

Fertility patterns of recent immigrants in the UK

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Extended abstract

Context:

Immigration has made a significant demographic contribution to the UK population in the past decade, with net migration accounting for the majority of population growth between 1998 and 2008¹. Furthermore, whilst natural change became the biggest contributor to population growth in 2008, this is partially due to foreign-born fertility with increases in the number of foreign-born females at childbearing ages within the UK. In 2008, 24% of all live births occurring within England and Wales occurred to foreign-born mothers, which is the highest ever proportion since recording of mother's country of birth began in 1969 and compares to 14% of live births ten years previously in 1998². The fertility of the foreign-born population is higher than that of the UK-born population, meaning that their increasing share of childbearing will drive increases in UK fertility levels. Indeed, it has been recognised that recent rises seen in UK fertility levels are partially accounted for by foreign-born fertility³.

Despite the importance of foreign-born fertility in the UK, research has been limited with regard to how foreign-born fertility will continue to contribute to the UK population in the near future. For example, existing literature on the fertility of migrants in other countries has suggested that childbearing may be elevated following migration due to the 'disruptive' effects of migration, but that overall completed childbearing will not necessarily differ from that of non-migrants. Alternatively, hypotheses have been proposed that migrants retain the fertility levels found at the country of origin, whilst others hypothesise that the country of destination norms will be most influential on fertility trends⁴.

¹ Office for National Statistics (2009, August) <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?ID=950>

² Office for National Statistics (2009, August) <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=369>

³ Tromans, N., Natamba, E. and Jefferies, J. (2009). Have women born outside the UK driven the rise in UK births since 2001? *Population Trends*. 136, 28-42.

⁴ For a summary, see: Kulu, H. (2005). Migration and fertility: Competing hypotheses re-examined. *European Journal of Population*. 21(1), 51-87.

The key hypotheses proposed within the literature can be summarised as: ‘disruption’ (elevated fertility following arrival due to postponement prior to the move, i.e. a recuperation effect); ‘socialisation’ (fertility will most closely resemble that of non-migrants at origin, due to the persistence of origin norms); ‘assimilation’ (migrant fertility will adapt to that at destination, with the social environment one is currently in most influential for childbearing behaviours); ‘selection’ (migrants represent a characteristically different group to non-migrants, due to the fact that they have been selected in to migration and will have selected fertility preferences also); and, ‘interrelation of events’ (migration and childbearing careers as intertwined within the life-course, rather than parallel careers. The migration, relationship formation and childbearing occur closely together within time, making it difficult to establish the ordering of events).

It is considered important to study how migration and fertility interact in the UK context because this will naturally have different implications for the UK population with regards to whether higher fertility levels amongst the foreign-born population will be sustained over time or lessen with duration of residence. The hypotheses outlined above are used as a guiding framework for this analysis.

Data and Methodologies:

This research uses a cross-sectional sample from the UK Labour Force Survey (LFS), with data pooled from April-June quarters for 2001-2008. Own Children Method (OCM) estimation is used to construct fertility estimates for females aged 15-49 years. The LFS pooled data provides sufficient sample sizes for conducting such analyses in the inter-censal period, and also provides year of entry information unavailable in existing census data. The unavailability of direct fertility histories is overcome by the use of the OCM estimation.

The recent foreign-born group of analysis is defined as individuals who arrived to the UK from 2001 onwards. In addition to this group, individuals from key countries of birth will be focused on as case studies. This is important for distinguishing between effects that might be due to country of origin and those that might be associated with the migration process itself. The estimates for the recent foreign-born groups will be analysed with reference to year of arrival to the UK in order to separate effects that might be associated with having recently arrived and

those that appear to be longer term in nature. This is particularly important in establishing the relevance of the disruption and interrelation of events hypotheses.

Fertility estimates will also be presented for the comparable UK-born population from the sample, in order to address the assimilation hypothesis. Estimates for country of origin fertility will be used from existing published data to address the socialisation hypothesis. Fertility of the recent foreign-born will be compared to both of these groups in assessing the selection hypothesis. It is noteworthy that we only explore short to medium term effects here, as individuals in the sample will have been resident in the UK for a maximum of seven years.