

Migration and Union Duration in Sweden. Evidence from Population Registers.

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Migration is a stressful life event that may be related to subsequent marital instability (e.g., Boyle et al. 2008). This holds for international migration in particular, and crude divorce statistics sometimes reveal elevated levels of union disruption for different groups of immigrants in developed countries. However, while the demographic dynamics related to the fertility and mortality of migrants have been studied in great detail, we still lack accurate analyses of divorce risks of immigrants in Europe and developed countries in other parts of the world. This is partly due data constraints: census data do not allow for much longitudinal analysis and most survey data contain too few immigrants to allow the study of migrants as separate categories. The present study improves on this situation by drawing on population-register data to investigate the divorce risks of immigrants in Sweden. It focuses on immigrants who married both prior and subsequent to migration to Sweden and tests the relative importance of cultural background and the socio-economic success in Sweden in explaining the divorce behavior of immigrants. Both factors turn out to be important. For the immigrant groups for which divorce risks are elevated, they can often be explained by these groups' relatively poor labor-market status. However, other groups of immigrants rather have depressed divorce risks, regardless of their socio-economic success or non-success. Our study is based on population register data on the resident population of Sweden. It covers the most common immigrant groups in this country, with geographical origins from almost every corner of the world. It is an extension of previous research of the authors that studied the interrelation between international migration and the childbearing dynamics of migrants to Sweden (Andersson and Scott 2005, 2007).

Data and Method

This study makes use of the Sweden in Time: Activities and Relations database (STAR), which is essentially a register-based panel containing information from the Swedish tax authorities, couple to demographic data from the Swedish population registers. The database contains information from 1968 - 2007 on the entire population of Sweden, including linkages between spouses, cohabitants, and children, allowing us to follow and study complete families.

The construction of the Swedish registers is such that we are required to divide the study population into two distinct groups - those who were married at arrival to Sweden, and those marrying after arrival. Unfortunately, for the group arriving as married, we have no information on the date of marriage, and as such can only observe the effects of time in Sweden on union disruption without taking union duration into account. While this is a shortcoming, it will still provide useful information regarding the temporal relation between the actual migration and union dissolution. For the second group, we analyze three distinct types of unions - co-ethnic, inter-ethnic (defined as two non-natives of different nationality), and ethnic-native.

We focus on the relative importance of country of origin, whether the marriage consists of spouses from different national origins, and the role of couples' demographic and socio-economic characteristics in divorce behavior. Of particular interest is the role which labor market success or failure has for the union stability of different types of migrants. Other variables we consider are the ages of spouses, and the presence of children in the household.

In our study we focus on country of origin as a marker of cultural background and the labor-market position in Sweden as a marker for socio-economic success in Sweden. By means of a step-wise modeling we aim at disentangling what separate roles socio-economic and cultural factors may have upon the divorce risks of immigrants. Our main country variable refers to the recorded country of birth of the woman in a marriage. The baseline is for women married with a man from the same

country as her. Additional binary variables show the effect on divorce risks of being married to a husband of different national origin or a husband born in Sweden. In addition, since Swedish citizenship indicates a more permanent legal status in Sweden it can be assumed to ease a divorce decision. Therefore we include a dummy for citizenship status for each partner in the union.

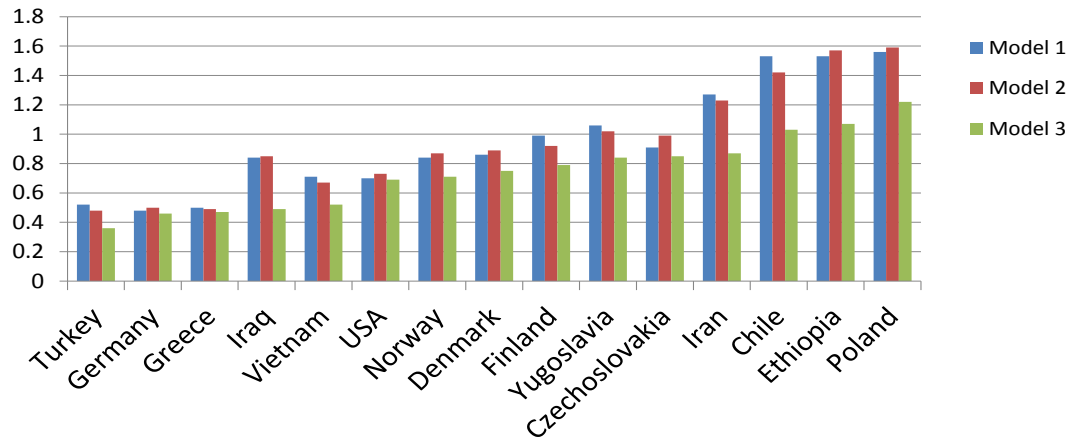
Piecewise-constant hazard rate models are estimated for union duration. Due to the heterogeneity of immigrant groups, separate models are estimated for immigrants from 16 different countries of origin - comprising roughly 85 percent of all immigrants to Sweden. As a reference, we estimate divorce risks for the native population as well.

Preliminary Results

This study is an extension of an earlier, unfinished study using a smaller database. The results from that study were promising, and it was decided to extend the study using the complete population. The preliminary results of that study are presented below.

Figure one shows the divorce risks for those married at arrival from various nationalities in three stepwise models. Model 1 represents an empty model, model two then adds demographic factors, and model three completes the picture by including economic controls. Our analysis reveals a very strong impact of both country of origin and labor-market status on the divorce risks of immigrants in Sweden. Divorce risks differ considerably between different country groups. Some nationalities have markedly higher divorce risks than native-Swedish couples; some have much lower risks. Socio-economic success or rather lack of success matters too. When we control for the effect of the relatively poor labor-market status of immigrants we find that this explains practically all of the excess risks of the groups that first displayed higher divorce risks than Swedish-born couples.

Figure 1. Nationality effects in stepwise models. Swedish couples = reference



This paper aims to delve deeper into an understanding of the interplay between socioeconomic exclusion and divorce among immigrants, and to contrast the union dissolution experiences of those who migrated as married and those who married subsequent to arrival.