

Testing the colocation hypothesis before and after family formation: an analysis of power couple migration in the Netherlands

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Introduction

In many industrialized countries couples of which both partners are highly educated – power couples - are concentrated in urban areas. Two decades ago Costa and Kahn (2000) attributed this to distinct migration patterns of couples with different educational profiles. They argued that the “colocation problem” – i.e. both partners have to coordinate career options and workplaces– is especially severe for couples who combine two specialized careers. Large and dense labor markets should be the most suitable environment to solve this problem. Therefore Costa and Kahn hypothesized that power couples would be more likely than other couples to migrate towards metropolitan areas. To date hardly any evidence was found for Costa and Kahn’s colocation hypothesis in the US. Instead the concentration of power couples in large metropolitan areas seems to be mainly due to migration of highly educated singles and subsequent union formation (Compton and Pollak, 2007; Cooke, 2011; Gautier et al., 2010). Furthermore, whereas the educational attainments of men affect family migration patterns in the US, those of women were shown to be irrelevant (Compton and Pollak, 2007; Cooke, 2011). These results are in line with numerous studies underlining the dominance of men’s careers in family migration decisions (Cooke, 2008; Shauman, 2010; Nivalainen, 2004). However, as women in many western countries have closed or even reversed the gender gap in education (Esteve et al., 2016), recent empirical evidence from Sweden revealed that also highly educated women increase the likelihood of couple migration, almost to the same extent as highly educated men (Brandén, 2013). Also in the Netherlands women’s bargaining power had increased to inhibit migrations proposed by their spouses or to initiate moves in favour of their own careers (Smits et al., 2004). This raises the question whether evidence for the colocation hypothesis can nowadays be found in the European context.

Furthermore, research on geographical patterns of couple migration tends to ignore the potential role of different phases in the life course. This is unfortunate since gender roles within couples tend to become more traditional after family formation. Differences in earnings between men and

women (the gender wage gap) accumulate during the life course, especially after family formation. Mothers are still much more likely than fathers to reduce their working hours or even to (temporarily) withdraw from the labor force to provide childcare, although differences are smaller among the highly educated (Perez et al., 2018; Drobnic, 2000; Drasch, 2013; Begall and Grunow, 2015). Since couple migration decisions are not only shaped by measurable socio-economic characteristics of male and female partners but also by gender ideology (Bielby and Bielby, 1992; Jürges, 2006) the intensified practices of traditional gender roles after the birth of children might weaken women's bargaining positions in couples' migration decisions. As a result, the relative weight of men's and women's educational attainments in internal migration decisions might be more skewed towards men in couples with children compared to childless couples.

Aim of the paper

Based on a rich longitudinal dataset which combines survey and register data we examine couple migration in the Netherlands between 2006 and 2018. The aim of the paper is threefold. First, we examine if and to what extent educational attainments of men and women affect couple migration propensities in general. Since practices of gender roles in The Netherlands are more traditional than in Sweden we hypothesize that:

H1: Both partner's human capital will positively affect interregional mobility of couples but the effect of men's human capital will be stronger than the effect of women's.

Second, we analyze geographical patterns of couple migration with different educational profiles. Based on Costa and Kahn's (2000) colocations hypothesis we test whether:

H2: Power couples are more likely than other couples to migrate towards metropolitan areas and less likely to migrate towards peripheral regions.

Third, we examine whether the effects of men's and women's human capital on couple migration behavior change after family formation. Based on the tendency that gender roles within couples become more traditional after childbirth it is hypothesized that:

H3: Gender differences in the effect of education on couple migration will be more severe among families with children than among childless couples;

Data and method

The data used in this paper are derived from the first waves of the Dutch Labour Force Survey (LFS) between 2006 and 2015 and from the System of Social Statistical Datasets (SSD) from Statistics Netherlands (Bakker et al., 2014). The LFS offers detailed information on educational profiles,

occupations, working hours, income and employment histories. The SSD is a set of integral registers which covers the complete registered population and offers micro-level socio-demographic, socio-economic and geographical information. In addition, it allows for linking parents and children so that geographical distance to parents could be included as a control variable explaining mobility patterns. Our research population consists of all opposite-sex married and unmarried couples in the LFS of which both partners (aged 22-45) have been interviewed (N=114,000 couples, 228,000 individuals). Subsequently, we tracked the research population until three years after the interview date using the SSD.

Couples' spatial mobility is analyzed in two steps. In both steps multinomial logistic regression analyses are conducted. First, determinants of couple migration are analyzed irrespective of location choice. The dependent variable contains three categories: 1) immobility (including short-distance moves), 2) internal migration (>30 km) and 3) international migration. Second, internal migration is analyzed towards specific macro-regions based on the availability of jobs. To test whether the effect of men's and women's educational profiles differ before and after family formation an interaction with family status is included. Preliminary results will be added to the abstract as soon as the first analyses have been conducted.

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