

Vidal, S. Perales, F. Lersch, P. Brandén, M. 'Family migration in a cross-national comparative perspective. Project aims and first results for Australia, Britain, Germany and Sweden.'

Abstract

There has been a long-standing debate on the gendered determinants of family migration and the asymmetrical impacts that family moves exert on the lives of men and women. Generally speaking, male partners are more likely to move for their own careers and female partners are more likely to follow them. In turn, men reap the benefits of migration while women experience lower occupational returns or even losses. Although the gendering of family migration is pervasive and persists across developed societies, variations in the way its determinants and outcomes intersect with gender may vary along institutional structures. This expectation is supported by a large literature depicting cross-national differences in other realms of gender relations at the household level such as family formation or distribution of paid and unpaid work. This literature highlighted the role of national institutions filtering the ways in which couples negotiate their life courses. Despite that, cross-national variation and institutional effects received poor attention by family migration scholars, as the bulk of the associated literature has limited itself to the study of a single national context. The goal of this presentation is twofold. First, we present a new unprecedented cross-national comparative project that explores cross-national variation and examines the role of national institutions in relation to gender asymmetries in the determination and the work related outcomes of family migrations initially considering, but not restricted to, the cases of Australia, Britain, Germany and Sweden. The project is groundbreaking in that it integrates a cross-national comparative design with core life course concepts and quantitative methods for the longitudinal analysis of micro-level processes using large-scale datasets. The second part of the presentation revolves around an empirical application where we investigate national level variation on the factors contributing to family migration in the four countries.

Extended abstract

Background and aims

The determination of internal migrations and the impact they have on job-related achievement is to date still unequal between men and women in contemporary societies. Concerning work, partnered men usually undertake geographical moves to benefit their own employment career, whereas women often follow their partners at the expense of their own employment career (Bruegel 1999, Cooke 2003). As a result, family migration results in diminished wages, decreasing employment rates, and an increased share of domestic work for migrant women, while the opposite holds true for migrant men (Boyle et al. 1999, 2003, 2009, Taylor 2007, McKinnish 2008, Meil 2010). The contribution of family migration to gender-based inequalities is also stronger when migration coincides with the transition into parenthood or when children are already present in the household (Cooke 2001, 2003). Though women eventually recover their pre-migration labour market status (Mulder and van Ham 2005, Clark and Huang 2006, Blackburn 2010), their careers rarely 'catch-up' with those of their partners (Cooke et al. 2009). Thus, family migration is an important contributor to within-couple gender inequality and of gender inequality at home and at work in a broader sense.

There has been substantial academic interest in the intersection between family migration and gender equality. Important theoretical contributions relate the determinants and outcomes of this sort of migration to the spouses' levels of human capital (Mincer 1978), their bargaining power within the couple (Lundberg and Pollak 2003), and their gender-role attitudes (Bielby and Bielby 1992). However, empirical support for these perspectives is partial and mixed, and thus these approaches cannot fully explain how decisions to move geographically are made within couples and why gendered opportunity structures emerge post-migration (Abraham et al. 2010, Shauman 2010, Brandén and Strom 2011, Perales and Vidal 2013). More recently, the emergence of a life course perspective in family migration research has resulted in theoretical progress (Bailey and Cooke 1999, Stovel and Bolan 2004). The life course approach to family migration rests upon the postulations that (i) long-term biographies of individuals shape family migration processes, and (ii) individual life courses are moulded by institutional settings (Bailey 2009). However, the adoption of these theoretical life course concepts and ideas into empirical research designs on family migration is to-date scarce.

Specifically, the bulk of family migration literature limits itself to the study of a single national context (except Boyle et al 2009 or Lersch 2013). Therefore, examination of how contextual factors shaping gendered opportunities and constrains intersect with the gendered determinants and consequences of geographical family moves has so far been neglected. International comparative studies have unveiled a high degree of

heterogeneity across countries in the prevailing levels and types of gender inequality (see Cooke and Baxter 2010). Based on this fact, a large body of literature has devoted itself to analysing how the effects of life events such as childbirth, marriage, or divorce on gender inequality in life outcomes (e.g. in life satisfaction, employment, or wages) vary across national contexts (Gornick et al 1998, Treas and Widmer 2000). However, no studies to-date have taken a similar approach using family migration as the reference event. Cross-national research shows that the impact of parenthood, marriage, and other life course events on the gendering of life outcomes varies by context, and single-country research indicates that family migration and parenthood have comparable gendered effects on work outcomes (Cooke 2001, 2003). Therefore, institutional mechanisms are expected to mediate the association between family migration and gendered life outcomes, particularly work-related outcomes. Cross-national research designs on family migration will thus contribute to shedding light over remaining puzzles and inconsistencies in the literature on family migration (Boyle et al. 1999).

The aim of this presentation is twofold. We first introduce a new and unprecedented research project on a cross-national comparative analysis of long distance movement of households within national boundaries. The second aim of the presentation is more applied, and reviews data-sources, methods and initial multivariate analysis of quantitative longitudinal individual data for our four case studies: Australia, Britain, Germany, and Sweden.

A cross-national comparative project on family migration

The main goal of the research project is to identify and examine the gendered component of the determinants and outcomes of family migration and how these differ across institutional contexts. The proposed research will fill gaps in knowledge by developing a conceptual framework that integrates life course theory and cross-national perspectives, and by undertaking quantitative examination of individual- and household-level determinants and outcomes of family migration using large-scale longitudinal data for Australia, Britain, Germany, and Sweden. Our final aim is to contribute to debates on persisting gender inequalities at home and at work and will be relevant to evidence-based policy making.

We will first develop a theoretical framework leaning on life course theory as well as cross-national perspectives. This theoretical development is aimed to support articulation of hypothesis on the role of national institutions and state policies reinforce or level off gender inequalities in the determination and work-related outcomes of long distance household migration. In the empirical part of the project we aim at (i) documenting similarities and differences across countries in the gendering of the predictors and outcomes of internal family migration, (ii) examining the

applicability of traditional theories to explain variation in the structure of family migration over men's and women's life courses across countries, (iii) assessing the role of institutional context in explaining such variation. To this end, we will undertake quantitative examination of individual- and household-level determinants and outcomes of family migration using large-scale longitudinal data for Australia, Britain, Germany and Sweden.

Life course methodologies will enable accounting of time dynamics inherent to family migration and will move beyond traditional empirical research by assessing interdependencies between life transitions, over time variation in relative conditions within couples, and the changing regional and national context. The choice of countries is based on data availability as well as divergences in macro-level institutional factors of interest to this research, including variation in welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999), occupational systems (Cartmill 1999, Estévez-Abe 2005) and national institutions regulating gender relations (Chang 2000). We will, however, not limit the analysis to them and expect researchers with expertise in other national cases to join efforts with us.

Developing a conceptual framework using a life course approach

The conceptual framework for the project will borrow largely from (a) life course theory and (b) cross-national perspectives (including theories of the welfare state). The life course framework conceives people's lives as trajectories formed from transitions and statuses spanning from birth to death. In this way, individual life courses are perceived to be forged by decisions about both opportunities and limitations in different life domains and reflect both life goals and path dependencies (Diewald and Mayer 2009). As a major life event that is both disruptive and challenging, family migration is interwoven with changing social interactions between partners and within couples, reflecting partners' linked lives and continuous renegotiation of their compromises. The life course approach offers a useful conceptual framework to formalize the dynamics of continuity and change in life situations of couples that are conducive to family moves. It also adds to theorising post-migration planned or unplanned adaptations and long-term effects in careers and domestic circumstances. This theoretical approach will be complemented by institutional international perspectives, so we explicitly recognise that opportunities, limitations, goals and outcomes and, in consequence, individuals' biographies are strongly shaped by the macro-level characteristics of the institutional environment. A cross-national comparative approach will enable examination of similarities and differences in life pathways across national contexts as well as identification of institutional mechanisms mediating the intersections between family migration and gender inequality. Structural features of the institutional environment such as employment and family

law, the type of welfare regime, the structure of the labour market, and the prevailing gender ideology are expected to be important.

Case Selection and Institutional Variation

We are aware of methodological issues behind cross-national comparative analysis, particularly those regarding case selection bias, a widely acknowledged flaw of studies explaining welfare states regimes and their particular traits (Ebbinghaus 2005). Therefore, we do not aim at generalizing the role of certain institutions outside the national contexts that we consider. Instead, our goal is to identify institutional specificities of our study cases and to argue why they had been conducive to national variation on gender inequality in the determinants and outcomes of family migration. Although we admit that case selection is influenced by data availability, we narrow to four national cases of study with variation on what we believe that are the main institutional features filtering national variation in the gender inequality of family migration.

We focus on three interrelated institutional level dimensions, and sources of national diversity, directly influencing the degree of household level gender inequality. The first dimension is the welfare state regime and its supporting policies. Variations in welfare state regimes respond to different principles each regime adhere to deal with class relations. Although these principles are set gender neutral, they have important effects on gender relations with regard to paid and domestic work (Cooke 2011), primarily affecting decisions about female labor market participation after childbirth. The second dimension relates to structural inequality in the labor market, most prominently that related to the segregation of women and men in different lines of work, which is strongly associated with gender differences in pay and working hours. Ultimately, gender related inequality in the labor market exerts influence the power relations within dual earner households, which in turn set the bases for gender asymmetric household decisions. The third dimension regards average cultural practices with regard to gender roles as well as policies directly dealing with gender equity and seeking to reduce gender inequality in all relevant societal domains. This last strand has an important impact on the general normative context, which frame individual decisions in more or less gendered cultures. Actually, household divisions of paid and unpaid work exceed intimate levels and seem to be filtered by the context where partners are embedded (Geist 2005).

An initial empirical application: the determinants of family moves in four national contexts

In the second part of our talk we present an empirical application with a focus on investigating the factors contributing to family migration in four countries. The analyses are based on national specific longitudinal datasets and focus on the examination of levels of family migration, its individual and household level predictors, and sex-asymmetry in the effects of the predictors. Our presentation deals with three aspects of the analyses. First, we describe the harmonisation of inclusion rules for analytical samples, variables and statistical methods. Second, we compare the results of the country specific analysis and scrutiny to what extent assumptions of diverse perspectives of the family migration literature are validated. The mechanisms that explain gender asymmetries in family migration are derived from three established theoretical approaches: (i) human capital theory, (ii) relative resources theory, and (iii) the 'doing gender' approach. Third, we set interpretations for similarity and divergence of results across countries under the umbrella of institutional diversity. The ultimate goal will be to explain the observed variation in country-specific results in terms of welfare state, occupational systems and other macro-level characteristics.

To undertake the proposed analyses we use quantitative, nationally representative, longitudinal information for each of the countries considered. For Australia we use data for the period 2001-2011 from the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, a multipurpose panel household survey that contains information from annual interviews with around 15,000 adults living in 8,000 households. For Britain we use data for the period 1990-2008 from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), another multipurpose panel household survey that contains information from annual interviews with around 9,000 adults living in 5,500 households. For Germany we use data for the period 1990-2009 from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), a third multipurpose panel household survey that contains information from annual interviews with around 20,000 adults living in 11,000 households. Finally, for Sweden we use data for the period 1990-2007 from the Sweden in Time: Activities and Relations (STAR) database, a collection of longitudinal administrative datasets containing relevant information for the whole Swedish population.

The structure of these datasets allows tracking individuals over time and taking into account their nesting within couples, families, and regions. Furthermore, they all collect extensive (and reasonably comparable) information on factors relevant to this research, including geographical relocation, fertility, marital status, and employment outcomes. As is typical in the relevant literature, episodes of internal migration will be operationalized as residential changes covering long distances (e.g. 50 km.) or cutting across regional boundaries. In addition, two aspects of the migration decision-making process will be evaluated for some of these countries, based on data availability. First, migration intentions of male and female partners will be used to achieve theoretically-informed operational measures of migration propensities and perceived migration-

related benefits. These will later be evaluated against to actual migration behaviour. Second, ex-post reported reasons for the move from both partners will be analysed. These will be used to construct a typology of moves, identify within-couple disagreement in reports, and identify lead migrants (spouses that move to benefit their careers) and tied migrants (spouses that move to follow their spouse). Although the latter two pieces of information are not available in Swedish register data, a similar construct based on objective criteria will be considered in such data.

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