



Full length article

The impact of intergenerational cultural transmission on fertility decisions

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 6 December 2017

Received in revised form 16 January 2018

Accepted 16 January 2018

JEL classification:

J13

J16

Z10

Keywords:

Culture

Immigration

Second-generation

Fertility

ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of cultural attitudes on the fertility decisions of women who were born in the U.S. To distinguish the economic and institutional effects from the cultural effects on fertility decisions, this study employs data from second-generation immigrant women who kept their heritage languages in the U.S. Total fertility rate (TFR) from the woman's heritage country is defined as a cultural proxy for fertility decisions. The results of the models indicate that second-generation immigrant women who kept their heritage languages and whose parents emigrated from countries with higher/lower TFR have more/fewer children in the U.S., respectively. Heritage cultures have positive and statistically significant impact on women's fertility decisions. The two main findings indicate that first, culture has quantitative effects on a woman's fertility decisions and second, culture slowly shifts over time. The results also demonstrate the importance of cultural transmission from one generation to the next, which can be used by policy makers.

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1. Introduction

Economic growth has experienced large variation across nations since World War II. Fertility is the main contribution to human capital accumulation and economic growth of each country (Licandro, 2002). A woman's decision for the number of children she has depends on many factors including characteristics of the woman, her husband, and her culture. Culture is defined as those traditional beliefs, values and ethics of social groups that transmits from one generation to the next generation without substantial changes. Moreover, culture and socio demographic affect expectations and preferences which shape people's behaviors and decisions (Guiso et al., 2009, 2006; Luttmer et al., 2011; Javid and Nejat, 2017; Javid et al., 2017).

Parents are the main institution who transmit own cultural views to their children. Bisin et al. (2004) indicate that minority group parents put great effort into changing the culture in their living environments to socialize their children. Immigrant families may present their origin cultures to their own children through speaking their Heritage Languages (HL) (Hughes et al., 2006; Tsai et al., 2012). HL refers to a language often spoken at home that is inherited from a parent's heritage country. HL is a primary instrument that transmits parents' origin cultures and beliefs to the second-generations. When parents speak HL to their children, they can easily convey their own values, beliefs and experiences (Fillmore, 1991; Tsai et al., 2012).

This study suggests the best way to measure the cultural effect is assessing second-generation immigrants who kept their heritage languages in a host country. Each immigrant has a specific culture that he/she brings to the host country and may transmit own culture to his/her own second-generation (Alesina and Giuliano, 2010; Salari, 2016; Tabellini, 2010). This study examines the fertility decisions of second-generation American women who kept their HLs and grew up in the U.S.

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The main difference for these second-generation immigrant women compared to other native women is being exposed to their ancestors' different cultures.

This study employs data on second-generation women in 1970 from 2 Metro Sample of the U.S. Census and links them to the values of total fertility rate (TFR) of their ancestral countries. This study suggests an empirical approach to measure the cultural effect of quantitative variables on fertility decisions. This approach focuses on immigrants' descendants in a country to isolate cultural effects from other economic aspects that may influence the fertility decisions of a woman.

The results indicate that there is strong evidence of the cultural impact for the fertility decisions of second-generation immigrant women who kept their HLs.

The main finding shows that second-generation immigrant women's decisions regarding their fertility decisions are consistent with their heritage countries: second-generation immigrant women who kept their HLs and belong to the heritage countries with high/low level of TFR have more/fewer children in the U.S., respectively. The results indicate that immigrant parents can transfer their own views through speaking HLs, and second-generation immigrant women who kept their HLs have similar attitudes to those women from their origin cultures.

This section is followed by the literature review, which is then succeeded by dataset descriptions and sample selection. The empirical approach and results are presented in subsequent sections. Finally, the last section presents the conclusion.

2. Literature review

Culture has been seen as the causal source for relating economic behaviors across generations. Culture's role in economic behaviors has been absent from studies for a long time, since having an empirical methodology to investigate this subject was difficult to find. The difficulty is finding a capable way to differentiate between cultural and institutional effects on economic decisions. Booth (2016) shows the importance of cultural factors on explaining economic preferences of women and men, which shape behavioral decisions. Several studies show how structural changes such as extra-family child care policies affect fertility decisions (Khanam et al., 2016; Yasuoka and Miyake, 2014), while few quantitative studies demonstrate that culture is a significant factor of fertility decisions.

This study builds on prior studies that have shown the impact of origin country on behaviors of immigrants' descendants. Guinnane et al. (2006) examine the Irish fertility in the U.S. in the 19th century and show the evidence of persistence of an Irish culture in the U.S. They show that Irish immigrants had larger families compared to the native-born population in the U.S. Moreover, Fernández and Fogli (2009) discuss the effect of origin country by investigating the fertility decisions of second-generation immigrant women. The cultural proxies for these women are statistically significant in describing the number of children they had. Fernández and Fogli (2009) also show that TFR of women's ancestors in 1950 played an important role in women's decisions about the number of children they had in 1970. Furthermore, Blau et al. (2013) demonstrate that fertility, education, and labor supply of second-generation immigrant women are significantly affected by their parents' level of these variables. However, the mother's and father's effects are asymmetric: fertility and labor force participation of women are mostly related to the mother's heritage country, while educational levels of women are highly affected by the father's heritage country.

Meanwhile, parental characteristics may affect children behaviors. There are other theoretical economic studies in transmission of values that assume parents are the primary institutions who are able to transmit their own beliefs to their children, and they can socialize their children to the particular behaviors. Bisin and Verdier (1998) find that children achieve preferences through their observations and experiences they received from their parents and environments. Bisin and Verdier (2001) and Tabellini (2008) highlight the role of parents on the assimilation of their children. They present evidence that preferences of children depend on their parents' socialization actions, since parents encourage their children to make decisions that are close to their own preferences, particularly in economic decisions.

Previous cultural studies have two main limitations. First, studies using immigrants to represent cultural behaviors do not consider the effect of immigration difficulties that may disrupt or delay the fertility decisions of immigrants. Second, previous studies using second-generation immigrants to represent cultural attitudes, while this approach could not distinguish the main culture that second-generation immigrants are involved. Second-generation immigrants are faced with as many as three different cultures: the mother's heritage culture, the father's heritage culture, and the birthplace culture. It is not clear in which of those cultures these second-generation immigrants are involved. This study proposes using second-generation immigrant women who kept their HLs in the U.S. to address these main issues. First, since all second-generation immigrant women have been born and raised in the U.S., they have not been faced with immigration disruptions. Second, heritage language in the U.S. indicates the main culture that second-generation immigrants are involved in and faced with, in the long term. This study suggests that speaking HL is an important part of each culture that increases the chance of cultural transmission from ancestors to the children. Consequently, those second-generation immigrants who kept their HLs can represent their heritage cultures.

HL plays a significant role in helping people maintain their heritage cultures and stay up to date regarding their heritage cultures through speaking with the people from the same heritage countries. The number of people who are multilingual and their mother tongues are not English has been growing since 1990.¹ Therefore, there are many women in the U.S. who

¹ The Census Bureau reports that more than 60.6 million people (21% of U.S. population) aged 5 and over spoke a language other than English at home in 2011. During 1990 there were only 31.8 million people (14% of U.S. population) who spoke language other than English at home (Ryan, 2013). An approximate increase of 96% has been observed for people age 5 and over whose HL is not English.

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