

Homogamy and Convergence Theory Revised: The Dissolution of Cohabiting Unions among Second-Generation Caribbeans

Abstract

Due to migration European societies are becoming increasingly diverse. Both with regard to origin countries as well as migrant generations. This diversification of populations leads to challenges, not only in societal debates but also in relation to what types of data to use in order to capture the diversity in demographic behaviour among diverse migrant populations. Because migrants and their descendants are often underrepresented in surveys, researchers increasingly rely on register data. Unmarried cohabiting relationships are however not always fully included in registers or migrant populations are too small to look at specific origin groups. This makes it difficult to test whether hypotheses and theories are universally applicable to different types of relationships and origin groups.

Register data of Statistics Netherlands do however allow for such an endeavour. Using this data we challenge the dominant hypothesis that exogamous migrant couples are more likely to separate than endogamous ones by examining how the ethnic composition of couples relates to stability of unmarried cohabiting unions among two second-generation groups for whom unmarried cohabitation is common; those of Surinamese and Antillean descent. Retrospective and prospective administrative data are used to identify unmarried cohabiting couples as soon as two partners live at the same address, have no kinship and at least one of the following applies: they have a common child, jointly moved houses or have a fiscal relationship. We estimate event-history models including 20,088 unmarried cohabiting couples. Our findings suggest that exogamy functions as a protective factor in unmarried cohabiting unions among these two second-generation groups. Little difference in union stability was found by generation of the co-ethnic partner. Overall we show the importance of taking the diversity in population structures and union formation dynamics into account when conducting empirical studies and formulating theoretical starting points.

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