



Transition to adulthood in France: Do children of immigrants differ from natives?



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ABSTRACT

This study examines differences in patterns of transition to adulthood among children of immigrants and natives in France. We simultaneously analyze the working-related and demographic events that make up the transition to adulthood for two main groups of immigrants' children (i.e., North African and Southern European) and compare them to the pathway of native-born French. We identify five groups of similar trajectories using sequence and cluster analysis. In order to analyze how trajectories to adulthood are shaped by ethnic origin, gender and background characteristics, we estimate multinomial logistic regression on the likelihood of belonging to each of the five selected clusters. We do not find huge differences between children of immigrants and natives. However, specific patterns do emerge for immigrants' children. They less frequently follow paths with long periods of autonomy and adopt the more economically constrained pathways to adulthood. In particular, they stay significantly longer in the parental home, partly because their parents come from societies characterized by strong family ties, and partly because they have greater difficulties in becoming economically self-sufficient. For children of immigrants from North Africa, especially women, the entry into adulthood is slower and is less marked by union formation, whether cohabitation or marriage. Finally, children of immigrants from Southern Europe behave more like native French.

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1. Introduction

The way people become adults has changed substantially in most Western countries since the late 1960s. During that period, early life trajectories became more complex, longer and more differentiated by individual characteristics (Aassve, Burgess, Chesher, & Propper, 2002; Furstenberg, 2010; Rindfuss, Choe, Kabamalan, Tsuya, & Bumpass 2010). Key events in young people's lives became less synchronized and occurred in a less standard order. Many scholars view these changes in the transition to adulthood as part of the second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe, 1995). Changes in norms, increased affirmation of individual autonomy, an evolving gender system, and secularization have led to more independent living and to a postponement of the least irreversible events, such as having children (Billari & Liefbroer, 2010). But structural transformations of educational patterns, labor market contexts, and working and living conditions are also important factors underlying the observed variations in entry into adulthood (Billari, 2004; Blossfeld, Klijzing, Mills, & Kurz, 2005). Growing economic

insecurity, increased employment instability and rising costs of living have been major causes of life event postponement.

Although these changes are widespread, pathways to adulthood also vary by socioeconomic group (Berzin & De Marco, 2010; Furstenberg, 2010). Fewer individuals of relatively low socioeconomic status pursue post-secondary education, and for them the transition to adulthood is generally faster, while individuals of higher socioeconomic status are more likely to pursue higher education, to live longer on their own, and to postpone union formation (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999). Family background is a key factor in these differences among groups, since it determines levels of cultural and economic resources, which in turn influence the process of entry into adulthood (Elzinga & Liefbroer, 2007; Furstenberg, 2008; Schoen, Landale, Daniels, & Cheng 2009).

Most research into the effect of family background on the transition to adulthood in Europe has focused on parents' social class (Sironi, Barban, & Impicciatore, 2015; Galland 1997). Less attention has been paid to differences in patterns of transition to adulthood across ethnic origin groups (except De Valk, 2006; Kleinepier, de Valk, & van Gaalen, 2015), in spite of the fact that immigrants'

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children now make up a sizeable and growing fraction of the European population and are reaching the age of family formation. Some recent studies have analyzed the early trajectories of second-generation immigrants in Europe by focusing on one transition component at a time, mainly the timing of first union and first birth (Hannemann et al., 2014; Kulu et al., 2015; Bernhardt, Goldscheider, Goldscheider, & Bjerer, 2007 and Andersson, Obucina, & Scott, 2015 in Sweden; Lievens, 1999 in Belgium; Milewski & Hamel, 2010 and Pailhé, 2015 in France; Soehl and Yahirun, 2011 in Germany). There are fewer studies on the overall process of entry into adulthood (except De Valk, 2006; Hamel, Mogueu, & Santelli, 2011; Kleinepiper & de Valk, 2016). Even fewer studies have taken a gendered perspective in analyzing the entry into adulthood of immigrants' children (except Bernhardt et al., 2007; Goldscheider, Goldscheider, & Bernhardt, 2008). What remains unclear from this literature is how employment and family trajectories interact for children of immigrants, and whether this interaction varies by gender within the same minority group. It is thus essential to address the overall process of entry into adulthood for children of immigrants from a gendered perspective.

This study examines whether the new pattern of transition to adulthood can also be found among children of immigrants in France. It focuses on the interplay between gender and ethnic origin, and it investigates whether individual behaviors are affected by cultural and/or socioeconomic factors.

Because of its long history of receiving migrants, the French population includes a significant proportion of immigrants' children; in 2008 they accounted for about 10% of the population (Insee, 2012). Some minority groups, such as those from North Africa or Southern Europe, come mostly from countries characterized by strong family ties and that have not experienced secularization (Reher, 1998). This may influence their children's process of entering adulthood and distinguish them from the typical French model, which is characterized by early home leaving, remaining single for a relatively long time, increasing unmarried cohabitation and non-marital childbearing, as well as independence from older generations (Cavalli, Cicchelli, & Galland, 2008). Moreover, children of immigrants are often from modest social backgrounds, have lower educational levels, are more strongly impacted by unfavorable economic conditions and have few employment opportunities (Meurs, Pailhé, & Simon, 2006; Brinbaum, Meurs, & Primon, 2015). It takes much longer for them to become financially independent, a fact which may influence their transition to adulthood.

In this paper, we analyze the process of transition to adulthood for France's two main groups of immigrants' children (i.e., North African and Southern European) and compare it to the pathways of native-born French. We simultaneously analyze the key events that make up the transition to adulthood, i.e., the completion of education, leaving the parental home, entry into the labor market, union formation, and entry into parenthood. Our research is based on data from the 2008 "Trajectories and Origins" survey (a survey that contains rich demographic data and oversamples immigrants' children) and applies sequence analysis.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 outlines the main results reported in the literature and lists our research hypotheses; Section 3 describes the data, analytical strategy and variables we use in the empirical part of the research; Section 4 presents the results; and Section 5 summarizes the main findings and provides a conclusion.

2. Background and hypotheses

2.1. Diverse pathways of transition to adulthood

Typically, the demographic events of the transition to adulthood have included such markers as leaving home, finishing

education, getting a full-time job, marrying or cohabiting, and having children (Modell, Furstenberg, & Hershberg, 1976). In nearly all European countries, since the late 1960s, the sequencing of these events and the pace at which they occur have become less standardized, more diverse and more unpredictable (Lesnard, Cousteaux, Chanvriil, & Le Hay, 2010; Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011). Compared to previous decades, they occur much later, at more diverse ages, and for durations that vary more widely (Brückner & Mayer, 2005). Some life events such as marriage concern smaller shares of the population, while more young people cohabit, have children outside marital unions, or remain childless (Billari & Liefbroer, 2010; Kiernan, 2002, 2004). Transitions between different states also take longer. In particular, young adults explore multiple possibilities before making decisions that will have a lasting impact on their lives. For instance, living in one's own home has become part of the transition to adulthood. These changes have affected both men and women, so much so that pathways to adulthood tend to converge across genders. However, entry into adulthood still differs between men and women in terms of the timing of marriage and non-marital childbearing (Oesterle, Hawkins, & Hill, 2011; Winkler-Dworak & Toulemon, 2007).

Many scholars view the process that is changing the course of entry into adulthood as part of the second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe, 1995). This de-standardization process results from changes in dominant norms that shape not only the possible, acceptable and desirable transitions over the life course but also their sequencing (Hoffmann-Nowotny & Fux, 2001; Lesthaeghe & Surkyn, 2004). Due to changes in cultural beliefs, secularization and increased individualization, young individuals have more freedom in choosing their lifestyles and personal living arrangements, as well as in planning their own lives.

Changes in the family model have also arisen as a result of structural factors such as changes in educational patterns, the increasing labor market participation of women, and changes in their role in society due to a higher level of education. The growing diversity and instability of young adults' life trajectories appear to be linked to the growing insecurity that characterizes modern societies (Beck, 1995; Blossfeld, Klijzing, Mills, & Kurz, 2006; Blossfeld & Hofmeister, 2006). Increasing youth unemployment, the prevalence of limited-term work contracts and unstable employment are now viewed as major causes of the postponement of departure from the parental home and family formation in contemporary Europe (Blossfeld et al., 2005). These changes in the labor market, coupled with rising housing costs, create an incentive for young adults to pursue post-secondary education.

2.2. A specific process of entering adulthood for immigrants' children

Immigrants' children go through a specific process of entering adulthood in that their parents' cultural background may significantly differ from that of the host society, and many have been raised in conditions of socio-economic disadvantage.

The family of origin defines young adults' cultural resources. Child and adolescent socialization processes shape their aspirations, values and attitudes and, in turn, their pathways to adulthood (Liefbroer & Elzinga, 2012). Dominant values and norms during childhood influence family formation behaviors and their timing (Barber, 2000). For instance, highly religious individuals tend to have conservative attitudes towards family formation (Michaël & Tuma, 1985; Régnier-Loilier & Prioux, 2008). In particular, they ascribe importance to the institution of marriage and favor early family formation as well as early motherhood. Their behaviors are also more traditional: they are more likely than non-religious people to enter into a formal union (in particular, marriage) upon leaving the parental home than to live independently (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999). Due to family

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