

April 28th, 2006

Abstract for EAPS EPC, June 2006

Title: Family Formation 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

Introduction

The number of people in Germany who are of foreign origin or who have immigrant parents is growing. Our study investigates the process of family formation among immigrant women from guest-worker countries. The main research questions are: Are the birth risks of immigrant women different from those of West Germans? If so, what is the extent to which fertility differences can be explained by immigrants' selectivity, duration of stay in Germany, and compositional differences?

Theoretical Framework

Four hypotheses are discussed: The socialization hypothesis states that an individual follows the behavior and norms dominant during childhood. The adaptation hypothesis argues that current circumstances of living are more important in fertility-decision making. The disruption hypothesis assumes that the migration process and related difficulties influence fertility behavior. The selection hypothesis deals with the assumption that the immigration is the effect of fertility intentions and that unobserved factors are of importance.

Data and Method

We use data from the German Socio-Economic Panel. We construct birth histories for about 1500 immigrant women from Italy, Spain, Greece, former Yugoslavia, and Turkey, compared to West German women, and apply event-history techniques to the analysis of first-, second-, and third-birth risks. Apart from standard variables, such as education and religious affiliation, we include migration specific variables, such as time since migration, country of origin, and migrant generation.

Results

Our analysis of first births reveals that the age at first birth is lower among first-generation immigrants than among West Germans. The share of childless women in the immigrant group is much smaller than in the native group. First-birth risks are elevated in the first two years after immigration. Second-generation immigrants are older at first birth compared to their parents' generation, but are still younger than West Germans. For second and third births we observe higher transition rates for immigrant women of the first generation than for second-generation immigrants and West Germans.

Our results prove the socialization hypothesis for the first immigrant generation as well as the selection hypothesis, in which immigration and marriage are highly correlated events. We do not find evidence for a disruption effect here. The fertility behavior of second-generation immigrants in Germany, however, would seem to prove the adaptation hypothesis.