

Acculturation to Gender Norms: Employment Trajectories by Migrant Origin after the Transition to Parenthood in Finland

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Introduction

The transition to parenthood is an important life course event which is heavily influenced by social policies, institutions (e.g., Berger & Carlson, 2020; Cooke, 2006), social norms and gender role attitudes (Grunow & Evertsson, 2016). Research has shown that there is a migrant-native employment gap that is particularly evident amongst mothers, pointing at the transition to parenthood as an important turning point (Kil, Neels, Wood, & de Valk, 2018; Vidal-Coso, 2019). Analysing the return to employment after a woman's first birth, we aim to examine how time spent in the majority culture and the migrant origin of the spouse, both of which are associated with exposure to social norms, policies and institutions, influences the behaviour of migrant-origin women after experiencing a first birth.

Background

The behaviour of an individual in any given society is strongly influenced by the social norms and institutions surrounding them, as well as by their position in society. If that individual moves to another society during their childhood or youth, to what extent do they take on the behaviours of their majority peers? Children of immigrants have been researched extensively in recent years, examining both the behaviours and attainments as well as their values, beliefs and expectations. Our research on the patterns of employment bridges these two ways of analysing the role of acculturation among children of immigrants since the use of parental leave is strongly connected to both an individual's structural position on the labour market as well as social norms, particularly those related to gender equality.

Research indicates that the migrant-native employment gap is larger amongst mothers than non-mothers (Holland & de Valk, 2017; Kil et al., 2018; Vidal-Coso, 2019). On one hand, this may reflect the fact that in many cases, the countries of (parental) origin have lower rates of female labour force participation, especially among mothers. In this case migrants may draw on gender roles from their country of origin, influencing their labour force participation in the country of destination after experiencing a first birth. On the other hand, structural factors may influence a migrant's labour market position in the country of destination, such as lack of country-specific human capital, limited social capital or institutional knowledge (influencing access to child care, for example), or discrimination on the labour market, all of which may be exacerbated by the transition to parenthood (Kil et al., 2018).

Both of these factors may be influenced by the age at which the migrant moved to the country of origin, and the length of time they lived there before having their first child. Indeed, previous research on gender values has found these to vary by immigrant generation, length of residence, country of origin and gender (Röder & Mühlau, 2014; Sánchez Guerrero & Schober, 2021). Interestingly, women tend to adapt their values to those of the receiving society to a greater extent than men (Idema & Phalet, 2007; Röder & Mühlau, 2014). This highlights the importance of also examining the migrant status of the father. Although there are studies examining how labour market outcomes such as earnings are influenced by intermarriage (e.g., Brekke, 2013; Mohn, 2020), we are not aware of studies examining such a gendered process as returning to the labour market in relation to the origin of partner.

Research questions

We aim to assess how closely migrant-origin women in Finland resemble their majority peers in terms of their return to employment after the birth of their first child. Our research questions are:

1. Do migrant-origin women differ from their majority peers in their return to employment following the birth of their first child? Is there a generational/age-at-migration gradient? Does length of residence (taking into account age at first birth) increase similarity?
2. To what extent are the differences in the use of parental leave due to the structural position of children of immigrants on the labour market prior to childbirth and their level of education?
3. How is women's return to employment influenced by her partner's characteristics?

Data and methods

Employing full population register data from Statistics Finland, we analyse first births occurring between 2005 and 2017 and associated employment patterns and parental leave transfers until 2020. We restrict our sample to women who experience a first birth between the ages of 20 and 40 (approximately 98% of first births happen to women aged 40 and under, Statistics Finland). Thus the birth cohorts that we include are those born 1970–97. We focus on women who had a partner (marital or cohabiting) at the time of first birth, with supplementary results for all women. We omit women who migrated to Finland at age 18 or above as well as women who were missing from the data in at least one year during the time interval from one year before childbirth to three years after childbirth.

We divide our sample into four groups based on migrant origin and age at arrival: (1) majority (Finnish-born parents, $N=221,815$), (2) mixed origin (one Finnish-born and one foreign-born parent, $N=3,609$), (3) second generation (Finnish born, foreign-born parents, $N=225$), (4) first generation childhood migrant (foreign born, migrated before age 13, foreign-born parents, $N=2,234$), and (5) first generation youth migrant (foreign born, migrated between ages 13–17, foreign-born parents, $N=1,284$). The main reason for choosing age 13 as the cut-off between childhood and youth migrants is data-driven: we do not have reliable information on age at migration before 1987, when our oldest sample members are 12. However, this is also the age at which secondary education begins.

We follow women in the three years following the first birth using two dependent variables: (1) a binary variable of having earnings from employment (or self-employment) of at least 10,000 EUR (in 2016 values) in a calendar year, and (2) earnings relative to pre-birth earnings (calendar year before the child was born) for those women who are employed, capped at 100%. The first dependent variable is modelled with logistic regression analysis and the second with linear regression analysis. In all our models we include interactions between the generation groups and time (years since first birth), and cluster errors by individuals. Results are displayed as predicted probabilities (margins).

The time-constant control variables in all models are age at first birth and its square, year of first birth, and the month in which the child was born. The time-varying control variables are living with a partner and birth of second child (for models of relative pay). To assess our second research question on the role played by structural position, we add women's education level, their employment months and their earnings from employment in the year before the first birth (Model 3). To assess our third research question on the partner's characteristics, we add the generation of the father of the child and the age and its square of the father (to be exact, this is the co-habiting partner the year the child was born, not necessarily the biological father) (Model 4). In the next step we add time-varying measures of the education level and employment months of the spouse as well as the income difference

between partners before first birth (Model 5). Finally we test for interactions between the woman's and her partner's generation (Model 6 = Model 2 + interaction; Model 7 = Model 5 + interaction).

To assess the role of length of residence we will employ interactions between age at migration and age at first birth. We will also take into account country-of-origin differences in further analyses as well as sensitivity analyses with alternative specifications of our outcomes.

Initial Results

The two panels of Figure 1 show the initial results for return to employment and relative pay for those who have returned (left and right panel, respectively). What we can see is the expected generational gradient for the return to employment. This is explained to a large extent by women's own structural position and somewhat by the migration characteristics of the spouse.

When it comes to relative pay among those who have returned, we do not see the same generational gradient. The advantage of majority women is mainly seen after we control for structural position. In particular, the 2nd generation do not return as fully as other women in terms of relative pay.

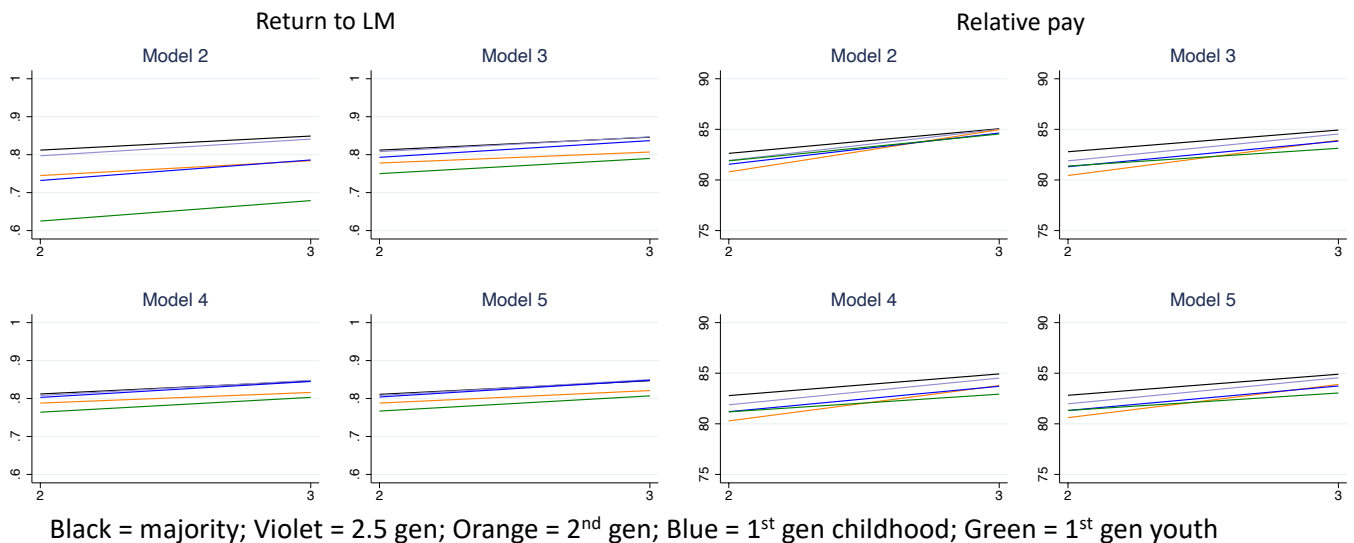


Figure 1. Generational status and return to employment (left panel) and relative pay from employment (right panel) in the three years following birth of first child.

The origin and generation of the spouse seems to play a large role for return to employment (left panel of Figure 2). Having a migrant origin spouse separates women according to generational status more than having a Finnish-born spouse. The origin of the spouse seems to be particularly influential for the second generation, but in our analyses this is a very small group. Interestingly, the pattern is the opposite when it comes to relative pay among women who return to employment (right panel of Figure 2). Here, women with a foreign-born spouse return to closer to their pre-birth pay than women with a Finnish-born spouse but controlling for personal and spousal characteristics this is no longer the case. However, in many cases those with a childhood migrant spouse return less fully than those with an adult migrant spouse.

Discussion

This research employs the transition to parenthood to examine how similar migrants' behaviour is to the majority population. Overall, many expectations based on different degrees of acculturation are confirmed: the second

generation tends to be closest to the majority, followed by the childhood migrants and the largest differences tend to be observed among the youth migrants. Education and employment before birth are particularly important for explaining differences in return to employment. The migration background of the spouse seems to play out somewhat differently for the two outcomes analysed. The findings for the male partner's migration status highlight the importance of conducting couple-level research, and warrant further examination.

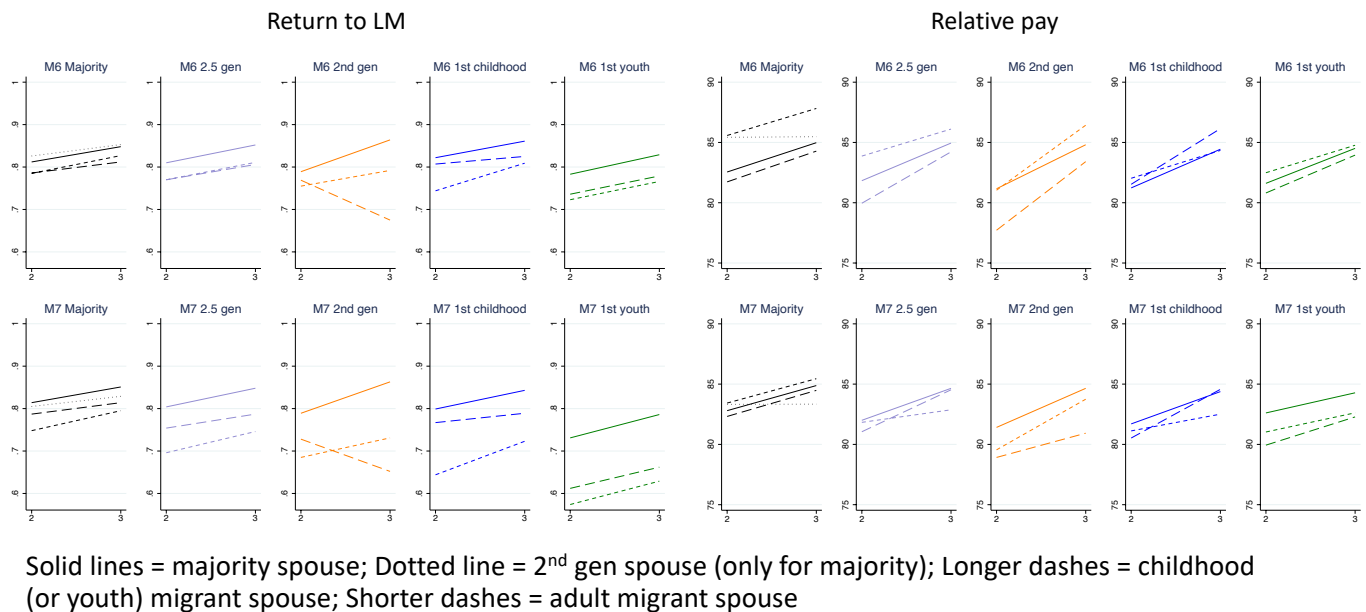


Figure 2. Generational status of woman and her partner and her return to employment (left panel) and relative pay from employment (right panel) in the three years following birth of first child.

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