

Ethnic Homogamy as a De-stabilizing Factor? Union Dissolution among the Caribbean Second Generation in the Netherlands

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Introduction

Research about union dissolution among children of immigrants, the so called second generation, focusses primarily on marriage and the increased risk of divorce among inter-ethnically married couples. So far hardly anything is known about the dissolution of unmarried cohabitating relationships and how this relates to homogamy of the couple in terms of their ethnic origin. This is unfortunate since unmarried cohabitation often precedes, but also is an alternative to marriage in many European societies (Perelli-Harris and Lyons-Amos 2015, Sobotka and Toulemon 2008). This not only holds for majority populations, but is also the case for certain migrant populations, such as those of Caribbean descent (Hannemann and Kulu 2015, Hannemann et al. 2014, Kleinepier and De Valk 2016). By primarily focusing on marital divorce, previous research does not do justice to an increasingly diverse population and diverse union formation and dissolution patterns.

The aim of this paper is to fill this gap in the literature by examining how ethnic homogamy is related to the dissolution of unmarried cohabitating relationships among the Caribbean second generation in the Netherlands. We focus on the Surinamese and Antillean second generation, who are among the largest non-Western migrant groups in the Netherlands (Statistics Netherlands, 2018). Focusing on these groups is especially interesting because of the norms regarding union formation and dissolution in the Caribbean culture. Most research on the stability of interethnic relationships focusses on migrant groups in which relationship norms and behaviors are more traditional than among Western majority populations, such as among the children of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants. For the Caribbean second generation in the Netherlands it can however be argued that norms regarding union formation and dissolution are actually less traditional than among the majority population, especially with regard to Antilleans. This reversed level of traditionality may have implications for the stability of interethnic relationships among the Caribbean second generation.

Using convergence theory, we formulate several hypotheses about how the origin of the partners influences the stability of unmarried cohabitation among the Caribbean second generation. Previous studies generally only make a distinction between heterogamous versus homogenous relationships (but see Eeckhaut et al. 2011). When examining relationships of the second generation it is however important to extend partner choice options as homogenous partners can be either first generation immigrants born in the parents' country of origin, or second generation co-ethnics. Moreover, we take a gender perspective and examine whether the stability of an unmarried cohabitation differs across the origin of the man and the woman (not yet elaborated on in this abstract).

Theoretical framework

According to convergence theory the risk of separation depends on the norms about union formation and dissolution in the culture of both partners (Jones 1996, Zhang and Van Hook 2009). In some ethnic groups the norms regarding separation and divorce are more traditional than in other groups, which can translate into relatively low dissolution rates. In other ethnic groups partnerships dynamics are more liberal which might subsequently result in more break-ups. When partners with different ethnic backgrounds enter a cohabitation, the separation propensities of both groups are combined. The risk for union dissolution in that case reflects the separation propensities of the respective ethnic groups represented in the couple.

In the Caribbean culture, the norms regarding union formation and dissolution are relatively liberal. Marriage is, for example, less common than among the Dutch majority population (ref) and single parenthood is relatively common which indicates less stable partnerships (Kleinepier and De Valk 2016). Moreover, a study by Smith, Maas, and van Tubergen (2012) shows that marital divorce rates are higher among Surinamese and Antilleans than among the Dutch majority population. If a couple consists of a second generation Caribbean partner and a Dutch partner, we may expect that the separation propensities of both cultures are joined. This is likely to make the couple less inclined to separate compared to a couple in which both partners have a Caribbean background with relatively high separation propensities. Opposite of what is usually hypothesized and found for more traditional migrant populations, we therefore expect that unmarried cohabiting unions between a second generation Caribbean partner and a Dutch majority partner are more stable than an unmarried cohabitation between two partners with a Caribbean origin (H1).

Convergence theory also offers a suitable framework for hypothesizing about how different homogenous partners relate to the stability of a relationship. The Caribbean second generation is socialized with two cultures, that of their parents country of origin and that of the Netherlands. Their

separation propensity is therefore likely to be lower than that of a partner born in Suriname or the Antilles. If a couple consists of a second generation and a first generation Caribbean partner, their joined separation propensity is likely to be higher compared to a couple in which both partners are of the Caribbean second generation since first generation partners bring along a higher risk of separation. Following this line of reasoning, we therefore expect that unmarried cohabiting unions between a second generation partner and a first generation partner are less stable than an unmarried cohabitation between two second generation partners (H2).

Data and Method

In this study we use full population register data from Statistics Netherlands. These longitudinal data from the System of Social Statistical Datasets (SSD) (Bakker, Van Rooijen, and Van Toor 2014) include all second generation individuals with a Surinamese and Antillean origin born in the Netherlands between 1980 and 1995 (Surinamese N=74,061, Antilleans N=23,670). We have access to data from 1995 until 2017, which capture the years in which our research population reaches adulthood and starts to form relationships. A person is classified as second generation when he or she is born in the Netherlands, but at least one of his or her parents is born abroad; in this case in Suriname or the (former) Dutch Antilles. The data used in this paper are unique because they include all individuals involved in unmarried cohabiting relationships, rather than a selective sample. Previous research among migrant populations based on surveys had to rely on relatively small samples of unmarried cohabiters (e.g. Hannemann and Kulu 2015, Hannemann et al. 2014). And studies that do use register data are often limited to including only part of the unmarried cohabiters (e.g. with children) because no data is available on residential addresses (Holland and De Valk 2013, Nekby 2010). In our data, couples are classified as unmarried cohabiters when two individuals, with or without children, form a private household and live at the same address. A procedure developed by Statistics Netherlands filters out family members, friends and roommates who are living together.

We use discrete time event history analyses in order to test our hypotheses. We focus on the first unmarried cohabitation of the Caribbean second generation. The duration of unmarried cohabiting relationships is calculated by subtracting the date at which the unmarried cohabitation ends from the date at which the couple first started living together. In case an unmarried cohabitation turns into a marriage relationships are censored. Next to the duration of unmarried cohabiting relationships, the data include detailed information about both our research population and their partners, such as their ethnic background, educational level and age. This allows us to control for different types of homogamy that may play a role in the stability of relationships.

Preliminary results

Our preliminary (descriptive) findings (see Figs. 1a and 1b) are in line with our expectations. As can be seen in Figure 1a and 1b, unmarried cohabiting relationships are least likely to end when the partner is from the Dutch majority population. This confirms our first hypothesis (and is thus contrary to earlier findings on less stable interethnic marriages among e.g. the Turkish and Moroccan origin group). Moreover, there is also a difference in the probability of separation between having a first or a second generation partner. In line with H2, unmarried cohabiting relationships with a first generation partner are less stable than when both partners are from the second generation. This is especially true for the Antillean second generation (see figure 1b). Among this group, the probability of an unmarried cohabitation ending within five years is about 20% when the partner is Dutch, whereas this is more than 30% when the partner is of the second generation and even more than 40% when the partner is of the first generation.

The next step will be to test our hypotheses in a discrete time event history model, while controlling for several background characteristics. Moreover, we will run analyses that distinguish between the origin of the man and the woman.

Figure 1a. Stability of unmarried cohabitation among the Surinamese second generation (Cumulative Index Functions)

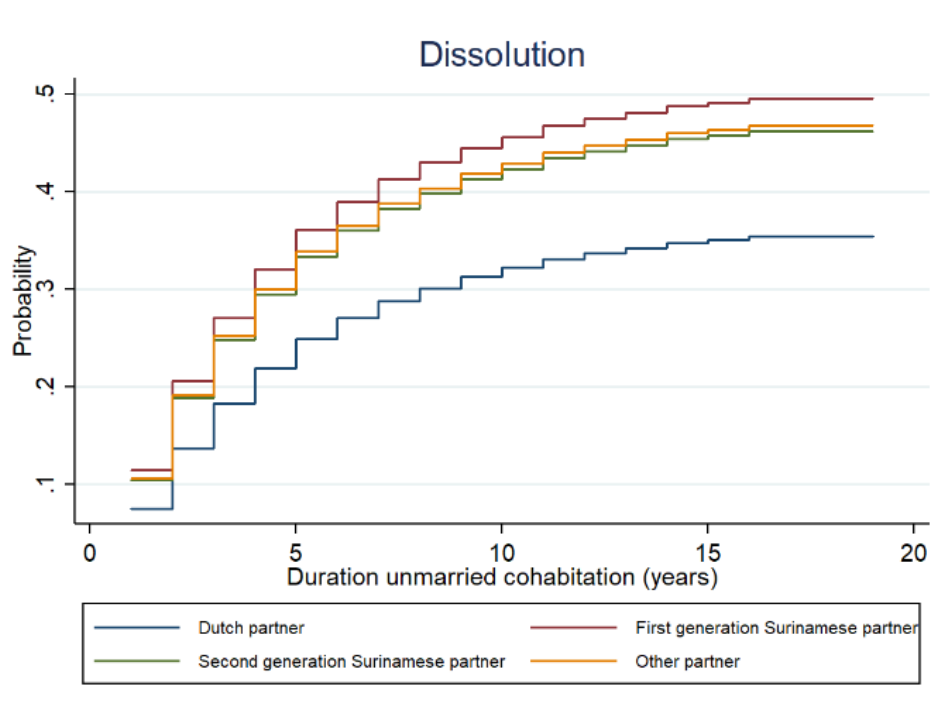
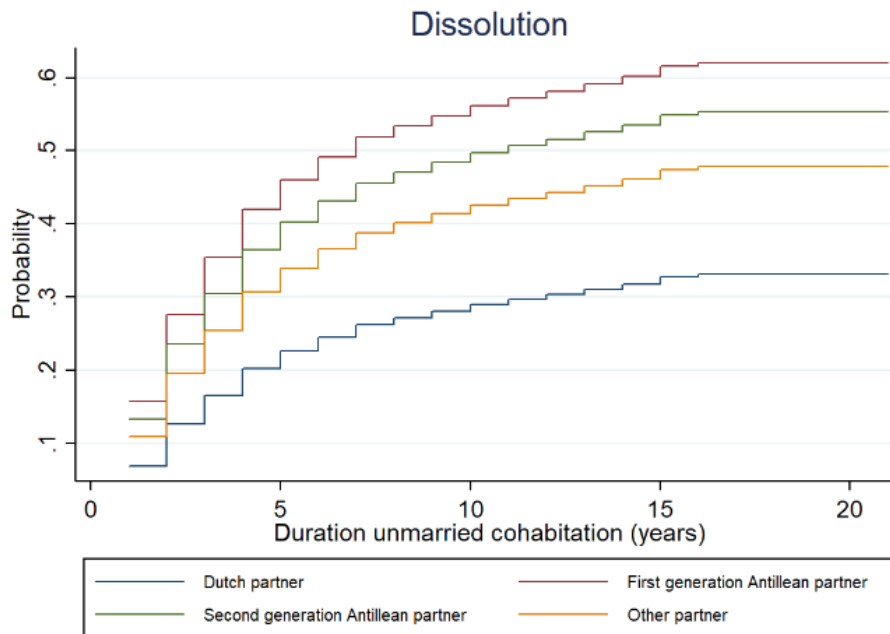


Figure 1b. Stability of unmarried cohabitation among the Antillean second generation (Cumulative Indice Functions)



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