, have an increased risk of poorer mental wellbeing. Migrant youth with a higher level of subjective financial wellbeing have a reduced risk of poorer mental wellbeing.



Table 4: Regression models for self-rated health and GHQ-12 score amongst migrant youth, UK

	Logistic regression model for better self-rated health		Linear regression model for GHQ- 12 score (higher score indicative of poorer mental wellbeing)	
	Coefficient	P> z	Coefficient	P> z
<i>Which parent(s) migrated</i>				
(Both parents)				
Father migrant	-0.10	(0.866)	1.28	(0.365)
Mother migrant	-0.36	(0.361)	0.60	(0.529)
<i>Separation from migrant parent(s)</i>				
(Migrated with parents)				
2-5 years	-0.43	(0.430)	-0.89	(0.500)
6+ years	-0.50	(0.461)	4.23**	(0.010)
<i>Age at migration (years)</i>				
(0-11)				
12-17	0.32	(0.591)	2.92**	(0.037)
<i>Origin region</i>				
(sub-Saharan Africa)				
South Asia	-0.61	(0.403)	1.91	(0.248)
Other	-0.36	(0.557)	3.91***	(0.004)
<i>Duration of stay in destination country (years)</i>				
	-0.02	(0.740)	0.17	(0.155)
<i>Gender</i>				
(Male)				
Female	-0.47	(0.210)	0.37	(0.679)
<i>Education level</i>				
(Low)				
Medium	0.60	(0.173)	-1.12	(0.308)
High	0.79	(0.132)	0.42	(0.739)
<i>Subjective financial status</i>				
(Low)				
Medium	0.02	(0.965)	-2.27*	(0.072)
High	0.49	(0.330)	-2.20*	(0.079)
<i>Living arrangements</i>				
(With parents)				
With partner and/or own children	0.24	(0.634)	0.87	(0.468)
Other	-0.02	(0.964)	2.22*	(0.061)
Constant	0.96	(0.428)	5.64*	(0.051)
N	172		172	

P-values in parentheses: \* p&lt;0.10, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \*\*\* p&lt;0.01.

### *Wellbeing outcomes amongst migrant youth in France*

Table 5 displays models for self-rated health and level of conflict with parents amongst migrant youth in France. Similar to the UK case, none of the standard migration or socio-demographic characteristics significantly differentiate self-rated health amongst migrant youth. Further, which parent migrated is not significantly associated with self-rated health. However, the result for length of separation from migrant parent(s) shows youth who experienced a short (2-5 years) period of separation from their migrant parent(s) are more likely to report better self-rated health. This result, which was not significant in bivariate analyses, is related to the fact that migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia have poorer health outcomes. As these groups are more concentrated in the 2-5 years separation category, when we control for the negative effect of being from one of these regions, we see a positive effect of short-term separation. However the significance of this result calls for further investigation.

Table 5: Regression models for self-rated health and level of conflict with parents amongst migrant youth, France

	Logistic regression model for better self-rated health		Linear regression model for conflict with parents score (higher score indicative of higher conflict)	
	Coefficient	P> z	Coefficient	P> z
<i>Which parent(s) migrated</i>				
(Both parents)				
Father migrant	0.37	(0.608)	-1.54***	(0.003)
Mother migrant	0.52	(0.178)	-0.58**	(0.042)
<i>Separation from migrant parent(s)</i>				
(Migrated with parents)				
2-5 years	0.88**	(0.040)	-0.15	(0.636)
6+ years	0.63	(0.212)	0.63*	(0.092)
<i>Age at migration (years)</i>				
(0-11)				
12-17	0.12	(0.810)	-0.19	(0.604)
<i>Origin region</i>				
Northern Africa (sub-Saharan Africa)	1.01*	(0.072)	-0.67*	(0.092)
Asia	-0.50	(0.269)	-1.08***	(0.002)
Other	0.52	(0.275)	-0.37	(0.294)
<i>Duration of stay in destination country (years)</i>				
	0.04	(0.418)	0.05	(0.171)
<i>Gender</i>				
(Male)				
Female	0.05	(0.865)	-0.49**	(0.036)
<i>Education level</i>				
(Low)				
Medium	0.27	(0.477)	-0.44	(0.124)
High	0.19	(0.676)	-1.35***	(<0.001)
<i>Subjective financial status</i>				
(Low)				
Medium	0.15	(0.713)	0.28	(0.352)
High	0.28	(0.488)	0.08	(0.779)
<i>Living arrangements</i>				
(With parents)	-0.22	(0.617)		
With partner and/or own children	0.29	(0.465)	-0.03	(0.929)
Other	-1.03	(0.246)	-0.02	(0.945)
Constant	-1.03	(0.246)	2.63***	(<0.001)
N	210		210	

P-values in parentheses: \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01.

<sup>1</sup> The question also included an item on religion. We did not include it in our analyses as there was little variation in the responses.

The model for level of conflict with parents shows that young migrants who experienced long-term separation from parents (6+ years) during the family migration process have an elevated risk of conflict with parents after controlling for other factors. Young people who had only one migrant parent have a reduced risk of conflict with parents relative to having two migrant parents, and this is most reduced if the migrant parent is their father (however this is a rare situation and potentially includes specific family situations). The other results in the French level of conflict with parents model show that female gender and high education level are significantly associated with a reduced risk of conflict with parents. Further, migrant youth from Asia and Northern Africa have significantly reduced risk of conflict with parents relative to migrant youth from Sub-Saharan Africa.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

Children with an immigrant background make up an increasing proportion of children living in Western countries today (Hernandez et al., 2009), making it all the more important to understand the extent to which they share characteristics and to identify vulnerable sub-groups. The key contribution of this study is to show that family migration characteristics during childhood do correlate with wellbeing into young adulthood in the UK and France. Findings from both countries point to a greater impact of the circumstances of family migration on elements of psychosocial wellbeing, mental wellbeing in the UK case and conflict with parents in France, than on self-rated health in early adulthood, thus confirming our first hypothesis. Our findings do not allow us confirm nor reject the second hypothesis given that family migration characteristics are not associated with self-rated health in both contexts, and that the effect of long-term separation (6 years or plus) on both indicators of psychosocial wellbeing is of similar scale (score is around 30% higher compared to reference group of children not having been separated from parents).

Much of the previous work on the wellbeing of children reunified with migrant parents in the destination country highlights the potential for this group to experience poorer psychosocial wellbeing (Suarez-Orosco et al., 2002; Shapiro et al., 2013). This paper confirms that this association continues into early adulthood. Specifically, the results show that longer-term separation from parents through the migration process is negatively associated with conflict with parents in France around the age of eighteen and mental wellbeing in the UK for young adults aged eighteen to twenty-five. Separation from parents, especially when it is long-term, disrupts the parent-child relationship, which may be difficult to recover, even upon reunification. This affectional bond is important in itself, but also for the development of the children in other areas. Our study confirms the negative impact of separation on this relationship in early adulthood (French case) and suggests indirect impacts through the deterioration of mental wellbeing (UK case). This finding for early adult life, rather than childhood, which has been the predominant focus of other studies, is supported by studies of attachment security

amongst the general (not specifically migrant) population in early adulthood. Waters, Weinfield, and Hamilton (2000) highlight that having experienced attachment-related adverse life events in childhood, can elevate the risk of poorer psychosocial wellbeing in early adulthood, as individuals make the transition from security and limited autonomy as children to the insecurity and independence of adulthood. Whilst heavily influenced by the circumstances of their migration, uncertainty surrounding the transition to adulthood may be particularly acute for migrant youth because of their differing social, economic and legal resources relative to native counterparts (Rumbaut & Komaie, 2010).

The results also show that migrant youth in France with one migrant parent only have a reduced risk of conflict with parents compared to those with two migrant parents. Descriptive results show that among children with two migrant parents, separation was usually with the father. A possible explanation for this could be that communication with migrant fathers was usually less maintained than with mothers (Parreñas, 2008; Pribilsky, 2012), especially as we're focusing on older flows, and the re-construction of the relationship upon reunification may also have been more complex for these families.

Our results show limited associations between self-rated health and family migration characteristics despite literature on the health of immigrants highlighting the importance of factors such as strength of social networks (Nielsen & Krasnik, 2010) and quality of relationships with family being likely to be an important component of young adults' social networks. The lack of association between self-rated health and family migration characteristics (and the controls) may in part be related to the focus in this study on young adults, a study population generally in very good health, thus making it more difficult to detect factors which differentiate health.

Most of the existing studies focusing on the post-reunification experiences of child migrants adopt a qualitative perspective. This study is unique in that it not only adopts a quantitative approach but draws on national, rather than small-scale, survey data to describe the family migration background for young adults and link it to wellbeing in two major European destinations. The ability to study the characteristics of migration in a previous life stage and contemporary wellbeing enables a more nuanced understanding of how migration fits into the life course and trajectory of migrants, a goal quantitative migration studies have frequently struggled with (Wingens, Windzio, de Valk & Aybek, 2011). As noted in the methodology, there remain a number of limitations with the survey data used in this study and more broadly currently available to migration scholars today. However, advancements in survey design and data collection are improving. In the UK case, the Understanding Society survey team recently ran a consultation with researchers on how the ethnic minority boost could be re-designed and enhanced to meet their needs, and in response to this new waves now include more immigrants (born abroad) particularly more recent immigrants (Understanding Society, 2016). In the French case, the future survey on population diversity (TeO2) will include questions on mental

wellbeing. Data collection efforts which deliberately include significant numbers of migrants, possibly by using a 'boost' sampling methodology, and seek to collect retrospective information, for example information on family migration characteristics, but also on wellbeing and circumstances prior to migration, will enable further advancements.

To conclude, the results of this study pave the way for further extending research on children in transnational families from a life course perspective and examining their wellbeing and life chances in adulthood, as well as highlighting that studies of the wellbeing of adult migrants should consider family migration trajectories.

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