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Patterns of supported home purchase in the United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

Housing markets are an important arena for the intergenerational transmission of (dis)advantage in advanced economies. In recent years, academics and policymakers have argued that homeownership is becoming a 'family affair' as home buyers become increasingly reliant on receiving financial and in-kind support from their relatives. This article develops our understanding of supported home purchases in Britain by examining the distribution and residential implications of receiving assistance to buy a home. The results show that support for home purchase is more widespread, varied and multichannelled than is often assumed. Receipt of support is also socially patterned as younger and more economically marginal buyers, as well as those in the tight London housing market, are disproportionately likely to purchase homes with assistance. Finally, although support generally has weak associations with the characteristics of housing purchases, drawing on an inheritance boosts the probability that those entering homeownership buy homes in more advantaged neighbourhoods. Receiving support also reduces the likelihood of heavier mortgage borrowing among moving owner-occupiers.

KEYWORDS: Homeownership; mortgages; residential mobility; social mobility; United Kingdom; Understanding Society

Introduction

The distribution of homeownership and housing wealth has a major impact on patterns of economic inequality across the Global North, including within the United Kingdom (UK). Here, successive Westminster governments have long stoked demand for owner-occupation through policies that range from providing financial support to first-time buyers (for example the Help to Buy package of measures introduced in 2013) through to favourable fiscal treatment of homeownership, discounted sales of public housing stock and the deregulation of rental alternatives (Christophers,

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2021). These interventions have been justified, in part, by arguments that widening access to homeownership spreads wealth and fosters social mobility (Saunders, 1990).

Yet since the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), it has become increasingly clear that homeownership is not having these equalising effects (Ronald & Arundel, 2023). For most of the post-2008 period, house price inflation and low interest rates benefitted established owner-occupiers in high demand areas, who were able to accumulate large equity stocks (Meen, 2013). Meanwhile, mounting problems of housing access and affordability—especially in jobs- and amenity-rich cities—combined with weak wage growth, austerity cuts to social security, more restrictive mortgage lending and the restructuring of labour markets all made home purchases increasingly difficult for other households, in particular younger ‘outsiders’ and those with lower and less stable incomes (Coulter, 2023). In response, many households have turned to their family networks for support to purchase homes and to manage housing-related expenditures. As not all families can provide such assistance, this ‘re-familialisation’ of housing opportunities threatens to undermine policymakers’ espoused commitment to social mobility as intergenerational transmissions of property wealth and residential disadvantage intensify (Blanden et al., 2023; Forrest & Hirayama, 2018; Gregg & Kanabar, 2023).

Although a growing literature examines intergenerational correlations in housing attainments and the dynamics of family solidarity across Global North housing systems (Lersch & Luijkx, 2015; Mulder et al., 2015), rather less is known about the distribution of the different types of support people receive for home purchases or the extent to which supported purchases differ from those made without support (Moos, 2017). Part of the difficulty is that support can be provided in lots of ways, from co-residence to accelerate savings through to gifts and loans, support with mortgage borrowing and inheritances (Cook, 2021). Such a wide variety of often informal private practices are rarely all captured in data and so much of our knowledge comes from small qualitative studies or bespoke but not necessarily representative surveys (Druta & Ronald, 2017; Scanlon et al., 2019). While the government’s English Housing Survey does ask people whether they received support to buy their home, its cross-sectional design does not record their characteristics around the time that the purchase actually occurred. This is analytically limiting as the prevalence and consequences of support most likely vary with life course circumstances as well as potentially over space and time.

This article aims to deepen our understanding of supported home purchases in post-GFC Britain by harnessing new nationally representative data to answer two research questions: (1) *who receives what types of support to buy a home* and (2) *to what extent do supported and unsupported homebuyers make different sorts of housing purchases?* The study extends previous research in two ways. First, the article moves beyond the literature’s prevailing focus on young adults and first-time buyers to examine

all types of home purchase and a wide range of support practices across the entire life span. This more holistic perspective is useful as the prevalence, usage and types of assistance probably all vary with age and current tenure. Second, the analysis disaggregates owner-occupation by considering several important locational and financial characteristics of housing purchases. Such disaggregation is important as these attributes impact significantly on homeowners' living conditions and prospects for wealth accumulation. Although the analysis focuses on Britain, the UK case is more widely instructive as the same trends that have driven enhanced flows of housing support and the reconfiguration of family relations around property wealth in Britain (*inter alia* mounting housing affordability problems, weak income growth, policy support for homeownership, favourable tax treatment of family transfers and reduced public welfare provision) have also been felt across many advanced economies through the post-GFC period (Ronald & Arundel, 2023).

The rest of the article is structured as follows. The next section sketches the conceptual and contextual background, reviews existing evidence and derives four hypotheses. The subsequent section then describes the survey data and research methods. The next section then presents and interprets the results before a final section concludes.

Supported home purchases in Britain

Contextual drivers

There is strong evidence that intergenerational transmissions of opportunity, wealth and living standards occur in the UK housing system, as children from advantaged families are particularly likely to enter homeownership and accumulate housing assets (Blanden et al., 2023; Boileau & Sturrock, 2023; Gregg & Kanabar, 2023). In one sense *plus ça change*: even during the post-war decades, when homeownership rates rose across the social spectrum, studies demonstrated that the children of homeowners were considerably more likely to become owner-occupiers than the children of tenants (Jenkins & Maynard, 1983). Nor is this a UK-specific phenomenon as associations between parent and child homeownership have long been documented across the Global North and found to be stronger in contexts where housing affordability constraints are more acute (Mulder et al., 2015).

While intergenerational correlations in homeownership are partially caused by parental socialisation and the transmission of education, financial know-how and occupational attainments (Flynn & Kostecky, 2023; Lersch & Luijkx, 2015), three conditions mean that intensified flows of direct family support for home purchases have become more relevant in twenty first century Britain. First, as Saunders (1990) noted, surveys consistently show that *homeownership is highly desirable* to the British public.

There are many reasons for this including the tenure's actual and perceived economic advantages as well as socialised preferences, cultural steering, policy support and the paucity of secure rental alternatives. Second, the *barriers to home purchase have generally risen* since the GFC, in particular for younger prospective first-time buyers (Meen, 2013). While postponed demand due to higher education and delayed family formation has contributed to falling rates of young adult owner-occupation, weak income growth coupled with job insecurity and public austerity have simultaneously made it harder for many would-be buyers to satisfy mortgage lenders' salary and downpayment requirements (Coulter, 2023). Meanwhile, house price growth and more cautious lending have, until lately, tended to make these requirements more onerous, especially before the UK government stepped in during 2013 to support buyers with Help to Buy mortgage guarantees and equity loans (Scanlon et al., 2019).

Finally, *intergenerational support is increasingly available* and small family sizes mean that any such flows of support are rarely significantly diluted amongst siblings. In collective terms, the Baby Boom generation have amassed unprecedented wealth which can be transferred to younger family members or passed on as inheritances (Boileau & Sturrock, 2023; Hood & Joyce, 2017). A relatively favourable inheritance tax regime including annual gifting exemptions ensures little-to-no taxation of many such flows, although research does suggest that wealthier families in Britain and elsewhere give gifts in later life in order to off-load wealth and thus minimise (1) their estate's liability for inheritance tax as well as (2) the means-tested costs of paying for their own residential care (Scanlon et al., 2019; Suari-Andreu et al., 2024). In addition to these material logics, qualitative studies suggest that parental support has become more normatively accepted as today's parents view assisting their adult children's home purchases as a positive way to promote their independence in constrained times (Cook, 2020, 2021; Druta & Ronald, 2017). Of course, many families do not have the resources to do this, and so housing opportunities are becoming increasingly stratified by parental background (Forrest & Hirayama, 2018; Ronald & Arundel, 2023). Indeed, recent evidence suggests that the popular discourse of a homogenous 'Generation Rent' rides roughshod over the reality of deepening class stratification in housing, as declining rates of young adult homeownership are most pronounced amongst children from less advantaged families (Blanden et al., 2023; Boileau & Sturrock, 2023; Gregg & Kanabar, 2023).

Types of support

Although there are limited official data on supported home purchases, Cook (2021) lists four channels through which such assistance flows between family members, usually 'down' the generations. The first is the giving of financial *gifts or loans*, most commonly to ease downpayment constraints, but also to offset transaction costs such as solicitor fees. Recent

research shows that in Britain large intergenerational gifts are most commonly made to support home purchases (Boileau & Sturrock, 2023), while receiving such gifts has been found to significantly boost the probability of entering homeownership in the UK (Suh, 2020), the Netherlands (Helderman & Mulder, 2007) the US (Lee et al., 2020) and Australia (Ong ViforJ et al., 2023). These results chime with qualitative evidence that families view supporting homeownership as a way to keep wealth in the family while boosting the autonomy of younger generations (Cook, 2021; Druta & Ronald, 2017).

The scale of these transfers is uncertain but probably extensive. One survey by the firm Legal and General estimated that in 2016 the 'Bank of Mum and Dad' provided £6.5 billion to support around 300,000 home purchases with an average of £22,000 per transaction (Scanlon et al., 2019). Recent figures from the English Housing Survey and other sources indicate that around a quarter to a third of first-time buyers were helped in this fashion, while around another tenth drew on inherited funds (Rowlingson et al., 2023; Scanlon et al., 2019). Although first-time buyers are probably the main recipients of familial gifts and loans, a 2017 report for the Social Mobility Commission found that 12% of UK homeowners also received gift or family loan support when buying a new home (Scanlon et al., 2019). Crucially, studies of the distribution of gifting conducted in different countries agree that this is highly uneven, as socio-economically advantaged homeowners with housing equity are disproportionately likely to provide gifts (Boileau & Sturrock, 2023; Mulder & Smits, 2013).

A second way to support home purchases is by *assisting with mortgage applications*. While this can be done simply through providing advice, many lenders now offer products where non-resident family members can formally act as joint applicants, repayment guarantors or can assign their savings and/or housing equity as security to reduce their loved one's downpayment. In some countries such arrangements are widespread: in 2018 almost 30% of 20–34-year-old homeowners in Norway listed a parent as a mortgage guarantor (Sandlie & Gulbrandsen, 2021, p. 103). However in Britain these practices are less common, with only 10% of one specialist lender's customers reporting in 2018 that they had used a family support mortgage product (Scanlon et al., 2019, p. 8). That study's authors note that this 'probably reflects the relatively recent introduction of these types of mortgage' (2019, p. 7).

A third potential form of support is *bequests and inheritance*. Although these were the focus of much research in the late-twentieth century, the housing implications of inheritance are less studied today given the policy emphasis on assisting first-time buyers and because greater longevity means that most adults inherit some years after having already entered owner-occupation (Hood & Joyce, 2017). However, inheritance still shapes housing market dynamics as the proportion of households who inherit is rising and the amounts inherited are growing (Hood & Joyce, 2017). Indeed, recent surveys estimate that around 10% of British first-time buyers and

5% of moving homeowners had drawn on inherited monies (Scanlon et al., 2019). US research, meanwhile, shows that receiving an inheritance increases the probability of homeownership in early adulthood, while expecting to receive an inheritance sometime in the future boosts millennial homeowners' housing wealth (Flynn & Kostecky, 2023).

A final support practice is *providing in-kind assistance*. While for a lucky few this may involve living rent-free or at below-market rates in a family-owned dwelling, co-residence with family members (usually parents) is a more common experience. Considerable research shows that extended parental co-residence has become more commonplace among young adults in many Global North countries over recent decades (Coulter, 2023). While this trend is partly a way to cope with labour market precarity and increased problems of housing access, for middle-class families co-residence can also function strategically as a housing 'springboard', as living longer in parental homes speeds up the accumulation of deposit savings. Clapham et al. (2014) label this strategy 'stay home to own' and estimated that it has become more prevalent in Britain since the 1990s. Longitudinal analyses bear this out as living with parents into early adulthood has a positive impact on the probability of entering homeownership in Britain and Australia (Bayrakdar et al., 2019; Suh, 2020), especially in tighter housing markets (Ong ViforJ et al., 2023). However, the ways this strategy conflicts with normative expectations around home-leaving means that co-residence is probably most commonly used by young prospective buyers.

Hypotheses

As there is little representative UK evidence about the distribution of these support practices, this study follows Moos (2017) by first examining the characteristics of supported homebuyers and the extent to which these differ from their unsupported peers. This analysis harnesses the rich potential of a new survey dataset to answer the first research question by exploring the overall distribution of support and whether differential receipt of assistance entrenches inequalities.

Existing literature suggests two hypotheses. The first concerns the biographical timing of home purchases. US and French studies have shown that receiving gifts accelerates homeownership entry—especially during downturns and in constrained market conditions—primarily by lowering downpayment barriers (Begley, 2019; Lee et al., 2020; Mayer & Engelhardt, 1996; Spilerman & Wolff, 2012). Similar findings have been reported for parental co-residence and wealth gifting in Australia and for the immediate post-GFC period in the UK (Ong ViforJ et al., 2023; Suh, 2020). However, the focus of this literature has largely been on younger adults' transitions into owner-occupation and so little is known about how support receipt may also relate to the timing of home purchases among older adults and established homeowners. These considerations together inform the *acceleration hypothesis (H1)* that supported home purchasers are, on average,

younger than those buying without support. H1 is anticipated to hold primarily among those moving into homeownership as support provision is likely to be focused more on propelling younger people quickly into owner-occupation than on enabling subsequent moves within the tenure. Moreover, established owners may also be prone to devote inheritances to varied ends (either non-housing goals or possibly renovation work and/or paying down mortgages), while renters and those in the parental home concentrate on using bequests to enter homeownership as swiftly as possible (Flynn & Kostecki, 2023).

The second *assisting the advantaged hypothesis* (H2) states that apart from age, there are no major differences in the demographic and socio-economic attributes of supported and unsupported purchasers. This is because aside from those receiving the very largest gifts and inheritances (for example directly inheriting a dwelling), most new homeowners and many existing owners will still need to access mortgage finance and thus will still need to satisfy lenders' eligibility checks. This selectivity should ensure that both groups are advantaged relative to the general population (Moos, 2017). However, two potential nuances to H2 are worth noting. First, Mayer and Engelhardt (1996) suggest that support may reward 'merit' and thus disproportionately flow to households that have attained normatively valued and costly life milestones, in particular gaining higher qualifications or having children. Second, both Luea (2008) and Mayer and Engelhardt (1996) argue that familial support could flow disproportionately to more marginal (and younger) homebuyers who would be otherwise unable to afford to purchase homes. Although these studies reported mixed evidence of this in the US, if it is true in Britain then we would expect to see that supported purchasers have lower incomes and a less advantaged occupational position than their unsupported counterparts. Again, this pattern is likely to be most noticeable among new entrants to homeownership.

The article's second question asked whether supported homebuyers make qualitatively different sorts of dwelling purchases—in terms of their locational and financial characteristics—to those homebuyers who do not receive support. Here, the *reaching hypothesis* (H3) states that supported homebuyers tend to buy more advantageously located and more costly homes than their unsupported peers. This hypothesis stems from overseas evidence that support is associated with buying larger, higher priced homes (Mayer & Engelhardt, 1996; Spilerman & Wolff, 2012) in more affluent, centrally located urban neighbourhoods (van Gent et al., 2023). This could be because receiving support enables larger downpayments and greater borrowing than would otherwise be possible. van Gent et al. (2023) speculate that family members might also have sufficient 'skin in the game' to steer gift-funded purchases towards homes that are seen as good familial financial prospects.

However, a *de-risking hypothesis* (H4) states that receiving support is associated with reduced mortgage borrowing, evidenced in lower loan-to-value (LTV) ratios (Spilerman & Wolff, 2012). This hypothesis is

underpinned by prospect theory's argument that people tend to be risk averse as they are more psychologically sensitive to potential losses than equivalent gains (Morrison & Clark, 2016). Evidence of de-risking would suggest that households prioritise dwelling gains less highly than reducing their exposure to shocks and bringing down their regular mortgage payments. It is important to note that while H4 runs somewhat counter to H3, these are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and each may be used by different families with differing risk appetites. We might also expect H4 to hold primarily for established owners as in Britain a strong desire to enter homeownership as quickly as possible may trump any latent de-risking preference among new entrants.

Data and methods

The data used in this study were gathered in the first 12 waves of the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS or Understanding Society) (University of Essex & Institute for Social & Economic Research, 2022). Understanding Society began in 2009 when a nationally representative sample of over 50,000 adults in around 30,000 households completed wide-ranging interviews. Sample members are contacted annually for follow-up interviews with each wave of data collection stretching over two calendar years. Members of UKHLS's predecessor, the British Household Panel Survey, were absorbed into Understanding Society in the second wave and the sample was later expanded with an additional Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Boost. Longitudinal response weights to correct for the study's complex design as well as for selective patterns of non-response and attrition are available and were applied throughout this research.

In wave 12 (2020–2021), the UKHLS household questionnaire asked a new question to all households observed to have bought their home since their last observation as well as to a subset of more established homeowners. These respondents were asked: *Which, if any, of the following types of assistance from friends or family did you get to help you finance the purchase of this property?* Respondents could select a financial gift or loan, support with getting a mortgage, inheritance, none and other, with those reporting the latter prompted for further details. For this study the small number of 'other' responses were inspected and either collapsed in with the listed forms of support or else assigned to the no support group (for example those reporting Help to Buy assistance). Although respondents could select multiple forms of support, in practice the majority reported only one channel and for some of the analyses all types of support were pooled into an aggregated dummy contrasting those receiving any form of support (coded 1) with those who received none (coded 0).

While this is the first nationally representative UK panel data on who receives support for buying a home, it is important to note that the UKHLS questionnaire imposed two limitations. First, to constrain the length of interviews, no information on the financial value of the various forms of

support was gathered. Second, the way the question on support is framed and coded means that respondents only provide data on the forms of assistance they received around the time of the purchase event and which were specifically for buying their house. This means we probably miss the lower-level transfers (for example occasional support with living expenses) that may occur over more extended periods and which may nonetheless smooth home purchase by assisting with savings accumulation (Cook, 2020).

The sample was restricted to homeowners in wave 12 who were asked the focal question on supported home purchases. All person-year records provided by these respondents were extracted and by working back through their interview records it was possible to identify when their wave 12 home was purchased. Respondents who purchased their home prior to the UKHLS survey were excluded along with respondents who reported buying without moving (usually *via* paying off a mortgage *in situ*). To identify in-kind support, a variable distinguishing (1) moving owners from those entering ownership from (2) rental housing and (3) parental homes was also defined using information about where the focal respondent lived immediately prior to their housing purchase.

After these procedures the final unweighted sample comprised 1375 purchases. Of these, 942 (69%) were made by existing owners, 292 (21%) by renters and 141 (10%) by those living in the parental home. The latter two groups are not necessarily first-time buyers (although most probably are) and for much of the analysis these were pooled into a single category of 'entrants'. A range of additional variables measuring the demographic (age plus dummies for sex, ethnic minority status, partnership and presence of children), socio-economic (dummies for degree-level qualifications, occupational status and a family monthly income variable measured in £2015) and housing characteristics of purchasers and their purchases were also defined for the analysis. The latter indicators are described in more detail in the analysis section. Small volumes of missing data on some variables mean that the underlying unweighted sample sizes vary very slightly from those listed above across some portions of the analysis.

Analysis

The prevalence of support

The vertical bars of Figure 1 show the percentage of all homebuyers (on the left of the figure), the percentage of entrants to owner-occupation (the middle block of bars) and the percentage of moving homeowners (on the right of the figure) who reported each type of support. Encouragingly, the data in Figure 1 align closely with prior estimates of support prevalence reported by Rowlingson et al. (2023), Scanlon et al. (2019) and in official analyses of the English Housing Survey (Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities [DLUHC], 2022). The 'all purchases' bars of Figure 1 indicate that during the study period around a third of

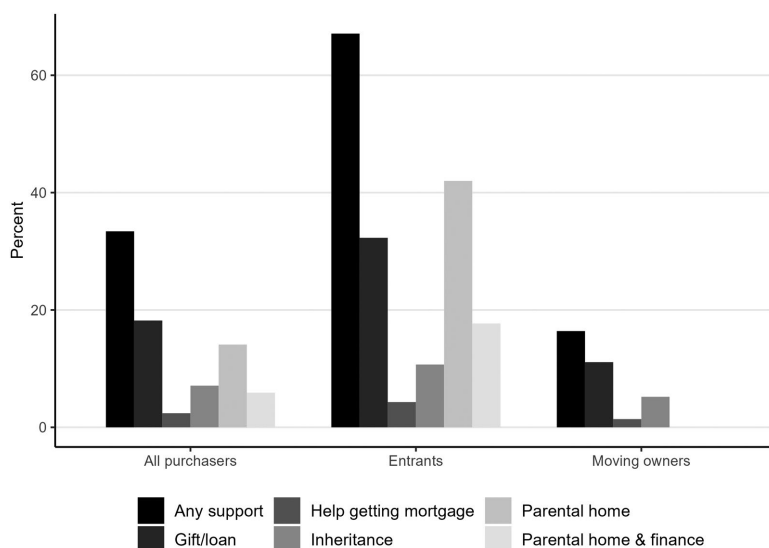


Figure 1. Patterns of support.

all UK housing purchases—grossing up to roughly 400,000 transactions per year—were supported in some way, with nearly 20% of buyers receiving gifts or loans and 7–8% using an inheritance. Living in the parental home prior to purchase was a common strategy (15% of all home purchases) and around 5% of homebuyers benefitted both from parental co-residence *and* from some form of financial assistance (usually a gift or loan). Echoing Scanlon et al. (2019) evidence, very few homebuyers received any formal assistance with mortgage borrowing and thus this form of support was not examined in further detail.

Comparing support prevalence among those entering owner-occupation (the middle bars) with the prevalence of support among moving homeowners (the right bars) shows that, as expected, those moving into homeownership were considerably more likely to receive some form of support (around two thirds of purchases) than were moving homeowners (under 20%). Partly this is because ‘staying home to own’ is a common strategy among new entrants. However, a much higher share of entrants (around 33%) than moving owners (around 10%) also reported receiving gifts or loans, while 10% reported using an inheritance as opposed to <5% of moving owners. It is striking that nearly a fifth of new entrants drew both on prior parental co-residence *and* on another form of support when buying their home. This type of multichannel assistance is often overlooked in quantitative analysis despite qualitative research showing that familial homeownership assistance is often prolonged, ‘cumulative and diffuse’ (Cook, 2020, p. 89). Overall, Figure 1 demonstrates that support practices are varied and widespread in that they are targeted towards new entrants and yet also used by a sizeable minority of moving owners.

Age patterning

H1 posited that entrants receiving assistance are younger than their unsupported counterparts. Table 1 tests this hypothesis by showing the mean age of homebuyers by type of support. In line with H1, among entrants the mean age of unsupported buyers was around 10 years higher than that of the supported buyers. Table 1 also shows that average age varied by support type with entrants moving into homeownership from the parental home several years younger, on average, than those receiving gift or loan support. Interestingly however, even among moving owners there was a substantial gap in average age between those receiving support (mean = 44 years) and those making unaided purchases (mean = 53 years). This hints that the substantial flows of support to existing owners are predominantly helping younger owner-occupiers who are perhaps struggling to make 'second step' moves. Support thus seems not only to accelerate homeownership entry (H1) but also may lubricate subsequent moves by constrained younger owner-occupiers.

It is important to note that the figures in Table 1 do not prove that support *causes* homeownership entries to be accelerated. Yet there are several reasons to interpret the age-grading of (un)supported entrants at least partially in this light. First, in the UK context of constrained access to the tenure of preference, the fact that those receiving no assistance to make this transition are substantially older than supported entrants (42 versus 32 years) suggests that support is at least helping to accelerate homeownership entry, as reported by Suh (2020). While a portion of the large age gap between supported and unsupported entrants is probably down to the latter containing more older individuals who are either regaining owner-occupation after an adverse event (for example divorce) or after choosing to rent for a short spell (for instance to get used to a new area following long-distance migration), previous studies show that leaving and returning to owner-occupation is relatively unusual in the UK and thus this explanation is unlikely to fully account for the large age disparities in Table 1 (Wood et al., 2017). Second, although case numbers are small, it is striking that mean age has a 'dose dependent' relationship with support among new entrants, as those receiving the most intensive assistance of parental co-residence plus a transfer are on average slightly younger

Table 1. Mean age of home purchasers by type of support.

	No support	Supported				
		Any	Gift/loan	Inheritance	Parental home (PH)	PH and finance
All (n = 1375)	51.0	35.8***	36.4***	39.8***	29.5***	28.9***
Entrants (n = 433)	42.1	31.7***	32.6***	31.2**	29.5***	28.9***
Moving owners (n = 942)	52.8	44.1***	41.9***	48.6	–	–

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$. Significance tests compare each group's mean against the mean of the no support group within a given row. Unweighted n.

than those either living at home or just receiving a transfer and especially than the unsupported. Third, new entrants supported by an inheritance are considerably younger than their unsupported counterparts while this pattern is not visible among moving owners. Although these differences should not be over-interpreted given small sample sizes, this pattern does fit with the idea that younger adults use windfalls to enter homeownership, while inheritances do not accelerate moves among those who already own their home.

Comparing purchaser characteristics

H2 proposed that there would be little difference between the socio-demographic profiles of supported and unsupported purchasers (Moos, 2017). However, it was also noted that support might enable more marginal households to buy homes or might be targeted towards householders who have attained normatively valued but expensive life course milestones (Mayer & Engelhardt, 1996). Table 2 tests H2 against these alternative explanations by tabulating how the percentage of buyers with specified characteristics (or their mean incomes) varies depending on the type of support they received.

Table 2 provides little evidence for H2. In terms of socio-demographic characteristics, the upper rows of Table 2 show that there is little systematic variation in buyers' gender or ethnicity by support type. The only exception is that the percentage of ethnic minorities is lower among those using an inheritance to enter homeownership (3.1%) than one would expect given the corresponding ethnic minority shares of unsupported (15.6%) and supported (10.4%) new entrants. This may reflect historically rooted racial wealth inequalities that have left younger cohorts of minorities inheriting less than their White British counterparts.

There is also no evidence in Table 2 to support Mayer and Engelhardt's (1996) contention that assistance is channelled towards buyers that are perceived by their families as 'worthy' due to them already having attained normative life course milestones like forming committed partnerships or having children. In fact, among entrants to ownership, the share of buyers with children is much lower among those receiving most forms of support than it is for the unsupported, implying that in the UK supported entries to ownership primarily occur *before* family formation takes place. Moreover, among all home buyers support is linked to a reduced likelihood of being partnered. The latter result is not being driven by differential flows of gift or loan receipt as levels of partnership among those buying with gifts/loans are fairly similar to partnership levels among unsupported buyers. Instead, it is those (1) buying with an inheritance or (2) entering homeownership from parental homes who are significantly less likely to be partnered than are unsupported buyers. The inheritance effect suggests that receiving a bequest may be more beneficial for the home purchase decisions of singles than it is for (typically less resource constrained)

Table 2. Purchaser attributes by type of support.

Variable	Type of purchaser	No support	Supported				
			Any	Gift/loan	Inheritance	Parental home	PH and finance
% female	All	41.4	42.8	41.8	43.9	36.2	35.4
	Entrants	42.8	39.4	37.3	34.7	36.2	35.4
	Moving owners	41.1	49.7	48.4	53.4	–	–
% ethnic minority	All	6.7	9.4	8.6	3.3	11.6	15.0
	Entrants	15.6	10.4	11.4	3.1*	11.6	15.0
	Moving owners	4.9	7.3	4.6	3.5	–	–
% living with partner	All	69.5	56.4**	63.7	54.7*	42.9***	40.3**
	Entrants	59.6	52.7	60.8	52.1	42.9	40.3
	Moving owners	71.4	64.2	67.9	57.4	–	–
% living with children	All	31.9	24.1*	29.3	15.3*	10.3***	9.4*
	Entrants	40.8	18.9**	21.7*	14.4*	10.3***	9.4**
	Moving owners	30.2	34.9	40.5	16.2	–	–
% tertiary degree	All	52.7	59.7	63.7*	59.3	49.6	46.7
	Entrants	63.9	58.4	64.0	66.1	49.6	46.7
	Moving owners	50.4	62.5*	63.2	52.1	–	–
% managerial or professional occupation	All	41.0	47.0	50.7	49.2	40.3	37.8
	Entrants	61.1	44.1*	45.4	53.3	40.3*	37.8*
	Moving owners	37.0	53.1**	58.2**	44.8	–	–
Mean monthly family income (£2015)	All	3970.4	3274.6***	3756.2	2728.4***	2523.8***	2344.3***
	Entrants	3906.9	2934.4**	3258.6	2557.3*	2523.8***	2344.3**
	Moving owners	3982.8	3951.3	4515.6	2869.7**	–	–
% London	All	5.4	9.3	14.8**	7.8	7.7	15.7*
	Entrants	5.7	7.1	12.7	8.2	7.7	15.7
	Moving owners	5.4	13.9*	17.9**	7.4	–	–

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$. Significance calculated from χ^2 tests where no support is the comparator (for categorical variables) or from t-tests comparing group means against the mean of the no support group (for continuous variables).

couples who, by virtue of having access to two families, one might anticipate being more likely to receive inheritances in the first place.

The patterning of socio-economic characteristics meanwhile runs largely against H2. Across the board, patterns of degree holding by support type are muted. While those moving into ownership from the parental home are the least likely to have degree-level qualifications, these patterns do not meet conventional thresholds for statistical significance and the fact that a higher share of supported than unsupported moving owners possess degrees (and are also employed in advantaged managerial and professional jobs) is potentially a cohort effect reflecting their relative youth (Table 1). In contrast, the share of entrants to homeownership working in managerial and professional roles is considerably lower among supported (44%) than unsupported (61%) purchasers, with a particularly low share of those benefiting from parental co-residence and financial support employed in

such occupations. Variations in mean income reflect this occupational patterning as well as partnership trends with unsupported entrants to ownership having much higher mean family incomes (£3900/month) than the supported (£2934/month) and especially those entering from the parental home (£2523/month or £2344 if also supported by financial means). Across entrants and moving owners, homebuyers using an inheritance also have significantly lower incomes than their unsupported peers. Taken together, this evidence suggests that support is more often used by economically marginal and younger households.

The bottom rows of [Table 2](#) examine the geography of support by testing whether buyers in the costly London housing market are over-represented amongst those receiving assistance. Among all purchasers and among moving homeowners, the share of purchases supported by gifts/loans that are made in London is around 10 percentage points higher (14.8% and 17.9% respectively) than the share of unsupported purchases occurring in London (5.4%). A strikingly large share of purchases supported by the dual means of parental co-residence and a transfer (15.7%) also take place in the capital. Similar patterns are found among entrants to owner-occupation, but low sample sizes probably explain why these estimates do not meet conventional thresholds for statistical significance. Overall, the figures in [Table 2](#) suggest that support is especially important for purchasing homes in constrained markets (Ong ViforJ et al., 2023).

Residential outcomes

The final analyses tested H3 and H4 by estimating a series of regressions where the dependent variables were set to the characteristics of housing purchases. Three sets of models were estimated to predict (1) whether purchased dwellings were located in more advantaged neighbourhoods (where 1=least deprived 60% of neighbourhoods and 0=the most deprived 40% as measured by national Indices of Multiple Deprivation), (2) mortgage LTV at purchase (where 1 = <=75% and 0 = >75% of the purchase price) and (3) the logged price (in 2015 pounds) of the dwelling. Alternative cut points for the neighbourhood and LTV variables were tested and yielded qualitatively similar but less precisely identified results.

For each outcome, separate models—logistic regressions for the neighbourhood and LTV outcomes and regressions predicting logged house prices—were first estimated to examine how each type of support was associated with purchase characteristics. The possibility that support might have variable effects for different types of purchase was tested by interacting the support dummies with the dummy variable distinguishing entrants from moving owners. As only entrants could live in the parental home prior to purchasing, the models which included in-kind support dummies were only estimated on the entrant sample. After estimating these initial models, their output was used to compute the Average Marginal Effects (AMEs) of support receipt for both the entrant and moving

owner subsamples. Finally, the AMEs of support receipt were then recalculated after adjusting the regressions for the battery of control variables discussed in Table 2. Given the number of models, the parameters for the control variables are not reported, but these run largely in line with expectations.

Figure 2 plots the AMEs and 95% confidence intervals of support receipt from the regressions predicting each of the three residential outcomes. The overall impression from Figure 2 runs counter to H3 and H4 as those receiving assistance do not tend to make substantially different sorts of purchases than those who do not receive assistance. In particular, the right-hand panel of Figure 2 shows that support has no discernible association with purchase price for either entrants or moving owners. This runs contrary to H3 and earlier evidence from other countries where support was found to increase the size and value of purchased homes (Mayer & Engelhardt, 1996; Spilerman & Wolff, 2012).

However, a close reading of Figure 2 nuances this overall impression of an absence of evidence. First, the left-hand panel shows that, in line with H3, inheritances boost the likelihood that entrants to owner-occupation purchase homes in more advantageous neighbourhoods. That this effect contrasts so starkly with the rest of the estimates in the left panel of Figure 2 suggests that perhaps the greater value of inheritances or else direct bequests of property translate into locational gains which cannot be matched by other more modest forms of support. Second, support has complex and varied relations with mortgage borrowing. Among moving owners, receiving any support, gifts/loans or using an inheritance is

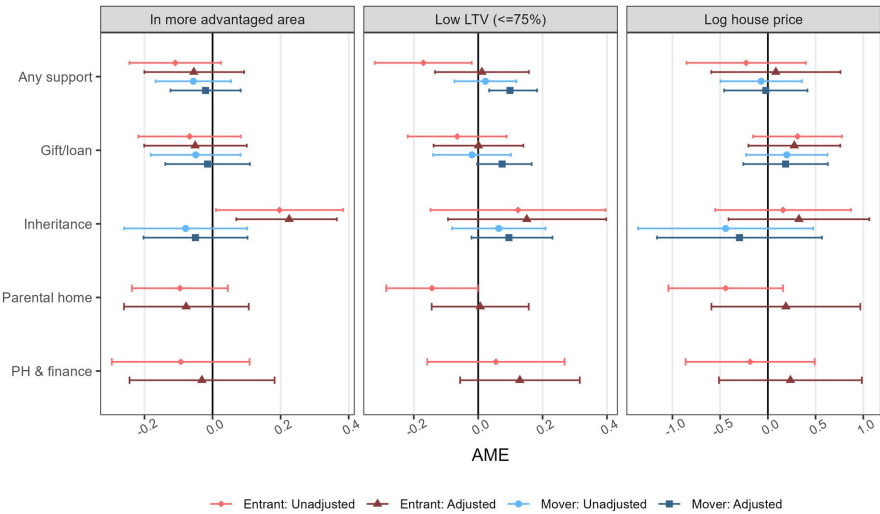


Figure 2. Average Marginal Effects of support on the characteristics of housing purchases.

Notes: Horizontal axis scale varies across the panels. 95% confidence intervals. Adjusted models control for variables in Table 2.

associated with a greater probability of lower LTV ratios (although the confidence intervals for the gift/loan and inheritance estimates just include 0 and so should be cautiously interpreted). This result is broadly in line with the de-risking hypothesis (H4) as it indicates that support, *ceteris paribus*, allows moving homeowners to take on lower levels of mortgage borrowing. This pattern is not observed among entrants where negative unadjusted AMEs for any support and parental co-residence suggest that these forms of assistance actually boost the likelihood of taking on a larger mortgage. That this effect disappears once the AMEs are adjusted suggests that it is the life course circumstances of supported entrants rather than their support receipt which explains their higher LTV ratios.

Overall, [Figure 2](#)'s results echo Moos' (2017) North American evidence by showing that support has quite weak associations with the characteristics of dwelling purchases. H3 and H4 hold only for specific groups of home purchasers as inheritance enables entrants to 'reach' for more advantaged areas while support enables de-risking among moving owners. When taken with the evidence in [Tables 1](#) and [2](#) and [Figure 1](#), these findings suggest that support in contemporary Britain is primarily channelled towards younger, more economically marginal households to help them attain homeownership or perhaps to move home without heavy borrowing.

Conclusions

The distribution of homeownership and housing wealth plays a major role in shaping patterns of prosperity across the Global North. Faced with heightened barriers to home purchase following the Global Financial Crisis, many households in advanced economies have fallen back on their family networks for support to enter homeownership or to move within owner-occupation (Begley, 2019; Scanlon et al., 2019). While academics have shown that this 're-familialisation' process undermines social mobility (Blanden et al., 2023; Ronald & Arundel, 2023), commercial lenders have sensed an opportunity and in Britain are increasingly marketing a range of unconventional mortgage products to cater to this emerging source of demand. As relatively little is known about supported home purchases, this article harnessed a new survey dataset to examine their distribution and residential consequences in twenty first century Britain. While the results cannot simply be naively generalised to other contexts, the fact that many countries have lately experienced similar trends of *inter alia* house price inflation, retrenchment of public welfare provision and policy promotion of owner-occupation suggests that the findings have broad salience for international debates about how changing family relations are bound up with the restructuring of housing, welfare and economic systems (Ronald & Arundel, 2023).

Three constellations of findings emerged from the analyses. First, support for home purchases is *more widespread, varied and multichannelled* than is often acknowledged in public debates. The Understanding Society

data confirm that in the post-GFC period around one third of all UK home purchases and the majority of entries to owner-occupation were supported in some fashion, most commonly with gifts or loans and parental co-residence, but also less frequently by inheritance. Crucially, support does not just flow to those entering owner-occupation, as just under a fifth of moving homeowners reported receiving some kind of assistance. Among those entering owner-occupation parental co-residence is a particularly common form of support, with a sizeable minority of those moving into ownership from the parental home also benefiting from financial assistance. This validates Clapham et al.'s (2014) prediction that 'staying home to own' would become an increasingly common housing pathway for younger Britons as the twenty first century progresses. The prevalence of this pathway chimes with qualitative evidence that homeownership attainment in Britain and beyond is increasingly viewed as a family project rather than something one achieves alone (Druta & Ronald, 2017).

Second, the analyses show that *support is unevenly distributed* among homebuyers. While entrants to homeownership are substantially more likely than moving owners to receive assistance, in general those receiving support are younger and more economically marginal than those who have not received assistance. This suggests that flows of support probably accelerate homeownership entry (Helderman & Mulder, 2007; Lee et al., 2020; Suh, 2020) and lubricate purchases by households who are otherwise financially constrained. Of course, these patterns probably not only reflect differences in need but also in the availability of support, as younger adults are disproportionately likely to have older family members with the resources to supply assistance. Nonetheless, the idea that support flows to the financially-constrained is further supported by the spatial patterning of supported purchases. Gifts and loans are disproportionately received by moving owners in London, a pattern which suggests that these transfers are directed to places where local constraints are particularly severe (Ong ViforJ et al., 2023).

Finally, it appears that *support has weak links to the characteristics of housing purchases* (similar to Moos, 2017). While previous studies have reported that support increases the size and price of purchased dwellings (Mayer & Engelhardt, 1996; Spilerman & Wolff, 2012), no evidence that this occurs in twenty first century Britain was found here. This could be because support in the highly constrained UK context is targeted towards helping needy households to overcome the credit barriers that are stopping them from either entering owner-occupation or selling up and moving in the first place (Luea, 2008). However, support was found to have associations with housing outcomes in two instances. Regression estimates showed that inheritance enables entrants to homeownership to buy into more advantaged neighbourhoods, while among moving owners support is associated with a reduced propensity to take on large mortgages. This suggests that specific types of support may, for some people, enable them

to attain more advantaged places and smaller mortgages than they could otherwise afford.

Taken together, these findings corroborate that varied flows of support play a key role in housing market dynamics. While the provision of support for home purchases is often interpreted as a dynastic economic strategy (Forrest & Hirayama, 2018), in Britain's ownership-centric housing system such assistance is probably also designed to simply improve the residential conditions (for example the security and control) of family members by preventing them from having to rent. Further research could thus explore how family relations and the economic strategies of donors (for instance their financial planning in later-life) and recipients (for example savings behaviours) shape and are in turn shaped by the provision and receipt of support for housing purchases over the life course (Flynn & Kostecki, 2023). Further analysis of supported home purchases could also focus on their legal ramifications given that financial transfers are often informal with little-to-no documentation about how they are to be used or repaid (Scanlon et al., 2019).

Finally, it is important to acknowledge this study's limitations. The Understanding Society data are rich but in wave 12 did not record the size of transfers, the identity of donor(s) or their financial characteristics. While previous studies indicate that the vast majority of support comes from (grand)parents (Boileau & Sturrock, 2023) we cannot be certain of this and we also do not know when support transfers were made or on what terms. There might also be some fuzziness between gifts and inheritances given that monies inherited from grandparents might well be quickly gifted down the generations by parental recipients. Indeed, the structure of UK inheritance tax—as in other contexts like the Netherlands (Suari-Andreu et al., 2024)—incentivises the 'advancing' of inheritances as no tax charge is levied on gifts made seven plus years before death, while the regular giving of small gifts before death is also encouraged by the provision of annual tax-free allowances. Finally, the design of the UKHLS questionnaire means that we probably only capture larger support transfers and not the lower-level forms of assistance that might cumulatively enable people to save up to buy homes (Cook, 2020). Overall, these limitations suggest there remains a pressing need for further statistical and qualitative analysis of the interactions between family and homeownership dynamics within and beyond Britain.

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