

Patterns of dating and the transition to cohabitation among the children of immigrants in Europe

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Abstract

In this paper I examine first of all the dating behavior of the children of immigrants. Key questions are with whom they date (inter- or intra- ethnic), at what age they start dating and how this dating patterns relate to the transition into a cohabiting union. The transition into cohabitation will distinguish between a cohabiting unmarried and married union. Furthermore we will make comparisons between these patterns across Europe. Data from the project The Integration of the European Second generation (TIES) carried out in 15 cities across Europe are used covering the Turkish and Moroccan children of immigrants and a majority comparison group aged between 18 and 35 at the time of the survey. Descriptive comparative analyses are complimented by event-history analyses. First findings indicate that a substantial share of the children of immigrants dates with a native partner in adolescence. However entry into a cohabiting union is most often made with a partner from the same origin (either first or second generation). Although the majority of these cohabitations are married unions also unmarried cohabitation seems to become more important for the children of immigrants than it was in the parental generation. At the same time unmarried cohabitation seemed to start at later ages than married unions. Further analyses will pay attention to the characteristics of both partners in the union to further disentangle main mechanisms behind these processes and the specific position of the descendants of immigrants across Europe.

Introduction

Union formation of immigrants has traditionally focused on marriage patterns covering mainly patterns of intermarriage and homogamy (Kalmijn 1998, 2010), or the timing of marriage (Oropesa & Landale, 2004). Furthermore, with few exceptions (e.g. Van Tubergen en Kalmijn 2010, Huschek 2011; Milewski and Hamel 2010) these studies in Europe have focused largely on immigrants rather than on their descendants. Dating patterns have so far been largely overlooked. Existing studies in the US are often either small scale or tend to focus on college students only (Levin, Taylor and Coudle 2007). These studies furthermore predominantly look at the role of in and out group feelings and ethnic identification. In Europe studies on inter ethnic dating is still limited and mainly focused on individual skills of the adolescent and the relation with their parents (e.g. Bucx, F., and Seiffge-Krenke 2010).

Although the studies from the US provide an interesting starting point for the study of romantic relations and dating and their determinants, the findings can not be directly extrapolated to the European situation. In particular since migrant origins are rather different (including different union formation patterns) in Europe where also many young adults of immigrant origin do not attend college. The lives of these young adults might thus be embedded in a very different context.

The fact that little is known on intra ethnic dating in Europe is unfortunate as one can assume that it is in particular dating in adolescence or early young adulthood that may be important for the formation of inter ethnic links in society. In a context where growing shares of the young population across Europe do have an immigrant background (including increasing proportions of children of immigrants) we need to know more on the formation of their unions from an early stage onwards. It is crucial to know who dates whom and how these dating relations do or don't translate into cohabitation with a partner. Linking dating and cohabitation will shed better light on the transition to adulthood among these young adults and the decisive moments in their life course when it comes to the formation romantic relations.

Data and methods

Data from the TIES (The Integration of the European Second generation) survey are used. This is a cross-sectional survey conducted in eight European countries, covering almost 10,000 young adults that were interviewed between 2007 and 2008. The TIES sample consists of second-generation young adults (18-35 years) of Turkish, Moroccan and ex-Yugoslavian origin and a majority group of young adults for comparison. Questions cover (retrospective) information on key phases and transitions in the life course. The analyses of this study cover those of Turkish and Moroccan origin and the comparison group in six European countries (due to data availability on our key variables of interest).

We focus on the questions on dating relations the young adult had since adolescence. For each of the partners the person had we know the ethnic background of that partner as well as his/her age and educational level. Descriptive analyses of these dating patterns is followed by event history analyses of the transition into the first cohabiting union in which married and unmarried unions are studied. The role of intra ethnic dating and its translation into cohabiting unions is the main emphasis we put in the paper. At the same time I cover other crucial factors know to be related to these processes including educational level, place of residence, and affinity to both the country of residence and country of origin of the parents.

Literature

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