



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Advances in Life Course Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/alcr



Does family matter for recent immigrants' life satisfaction?

Claudia Masferrer*

McGill University, 845 Rue Sherbrooke O, Montréal, Québec H3A 0G4, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 26 May 2015
Received in revised form 15 February 2016
Accepted 28 March 2016
Available online xxx

Keywords:

Life satisfaction
Immigrant adaptation
Immigrant living arrangements
Family and households
Subjective well-being
Canada

ABSTRACT

Using the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, a nationally representative survey of recent immigrants, this paper explores the influence of coresidents on satisfaction with life in Canada. Results of cross-sectional logistic regression models indicate that except for living with young children shortly after arrival, living arrangements have a null influence on life satisfaction, when taking into account explanatory factors of demographic characteristics and modes of incorporation. To study how living arrangements influence changes in life satisfaction over time, I estimate fixed- and random-effects logistic regression models. Results from longitudinal analyses show that coresidents and changes in coresidents have null effects on changes in life satisfaction. Putting together results from cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses, findings suggest that characteristics of family living arrangements may be significant for *interpersonal* comparisons of satisfaction, but not for *intrapersonal* comparisons. This indicates that time-constant characteristics including personality, a key factor influencing satisfaction, as well as immigrant entry status and ethnicity may be selecting individuals into types of living arrangements. Overall, findings show large and significant influences of indicators of economic integration on satisfaction in the destination country, while coresidents and living arrangements have a small influence.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

People often migrate in search of a better life. To date, most research concentrates on whether or not migrants achieve a better life in economic terms. Scholars commonly measure integration in terms of income, educational attainment, or even naturalization rates, but still relatively little is known about how migrants assess their own life in the destination country (De Jong, Chamrathirong, & Tran, 2002; Easterlin, 2006; Suh, Diener, & Frank, 1996). While recent research has begun to assess changes in immigrants' subjective well-being (Amit, 2009; Bartram, 2010, 2011; Dion, Dion, & Banerjee, 2009; Houle & Schellenberg, 2010; Safi, 2010), the contribution of family living arrangements to immigrants' life satisfaction (hereafter, satisfaction) has been mostly overlooked.

The family is undoubtedly central to the migration experience; family factors into the decision to migrate and influences how migrants adapt to the receiving society (Boyd, 1989; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Mincer, 1978; Pessar, 1999; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Immigrants commonly move along with other family

members or choose destinations where relatives and friends have already settled (Liu, 2013; Massey et al., 1993).¹ Immigrants may turn to established family and friends for support, in finding housing or employment, and learning a new language. At the same time, arriving with dependents is associated with stress and everyday challenges (De Jong et al., 2002; Ying, 1996).

How do these family ties, and associated living arrangements, impact satisfaction in the destination and over time? Most previous research on immigration life satisfaction and living arrangements focuses on the elderly, missing a large portion of the immigrant population. At the same time, studies of the influence of family on life satisfaction focus primarily on union status, rather than extended family or living arrangements. Given the greater likelihood of immigrants to live in non-family households, it is likely that intimate partnerships extend beyond union status alone. The current paper bridges and expands these diverse bodies of research to better understand how immigrants' satisfaction with life in their new country relates to living arrangements. Specifically, this paper addresses (1) how different living

* Correspondence to: Centro de Estudios Demográficos, Urbanos y Ambientales, El Colegio de México, Camino al Ajusco 20, Col. Pedregal de Sta. Teresa, México D.F. 10740, Mexico.

E-mail address: cmasferrer@colmex.mx (C. Masferrer).

¹ The availability of family reunification procedures within immigration policy is an explicit recognition of family motivations for migration. Countries have, to varying degrees, legal and bureaucratic procedures allowing individuals to move with other family members or helping members to immigrate later.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2016.03.008>

1040-2608/© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

arrangements influence life satisfaction both initially upon arrival as well as four years later; (2) how they influence changes in life satisfaction; and (3) how changes in living arrangements influence changes in life satisfaction.

To answer these questions, I use data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada. I first estimate cross-sectional logistic regression models of the impact of living arrangements on life satisfaction at two different stages of the adaptation process: six months and four years after arrival. I then use fixed-effects logistic regression models to estimate the influence of coresidents on changes in satisfaction over time, accounting for personality and other time constant individual characteristics, and further compare these results to random-effects models.

Studying these processes in Canada is instructive. Canada has one of the highest immigration rates in the world; around one in every five people is foreign born (Statistics Canada, 2007a). The 1967 Immigration Act implemented a points system to select immigrants in terms of their skills, work experience and demographic characteristics.² Immigrants are also admitted for humanitarian and family reunification considerations.³ Consequently, immigrants to Canada are from diverse countries of origin, and most are visible minorities.⁴ Life satisfaction and how immigrants assess their experience will impact emigration and settlement patterns, future immigration (De Jong & Gardner, 1981; Mara & Landesmann, 2013; Massey & Akresh, 2006), and ultimately, social cohesion and national identity (Frideres, 2008; Reitz, 2009). Immigration will be a key contributor to population growth and source of ethnic diversity in many countries all over the world. Within this context, understanding the determinants of immigrant satisfaction is of primary importance.

2. Background

2.1. Satisfaction with life: family as a life domain

Life satisfaction, or self-reported happiness, is defined as the overall assessment of an individual's quality of life according to their personal judgment and criteria (Diener, 1984; Easterlin, 2001). In common with many researchers, I use life satisfaction – or satisfaction – and subjective well-being interchangeably. Contemporary perspectives consider that satisfaction with life is not the result of personality or events alone, but rather an interaction between them (Suh et al., 1996). This creates a complex interdependence between events and objective circumstances, and how individuals react to these over time (Kim-Prieto, Diener, Tamir, Christie, & Diener, 2013).

Scholars have usefully suggested that overall satisfaction may be understood in terms of satisfaction across various life domains, including health, income, family, and work (Cummins, 1996; Easterlin, 2006). Others add to this list community and friends, personal freedom, and values (Dolan, Peasgood, & White, 2008;

Layard, 2005). Within these domains, family relationships have been considered the major factor in determining happiness, followed by financial situation, work, community and friends, and health (Ball & Chernova, 2008; Layard, 2005).

2.2. Changes in life satisfaction and the immigrant 'culture shock' process

Few sociological and demographic studies have examined immigrants' changes in life satisfaction using longitudinal data, with the exception of studies on internal migration (for example, (De Jong et al., 2002; Martin & Lichter, 1983)). However, insights from social psychology literature are informative about the cognitive impact of adjusting to new situations or unfamiliar social systems. This process, also known as culture shock process, involves relearning and acculturative stress, but is not necessarily a negative experience as its positive force may ease adaptation in the long term (Pedersen, 1995). Overcoming culture shock is an intrapersonal phenomenon that unfolds over time. A stage of fascination and excitement in the first months after arrival tends to be followed by a period of disillusion and frustration, a learning phase of adjustment, finalizing with a stage where the individual is able to function effectively (Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Pedersen, 1995; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Although there are no set durations for each period, the 'honeymoon' stage usually ends after the first few weeks. During the first six months, immigrants go through a negotiation process characterized by anxiety and loneliness, but after a first year of adjustment, individuals are usually better adapted, feeling more comfortable and being able to participate better in the host society. Adjustment is strongly influenced by life changes, personality, and social support (Berry, 1997; Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Pedersen, 1995). Adaptation among international migrants is usually greater than for internal migrants, and the processes differs for sojourners, immigrants, refugees, and business professionals as motivations and expectations differ (Ward et al., 2001).

2.3. Family: a safety net and a source of stress for immigrants

The literature on social support – emotional, informational, and instrumental functions performed by social ties (Barrera, 1986) – provides insights on how family and living arrangements may relate to immigrant life satisfaction. Social support and social ties, both perceived and received, play a key role in well-being and mental health (see (Turner & Turner, 2013) for a review). But the importance of health and financial needs is found to be larger than the support provided by coresidents (Kim & Chen, 2011; Wilmoth & Chen, 2003). Some find that family members, such as siblings, children and spouses, are more important than friends in providing social support, while others argue the opposite (see (W. Shor, Roelfs, & Yogev, 2013) for a review), depending on the situation. Overall, scholars agree that social ties have beneficial effects on health and serves as a buffer for the negative effects of stress (Smith & Christakis, 2008; Thoits, 1995; Umberson & Montez, 2010). Its effectiveness on buffering stress depends on its source and type, especially primary and significant others compared to secondary and experientially similar others. Thoits (2011) argues that in situations where family members are either experiencing the same stressful situation, or are themselves the source of stress, friends and secondary groups constitute more significant sources of support. This is dependent on family functioning, and quality of ties (Franks, Campbell, & Shields, 1992).

Next, I discuss further how living with a spouse, children, extended kin, and non-kin might be associated to satisfaction among recent immigrants.

² Since 1967, the point system has gone through a series of modifications. In the mid-1990s it started emphasizing educational attainment rather than intended occupation, with the assumption that this would ease economic integration. Among other changes, the 2002 Immigration and Refugee Protection Act granted points to economic class applicants for having relatives living in the country, with the rationale that immigrants with relatives in Canada adapt more easily and are more likely to settle permanently. In 2008, the introduction of the Canadian Experience Class program (capped at 8000 applications per year) facilitated transitioning from a temporary to a permanent residence status, something limited beforehand.

³ Since 2000, the annual average of new permanent residents has been 250,000. In the last ten years, around 26% of the new immigrants are family class, 60% are economic migrants, 11% are refugees and 3% are other immigrants (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2012).

⁴ The term in Canada refers to non-aboriginal populations who are non-white in skin color and non-Caucasian in race.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4929539>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4929539>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)