Fertility Differentials across Race-Ethnicity and Generational Status: Incorporating Non-Hispanic Immigrants

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Background

- Research on race-ethnic fertility differentials in the U.S. focuses largely on Hispanics’ higher fertility rates compared to whites
- However, the U.S. draws immigrants from other parts of the world
- More research is needed to understand whether, and how, other race-ethnic groups vary in their fertility behavior across generations

Prior Research

- Studies have found race-ethnic differences in immigrant fertility, but many of these are now dated
- Prior work often has focused on differences in the age structure of race-ethnic immigrant groups
- Mexican women’s high fertility is largely explained by the large proportion of foreign-born women, who are generally young
- There is evidence that among Mexican women, fertility initially decreases with generational change but increases between the second and third generation

Present Study: Research Questions

We examine completed fertility among women aged 40–44 to account for the younger age structure of immigrants.

- Is the higher fertility an immigrant factor, or is it unique to Mexican women?
- Does generational change in fertility go in the same direction across race-ethnic groups, or does it vary?

We also explore differences in the timing of entry into parenthood among young women aged 18–24 and completion of childbearing among the 40–44.

- Are there race-ethnic and generational differences in year of birth among women aged 40–44?

Data and Sample

- Mexican, other Hispanic, Black, Asian, and white women; both foreign and native born
- Ages 18–94: N=22,322
- Key variables:
  - Completed fertility (parity) among 40–44
  - Age at last birth among 40–44
  - Has had a birth through 18–24

Figure 1: Proportional Changes in Mean Parity by Race/Ethnicity and Generation for Women Aged 40–44

Figure 2: Proportional Changes in Mean Parity by Race/Ethnicity and Generation for Women Aged 40–44

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Quantum or Timing?

- Differences in completed fertility may represent actual differences in fertility quantum, timing, or both.
- To explore whether there are differences in the timing of entry into parenthood, we first analyze the proportions of younger women (18–24) who have had a child.
- With a larger sample size, we are able to further disaggregate those who immigrated as children (the 1.5 generation) and those who arrived at age 12.
- We also explore whether there are differences in the timing of finishing parenthood by looking at the mean age at last birth among women aged 40–44.

Figure 3: Proportional Changes in Mean Parity by Race/Ethnicity and Generation for Women Aged 40–44

Conclusions

- This cross-sectional study does not permit causal conclusions about the association between marital status and well-being.
- The contribution of foreign-born women to American fertility rates varies by race/ethnicity, in terms of both quantum and timing.
- Foreign-born women aged 40–44 have higher fertility than the native-born.
- Mexican immigrant women have significantly higher fertility than other immigrant women, net of other factors—thus it is not only an immigrant factor.
- Predictors explain more racial/ethnic variation in fertility with subsequent generations, suggesting that different mechanisms are in play across generations.

Limitations

- Cross-sectional surveys
- Small cell sizes for Asian and Black women who are children of immigrants
- Aggregated racial-ethnic groups
- Limited availability of pre-migration factors (e.g., births before migration, reason for migrating, pre-migration SES)

Future Directions

- Further explore starting patterns among women aged 18 to 24
- Assess how well correlates explain earlier fertility among women aged 18 to 24
- Further disaggregate country of origin
- Examine synthetic cohorts over more survey years
- Explore role of partner characteristics

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