

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

WILEY

# The role of non-resident family ties in rural staying

Sara Ferguson<sup>1</sup>  | Tialda Haartsen<sup>2</sup>  | Annett Steinführer<sup>3</sup>  | Gemma Catney<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Geography, School of Natural and Built Environment, Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, UK

<sup>2</sup>Department of Cultural Geography, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands

<sup>3</sup>Institute of Rural Studies, Johann Heinrich von Thünen Institute, Federal Research Institute for Rural Areas, Forestry and Fisheries, Braunschweig, Germany

## Correspondence

Sara Ferguson, Geography, School of Natural and Built Environment, Queen's University Belfast, Belfast BT7 1NN, UK.  
Email: [sara.ferguson@qub.ac.uk](mailto:sara.ferguson@qub.ac.uk)

## Funding information

Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Grant/Award Number: ES/S014683/1; Dutch Research Council (NWO), Grant/Award Number: 464.18.109; Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), Grant/Award Number: STE 2649/3-1

## Abstract

Internal migration research is paying increasing attention to the role in migration behaviour of having non-resident family—family living *outside* of the household—living close by, and also to non-migration and staying in general. Combining these two themes, this paper investigates the role of non-resident family ties in rural staying for adults aged 31–64. Using a mixed methods analysis of survey and interview data from the Netherlands, Germany and Northern Ireland (UK), we examine if the presence of non-resident family nearby relates to future intentions to stay in the rural region, and we explore the meanings of different family relations and how they relate to past and ongoing staying behaviours. Our findings reveal that living near non-resident children and in-laws increases the likelihood of the intention to stay in the rural region for the rest of one's lifetime. While the quantitative analyses suggest that the presence of parents in the area does not contribute to future staying intentions, the interviews revealed that parents' residential proximity was integral in the original staying decision. Non-resident family members provide emotional and instrumental support, offer location-specific structural opportunities, and provide a sense of security. Partly, family obligations also play a role in staying, yet not in the sense that rural stayers are 'stuck in place' because of family ties, but rather in an implicit way, intertwined with senses of belonging and attachment.

## KEYWORDS

family networks, intentions to stay, internal migration, linked lives, residential history

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Until recently, internal migration research was mostly associated with socioeconomic motives such as obtaining educational qualifications or finding a suitable employment. Less focus has been placed upon social motives for migration, including those related to family (Gillespie & Mulder, 2020; Mulder, 2018). Research exploring the role of family within migration and residential mobility behaviours has predominantly concentrated on the linked lives of family members living within the same household, particularly children and partners

(Cooke, 2008). Less attention has been afforded to the role of family living *outside* of the household. This led Mulder (2018) to call for a family ties perspective in migration research, suggesting that more attention needs to be directed towards the role of non-resident family in internal migration and immobility behaviours. Following this, several studies have shown that family appears to be as important as employment in migration motives over longer distances (Gillespie & Mulder, 2020; Thomas et al., 2019), with the desire to live close to non-resident family/friends as the most important 'sub-motive' (Thomas, 2019). To date, most of this research has emphasised the

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2023 The Authors. *Population, Space and Place* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

relation between the proximity of non-resident family and internal migration, with less focus placed upon the type, meaning, or intensity of the actual family ties, in which ways they facilitate mobility, or on how family relates to staying.

The literature on immobility and on intentions to stay strongly associates staying with social motives, such as wanting to remain close to family and friends (Bjarnason, 2014; Kuhmonen et al., 2016; Thissen et al., 2010). Within rural settings and from a life course perspective, strong senses of rootedness in place via social networks including family, friends, and close-knit communities have been offered as both explanations for the decision to stay (Ferguson & Catney, 2023; Morse & Mudgett, 2018), and also as an important element within the conceptualisation of a rural idyll (Ní Laoire, 2007). However, thus far, such social networks are typically referred to as an 'umbrella' concept, resulting in a limited understanding of the specific roles of different types, intensity and meanings of non-resident but geographically proximate family such as parents, children, siblings, in-laws, or other relatives in (rural) staying (Mulder, 2018; Stockdale & Haartsen, 2018). Therefore, Stockdale and Haartsen (2018, 6) called for further research into the role of linked lives outside the household in staying to better understand the roles played by different family members, peers, or the home community in the decision to stay.

This paper responds to the calls presented above by investigating if and how having different types of family members living nearby relates to staying in the rural region. Our research questions are (1) does having non-resident family close by explain future intentions for rural staying, and which family relationships explain these intentions? and (2) which family relations matter in past and ongoing staying processes, and why and how they do so? The findings are based on a mixed methods analysis of data from a large household survey and in-depth interviews conducted with respondents aged 31–64 years, in three rural regions: Clogher Valley (Northern Ireland, UK), East Groningen (the Netherlands) and Südharz (Germany). The data are drawn from a wider project, *STAYin(g)Rural*.<sup>1</sup> Because of their situation in North West and Central Europe, these areas can be considered similar in terms of norms and values towards family and family support (Hank, 2007). Therefore, cross-national comparisons are beyond the scope of this paper.

In line with the 'mobility turn' that acknowledges that mobility and immobility are not static or rigid dichotomies, but instead are blurred and relational practices (Barcus & Halfacree, 2018; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007), in our analyses we include past residential (im)mobility (stayers, returnees, incomers), ongoing staying behaviour, and future intentions to stay. We distinguish parents, children, siblings, in-laws and other family members as types of non-residential family. We focus on people aged 31–64 years old because family-related motives for renegotiating staying, leaving and returning are often associated with these ages. Young adults more often migrate

for employment and educational reasons (Haartsen & Thissen, 2014; Hofstede et al., 2022b; Rérat, 2014; Stockdale et al., 2018; Thomas, 2019) and for retirees, the quality of the residential area is often an important motive (Stockdale, 2006).

## 2 | RURAL STAYING AND FAMILY TIES

Over the past decades, the temporal and spatial dimensions, agency of, motives for, and influences upon staying behaviours have been explored in greater depth. Especially for the rural context, several publications on past staying and future staying intentions have revealed that next to structural motives such as employment and housing, non-structural motives such as attachment to the rural landscape and the local community, and being close to family and friends, are important motives to stay put (Haartsen & Thissen, 2014; Hofstede et al., 2022a; Husa & Morse, 2022). Indeed, from a rural lens, there has been a strong family and kinship discourse interwoven within the conceptualisation of the rural idyll, and specifically how the communitarian features of rural areas relate to residential mobility decisions (Gkartzios & Scott, 2010; Ní Laoire, 2007; Scott et al., 2017).

There has been a growing appreciation that multiple and often interrelated domains of an individual's life can influence residential mobility behaviours, which can include *both* moving *and* staying. Given that these biographies are rarely devoid of the influence of others, the 'linked lives' with family (and the events that occur in the lives of these family members) is one important domain that may influence (im)mobility decisions across the life course (Coulter et al., 2016; Elder et al., 2003; Halfacree & Boyle, 1993; Rye, 2011; Tucker et al., 2013). Scholars such as Mason (2004), Holdsworth (2013), Coulter et al. (2016) and Bailey et al. (2021) highlighted the centrality of family within residential (im)mobility, arguing that over time (im)mobility can often also affect family relations and serve as an important resource to forming social networks, including family-bonding (Buckle, 2017). Such scholars also suggest that viewing residential mobility as both a relational and active practice, as opposed to a discrete event, "can help us understand how residential moves link lives at the micro-level by re-configuring family life and social networks" (Coulter et al., 2016: 358) and recognise that linked lives can affect moving and staying across the life course (and vice versa). Nevertheless, despite the acknowledged importance of family in residential decision-making and in rural staying in particular, 'family' is often encapsulated within the wider umbrella term of social or family networks, without exploring in detail which type of family relations and which types of family bonds are most decisive (Adams & Komu, 2022; Cook & Cuervo, 2020; Johnson et al., 2005; Morse & Mudgett, 2018), to whom, and at what stages across the life course.

Studies exploring the influence of family on residential mobility behaviours suggest that those living in closer geographical proximity to non-resident kin (typically parents, adult children, and siblings) report an increased likelihood of staying in, or returning to, the area (Ermisch & Mulder, 2019; Kan, 2007; Mulder & Malmberg, 2014). The

<sup>1</sup>STAYin(g)Rural is an international project jointly funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and German Research Foundation (DFG), between 2019 and 2022. Further details can be found at [www.stayingrural.eu](http://www.stayingrural.eu).

presence of family living close by increases opportunities for face-to-face contact and other *social interactions*, making it easier to build and maintain strong relationships (Chan & Ermisch, 2015; Hank, 2007; Pettersson & Malmberg, 2009; Thomas & Dommermuth, 2020). This personal contact can result in shared social bonds, exchanges of support, resource provisions and opportunities, and other local social capital that may influence (and importantly be influenced by) the decision to stay (Fischer & Malmberg, 2001; Holdsworth, 2013). These support exchanges include instrumental support, such as helping with household tasks or childcare, in addition to emotional support, such as involvement in the personal life and provision of advice (Hünteler & Mulder, 2020). Such support exchanges between family members may be particularly important in rural areas, where social networks (extending beyond family) may be smaller than those found in urban settings.

Social networks of family and friends in the area also function as location-specific insider advantages (LSIA) (Fischer & Malmberg, 2001; Fischer et al., 2000; Mærsk et al., 2021; Westin, 2016). LSIAs include knowledge, information, assets, and abilities, and are (i) location-specific, in that they can only be used, exist, or are of value in a specific place, and (ii) grow over time, being associated with a strong sense of attachment to place, and locally based networks. The accumulation of different types of LSIAs relates to why some people stay. For the context of our research, particularly important—and going beyond the general support and advice functions of non-resident kin mentioned earlier—is that locally-based family members can provide structural opportunities, facilitating access to housing and employment opportunities (Thomas et al., 2016). These have been suggested to be particularly significant in rural areas, especially in settings with strong family farming traditions or where settlement patterns resemble the traditional Irish *clachan* system where there are clusters of kinship homes (Matysiak, 2021; Stockdale & Ferguson, 2020). However, gaining greater insight into which family members provide which type of LSIAs can help in understanding how much access rural stayers have to these LSIAs. For example, if certain opportunities are mostly provided by siblings, stayers may have less access to them than to opportunities provided by parents or adult children, simply because of the greater chance that the latter live in relatively close proximity.

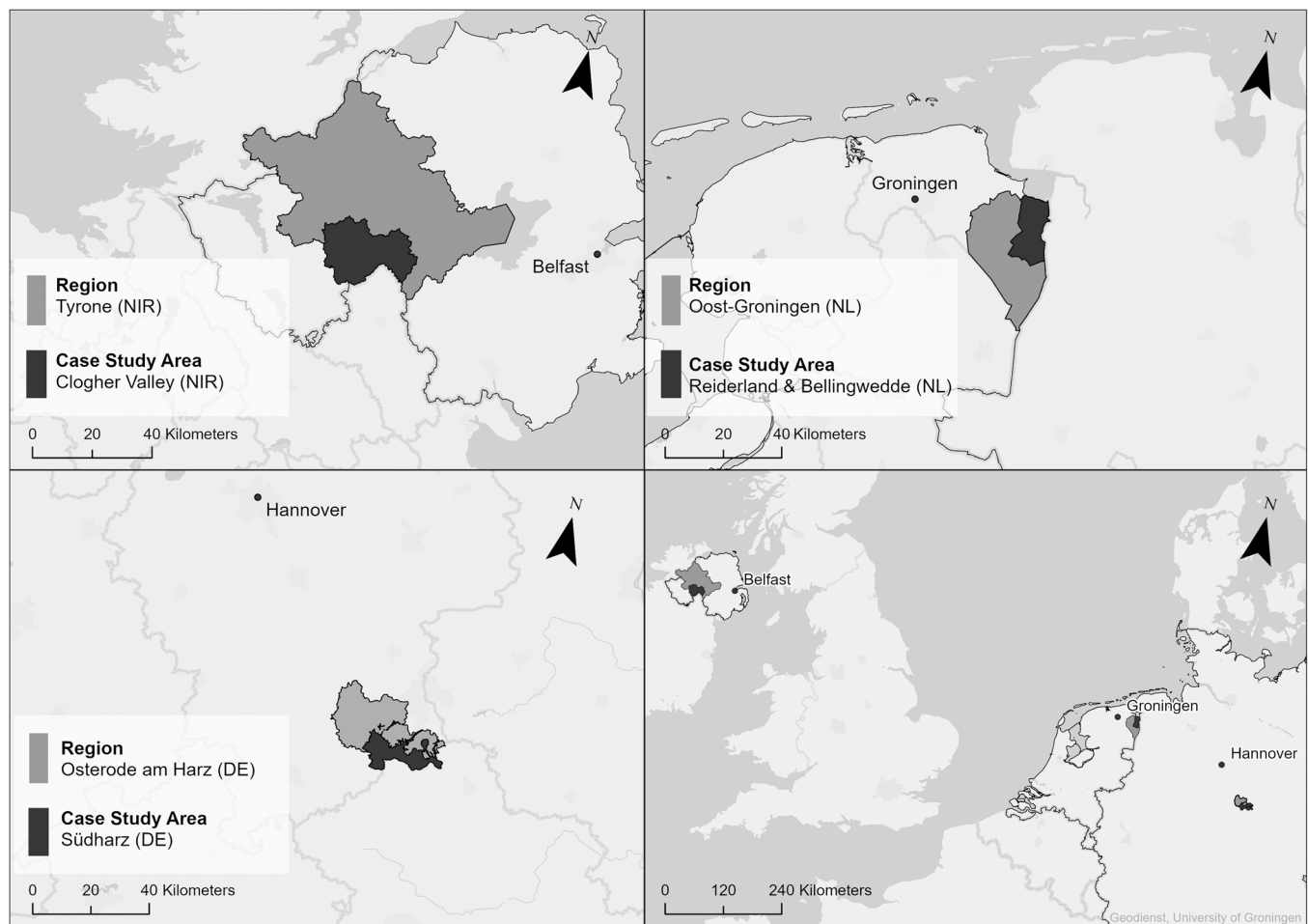
Social and kin networks also contribute to place belonging and attachment, which have been emphasised as important influencing factors within the rural staying literature (Clark et al., 2017; Thissen et al., 2010). Importantly, Husa and Morse suggest that family is a key factor which binds people to place, “especially for those who grew up and live now in a rural town” (2022: 38). Morse and Mudgett (2018) emphasise that family ties are often interrelated or entangled with other staying motives, including place attachment, rootedness, and nostalgia. This may be particularly pertinent amongst farming families within rural areas, whereby the same land may have been farmed by ancestors, creating a strong sense of rootedness, home, and subsequent desire to stay (Stockdale & Ferguson, 2020). Family ties have also been identified as influencing staying decisions through the socialisation process. This implies that staying preferences and

subsequent decisions may be informed (albeit not always consciously) by the choices, preferences, and norms of others within their social environment, including family. These can be passed down through generations, and can be cumulative (Guveli et al., 2016; Thissen et al., 2010). For example, within a wider family network, if the familial norm is to stay, this may also influence future mobility behaviours and residential decisions. All the above reinforces the importance of having both a relational and biographical understanding of the relationships between residential (im)mobility, linked lives, place attachment and structural conditions (Bailey et al., 2021), and acknowledging that these are played out over a significant portion of people's lives, rather than at a single point in time (Cook & Cuervo, 2020).

Although relationships between family and the propensity to stay are, in the most, overwhelmingly positive, family can also introduce certain *obligations* that may serve as residential restrictions or constraints (Coulter et al., 2016). Despite the narrative that immobility cannot easily be described as either voluntary or involuntary, and requires a more nuanced consideration (Robins, 2022), several scholars (e.g., Barcus & Brunn, 2009; Stockdale et al., 2018) identify tied or reluctant rural stayers who may prefer to live elsewhere but are prevented from doing so due to obligations, including family responsibilities. For example, the trailing spouse literature refers to partners (often the wife in heterosexual partnerships), who are willing to move/stay for the sake of their partner and/or family (Amcoff & Niedomysl, 2015; Clerge et al., 2017; Stockdale, 2017). The obligations or responsibilities referred to within this literature are those which occur within the same household. Yet less is known about obligations or responsibilities linked to other family members, beyond the household but within the same (rural) locale. A notable exception includes the study by Ní Laoire (2005), who identified wider cultural and familial responsibilities attached to maintaining family farms in Ireland, resulting in young male farmers staying on the land. Elsewhere, specific reference has been made to relationships between parents and non-resident adult children, including associated moral obligations and senses of responsibility, which are often strongly embedded in social norms (Bailey et al., 2004; Komter & Vollebergh, 2002).

### 3 | DATA AND METHODS

To investigate if and how having different non-resident family living nearby can explain the staying behaviours of people in rural areas, we utilise data collected as part of the wider research project *STAYin(g)Rural*, which aims to understand why and how people stay in rural areas. The project includes three European rural case study areas: East Groningen (the Netherlands), Südharz (Germany), and Clogher Valley (Northern Ireland) (see Figure 1), all of which are recognised as being remotely rural within their respective national contexts, and have reported long histories of out-migration, depopulation, and population ageing. Each case study area is situated at a 45–90-min drive from its nearest city (Groningen, Göttingen,



**FIGURE 1** Maps of the case study areas.

Belfast, respectively). Hank (2007) divided Europe into three distinctive areas, based on geographical specific cultural values and attitudes regarding family and familial support preferences. Our case study areas are located in the same distinctive area of North West and Central Europe, where due to characteristics within the rural economy, family members typically live further apart and with more supportive welfare state regimes than in (south)eastern and southern European contexts. Given these commonalities, and that our paper's focus is to investigate the role of non-resident family in staying in rural areas more broadly, we include data from all three case study areas without making explicit cross-national comparisons.

This paper adopts a mixed methods research design by combining quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data, collected in each of the three case study areas. The quantitative analyses, conducted at the individual level, are used to investigate if having intentions to stay can be explained by having non-resident family living in the area, and to identify which specific relations are significant. The subsequent qualitative analyses then reveal in-depth information concerning the type, intensity and meaning of the family ties that are involved in rural staying. Hence, the qualitative analyses also contain information on how the respondent relates to others in the household, and how decision-making is a relational process.

Respondents who reported being over 30 years old, but younger than 65 and not yet retired, were included for analysis in this study.

For the quantitative analyses, we use data collected as part of a large household survey conducted in each of the three case study areas during autumn and winter 2019/early 2020, in rural settlements (of up to 2000 inhabitants) and the surrounding countryside outside their built-up area (see also Ferguson & Catney, 2023; Hofstede et al., 2022a, 2022b; Lengerer et al., 2022). Adopting systematic random sampling techniques specifically adapted to each context, 2000–2500 addresses were targeted from postal address files, with an assumed 40% response rate. A total of 3266 completed surveys were returned (>1000 in each case study area), with an overall response rate of 47%. Some 1233 respondents were eligible for inclusion in the quantitative analyses. Within the survey, eight sections covered a diverse range of topics. Most relevant to the analysis in this paper were questions which provided information on the respondents' staying intentions non-resident kin living in the area, family related factors influencing their decision to live/stay in the area, residential history, and socio-demographic background.

For the qualitative analyses, we draw on 43 in-depth interviews conducted during spring 2021 with survey respondents in the three case study areas who had indicated a willingness to participate in a

follow-up semi-structured interview. For the purpose of the wider study, we selected interviewees who represent a diverse variety of rural staying behaviours. We have no indication of a potential self-selection effect with regards to family orientation. Due to the requirement to adhere to public health guidance during the global coronavirus pandemic, interviews were conducted either online or by telephone. All interviews, which lasted 90 min on average, were audio-recorded, professionally transcribed, anonymized, and subsequently translated into English (if required). With the aim of building upon initial findings emerging from the household survey, a wide range of themes were explored. Those most pertinent to the current analysis included: residential history, motivations for (not) moving, and the presence of, and engagement with, different family members living in the area. Interviewees were assigned a pseudonym to ensure anonymity, and transcripts subjected to thematic analysis with Atlas.ti software, involving close reading, re-reading, and coding by the authors, with key themes emerging as part of an iterative analytical process.<sup>2</sup>

## 4 | NON-RESIDENT FAMILY TIES AND RURAL STAYING: RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 4.1 | Intentions to stay rural and non-resident family

Binary logistic regressions were conducted using the survey data to identify the relationship between intentions to stay and having non-resident kin living in the area. For the dependent variable 'intentions to stay', we used answers to the survey question: '*How long do you intend to live in this area?*'. As independent explanatory variables, we used responses to questions about having non-resident family living in the area, family as being a motive to reside in the area, residential history and duration of stay in the area, and several socio-demographic variables. Before we present the results of the regressions, we discuss the descriptive statistics of the variables in Table 1. The scores at the four answer options for 'intentions to stay' were: up to 2 years (2%), up to 5 years (3%), up to 10 years (10%), and the rest of life (85%), indicating that most of our respondents want to stay long-term. Because of the skewed distribution of the variable, we dichotomised the responses into 'the rest of my life' (85%) versus 'not the rest of my life' (15%).

The proximity of non-resident family was measured as '*do any of the following persons live in this area?*', with the following answer categories: parents, sons or daughters, brothers or sisters, in-law(s), and other relatives. People who answered 'no' to in-laws include non-partnered individuals. Importantly, in-law(s) also include parents-in-law. Table 1 shows that slightly more than half of the respondents reported having parents or children living in the area, especially those that have 'rest of life' intentions to stay. It should be noted that

younger respondents more often have parents living in the area (up to 69% of the 31–40 years old), and older respondents much less (27% of the 61–64 years old). Many of these older respondents' parents may have deceased, while others may be living but outside of the area. Slightly fewer than half of the respondents have siblings, in-laws or other relatives living in the area. Respondents with 'not rest of life' intentions to stay less often report having family living in the area.

'Family as a motive' was measured via two statements on how important 'to be close to family members' and 'family responsibilities' were in the decision to live in the area. The answer scale ranged from 1 ('not important at all') to 10 ('very important'), which was dichotomised into two categories: one with scores of 1–6 being defined as less important, and the other with scores of 7–10 being defined as (very) important. The results show that being close to family members was a more important motive than family responsibilities, and that 'rest of life' stayers felt this more strongly.

'Residential history and duration of stay in the area' is based on the respondents' residential history. This was constructed using the information respondents provided concerning up to eight residential moves within the course of their lifetime from birth, including the residency dates, place name, region, and type of settlement. We include three categories of past staying: lifetime stayers (people who had never left the case study area), returnees (those who have spent most of their formative years (0–18 years old) in the area, moved away, and subsequently returned to the area), and incomers (those who had never lived in the case study area before moving there). We combined these categories with duration of stay in the area, in order to acknowledge that some returnees or incomers may have moved to the area a relatively long time ago. This resulted in five categories: life-time stayers (55%), returnee >10 years (9%), returnee ≤10 years (5%), incomers >10 years (20%), and incomers ≤10 years (11%). It is striking that of those with 'not rest of life' intentions to stay, 41% are life-time stayer. It is also interesting to note that incomers form a relatively large share of our respondents, and that two-thirds have already lived in the area for over 10 years. However, compared to returnees, incomers more often have 'not rest of life' intentions to stay.

With regards to socio-demographic characteristics, almost half of all respondents (47%) reported living in a household with children (including adult children), and a further 29% reported living with their partner, but without children. Those with 'not rest of life' intentions to stay more often report living alone (17%) and less often report living with both a partner and children (29%). A larger proportion of survey respondents were female (58%), and aged 51–60 (39%). This is similar for both those with shorter and life-time intentions to stay. A relatively large share of our respondents report having a higher education qualification (40%), particularly those with 'not rest of life' intentions to stay (50%). Not included, but relevant to note, is that 5% of our respondents (or others in the household) farm full-time, 10% on a part-time or hobby basis, and 85% do not farm. In term of housing tenure, 86% of respondents are owner-occupiers.

Table 2 presents the binary logistic regression models, with intentions to stay for the rest of life as the dependent variable.

<sup>2</sup>This study received full ethical approval from each of the institutions involved in this project.



**TABLE 1** Descriptives of the variables used in the analyses.

		Intentions to stay	
	Total % (n)	Not rest of	Rest of
	100 (1233)	life %	life %
		15 (177)	85 (1046)
Non-resident kin			
Parents living in the area	53 (650)	44	56
Children living in the area	53 (645)	39	55
Siblings living in the area	45 (554)	32	48
In-laws living in the area	47 (574)	32	49
Other relatives living in the area	42 (520)	30	45
Family related motives to live in the area			
To be close to family members (very) important	66 (808)	54	68
Family responsibilities (very) important	44 (532)	30	48
Residential history and duration of stay in area			
Lifetime stayer	55 (670)	41	57
Returnee >10 years	9 (114)	6	10
Returnee ≤10 years	5 (61)	6	5
Incomer >10 years	20 (241)	27	18
Incomer ≤10 years	11 (137)	20	10
Family living in household			
Living alone	10 (126)	17	9
With partner and children	47 (569)	39	48
With partner, without children	29 (349)	29	28
Without partner, with children	5 (62)	8	5
Other	10 (117)	7	10
Age category (years)			
31–40	23 (280)	27	22
41–50	26 (316)	23	27
51–60	39 (480)	39	39
61–64	12 (147)	11	12
Gender			
Male	42 (516)	44	42
Female	58 (707)	57	58
Education			
Low education (none/school level)	38 (459)	31	38
Middle education	22 (273)	19	23
Higher education	40 (491)	50	39

Models were tested for multicollinearity (VIFs < 2). Model 1 shows that having children and in-laws living in the area is significantly associated with reporting intentions to stay long-term. Having siblings and 'others' (such as uncles, aunts, and cousins) living in the area also significantly increase the odds of reporting long-term future staying intentions. Interestingly, having parents nearby does not predict long-term intentions to stay, even though family responsibilities as motive to reside in the area is highlighted as a significant predictor in model 2. However, it should be noted this may be an effect of the responses of older participants, who less often reported having parents currently living in the area. Moreover, while proximity to family members is noted by most respondents as being an important motive for deciding to live in the area, it does not significantly predict future staying. In model 2, 'other' family is no longer significant. By adding 'residential history combined with duration of the stay in the area' to the model (3), it becomes clear that being either a lifetime stayer or a returnee who has already lived in the area for over 10 years significantly contributes to future staying intentions. The influence of siblings is no longer significant. Furthermore, family responsibilities as a motive is no longer significantly associated with intentions to stay long-term.

The socio-demographic predictors do not alter the influence on staying intentions of non-resident family, family as a motive, or residential history (model 4). Interestingly, living in a household without a partner and with children decreases intentions to stay long-term. A potential explanation may be that respondents stay because of emotional and instrumental support from parents (in-law) in childcare (Hünteler & Mulder, 2020), or that in and after divorce situations, they decide to reside close to the ex-partner for childcare reasons (Van der Wiel et al., 2021). Such respondents seem to be motivated to keep open the option to leave within 10 years' time. Also, having a higher-level qualification decreases the intentions to stay long-term. Age and gender are not significant predictors in intentions to stay long-term.

## 4.2 | Meanings of non-resident family ties in rural staying

As presented in Table 1, between 40% and 52% of our respondents report to have some non-resident kin living in the area. However, in Section 4.1 it was shown that not all types of family significantly influenced future staying intentions. Confirming this, the follow-up in-depth interviews revealed that family networks are extensively embedded within staying (re-)negotiations and long-term (past and future) staying processes, with some specific family relations being identified as being particularly influential, for a variety of reasons. Following analysis of the interviewee narratives, the majority of whom had actively chosen to live and stay in the area, and expressed intentions to stay for the foreseeable, five overarching themes were identified. In line with our literature review in Section 2, social interactions (4.2.1), structural opportunities (4.2.2), senses of

**TABLE 2** Binary logistic regression models predicting the effects of non-resident family, family as a motive, and residential history on intentions to stay for the rest of one's life (odds ratios).

Intentions to stay (1)/not stay (0) rest of life								
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	SE	Exp (B)	SE	Exp (B)	SE	Exp (B)	SE	Exp (B)
Family ties outside the household								
– Parents (yes = 1)	0.179	1.171	0.187	1.051	0.204	0.884	0.219	0.913
– Children (yes = 1)	0.169	1.782**	0.169	1.772**	0.171	1.725**	0.184	1.676**
– Siblings (yes = 1)	0.184	1.526*	0.185	1.492*	0.195	1.289	0.199	1.296
– In-laws (yes = 1)	0.175	1.824**	0.176	1.767**	0.178	1.829**	0.188	1.696**
– Others (yes = 1)	0.190	1.465*	0.194	1.363	0.198	1.293	0.203	1.284
Family as motive to reside in area								
– To be close to family members (1 = [very] important)			0.204	1.101	0.207	1.063	0.209	1.139
– Family responsibilities (1 = [very] important)			0.205	1.515*	0.208	1.429	0.211	1.409
Residential history								
– Lifetime stayer					0.263	2.247**	0.278	2.173**
– Returnee >10 years					0.396	2.638*	0.412	2.844*
– Returnee ≤10 years					0.420	1.432	0.426	1.621
– Incomer >10 years					0.260	1.425	0.273	1.330
– Incomer ≤10 years (reference)					–	–	–	–
Socio-demographics								
Family living in household								
– Living alone (yes = 1)							0.399	0.541
– With partner and children (yes = 1)							0.354	1.167
– With partner without children (yes = 1)							0.369	0.916
– Without partner with children (yes = 1)							0.459	0.367*
– Other (reference)							–	–
Age category (years)								
– 31–40 (reference)							–	–
– 41–50							0.249	1.499
– 51–60							0.254	1.364
– 61–64							0.364	1.523
Gender (female = 1)							0.179	1.139
Education								
– Low (reference)							–	–
– Middle (yes = 1)							0.252	1.197
– High (yes = 1)							0.205	0.665*
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.069		0.079		0.095		0.126	
N	1223		1223		1223		1223	

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

belonging (4.2.3) and family obligations (4.2.5) emerged as relevant topics. Additionally, senses of security (4.2.4) arose as a new theme.

#### 4.2.1 | Non-resident family ties and social interactions

Several interviewees discussed experiences of family solidarity, and the different types of support provided by non-resident kin. This family solidarity and provision of support, typically between adult children and their (in-law) parents, was suggested to have subsequently influenced both their initial decision and future intentions to stay in the area. Importantly, given that familial support was often reciprocal, there were no suggestions that the provision of such support was perceived to be a burden, or considered a family responsibility that had constrained them from moving away. Instead, social interactions had strengthened family relationships, reinforced feelings of belonging, and consequently resulted in the decision to stay long-term. This effect of family support on staying was particularly important in cases where family had been a primary motive for moving or returning to the area.

Examples of instrumental support—assistance provided to meet tangible needs (Schultz et al., 2022)—included grandparents. An example was Astrid, who, like several others in the sample, provided childcare for her grandchildren, enabling her adult children to have greater employment flexibility. Equally, and as highlighted by Mark who moved to the area where his wife originated, there were indications that adult children provided practical caring duties and support for their parents (in-law) as they aged, experienced failing health, and became increasingly immobile:

*"We also see them [grandchildren] more often nowa-days...I pick them up here from time to time, pick them up from kindergarten or something, and then they play here...also sleeps here sometimes on the weekend...Yes, one has so many grandma duties already which is nice"* – Astrid, 51-60, Germany, Incomer less than 10 years ago

*"Kelly took on a primary carer role when her mum was diagnosed with a terminal illness...it really ramped up towards the end. Kelly or her sister would have been there, you know, every day...towards the end, when she required care, one of them was ever present in the house, including sleeping over...being there for her mum was important to her...it would have been more difficult to manage if we weren't just a few minutes' drive away".*  
– Mark, 41-50, Northern Ireland, Incomer less than 10 years ago

Many of our findings also emphasised the importance of adopting a relational-biographical approach to residential mobility

practices, acknowledging that many of these decisions occur beyond the individual (Bailey et al., 2021). Asides from practical care, the interviews revealed how, in the initial staying decision, adult children had been influenced by the emotional support and advice provided by parents living nearby. Their appreciation of this support was particularly evident as they recalled their transition and navigation through different life course stages (e.g., union and family formation) in earlier years, with this seemingly becoming less important over time. Yet in contrast, there were indications that it was non-resident ageing parents who now appreciated the emotional support provided by their adult (in-law) children, such as alleviating feelings of loneliness. This was explored by Henk, who moved to where his wife originated long ago and who intends to stay in the area longterm:

*"Well, it's nice for my mother-in-law because she's alone. So now she has someone around, doesn't she...her daughter or me – if there is something, she will call...it is not even a five-minute drive, then we are there. The good lady is also 86, so she does need a little help here and there. It's actually nice...I have a very good relationship with her."* – Henk, 51-60, the Netherlands, Incomer 20-30 years ago

Interviewees also recognised that these social interactions with their adult children helped parents adapt to certain life course transitions such as contending with 'emptying nests', and the various daily-life changes that come with retirement. This support may therefore be subconsciously influencing both ageing parents and now adult children's future staying intentions.

Most interviewees indicated that social interaction or face-to-face contact was either essential or preferable for such support to be most effective; something aided by living in closer proximity, and therefore with a consequent influence on staying intentions. Again, reiterating both the relational and biographical nature of the relationship between non-resident kin and staying, these social interactions had been considered when making the initial staying decision, even if the support was not yet required. Sophia highlighted this forward-thinking when she told us about her decision to return to the area and stay:

*"So, the main reason was we wanted to be close to my parents; we have two children. It always bothered me a bit as a child that my grandmother lived so far away...you couldn't see them regularly. And I always made up my mind: When I have children someday, things will be different. My parents will live in the same town or very close by, so that the children will always be free to go there. It would have really bothered me, if the support from my parents simply COULDN'T be there, especially also in my professional life."* – Sophia, 31-40, Germany, Returnee less than 10 years ago



Beyond this reciprocal practical and emotional support between parents and adult children, social interactions with other non-resident kin (e.g., siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins) were much more limited in frequency and intensity and were of lesser importance in the decision to stay in the case study areas. For example, Ina (40–51), who moved to the area decades ago to join her husband, noted that despite having many brothers and sisters (in-law) living locally, contact with them is *"really just a fixed schedule...a fixed routine that's always there... it's really only birthdays and holidays that are often celebrated and spent together"*. Nevertheless, although social interactions with other non-resident kin were generally limited at adult life course stages, the interviews suggested that for long-term stayers and returnees they were significantly more frequent during childhood years.

#### 4.2.2 | Non-resident family ties and structural opportunities

Supporting and building upon both the linked lives and location-specific insider advantages literature, we identified several structural opportunities that were provided by non-resident family which proved to be influential upon both staying decisions and intentions, and interestingly also staying processes (i.e., conditions which enable staying). For example, when exploring the influence of housing on staying in the area, several interviewees discussed the various roles of non-resident kin in the provision of housing opportunities. These interviewees, particularly residents in Northern Ireland, noted that, along with their siblings, they had been able to avail of local housing opportunities by building on family (mostly parents') farmland, before national level planning policy became increasingly restrictive.<sup>3</sup> As an example, Owen explored how familial land ownership enabled him, and several of his siblings, to stay:

*"The home house is still there. My brother's living in it... then I've two other brothers who've built houses on the land, as well as me, at home. We all got planning applications passed and have built...No problems at all"* – Owen, 41–50, Northern Ireland, Lifetime stayer

Interestingly, non-resident kin, including parents, siblings, in-laws, and other relatives (such as uncles and cousins) were found to assist with access to local housing opportunities through the provision of practical support such as identifying suitable local properties, and more commonly by offering to help with labouring tasks during the construction phase. This lessened the financial costs associated with self-build and renovation processes, and subsequently made access to local housing a more affordable option:

*"I rented a house here for a while. My brother has a local construction company, and he told me about a house next to it becoming available, so I rented it. Otherwise, I would have had to register with the anti-squat company, or whatever it is called."* – Geert, 41–50, the Netherlands, Returnee 10–20 years ago

*"I had actually planned to take an apartment somewhere, but my father said: 'No...my daughter does not move into a rental apartment', and 'such nonsense' and, so anyway, we looked around here and we chose a ruin, which my brother and I then bought together... he had earned a lot of money...he was single and he saw helping me [to buy] as a way to help him invest money."* – Cornelia, 51–60, Germany, Returnee 31–40 years ago

Building upon this issue of housing accessibility and affordability, it was found that other direct and/or indirect financial support had been offered by non-resident kin, which contributed to the staying decision. For some, particularly in the German context where multi-generational households are more prevalent in our sample, this entailed family members (often parents) offering temporary accommodation whilst their adult children either saved for, or were in the process of, building their own house; whereas for others, akin to Cornelia's situation described earlier, financial loans or gifts to put towards a deposit had enabled them to purchase their house in the area. In acknowledgement of the relational nature of the relationship between linked lives and staying, these findings suggest that whilst this practical support from non-resident kin had facilitated staying, the process had also served to strengthen family bonds and relationships beyond the immediate household.

Aside from these more practical means of providing housing opportunities to stay, some interviewees indicated that having family connections to local properties could also influence staying decisions and intentions. For example, references were made to decisions to buy a particular property in the area due to a desire to preserve links with now deceased grandparents. Connections were also identified between residential properties and family genealogies, extending beyond immediate family, which created opportunities to stay. For example, Patrick referred to how connections to a *"far-out relation"* had helped him secure his current property:

*"I had an advantage. The boy that owned the house, he was a namesake, O'Neill, a cousin of my father's and he didn't want it to leave the O'Neill name....so I got first refusal, and I jumped on the bandwagon and bought it"* – Patrick, 51–60, Northern Ireland, Lifetime stayer

Non-resident kin were also found to influence staying behaviours through the provision of job opportunities, either through employment within, or sometimes succession of, an established family business, which had most often belonged to a parent. Derk, Mark and

<sup>3</sup>As Stockdale and Ferguson explained, "a strong presumption against countryside development in Northern Ireland had been replaced by a more liberal planning regime in the 1980s and 1990s, only for the planning pendulum to swing back towards stronger countryside controls since 2006" (2020: 366).

Karin highlighted that this practice is common within their rural residential locale:

*"Well, most people, what I see, come from here, or the parents live here...that's my guess. They maybe took over a painting company from a father, or the bakery or whatever."* – Derk, 51-60, the Netherlands, Incomer 10-20 years ago

*"Her [Mark's wife's] mum and dad were still in the area when we moved down...her dad and the family have a business here. So, three of her brothers are involved in that; [they] live here you know – and her sister comes down very regularly. So, the family are still very much rooted here."* – Mark, 41-50, Northern Ireland, Incomer less than 10 years ago

*"My father built a car dealership here and then we expanded again, built two more buildings, and then I joined the business – actually, I grew up in the business. I always say that I have gasoline in my blood."* – Karin, 51-60, Germany, Lifetime stayer

Comparable to housing, non-resident kin could also contribute towards obtaining local employment in the area in less obvious or direct ways. For example, Brian, a returnee, revealed that his father had offered him a warehouse space which enabled him to start up his own dream business in the area:

*"The pressure on space in Dublin is enormous. I mean to get a real space there, I'm talking €500 a month, minimum; whereas, €500 a month here would get you anything you wanted really. I mean, I'm using my dad's shed at the minute, or half of my dad's shed, it's not costing me anything other than space...It has made things a lot easier."* – Brian, 51-60, Northern Ireland, Returnee 10-20 years ago

Similarly, Sophia, introduced previously, indicated that because her parents lived in the neighbouring village, it had enabled her to accept a job in the regional town, as her parents provided the flexible childcare support she required. Occasionally, family members offered encouragement to follow in their footsteps, and those of previous generations, to stay in the area and to engage in local job sectors or industries. This was the case for Bernd (51–60), a lifetime stayer, who indicated that his father (also a lifetime stayer) had actively encouraged Bernd to join his father in the local mining industry. Moreover, given that Bernd's father was widely respected and had a good reputation in the company, he had an insider advantage and experienced no difficulty in obtaining a position, as the manager assumed that, like his father, he *"must be a good guy"*.

#### 4.2.3 | Non-resident family ties and senses of belonging

Acknowledging the biographical nature of residential (im)mobility (Cook & Cuervo, 2020), it is recognised that an individual's (and wider household's) residential mobility decision-making plays out over a significant portion of their lives, and can incorporate past, present, and future family members. Indeed, we found that nostalgic memories from childhood (which often featured non-resident family relatives) had served to contribute towards our interviewees' attachment to their residential area, and subsequent decision to stay. For example, Cornelia, who returned to live in the area over three decades ago, referred to pleasant childhood experiences of playing with cousins living close by:

*"It was not so lonely in the village. I also still find that so nice...having people with whom you do everything together...We had a lot of relatives. The children always came here [to the family home] during vacations...my cousins and so on...we were always a huge group. That was really nice."* – Cornelia, 51-60, Germany, Returnee 31-40 years ago

Social interactions established *because of* non-resident kin could also have a positive influence on community belonging, and subsequently influence staying intentions. For example, some interviewees referred to informal support offered by neighbours and the wider community during times of family hardship, tragedy, illness, or death, which served to bolster their appreciation of the local community and enhance their attachment to the area. Although this was not necessarily specific to a particular type of relation, Gary, a returnee to the area, referred to how the death of his father had reinforced and strengthened his positive feelings towards the local community, resulting in a long-term intention to stay. He told us:

*"I think it's since my dad passed...And from going to various wakes and funerals in the area, you really see that cohesiveness amongst the community. And people I wouldn't have generally spoken to a lot, or maybe mightn't even know that well, were coming up and helping you. Not only saying sorry for your loss, but being pragmatic about it...doing things to help you...And I thought, you would never see this anywhere else really."* – Gary, 51-60, Northern Ireland, Returnee 10-20 years ago

In addition to finding that the social interactions with the local community that occurred *because of* non-resident kin led to a greater sense of community belonging, we also found that the social interactions of non-resident kin with the wider community could also influence staying behaviours (including future staying intentions) in the area. These interactions, which also entailed extended family

members, were often said to be influential upon the wider family's reputation within the local community, and subsequently could influence the interviewee's sense of belonging and staying decision. This was highlighted by Diana, who explored how she had found it relatively easy to become integrated into the local community upon moving to the village at a young age, simply because of the good reputation held by her grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins in the area:

*"I think it [being content living in the village] has something to do with the fact that I was known from an early age...as a child I always went to my grandparents' house, and people knew me from her. Then I also have an aunt here, with her husband and my cousins...I think that has everything to do with it as well. They were known and liked."* – Diana, 41-50, Germany, Incomer 31-40 years ago

Akin to the connection between family genealogy and property, the historical embeddedness and endurance of families (not necessarily specific relations) within the area also contributed to interviewees' sense of belonging, and subsequently staying decisions and behaviours. Additionally, in this context, there were specific connections made between family surnames, landscapes, and even livestock. For example, both Brian and Owen emphasised these connections as they discussed the lengthy endurance of their family name in the Clogher Valley (NI); something which they intended on retaining:

*"I'm rooted here big time. The Smyths were in this area going back to some point in...well since the earliest records available...so the 1600s...there were Smyths listed as tenants even then."* – Brian, 51-60, Northern Ireland, Returnee 10-20 years ago

*"He [brother] would have been extremely interested in farming, then his wife would have been too. So, they would always have wanted to stay on the farmland and then because our parents passed away, it was never even considered selling anything at all...It was always going to stay in the family name."* – Owen, 41-50, Northern Ireland, Lifetime stayer

When the interviewees were asked if they felt at home living in their respective case study areas, non-resident kin featured frequently. For example, in describing the geographical scope of her 'home' in the case study area, Barbara (60-64) told us:

*"Where one has relatives still...yes, that belongs also with the region I would say...my godmother still lives in [district name] and nieces too...So, yes, I would say that also belongs to the area – what you count to be your*

*region...your home"* – Barbara, 61-64, Germany, Returnee more than 40 years ago

We found evidence that this emotional bond that can exist between a person and their environment (Brown & Raymond, 2007), which may influence staying behaviours, frequently extended beyond the residential address, or even the village or townland, but it did not commonly incorporate the entirety of the respective case study area. On the contrary, these self-defined geographies of home often encompassed the spaces occupied by non-resident kin, which also includes extended family members, such as the godparents and nieces discussed by Barbara.

#### 4.2.4 | Non-resident family ties and senses of security

In addition to providing a sense of belonging, we found that the presence of family living in the local area could provide a sense of security or comfort, which influenced past and future decisions to stay. Crucially, this was distinguishable from the 'security' which could be obtained from *direct* instrumental support by family members, such as keeping watch over property or livestock whilst on vacation. Interestingly, the narratives referred to a *perceived* sense of security acquired because of family living nearby. Although social interactions with non-resident kin may not have been particularly frequent (with the exception of those between parents and adult children), some interviewees reported feeling a certain sense of comfort in the knowledge that they had a local support network of extended family members which they could unquestionably rely upon in times of need. Reinforcing the relationality between non-resident kin and staying, this appreciation of having a family support network nearby not only resulted in an intention to stay, but subsequently led to an indirect strengthening of family bonds. For example, in the case of an emergency, the stayers in our sample could rely on someone calling with them at *"the drop of a hat"*. This was emphasised by Cathy, who when discussing her (in-law) brothers and sisters, told us:

*"They [relatives] live right beside me. But you know, I would say I probably only see them in passing...we don't go out of our way to catch up...But no, they're always here if you need anything. It's comforting to know that they are beside you if anything happens."* – Cathy, 51-60, Northern Ireland, Incomer 21-30 years ago

Additionally, having family living nearby could also serve to alleviate some of the common concerns often associated with living in more remote rural areas, such as vulnerability to social isolation or rural crime. Although there was an overt awareness of the potential challenges of ageing in a rural area, there was an acknowledgement that these concerns could be mitigated with the presence of family members living nearby:

*"My grandmother, who had looked after my daughter... unfortunately got a stroke. But even then, my big daughter was already a little bit older, so she could at least supervise her...they kind of supervised each other, I always say it like that...Yes, when grandma needed something, my daughter ran and got it for her...So, it was actually quite nice for them, this family life, I have to say quite honestly"* – Diana, 41-50, Germany, Lifetime stayer

#### 4.2.5 | Non-resident family ties and perceived obligations

Finally, and in support of the argument by Coulter et al. (2016), we found that family responsibilities and obligations did occasionally result in mobility restrictions or constraints. This was primarily highlighted through the entanglement, or inclusion, of non-resident kin within narratives surrounding a certain sense of duty to stay in the area. Although most interviewees indicated that there had been no, or few, expectations explicitly placed upon them by family members to stay, there were suggestions that this decision had been implicitly influenced by, and had also been largely dependent upon, family-focused situations and circumstances. This was more common for those whereby family members farmed the land or had established businesses in the local area, or else in instances whereby relatives were now ageing and there were ongoing or prospective mobility- or health-related concerns. These various responsibilities or obligations, which were often reported in relation to parents, were discussed by Dave, Ina, and Norbert, each of whom indicated that either their or their partners' involvement in and/or commitment to the family business (or farm) or care provision for family members had influenced their decision to stay in the area:

*"It did make sense to live here...because the farm is here. So, it doesn't really suit to go anywhere else to do what I am doing really, if you know what I mean....it was always intended that I would take over the farm from my dad."* – Dave, 31-40, Northern Ireland, Lifetime stayer

*"I don't know many families, other than the farming families, who really must take that into account. That makes us unique...We are not the same...If we leave here, we are able to look for something together, but as long as we have this [the farm], the question of whether we are going to do something else is not really an issue."* – Ina, 41-50, the Netherlands, Incomer 10-20 years ago

*"And my mother then came because of a dementia disease...she came here with us and is in a nursing home, so we had her here closer to us...we have then also quite often brought her here to us...so she has participated here in family life."* – Norbert, 61-64, Germany, Incomer more than 40 years ago

The degree to which these senses of duty were experienced as a responsibility also largely depended upon circumstance. For example, if there had been the sudden death of a parent or a sibling, there was a greater feeling of obligation to stay and take on certain family responsibilities, even if this was not linked to a farm or business. As Owen, a lifetime stayer, explained in relation to his family circumstances and the decision for all his siblings to stay in the area:

*"To be honest, we've all stayed very local... So, every member, we're a large family...nine of us. Although I did lose a brother back in 1993 due to a car accident. So, probably that as well...his death...it probably kept us close as a family, I think."* – Owen, 41-50, Northern Ireland, Lifetime stayer

The impact of this sense of duty upon staying behaviours was also strongly influenced by the level of affluence within the family network. For example, some of the interviewees who described being from less wealthy family backgrounds implied that they had felt obligations to stay and contribute towards building the family business, or indeed simply help it to survive, and relieve financial pressures. Interestingly, in some instances, financial pressures within families had also resulted in a decision to either temporarily leave or put plans in place to leave in the future, especially if it was recognised that the family business or farm could not viably support multiple incomes. This was highlighted by Richard and Ina, both from farming families, who explained:

*"At that stage, my mum was the only parent in the house. Two brothers still at home, but I was never going to get married and live at home on the farm. I was going to get out of the nest, and as I say, that was the plan from when I was something like 13. I was not going to be the farmer, so I was going to have to go find my own job, my own house...which I did."* – Richard, 61-64, Northern Ireland, Returnee 21-30 years ago

*"Suppose we leave the farm because one of our children takes over in x number of years, they will have a greater influence on whether we stay around than the in-laws... But if the farm cannot be continued, that is also a departure factor, so in that respect it can be both a stay factor and a departure factor"* – Ina, 41-50, the Netherlands, Incomer 10-20 years ago

## 5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we examined if and how having different types of non-family living close by related to future intentions to stay in their rural region and investigated the subjective meanings of non-resident family ties for past and ongoing rural staying behaviours. Our findings are based on a mixed methods analysis of data from a large

household survey and in-depth interviews conducted with respondents aged 31–64 years, in three rural regions across North West and Central Europe.

Our quantitative analyses of regional survey data showed that having non-resident children, in-laws, and to a lesser extent siblings living in the vicinity significantly increased the likelihood of intentions to stay for the rest of the rural resident's lifetime. Interestingly, the presence of parents living in the area did not contribute to future staying intentions, whereas their influential role in the provision of emotional and instrumental support was emphasised in our qualitative analysis of in-depth interview data. This finding was potentially related to older age groups less often reporting having parents nearby, but it is also possible that respondents included parents-in-law in the survey category 'in-laws', and as such are not measured in the category 'parents'. Our qualitative analysis showed that, for example, for incomers who joined a stayer family a long time ago and have since become long-term stayers, parents-in-law did play a positive role in their staying behaviour. It is also possible that parents (including in-laws) have an indirect influence on staying decision-making, and that this changes during the staying process, and varies in level of importance across the life course. For example, at the commencement of family formation, when the decision to move or stay was *initially* made, we found that parents had a strong influence on staying. However, reliance on parents subsequently lessened, before the life course stage when responsibilities associated with caring for ageing parents commonly arose. The quantitative analysis revealed that living in a household without a partner and with children leads only to short term (<10 years) staying intentions. It is possible that the 'safety net' of instrumental and emotional support provided by non-resident kin living nearby is most important during the period that the children are young.

Another interesting result that may relate to differences in the role of family in past and future staying behaviours was that 'to be close to family' and 'family responsibilities' were important motives for the decision to live in the area initially. But once staying became long-term, and especially as regards intentions to stay for life (as explored in the quantitative analyses), these motives were not significant. It is possible that having family around, including the support provided and various responsibilities that come with it, are taken for granted in rural areas where the sociality of close-knit community living is the norm, and hence are a part of lifetime rural staying. It may also be the case that a residential history of staying increases the likelihood of future intentions to stay (Fischer & Malmberg, 2001), just as past mobility increases the likelihood of future intentions to move (Haartsen & Stockdale, 2018).

In terms of the subjective meanings of the family ties in rural areas, emphasis is placed on a diverse range of practical, emotional, and economic support, as well as on structural opportunities associated with non-resident kin. Location-specific insider advantages in housing and employment opportunities were provided as direct support, often by a small number of family members; typically, immediate family members no longer living in the same household. Nevertheless, extended family members also played a more indirect

role in staying, typically in the form of strengthening the sense of belonging and of community, and of the reputation of family in the rural community, especially for lifetime stayers and returnees. Although our data did not allow us to decipher if our findings would have been different in urban settings, it is likely that rural settlement patterns of smaller close-knit communities make the influence of family particularly pertinent in the rural locale. While in our interviews family reputations had a positive influence, we also acknowledge that they can function in a stigmatising way, particularly in relation to issues such as rural poverty (Meij et al., 2020). We also found that direct engagement and personal contact with family might be limited in frequency, yet still be highly valued. The feeling that family members are unconditionally 'there when you need them' provided a sense of security and assurance, often in an indirect way and with minimal social obligations.

We have focused on non-resident family in rural staying in general. It may be worthwhile to explore socio-cultural cross-country differences in greater detail in future research, in addition to exploring how non-resident family influences staying behaviours across the rural-urban gradient. Despite the potential data challenges, comparing past staying and past leaving, and their potential relationship with having non-resident family close by, might also provide some important insights into the role of family ties in (rural) staying.

To conclude, we found multiple and different—yet often intertwined and relational—roles of non-resident family in rural staying, that can change over time (even within a particular life course stage), and for different staying behaviours (including past staying and future intentions to stay). However, and somewhat counter to earlier research (e.g., Ní Laoire, 2001), we found limited evidence that people stay out of a sense of duty or feel obligated to stay because of responsibilities associated with non-resident kin. In other words, rural stayers are not 'stuck in place' because of family ties. However, it is important to bear in mind the possibility of cognitive dissonance reduction. Many family-related responsibilities or obligations may be taken-for-granted, and therefore not vocalised within the context of discussing staying decisions. Equally, there is the possibility that some people assume they must stay due to commitments, and therefore state that they intend to stay in the area. Nevertheless, in support of Robins (2022), our findings emphasise the importance of viewing staying as an active practice. Whilst in some instances staying cannot be easily conceived of as voluntary, neither is it a passive event. Lastly, in support of socialisation theories (Thissen et al., 2010), the findings suggest that non-resident family ties, and even historical relations, have an important symbolic role in staying, serving to legitimise rural identities and cement a sense of belonging to place. Family ties, particularly those extending beyond parents, are often intertwined with notions of rural nostalgia, a sense of security and support, and the strong intergenerational 'staying cultures' that permeate rural contexts.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Dutch Research Council (NWO), and



the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) under the umbrella of the Open Research Area for the Social Sciences (ORA): ESRC-Open Research Area (ORA) project (ESRC award reference: ES/S014683/1, NWO award reference: 464.18.109, DFG grant no.: STE 2649/3-1). Many thanks to the project participants who willingly afforded us the time to partake in the study. A special thanks must also be given to the late Prof. Aileen Stockdale for providing invaluable inspiration and support during her time on the project.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data are not publicly available due to confidentiality issues. Survey reports for the single case studies are available from the authors on request.

## ORCID

Sara Ferguson  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3304-2074>

Tialda Haartsen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3858-3419>

Annett Steinführer  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7387-9114>

Gemma Catney  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9799-6355>

## REFERENCES

- Adams, R. M., & Komu, T. (2022). Radically ordinary lives: Young rural stayers and the ingredients of the good life in Finnish lapland. *Young*, 30(4), 361–376. <https://doi.org/10.1177/11033088211064685>
- Amcoff, J., & Niedomysl, T. (2015). Is the tied returnee male or female? The trailing spouse thesis reconsidered: Is the tied returnee male or female? *Population, Space and Place*, 21(8), 872–881. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.1969>
- Bailey, A. J., Blake, M. K., & Cooke, T. J. (2004). Migration, care, and the linked lives of dual-earner households. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 36(9), 1617–1632. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a36198>
- Bailey, E., Devine-Wright, P., & Batel, S. (2021). Emplacing linked lives: A qualitative approach to understanding the co-evolution of residential mobility and place attachment formation over time. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 31(5), 515–529. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2533>
- Barcus, H., & Brunn, S. D. (2009). Towards a typology of mobility and place attachment in rural America. *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, 15, 26–48. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41446817>
- Barcus, H., & Halfacree, K. (2018). *An Introduction to Population Geographies: Lives across space*. Routledge.
- Bjarnason, T. (2014). Adolescent migration intentions and population change: A 20-year follow-up of Icelandic communities. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 54(4), 500–515. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12050>
- Brown, G., & Raymond, C. (2007). The relationship between place attachment and landscape values: Toward mapping place attachment. *Applied Geography*, 27(2), 89–111. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apgeog.2006.11.002>
- Buckle, C. (2017). Residential mobility and moving home. *Geography Compass*, 11(5), e12314. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12314>
- Chan, T. W., & Ermisch, J. (2015). Proximity of couples to parents: Influences of gender, labor market, and family. *Demography*, 52(2), 379–399. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43699123>
- Clark, W. A. V., Duque-Calvache, R., & Palomares-Linares, I. (2017). Place attachment and the decision to stay in the neighbourhood. *Population, Space and Place*, 23(2), e2001. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2001>
- Clerge, O., Sanchez-Soto, G., Song, J., & Luke, N. (2017). 'I would really like to go where you go': Rethinking migration decision-making among educated tied movers: Partners of graduate students as tied movers. *Population, Space and Place*, 23(2), e1990. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.1990>
- Cook, J., & Cuervo, H. (2020). Staying, leaving and returning: Rurality and the development of reflexivity and motility. *Current Sociology*, 68(1), 60–76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392118756473>
- Cooke, T. J. (2008). Migration in a family way. *Population, Space and Place*, 14(4), 255–265. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.500>
- Coulter, R., Ham, M., & Findlay, A. M. (2016). Re-thinking residential mobility: Linking lives through time and space. *Progress in Human Geography*, 40(3), 352–374. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132515575417>
- Elder, G., Kirkpatrick Johnson, M., & Crosnoe, R. (2003). The Emergence and Development of Life Course Theory. In J. Mortimer & M. Shanahan (Eds.), *Handbook of the Life Course* (pp. 3–19). Plenum Publishers.
- Ermisch, J., & Mulder, C. H. (2019). Migration versus immobility, and ties to parents. *European Journal of Population*, 35, 587–608. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-018-9494-0>
- Ferguson, S., & Catney, G. (2023). 'Love knows no (spatial) boundaries?': Investigating diversity in the residential location choices of rural-residing couples upon union formation. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 97, 458–466. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2022.12.015>
- Fischer, P. A., Holm, E., Malmberg, G., & Straubhaar, T. (2000). *Why do people stay? Insider advantages and immobility* (HWW Discussion Paper 112). Hamburg Institute of International Economics.
- Fischer, P. A., & Malmberg, G. (2001). Settled people don't move: On life course and (im)mobility in Sweden. *International Journal of Population Geography*, 7, 357–371. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijpg.230>
- Gillespie, B. J., & Mulder, C. H. (2020). Non-resident family as a motive for migration. *Demographic Research*, 42(13), 399–410. <https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2020.42.13>
- Gkartzios, M., & Scott, M. (2010). Residential mobilities and house building in rural Ireland: Evidence from three case studies. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 50, 64–84. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9523.2009.00502.x>
- Guvelli, A., Ganzeboom, H., Platt, L., Nauck, B., Baykara-Krumme, H., Eroglu, S., Bayrakdar, S., Sözeri, E., & Spierings, N. (2016). *Intergenerational consequences of migration: Socio-economic, Family and Cultural Patterns of Stability and Change in Turkey and Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan London.
- Haartsen, T., & Stockdale, A. (2018). S/elective belonging and the perceived freedom to move: how rural newcomers families with children become stayers. *Population, Space and Place*, 24, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2137>
- Haartsen, T., & Thissen, F. (2014). The success-failure dichotomy revisited: Young adults' motives to return to their rural home region. *Children's Geographies*, 12, 87–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2013.850848>
- Halfacree, K. H., & Boyle, P. J. (1993). The challenge facing migration research: The case for a biographical approach. *Progress in Human Geography*, 17, 333–348. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030913259301700303>
- Hank, K. (2007). Proximity and contacts between older parents and their children: A European comparison. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69(1), 157–173. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2006.00351.x>
- Hofstede, H., Saleminck, K., & Haartsen, T. (2022a). The appreciation of rural areas and their contribution to young adults' staying expectations. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 95, 148–159. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2022.07.018>

- Hofstede, H., Saleminck, K., & Haartsen, T. (2022b). Beyond the (im) mobility and social-environmental dichotomy: Young adults' motives to reside in rural northwest Europe. *Population Space and Place*, 29(4), e32. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2632>
- Holdsworth, C. (2013). *Families and Intimate Mobilities*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hünteler, B., & Mulder, C. H. (2020). Geographic proximity to parents, intergenerational support exchange, and migration within Germany. *European Journal of Population*, 36(5), 895–918. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-020-09558-w>
- Husa, A., & Morse, C. E. (2022). Rurality as a key factor for place attachment in the great plains. *Geographical Review*, 112, 27–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00167428.2020.1786384>
- Kan, K. (2007). Residential mobility and social capital. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 61(3), 436–457. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2006.07.005>
- Kirkpatrick Johnson, M., Elder, G. H., & Stern, M. (2005). Attachments to family and community and the young adult transition of rural youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 15(1), 99–125. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2005.00088.x>
- Komter, A. E., & Vollebergh, W. A. M. (2002). Solidarity in Dutch families: Family ties under strain? *Journal of Family Issues*, 23(2), 171–188. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X02023002001>
- Kuhmonen, T., Kuhmonen, I., & Luoto, L. (2016). How do rural areas profile in the futures dreams by the Finnish youth? *Journal of Rural Studies*, 44, 89–100. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2016.01.010>
- Lengerer, F., Steinführer, A., & Haartsen, T. (2022). To participate, or not to participate – That is the question. (Non-)participation of older residents in rural communities. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 91, 47–57. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2022.02.008>
- Mason, J. (2004). Personal narratives, relational selves: Residential histories in the living and telling. *The Sociological Review*, 52, 162–179. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2004.00463.x>
- Matysiak, I. (2022). Stayers or leavers? Spatial (im)mobility patterns of young university graduates living in rural areas in Poland. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 62(1), 131–148. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12360>
- Meij, E., Haartsen, T., & Meijering, L. (2020). Enduring rural poverty: Stigma, class practices and social networks in a town in the Groninger Veenkoloniën. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 79, 226–234. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.08.031>
- Morse, C. E., & Mudgett, J. (2018). Happy to be home: Place-based attachments, family ties, and mobility among rural stayers. *The Professional Geographer*, 70(2), 261–269. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2017.1365309>
- Mulder, C. H. (2018). Putting family centre stage: Ties to non-resident family, internal migration, and immobility. *Demographic research*, 39, 1151–1180. <https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2018.39.43>
- Mulder, C. H., & Malmberg, G. (2014). Local ties and family migration. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 46(9), 2195–2211. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a130160p>
- Mærsk, E., Sørensen, J. F. L., Thuesen, A. A., & Haartsen, T. (2021). Staying for the benefits: Location-specific insider advantages for geographically immobile students in higher education. *Population Space and Place*, 27(4), e2442. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2442>
- Ní Laoire, C. N. (2001). A matter of life and death: Men, masculinities and staying 'behind' in rural Ireland. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 41(2), 220–236. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9523.00179>
- Ní Laoire, C. N. (2005). 'You're not a man at all!': Masculinity, responsibility, and staying on the land in contemporary Ireland. *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 14(2), 94–114. <https://doi.org/10.1177/079160350501400206>
- Ní Laoire, C. (2007). The 'green green grass of home'? Return migration to rural Ireland. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 23(3), 332–344. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2007.01.005>
- Pettersson, A., & Malmberg, G. (2009). Adult children and elderly parents as mobility attractions in Sweden. *Population, Space and Place*, 15(4), 343–357. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.558>
- Rérat, P. (2014). The selective migration of young graduates: Which of them return to their rural home region and which do not? *Journal of Rural Studies*, 35, 123–132. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2014.04.009>
- Robins, D. (2022). Re-imagining belonging to Brazil: Active immobility in times of crisis. *Population, Space and Place*, 28(6), e2558. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2558>
- Rye, J. F. (2011). Youth migration, rurality and class: A Bourdieusian approach. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 18, 170–183. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776410390747>
- Schultz, B. E., Corbett, C. F., & Hughes, R. G. (2022). Instrumental support: A conceptual analysis. *Nursing Forum*, 57(4), 665–670. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nuf.12704>
- Scott, M., Murphy, E., & Gkartzios, M. (2017). Placing 'Home' and 'Family' in rural residential mobilities. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 57(S1), 598–621. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12165>
- Sheller, M., & Urry, J. (2006). The new mobilities paradigm. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 38, 207–226. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a37268>
- Stockdale, A. (2006). The role of a 'retirement transition' in the repopulation of rural areas. *Population, Space and Place*, 12(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.380>
- Stockdale, A. (2017). From 'trailing wives' to the emergence of a 'trailing husbands' phenomenon: Retirement migration to rural areas. *Population, Space and Place*, 23(3), e2022. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2022>
- Stockdale, A., & Ferguson, S. (2020). Planning to stay in the countryside: The insider-advantages of young adults from farm families. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 78, 364–371. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.06.029>
- Stockdale, A., & Haartsen, T. (2018). Editorial introduction: Putting rural stayers in the spotlight. *Population, Space and Place*, 24, e2124. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2124>
- Stockdale, A., Theunissen, N., & Haartsen, T. (2018). Staying in a state of flux: A life course perspective on the diverse staying processes of rural young adults. *Population, Space and Place*, 24, e2139. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2139>
- Thissen, F., Fortuijn, J. D., Strijker, D., & Haartsen, T. (2010). Migration intentions of rural youth in the Westhoek, Flanders, Belgium and the Veenkoloniën, The Netherlands. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 26(4), 428–436. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2010.05.001>
- Thomas, M., Gillespie, B., & Lomax, N. (2019). Variations in migration motives over distance. *Demographic Research*, 40(38), 1097–1110. <https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2019.40.38>
- Thomas, M., Stillwell, J., & Gould, M. (2016). Modelling Mover/Stayer characteristics across the life course using a large commercial sample. *Population, Space and Place*, 22, 584–598. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.1943>
- Thomas, M. J. (2019). Employment, education, and family: Revealing the motives behind internal migration in Great Britain. *Population, Space and Place*, 25(4), e2233. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2233>
- Thomas, M. J., & Dommermuth, L. (2020). Internal migration and the role of intergenerational family ties and life events. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82(5), 1461–1478. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12678>
- Tucker, C. J., Sharp, E. H., Stracuzzi, N. F., Van Gundy, K. T., & Rebellon, C. (2013). Rural parents' messages to their adolescent sons and daughters to leave their home communities. *Journal of Adolescence*, 36(5), 963–970. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadolescence.2013.07.013>
- Urry, J. (2007). *Mobilities*. Polity Press.

- Westin, K. (2016). Place attachment and mobility in city regions. *Population, Space and Place*, 22(8), 722–735. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.1949>
- Van der Wiel, R., Kooiman, N., & Mulder, C. H. (2021). Family complexity and parents' migration: The role of repartnering and distance to non-resident children. *European Journal of Population*, 37, 877–907. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-021-09594-0>

**How to cite this article:** Ferguson, S., Haartsen, T., Steinführer, A., & Catney, G. (2023). The role of non-resident family ties in rural staying. *Population, Space and Place*, e2708. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2708>