

PAA 2005 – Long Abstract for Poster Session

Title: **Transition to First Birth of Immigrant Women in Germany**

Author: Nadja Milewski

Contact: Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research Rostock,
Konrad-Zuse-Str. 1, 18057 Rostock, Germany

phone: 49 (381) 2081-132, fax: -432

e-mail: milewski@demogr.mpg.de

Research issue to be addressed

Family formation is not only a micro-sociological phenomenon. It is also of societal importance as it reproduces social structure. Thus one macro-sociological aspect has been gaining importance in Germany – as in other European countries – since the 1970s: the emergence of foreign sub-groups. Members of foreign-born sub-groups have a wider background of experience and cultural influences than do non-migrants because immigrants have lived in at least two countries. On one hand, this could lead to a wider range in behavior and to more options in their actual behavior, compared to non-migrants. On the other hand, the process of migration might bear restrictive difficulties which non-migrants do not experience at all.

Although the group of foreign-born inhabitants in Germany is steadily increasing, there are gaps in the research regarding family-formation behavior of this population. Most research has focused on the guest-worker groups – these are Turks, Italians, Spaniards, Greeks, and people from the states formerly belonging to Yugoslavia - and Ethnic Germans, rarely on people belonging to nationalities of smaller size in Germany. Even overall, however, most of the quantitative analyses use crude measures, such as the Total Fertility Rate, or work with completed fertility rates. Methods accounting for timing and quantum effects have not yet been applied to research on immigrants in Germany. This is why our project focuses on transition processes, mainly to the first child. Our research question is: How does migration affect family formation?

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework will focus mainly on socialization hypothesis versus adaptation hypothesis. The adaptation model (also regarded as the assimilation model) applies to migrants who leave a country with relatively high fertility levels and move to a country with lower fertility rates. According to this model, immigrants might initially show the high fertility rates of their country of origin, but would, over time, adapt to the behavior seen in the country of destination. The hypotheses of socialization states nearly the opposite: migrants would continue to show fertility levels similar to the levels in their country of origin. The literature on immigrants to Germany generally supports the adaptation hypothesis: The longer immigrants stay in the host society, the more likely they are to adopt behavior common in the host country.

However, several authors have shown the importance of controlling for time since arrival and number of years an immigrant woman lived in the country of destination during her reproductive life span. A third theory is based on the assumption that difficulties coincide with a migration process. Therefore, fertility declines immediately following migration. It is possible that – after the period of disruption – immigrants catch up with the birth rates common in their country of origin.

Data and methodology to be used

We use data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP), carried out from 1984 to 2000 by the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) Berlin. Its guest-worker and foreigner sample is currently the largest repeated survey of immigrants (first as well as second generation of immigrants). We can construct birth histories for about 1600 immigrated women and compare them to some 3500 non-immigrated German women.

We focus on women born from 1946 to 1975. We restrict our data set of the non-immigrated women to West Germany, because of the fertility differentials between East and West Germany. Moreover, only a share of immigrated women live in East Germany (excluding Berlin). For immigrated women, we exclude exposure times and occurrences which happened before they immigrated to Germany.

We start with survival analysis (Kaplan-Meier survival curves) and compare migrants living in Germany to non-migrants. Then we apply event-history techniques to the analysis of first-birth risks. This is a form of proportional hazard models, used for time-dependent data. In addition to standard demographic variables, such as education and religious affiliation, we include migration specific variables such as time since migration, country of origin, and migrant generation. We also consider characteristics of the woman's partner.

Expected findings

Distinguishing between first and second generation migrants, we assume that women born and/or raised in Germany are more likely to adopt the family-formation behavior experienced in their country of destination, whilst first-generation immigrants would tend to adhere to the pattern in their country of origin. Hence, we want to control for the age at immigration: the younger the immigrant is, the more likely she follows the patterns in the country of destination.

Regarding education, we assume that the relatively young age at first birth among immigrant women is due to compositional effects, because the educational level among immigrants is, on average, relatively low. However, since a growing number of second-generation immigrants is striving for higher school degrees, we expect that they would be likely to postpone family formation, as is common in the host society. Furthermore, the composition of the immigrated population is changing; whereas earlier a male guest worker would come to Germany and bring his wife later, nowadays more and more migrants are highly qualified, single, and female. Therefore, we assume that relatively high opportunity costs as well as time and costs for mating selection would postpone a family formation as well.