



Marrying after arriving: The role of individuals' networks for immigrant choice of partner's origin



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 24 July 2012

Received in revised form 17 October 2013

Accepted 31 October 2013

Keywords:

Immigrants

Integration

Marriage

Individual networks

Spain

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the impact of social networks on the transition to marriage among recently arrived, single, immigrants in Spain. Our hypothesis states that the existence of individual networks at the moment of arrival strongly influences partner selection. Using the 2007 Spanish National Immigration Survey we apply competing risk models to estimate the likelihood of endogamous or exogamous marriage, for men and women separately. The analysis shows that among immigrant men and women, the presence of relatives or friends from their home-country at the time of arrival increases the probability of marriage to a co-national. Correspondingly, immigrants who obtained Spanish citizenship before migrating present higher chances of intermarriage, as they are likely to have more contact with the host society.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to analyze the influence of individual networks on the partner selection of newly arrived immigrants in Spain. We investigate the likelihood of getting married among single² foreign-born individuals. Our assumption is that the existence of pre-established personal networks, with other immigrants or with Spanish nationals, at the time of arrival, contributes to partner selection, measured in terms of endogamous (same nationality) or exogenous (Spanish nationals) marriages.

Immigrant marriage, and particularly intermarriage, is a phenomenon that draws much attention and previous research has frequently used immigrant\ native intermarriage as an indicator of the level of integration of an

immigrant group within a specific population (Gordon, 1964). From a sociological perspective, intermarriage is perceived as an indication that differing social groups accept each other as social equals, or as evidence of an intimate link between social groups – also implying social integration (Kalmijn, 1998; Van Zantvliet & Kalmijn, 2013). Marital union between different races or ethnic minorities has been of particular interest for US scholars for much of the 20th century (see for example Drachler, 1920; Gordon, 1964; Kalmijn, 1998; Rosenfeld, 2002; Meng & Gregory, 2005). This area of research has been also growing in relevance in Europe throughout recent decades (for example: Coleman, 1994, for the UK; Safi, 2008; Tribalat, Simon, & Riandey, 1996, for France; Lievens, 1999, for Belgium; Kalmijn & Van Tubergen, 2006, for the Netherlands; Dribe & Lundh, 2008, for Sweden; Huschek, Valk, & Liefbroer, 2012, for second-generation Turks in Europe; Sánchez-Domínguez, de Valk, & Reher, 2011, for Spain; and Lucassen & Laarman, 2009, cross-national analysis).

It has been shown that the length of settlement in a host society is among one of the most important factors influencing a predisposition for choosing a native partner.

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² We excluded from our dataset possible cases of marriage migration. Specifically, we selected immigrants claiming to be single and not in any kind of relationship before migration.

In other words, the longer immigrants stay, the more likely they are to adapt to, and assimilate their adopted country's cultural and social norms. Due to the importance of the length of stay, less attention has been paid to partner selection mechanisms among immigrants in countries where immigration is recent, and yet marriages between immigrants and natives are considerably high, particularly in the Spanish case (intermarriages increased from 4.5% of the total marriages in 1998 to 16.3% in 2010, according to marriage register data).

Contrary to traditional destination countries such as the US, France, the Netherlands, and the UK, Spain is experiencing immigration as a relatively new phenomenon. Spain offers an interesting context for the study of partner choice for several reasons. First, it underwent a rapid transformation during the latter two decades of the 20th century, shifting from being predominantly an emigration country to a country of immigration. This transition occurred at a pace and magnitude that far exceeded previous examples in developed countries. During the mid-1990s there were around half a million foreign-born individuals living in Spain (comprising 3% of the total population). Within ten years this figure had increased to some 4.5 million (over 10% of the total population). This means that most immigrants living in Spain have had a short period of residence and that marrying an immigrant, from the natives' perspective, is a fairly recent likelihood. For this reason, individuals' networks at the moment of arrival are expected to be of key significance as mechanisms that expose individuals to different social groups and help form social associations.

Second, immigration flows have been extremely diverse regarding origins. The presence of different cultural and historical backgrounds (Sánchez-Domínguez et al., 2011) creates a diverse ethnic composition for which to test the role of individuals' network on partner choice. At the beginning of the immigration process, in the early 1990s, the majority of new arrivals were of a European background. Later, Latin-Americans significantly exceeded the previous flows in terms of volume, and among the most represented were Ecuadorians, Colombians and Argentines. Moroccans have always constituted a significant immigrant group in Spain, with a relatively stable flow over time. Currently, Romanians are one of the main ethnic minorities, although this flow only really gathered pace in the middle of the 2000s.

In our analysis we focus on foreign-born immigrants from Colombia, Ecuador, Morocco, Romania and Argentina, for a number of different reasons. First, these countries are the five most represented developing countries in contemporary Spanish immigration and together they comprise around 50% of the foreign-born population in Spain. Moreover, in our database they are the only individual groups who are representative for the whole country in the sample. Those groups are also very diverse in terms of settlement processes, territorial distribution and sex ratio, thus creating different marriage market structures over time that are taken into account in our models. Our selection is also justified in terms of the availability of data: these are the only groups where information is available regarding their territorial concentration and gender

composition over time since the beginning of 1990s. These time-varying indicators from register data will be merged into our dataset and are of key importance to control for the impact of the marriage pool on partner choice.

Third, there is an absence of life-course research in this area for Spain. In this paper we use the 2007 National Immigrant Survey (NIS) of the Spanish National Institute of Statistics. It is the first database to provide retrospective information on the social and demographic characteristics and life-course events of immigrants in Spain, and includes rich information on immigrants' personal situations prior to migration. Moreover, by using this data we are able to take into account causality effects beyond the association between personal networks and type of marriage. In this way we avoid reversed causality, i.e., we can ascertain that those networks included in the models were formed before marriage, and that they existed or not when individuals arrived in the country. To our knowledge, most studies regarding partner choice among immigrants in Spain are based on cross-sectional data, without the benefit of retrospective information (Cortina, Esteve, & Domingo, 2008). In addition, most research on marriage patterns using the NIS data focus on the distribution of existing unions (Esteve & Cortina, 2011; Sánchez-Domínguez et al., 2011) or explore, in general terms, the factors leading to different types of unions among specific ethnic groups (Esteve & Bueno, 2012, for Moroccans).

Our main interest is the role individual networks play in partner selection by origin. It has already been shown that the existence of personal networks at the moment of arrival in a new country can strongly affect the establishment of social networks and are of key importance for the settlement patterns and incorporation of newly arrived immigrants (Hagan, 1994; Massey, Alcaron, Durand, & Gonzalez, 1987). For example, social networks can provide social capital to adapt to the new society, emotional and cultural support, initial housing and information about job opportunities (Hagan, 1998). The impact of those social environments on partner choice has been explored by a number of authors (among them Emerson, Kimbro, & Yancey, 2002; Lievens, 1998), however the role of personal networks, understood as an element that mediates immigrants and their marriage market, has been given little attention. A remarkable exception is a very recent study on friendship networks and interethnic union formation among immigrant children in the US (Van Zantvliet & Kalmijn, 2013). Here, our contribution is to extend the study of personal networks to foreign-born immigrants in a country with a short immigration history, which has been scarcely considered by previous literature (Van Zantvliet & Kalmijn, 2013) and certainly not for Spain. We argue that relationships established during the period of arrival, with co-nationals or with members of the host society, are key elements to explain the formation of an endogamous marriage or intermarriage in Spain.

We begin by presenting the theoretical framework. A description of the data and modelling strategy are then provided. This is followed by the analysis of the results and finally, the conclusions are presented.

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