

Migration to Sweden and Union Dissolution

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Abstract

Migration is a stressful life event that is likely to be negatively related to subsequent marital stability. This holds for international migration in particular, and crude divorce statistics often reveal elevated levels of union disruption for immigrants in developed countries. However, while the relationship between migration and other vital events like fertility and mortality have been studied in great depth, there is still a lack of accurate longitudinal analyses of the divorce dynamics of international migrants. The present study improves this situation by investigating the divorce risks of migrants to Sweden subsequent to immigration. The study involves those that were married at migration and those that married subsequent to arrival. We test various hypotheses of disruption, adaptation and selection to explain the elevated divorce risks. Our study is based on population register data on the resident population of Sweden and we cover the most common immigrant groups in Sweden.

Extended abstract

Migration is a stressful life event that is likely to be negatively related to subsequent marital stability (e.g., Boyle et al. 2008). This holds for international migration in particular, and crude divorce statistics often reveal elevated levels of union disruption for different groups of immigrants in developed countries. However, while the relationship between migration and other vital events like fertility and mortality have been studied in great depth, there is still a lack of accurate longitudinal analyses of the divorce dynamics of international migrants to Europe. In the present study, we improve on this situation by investigating the divorce risks of migrants to Sweden subsequent to their immigration. In terms of family demographic context, Sweden is a country where divorce is easy to achieve; divorce is more frequent than in most other European countries, but less frequent than in the US (Andersson 2002). Immigrants to Sweden come from a variety of countries, with very different family demographic and social contexts. Our study comprises migrants from sixteen of the most common countries of origin, covering about 85% of immigrants in Sweden. By means of longitudinal analyses of the divorce behavior of immigrant women and men, we study how their divorce risks are related to time since migration to Sweden, country of origin of the migrant and his/her spouse, and their socio-demographic characteristics. This allows us to test hypotheses on the role of (i) childhood socialization in country of origin; (ii) disruption in marital life due to the migration event; (iii) adaptation of family demographic behavior to that prevalent in the country of destination; (iv) selection of migrants by their socio-economic characteristics – in order to explain divorce dynamics and differences in behavior across migrant groups. Our study is based on register data on the resident population of Sweden. 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 is based on data from the Swedish Longitudinal Immigrant database, a register-based panel containing longitudinal information on vital events from Swedish

population registers, coupled to earnings and social-security data from the country's tax registers. The database contains information on socio-demographic life histories of residents in Sweden during 1968-2001. It contains data on immigrant women and men stemming from sixteen countries, and partners to these migrants, as well as a random sample of Swedish-born residents. In total, the database contains information on the life histories in Sweden of some 550,000 immigrants and natives. The initial database contained a sample of 110,000 individuals, which was expanded through the inclusion of spouses, cohabitants, and children in order to provide data on complete families of migrants.

In our study, we provide separate analyses for two types of married migrants: those that were married at migration to Sweden and those that married in Sweden subsequent to immigration. A third category consists of marriages where one partner belongs to the former group and the other to the latter. The situation in terms of union dynamics is different for these categories and the variables we apply differ, too. In all models, time since migration to Sweden is a central variable to consider. In addition, we focus on effects of country of origin, whether the marriage consists of two spouses from the same country or if the migrant has married a Swede, and the role of socio-economic factors like earnings, educational attainment and urban residence for 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 age at marriage, and the presence of children in the household.

Our analyses are done by means of event-history analyses of the divorce risks by time since migration or time since marriage, respectively. Due to the heterogeneity of immigrant groups, separate models are estimated for different countries of origin. As a reference, we estimate divorce risks for the native population as well.

References

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