

# **The influence of social embeddedness on timing of union formation among the Turkish second generation in seven European countries**

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## **Introduction**

The decision of when to start living with a partner is among the most important decisions of young adults. This choice is not made independently but influenced by other social actors. In the past, the influence of the family of origin has received most attention (Starrels and Holm 2000; Li and Wojtkiewicz 1994; Kiernan 1992; Thornton 1991), although it is known that friends can be influential as well on young adults' behavior (Harris 1995; Shah and Zelnik 1981). Studies focusing on social interaction with acquaintances or on contacts within institutions show the importance of these ties for information and value diffusion (Granovetter 1973; Montgomery and Casterline 1993). This may also be the case for the timing of union formation.

A helpful approach to study the influence of different social actors is the concept of social embeddedness. Social embeddedness refers to the different networks a person is integrated in. A main distinction can be made between family and non-family networks. A further distinction to specify embeddedness can be made by distinguishing between two types of social contacts, weak and strong ties (Granovetter 1973). Strong ties consist of family members and close friends and weak ties of acquaintances. These ties offer different types of resources and constraints resulting in different information access and ultimate behaviors (Moody and White 2003).

In this paper we will analyze the influence of the family of origin and the influence of weak and strong ties in non-family networks on the timing of union formation of the Turkish second generation in seven European countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland). Focusing on second-generation Turks is particularly interesting given that they navigate between family and friends, which can give rise to conflicts as the views and behaviors within non-family networks may differ from those in the family (Haug 2005). Turkish children of immigrants are particularly likely to be exposed to different views on union formation (De Valk 2006; De Valk and Liefbroer 2007). Their parents come from a more familistic and patriarchal society, where partner choice is strongly determined by the parents and where marriage in the early twenties is universal (Çelikaksoy, Nielson and Verner 2003; Nauck 2002b). This contrasts with the situation in many European countries where changes in family values and an emphasis on individualization is reflected in increasingly heterogeneous family formation patterns (postponement of marriage and childbearing, increasing cohabitation and divorce, low fertility) (Corijn and Klijzing 2001; Elzinga and Liefbroer 2007).

Despite the fact that we may expect an influence of the wider social network on union formation choices of these youth, little is known on how the wider social network (outside the family) is relevant. One can assume that especially in the case of networks with many people from outside the own ethnic group contrasting views on union formation will be encountered. Yet, not all kind of contacts with natives and persons of other ethnic groups may be equally important in influencing union formation choices of second-generation youths. Strong ties

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such as close friends, especially during adolescent years, are of particular importance. A Dutch study on the Turkish second generation indicated that a higher proportion of non-coethnic friends results in a higher resemblance of these second generation adults in union formation patterns of the native young adults (Huschek, De Valk and Liefbroer 2008). Furthermore, contexts are likely to differ by country offering different opportunities to form strong and weak ties in the receiving country.

The exposure of second-generation Turks to these opposing views on family formation offers the opportunity to study the influence of embeddedness into family and non-family networks. To enhance our understanding of the factors that influence union formation choices, the main research question of the paper is:

***How and to what extent does social embeddedness (in the family and in non-coethnic networks) influence timing differences in the union formation of second-generation Turks?***

This paper contributes to the literature by studying the influence of both the family of origin and non-family networks on union formation of second generation Turks in different societal contexts. This will first of all broaden our understanding of the importance of different social actors on union formation decisions. Secondly, specifying non-coethnic networks by making a distinction between strong and weak ties is a helpful approach to evaluate the importance of different network contacts on union formation. Thirdly, by including a cross-national comparison we may assess how and to what extent the same or different factors are relevant for union formation decisions of Turkish young adults in different settings.

## **Hypotheses**

### ***(I) Social embeddedness into the family and into non-coethnic networks***

The social networks of second-generation young adults are likely to consist not only of their family of origin and co-ethnic young adults but also of young adults from the receiving countries and from other ethnic groups. Networks (both co-ethnic and non-coethnic) are built through contact with out-group friends and acquaintances or through more indirect contacts, e.g. within the community and neighborhood or in communication with institutions (for example school attendance). It can be expected that those with many contacts to non-coethnic persons will be more exposed to and be more influenced by dominant ideas and behavioral patterns within the native society than those with few contacts outside their own community.

However, although children of immigrants tend to gradually adopt specific traits from the host society, there are domains of life for which this may be less the case. Previous research has shown that structural adjustment in the area of education and job market are likely to be the first to occur, whereas core values relating to family ties and gender patterns are slower to be changed. Union formation belongs to these latter aspects (Foner 1997; Lesthaeghe 2000). Aspects of union formation such as the choice between marriage and cohabitation and ethnicity of the partner belong to the most crucial normative aspects of union formation in Turkish families. The timing of a union, however, is also related to more practical issues and parents and family may take here less interest than for instance in the background of the partner of their children. Therefore, non-coethnic friends and acquaintances may be more likely to influence the timing of a first union, especially if they are numerous. Although, conformity with parents' values is usually high (Nauck 2002a), it may be that some second-generation youths choose to break with their family of origin due to, for example, conflicts. These young adults may also be more likely to resemble the native young adults in their union

formation patterns. This reasoning leads to the following hypotheses about social embeddedness:

*Turkish second generation young adults with a stronger social embeddedness into non-coethnic networks and weaker embeddedness into their family of origin are more likely to postpone union formation compared to those second-generation Turks with a weak embeddedness into non-coethnic networks and/or stronger embeddedness into their family of origin.*

### **(II) Strong vs weak ties in non-coethnic networks**

Social embeddedness is a generic concept that incorporates many different types of social contacts. However, not all kind of contacts with natives and persons from other ethnic groups may be equally important in influencing the timing of union formation of second generation young adults. Granovetter (1973) introduces a useful distinction between two types of social ties, weak and strong ties. Strong ties consist of close friends and weak ties of acquaintances. Those social ties are a form of social capital and offer opportunities and constraints for the individual actor. Weak ties often function as bridges to connect social networks and can facilitate information gathering, and diffusion of new ideas (Granovetter 1983). Strong ties are usually more important to generate social and emotional support, and act as a major support system in times of need, because they are characterized by high levels of time investment and intimacy.

Given the centrality of the family in the lives of people in general, and among migrants from Turkey in particular, it can be expected that strong ties are more relevant for decision making concerning the timing of union formation than weak ties, because only close contact will offer similar support or constraints than the family. Having close native friends offers the possibility to closely observe alternative behaviours and having an alternative support network of native friends can increase the likelihood of choosing a behaviour that resembles that observed among these native friends. Following this argumentation we would expect strong ties to be of higher importance than weak ties with respect to timing of union formation. This leads to our second hypothesis:

*The timing of union formation of second-generation Turks having strong ties in non-coethnic networks will resemble those of native young adults more than second-generation Turks who have no or only weak ties to non-coethnic networks.*

### **(III) Relevance of social embeddedness in different countries**

The social embeddedness into non-coethnic networks may differ by country, because of different opportunities and constraints. Schools, which are the most likely place to form contacts to non-coethnics in adolescence, can differ in their ethnic composition and different levels of segregation in neighbourhoods may lead to a greater separation between ethnic groups. Some second-generation young adults may therefore be less likely to establish strong or weak ties with persons from other ethnic groups. Nevertheless, once ties with non-coethnics exist they are likely to be of similar importance for the second generation in terms of support and influence, which leads to our third hypothesis:

*The effect of strong and weak ties on timing of union formation will be similar for second generation Turks in the different countries*

## Data and methods

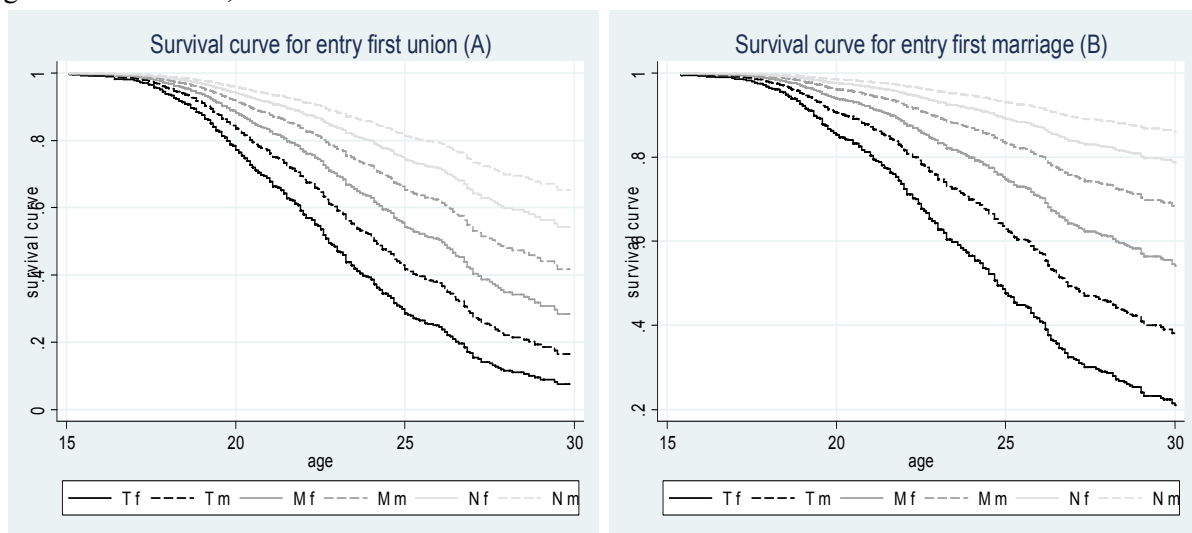
To test our hypotheses we will use data from “The integration of the European second generation” (TIES) survey for Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland. The TIES survey is an European comparative study that investigates the lives of the second generation from Turkey, Morocco and Ex-Yugoslavia as well as a native group in 15 cities in eight European countries. For the survey 10,000 respondents aged 18 to 35 years were interviewed in 2007-2008. Our sample includes 250 to 500 Turkish second-generation per country resulting in a total sample of about 3,000 second generation Turks.

Social embeddedness will be measured in terms of having weak and strong ties to the host society. To measure weak ties, we will use information about the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood in which the person lived, and the ethnic composition of the secondary school that was attended. To measure strong ties, information on the ethnicity of the three best friends in secondary school and on the ethnic composition of the wider friends’ network will be used. Testing for the position and contact within the family, we include the educational level of the parents, the level of maternal labor force participation, and a measure for conflicts with parents when the respondent was 17 years old. To control for other important influences on the timing of union formation of young adults, individual characteristics (such as educational attainment, age and gender) will be included. Event history analysis is used to test the hypotheses on the influence of social embeddedness.

## Preliminary findings for the Netherlands

The study of social embeddedness into non-coethnic networks among the Turkish and Moroccan second generation in the Netherlands showed that the Turkish second generation started their union formation earlier compared to the Moroccans and the native Dutch (Figure 1) and affirmed the continuing existence of differences in the union formation choices to the native group. In addition, our multivariate analysis (not shown) revealed that particularly those with only non-coethnic best friends postponed union formation, while the role of weak ties and the context remained relatively open. In our paper we will expand the analyses to the Turkish second generation in seven countries. Furthermore, we will give an assessment of factors influencing the timing of union formation by comparing the relative influence of embeddedness in the family and friendship network.

Figure 1: Smoothed survival curves for entry into first union (A) & first marriage (B) of second generation Turkish, Moroccan and native Dutch men and women in the Netherlands



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