CONTACTS WITH ADULT CHILDREN AND SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING IN LATER LIFE: DO MIGRANTS AND NATIVES DIFFER ACROSS EUROPE?

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Abstract

Previous studies have demonstrated, on the one hand, an association between intergenerational relationships and life satisfaction and, on the other hand, differences in life satisfaction between migrants and natives. We examine similarities and differences in life satisfaction of older Europeans by migration background (whether born in the country of residence) across four European regions and intergenerational solidarity. We question how and to what extent associational solidarity (contacts) between older parents and adult children is related to life satisfaction (as an indicator of subjective well-being (SWB) in later life and how this may have a differential effect by migrant status. Using data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (waves 2, 4, 5, 6) we model the role of contact and distance including the interaction by migrant status. Our results show that the lower the frequency of contacts with adult children, the lower the life satisfaction of the elderly parent. Our findings hold in the same way and to the same extent for both among migrant and non-migrant older parents. Parents (either mother or father) with no contact to their children show the lowest levels of life satisfaction, and even significantly below the life satisfaction of those older persons who are childless. This negative effect of no contact is stronger for migrant origin parents and especially women. Further steps will consider geographical proximity, number of children and grandparental childcare as additional explanatory variables that might show differential effects on life satisfaction between those of migrant and non- migrant origin in later life.

Long abstract

Introduction

The individual perception of wellbeing is fundamental as it can be argued that the only one to really know whether a person is feeling well and is satisfied with life is the person themselves (Layard 2005). Furthermore, being satisfied with one's life can help to manage stress and add to well-functioning in society. Previous literature (e.g., Katz 2009) showed that intergenerational family solidarity have a significant influence on life satisfaction. Mikucka and Rizzi, (2016) found that parents who had more access to support from relatives, experienced an increase and less often a decline in life satisfaction during parenthood than parents who had less access to relatives' support. Other studies found a positive relationship between having children and subjective wellbeing but only or especially among older individuals (Stanca, 2012; Margolis and Myrskylä, 2011). Arpino *et al.* (2018), found that grandparenthood per se and grandchild care provision are positively associated with SWB. At the same time, another strand of literature has shown that people with migration background report, on average, a lower life satisfaction than non-migrants (e.g., Arpino and de Valk 2018).

By theoretically starting from the intersection of these two fields of research, in this paper, we examine whether the effect of intergenerational solidarity between older parents and adult children on SWB (measured by life satisfaction) is the same for those of migrant and non-migrant origin across Europe. Our research question is the following: Is there an effect of intergenerational solidarity between older parents and adult children on SWB? And if so does the effect differ between those of migrant and non-migrant origin across Europe?

We focus on different dimensions of intergenerational solidarity following the literature in this field (Bengtson 2001). We start from: associational solidarity (i.e., contacts) and in further steps of analysis also consider structural solidarity (i.e., geographical distance) and functional solidarity (in the form of grandparental childcare).

In a previous study by Katz (2009), the link between different dimensions of intergenerational relations (solidarity, conflict, and ambivalence) and subjective well-being (life satisfaction, and positive and negative affects) of older people (aged 75+) was studied using a comparative perspective from a random urban sample in five countries (Norway, England, Germany, Spain, and Israel). Three general conclusions were drawn. First, the study country contributed significantly to the explained variance for all three components of well-being. Second, all intergenerational family solidarity dimensions

contributed significantly to the explained variance for all three components of well-being, although they were differentially related to the different aspects of subjective well-being. Third, personal resources, mainly physical functioning and financial adequacy, were related to all of the well-being variables, although their relative contribution was much stronger for life satisfaction. It remains unclear what the patterns for associational and structural solidarity looked like as they were not included neither was migrant status. At the same time Bordone and de Valk (2016) showed limited differences in intergenerational solidarity in the form of grandchild care provision between migrants and non-migrants as well as between migrants of various origins. However, persistent differences across Europe along a north–south gradient were found irrespective of migrant status.

We contribute to this line of literature and aim for a comprehensive coverage of different dimensions of intergenerational solidarity among a large sample of migrant (diverse origins) and non-migrant elderly residing across Europe (diverse destinations).

Data and methods

We use data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), a panel survey representative of the non-institutionalised population aged 50 and older in Europe and Israel (Börsch-Supan *et al.* 2013, 2017a, b, c, d). We pooled data from waves 2, 4, 5, and 6. Wave 1 was excluded as the scale used to measure our dependent variable was different and not comparable to that in the other waves. We also excluded wave 3 (SHARELIFE) because it only collected retrospective information. Our analyses include natives and immigrants living in 20 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland). We excluded Israel because of its very specific contextual situation when it comes to its migrant population.

We selected respondents aged 50 years or older at the time of interview. It should be noted that the working sample is not restricted to parents. Rather, childless respondents are also included in the analyses and compared, in terms of their life satisfaction, to parents with various frequencies of contacts with their children.

Our dependent variable is life satisfaction, measured with the widely used Satisfaction with Life Scale: "On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means completely dissatisfied and 10 means completely satisfied, how satisfied are you with your life?".

This allows respondents to integrate and weight various life domains the way they choose (Pavot and Diener 1993; see Arpino and de Valk 2018 for a recent use on different European data employed to compare immigrant and native populations).

Our first explanatory variable of interest is number of children, distinguished in four categories: 0 (reference), 1, 2, 3, 4+. Next, we considered contacts with children. For each child, the respondent reports the frequency of contacts (broadly defined including in person, by phone or mail contacts). We calculated the maximum frequency of contacts with children and generate a categorical variable: daily, more than once a week, once a week, less than once a week, never, childless (reference). Finally, we considered geographical distance which is again available for each child separately. We calculated the minimum distance with children and generate a categorical variable: < 5 km, 5-25 km, 25-100 km, > 100 km, childless (reference).

We account for heterogeneities in the relationship between intergenerational solidarity and life satisfaction according to both destination and origin contexts. As in Bordone and de Valk (2016), because of relatively small sample sizes, we group countries of destinations based on welfare and family systems: Nordic, Continental (reference), Southern, and Eastern Europe. This grouping reflects the main differences across Europe in terms of family relations. We also consider six origin regions following the classification of countries as suggested by the United Nations Statistics Division (http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm) and based on the size of the sample analysed: North-Western Europe, Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, America, Africa, and Asia. Interviewees with other origin will be excluded from the analyses as their samples are numerically too small to be considered as additional geographical regions and too heterogeneous to be grouped with another region in terms of family characteristics or migration patterns.

All the analyses control for age (50–54—reference; 55–59; 60–64; 65–69; 70–74; 75–79; 80–84), marital status (married or cohabiting with a partner—reference; never married; divorced/separated; widowed), employment status (retired— reference; working; other), number of children (only in models for contacts and geographical distance), whether the respondent lives in a rural (= 1) or urban (= 0) area. We then considered two measures of socio-economic status that refer to education and household income. As for education, SHARE classifies educational attainments according to the ISCED categories. However, the meaning of various levels of education differs across countries and cohorts. Therefore, as in Arpino *et al.* (2018) we use a relative measure of

education. For each individual, we calculate the percentage of people (of the same gender, country of destination and region of origin) with a lower level of education than their own one. This rank gives a continuous measure. As for household income, we calculated deciles of the total household income distribution, by country of residence and year of the survey, and included the corresponding dummy variables in the model.

Additionally, we included a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent has any long-standing illnesses and the GALI (Global Activity Limitation Indicator; = 1 for respondents declaring that, because of health, are "limited, but not severely" or "severely limited" in activities people usually do; = 0 otherwise). Dummies for survey waves, country of residence and region of origin (for migrants) are also included. The analyses are stratified by gender.

We estimated linear regression models with clustered standard errors. We considered interactions between the immigrant dummy variable and the explanatory variables.

Preliminary results

In this study we investigated the effect of associational solidarity (i.e., frequency of contact) between older parents and their children on older people's life satisfaction. We did so comparing immigrants and natives. The results showed similar distributions in different measures of intergenerational solidarity (i.e., contact and proximity) and number of children between migrant and non-migrant older adults in Europe (see Figures 1-3). We only notice a slightly higher percentage of parents who live very far (> 100 km) from all children among migrants (Fig. 2). Similar distributions by immigrant status were also found for grandchild care (not shown).

Figures 4a and 4b present selected results from the multivariate analyses (complete estimates are available upon request). The figures show predicted life satisfaction by immigrant status for childless individuals and parents with different frequency of contact with their children. The predictions are obtained from models, estimated separately by gender, that include interactions between immigrant status and the categories of the contacts variable. Several interactions were statistically significant pointing at a different effect of contacts for immigrants and natives.

For both genders, parents who lost contact with all their children ("never") show the lowest levels of life satisfaction, which is even lower than that of childless. The negative effect of having no contacts with any of the children is stronger for immigrants,

especially for women. The associations between number of children and other intergenerational solidarity measures and life satisfaction were overall similar for those with and without migrant background.

In the next steps of our work we are going to assess the stability of our results to different operationalizations of our explanatory variables. We will also conduct additional analyses to examine heterogeneities related to immigrants' origin (North-West Europe, South Europe, East Europe, America, Africa, Asia).

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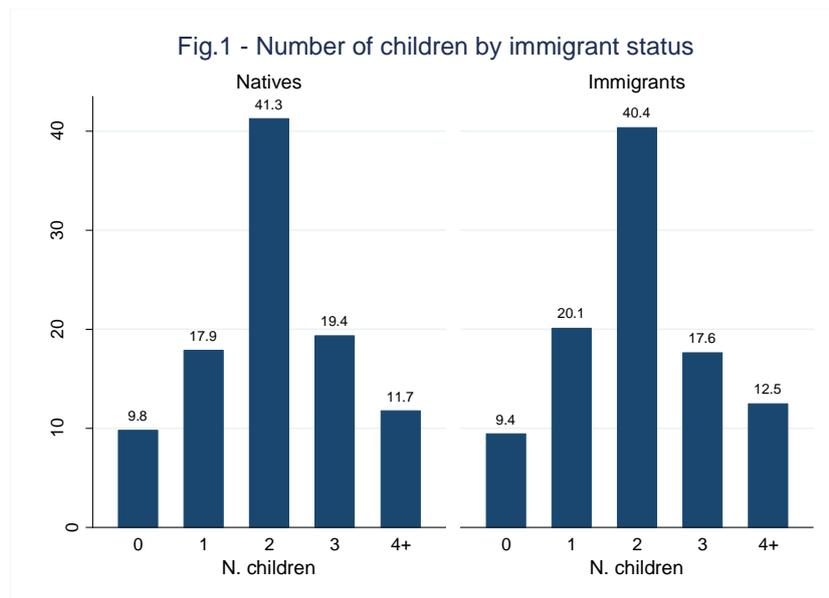
Figures

Fig.1 - Number of children by immigrant status

Fig. 2 - Distance to children by immigrant status

Native   Immigrant

Native:
- < 5: 63.6
- 5-25: 17.2
- 25-100: 9.7
- > 100: 9.5

Distance (km)

Immigrant:
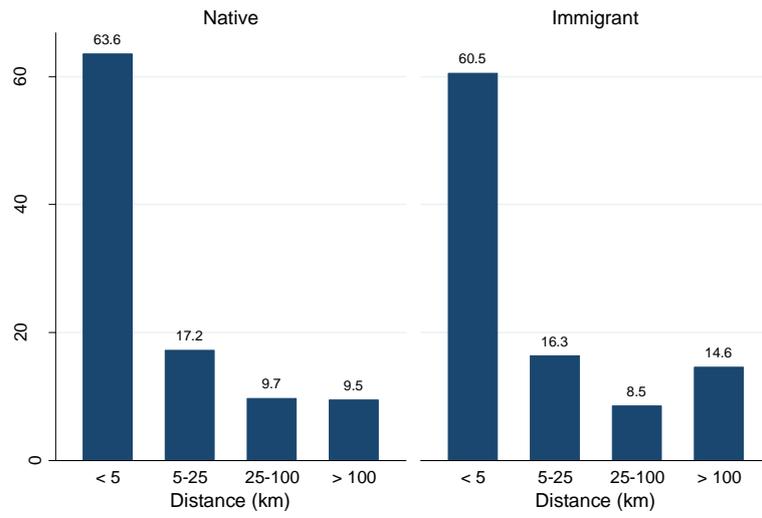- < 5: 60.5
- 5-25: 16.3
- 25-100: 8.5
- > 100: 14.6

Distance (km)

Fig. 3 - Contacts with children by immigrant status

Natives   Immigrants

Natives:
- daily: 50.9
- > 1 per week: 28.7
- 1 per week: 12.6
- less: 6.9
- never: 0.9

Contacts

Immigrants:
- daily: 50.3
- > 1 per week: 27.0
- 1 per week: 12.5
- less: 9.1
- never: 1.2

Contacts

Fig. 4a - Predicted life satisfaction as function of contacts, women

Fig. 4b - Predicted life satisfaction as function of contacts, men