

**Partner Choice and Timing of First Union among Immigrants and Their Descendants:
Marriage versus Cohabitation**

Jennifer A. Holland
Erasmus University Rotterdam
j.a.holland@essb.eur.nl

Kenneth Aarskaug Wiik
Statistics Norway
Email: kaw@ssb.no

Extended Abstract for the 2019 PAA Annual meeting, Austin. April 10 – 13.

Abstract

Partner choice and the timing of union formation are mechanisms for economic and cultural integration of immigrant-background individuals and reveal social distances between groups. Using Norwegian register data, we study partner choice and timing of all first marital and non-marital unions occurring between 2005 and 2016 ($N=309,532$, 92.3% cohabitation). We use cross-classified multilevel hazards models to investigate how (1) individual background, demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, (2) Norwegian partnership markets, and (3) norms about marriage in countries of (parental) origin shape union formation processes. Preliminary results show that cohabitation is the modal pathway into partnership, though it is most common among those choosing a majority partner. There is a generational shift toward later ages at marriage, but partner choice, pathway and timing go hand in hand with exogamy. Generational gradations of family process adaptation are conditioned by individual and partner characteristics, and origin and destination contextual factors.

Introduction and background

The family behaviors of immigrant background individuals are central for our understanding of social distance between groups and can be a key mechanism for economic progression and cultural integration. In the literature on immigrant background populations' family behavior, intermarriage between natives and immigrants has been considered particularly relevant (Kalmijn, 1998), but other aspects of family behavior like the timing of first union formation and fertility may also be indicators of societal integration (Andersson et al., 2017; Kulu & Gonzales-Ferrer, 2014). Considering partner choice and union timing simultaneously may provide further insights into the societal integration of immigrants and their children. For instance, deferral of first union or choosing cohabitation as a first union among migrant-background individuals, even when they partner endogamously, may signal adaptation to receiving country's union formation patterns within Western contexts where late marriage and non-marital cohabitation are increasingly common.

Using Norwegian register data on all individuals born 1985 and later who were either native-born or who immigrated as children or teens ($N=881,352$), we study relations between partner choice and timing of all first marital and non-marital first unions occurring between 2005 and 2016 ($N=309,532$, 92.3% cohabitation). Administrative register data are particularly well-suited to the study of the first union dynamics of immigrant-background populations. Nationally representative survey data often fail to capture sufficiently representative samples of minority populations. Some immigrant-background subgroups may be hard to reach through conventional surveys, due to language or other sources of social exclusion (Barnes, 2008; Stoop, Billiet, & Koch, 2010). Moreover, in 2005, a residential register was established, allowing for the identification of non-marital cohabitation. This unique data source will allow us to assess the timing of endogamous or exogamous first partner choice in terms of partners' migrant-background (i.e., a partner born abroad and/or with at least two foreign-born parents versus a native-born partner with native-born parents) as well as (parents') country of birth.

Although immigrants and their children born in Norway made up 17% of the total population at the onset of 2018 (Statistics Norway 2018), the country has a relatively short history of non-Nordic migration. The first major wave of non-Nordic immigration started around 1970, with the arrival of labor migrants, mainly from Pakistan, Turkey, Morocco and India (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli, 2008). Thus, until now, studies of the immigrant population's family formation behavior have mostly considered first generation immigrants, as is also the situation elsewhere in Northwestern Europe (De Valk & Milewski, 2011; Kulu & Gonzales-Ferrer, 2014). Second-generation immigrants, on the other hand, have been so

young that only a vague impression of their patterns of family formation has been gained so far. However, this is changing rapidly as more descendants of immigrants reach typical family formation ages. As of January 2018, there were around 160,000 second generation immigrants in Norway, of which one-third were in ages 16 and above. In comparison, in 2000 the total population of second generation immigrants comprised 44,025 persons, of which 8,192 (18.6%) were 16 years or older. Then as now, the largest global region of origin was Asia including Turkey and Africa, who made up 70% of the second generation in 2017, with Pakistan, Vietnam and Turkey as the three largest origin countries (Statistics Norway 2018).

In addition to the restrictions posed by the rather young age structure of the second generation, most prior studies on family formation among second generation immigrants have focused on the transition to parenthood or first marriage. Although these are vital events in the transition to adulthood, most international research on union formation among immigrants and their children misses out on unmarried cohabitation. In most affluent countries, cohabitation has increased both as a form of intimate partnership and as a context for parenthood (Perelli-Harris et al., 2012). In the Nordic countries, cohabitation before marriage is nearly universal, and more first births occur to cohabiting than to married couples (Holland, 2013; Noack et al., 2014). In such a context, choosing cohabitation instead of marriage as first union and deferral of first marriage could signal adaptation of the receiving country's family formation patterns and norms (DeValk & Liefbroer, 2007).

Few studies have considered partner choice and union timing simultaneously. Soehl and Yahirun (2011) investigated the timing of union formation and its implications for partner selection using urban samples from Germany (Berlin and Frankfurt am Main) and the USA (Los Angeles). They found that second generation Turks (Germany) and Mexicans (the USA) who married within their ethnic group did so at younger ages than those who married exogamously. Similarly, using population register data from Norway and Sweden, Wiik and Holland (2018) found that marital timing patterns of migrant background individuals who married exogamously were more similar to the majority populations than among those who married endogamously. However, among immigrant-background individuals who endogamously married, there was evidence of a shift toward the Scandinavian pattern of later marriage across immigrant generations.

Our knowledge about the interplay between partner choice and union timing for first non-marital unions is even more limited. Soehl and Yahirun (2011) included cohabitation in their analysis of partner choice and first union timing for their German sub-sample. However, their emphasis was on the role cohabitation plays in the first unions of Germans without an

immigrant background. In nearly all analyses, first cohabitation and first marriage were pooled in order to make group comparisons of the timing of any first union. Although they do not directly discuss this aspect of their research design in the paper, the choice to not investigate marital and non-marital unions separately may have been due to small sample sizes. In this study, with data covering the entire population of Norway, we are able to distinguish different patterns of partner choice and union timing among marital and non-marital first partnerships, even if we find that cohabitation is a marginal behavior among immigrant-background sub-populations.

Data and Sample

Data for the current study come from Norwegian population registers, with information on vital demographics such as marriage, age, dates of immigration and emigration, gender and (parents') country of birth. The introduction of a unique address for all dwellings made it possible to identify cohabiting unions from 2005 onwards. A cohabiting couple is defined as a man and a woman aged 18 years or older registered as residing in the same dwelling, who are not relatives or married and whose age difference is no more than 15 years. In addition, the population data will be supplemented with longitudinal register data on education (level and activity), total income, and place of residence. Such linking of data is facilitated through a system of universal ID numbers.

We will focus on all first marital and non-marital unions formed 2005 through 2016, among the total Norwegian population born 1985 to 1998 residing in the country at age 18 ($N = 881,352$), of which 30,060 (3.4%) were second generation immigrants, defined as being born in Norway by two immigrant parents. The total populations of immigrants who arrived prior to age 18, i.e. generation 1.5 ($n = 64,713 / 7.3\%$) as well as the majority population (i.e. those born in Norway by at least one Norwegian born parent ($n = 786,579 / 89.2\%$)) will be treated as comparison groups. To ensure that only unions formed in Norway are considered, we exclude immigrants who arrived at ages 18 or older from the analytic sample.

Variables and analytic procedure

We will use cross-classified multilevel hazards models to investigate how (1) individual background, demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, (2) Norwegian partnership markets, and (3) norms about marriage in countries of (parental) origin shape union formation processes. In these models, we will follow each individual from the year he or she turned 18 to the year of any registration of marriage or cohabitation or censoring due to death,

emigration or the end of the last year for which we have data (i.e., December 2106), whichever came first. The data set consists of 5,191,848 person-year observations. The number of first co-residential unions was 309,523, of which 285,732 (92.3%) were cohabitations and 23,800 (7.7%) were direct marriages.

The dependent variable consists of four categories of co-residential partnerships relative to continuing to be (i) unpartnered: (ii) cohabiting with an individual from the same country of origin, (iii) cohabiting with an individual from a different country of origin, (iv) married to an individual from the same country of origin, and (v) married to an individual from a different country of origin.

We separate between three migrant generations (i.e., 2nd generation, 1.5 generation, majority). We will further disaggregate individuals by seven *regions of (parents') origin*: (i) Nordic countries, (ii) Europe (excluding Eastern Europe), North America, Australia, and New Zealand, (iii) Eastern Europe, (iv) Asia and rest of Oceania, (v) Sub-Saharan Africa, (vi) Middle-East and North-Africa, including Turkey (MENA); and (vii) South and Middle America. We also control for *gender*, since the age grading of the timing of first union is gendered and to explore whether men's and women's partnership choices and union types differ. In multivariate models, we will include a range of time-varying control variables, such as education level, school enrolment, total income, and place of residence.

References

- Andersson, G., Persson, L. and Obućina, O. (2017) Depressed fertility among descendants of immigrants in Sweden." *Demographic Research* 36(39):1149-84.
- Barnes, W. (2008). Improving the participation of migrants in the Labour Force Survey: a review of existing practices in EU member states. *Survey Methodology Bulletin*, 63, 25–38.
- Brochmann, G. & Kjeldstadli, K. (2008). *A History of Immigration. The Case of Norway 900-2000*. Oslo, Norway: Universitetsforlaget.
- De Valk, H. A. G. & Liefbroer, A. C. (2007). Timing Preferences for Women's Family-Life Transitions: Intergenerational Transmission Among Migrants and Dutch. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69, 190-206.
- De Valk, H. A. G. & Milewski, N. (2011). Family life transitions among children of immigrants: An introduction. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 16, 145-151.
- Hannemann, T. et.al. (2018). Co-ethnic marriage versus intermarriage among immigrants and their descendants: A comparison across seven European countries using event-history analysis. *Demographic Research*, 39, 487–524.
- Huschek, D., De Valk, H. A. G. & Liefbroer, A. (2010). Timing of first union among second-generation Turks in Europe: The role of parents, peers and institutional context. *Demographic Research*, 22, 473-504.
- Kalmijn, M. (1998). Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends. *Annual Review of Sociology* 24(1):395-421.
- Kulu, H. and González-Ferrer, A. (2014) Family dynamics among immigrants and their descendants in Europe: Current research and opportunities. *European Journal of Population* 30(4): 411–435.
- Lappegård, T. (2006). Family formation and education among Pakistani, Turkish and Vietnamese women in Norway. *Genus*, 62, 75-95.
- Liversage, A. (2012). Gender, conflict and subordination within the household: Turkish migrant marriage and divorce in Denmark. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38, 1119-1136.
- Milewski, N. & Hamel, C. (2010). Union formation and partner choice in a transnational context: The case of descendants of Turkish immigrants in France. *International Migration Review*, 44, 615-658.
- Perelli-Harries, B., Kreyenfeld, M., Sigle-Rushton, W., Keizer, R. Lappegård, T., Jasilioniene, A., Berghammer, C., & Di Giulio, P. (2012). Changes in union status during the transition to parenthood in eleven European countries, 1970s to early 2000s. *Population Studies*, 66, 167–82.
- Soehl, T. & Yahirun, J. (2011). Timing of union formation and partner choice in immigrant societies: The United States and Germany. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 16, 205-16.
- Statistics Norway (2018). Immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents. <http://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/statistikker/innvbef>
- Stoop, I. A. L., Billiet, J., & Koch, A. (2010). *Improving survey response: lessons learned from the European Social Survey*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Wiik, K. Aa. and Holland, J. A. (2018). Partner Choice and Timing of First Marriage among the Children of Immigrants in Norway and Sweden. *Acta Sociologica*, 61, 143-162.