

# Creating Egalitarian Families: Factors that Shape Work-Family Balance among the Adult Children of Immigrants in Sweden

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Sweden has an egalitarian family system, structured and reinforced by social policies emphasizing gender and generational equality (Bernhardt 1992). Family relationships are more weakly institutionalized and egalitarian gender roles encourage a more equal sharing of support and care roles by the parents of children (Bernhardt 2005). Each of the two central axes of family life, between parents and their children and particularly between men and women, is under conspicuous challenge among immigrants and their children in Sweden.

It is likely, however, that the Swedish-born children of immigrants will vary greatly in the extent to which they assimilate these ideas about egalitarian families, and even if they do, their communities may make it difficult for them to turn their ideas into reality in the families they form. Living with others of similar national origins, while it often provides networks of information and opportunities (Murdie and Borgegard 1996), can limit social integration into the larger Swedish society. While there is much research on the economic integration of immigrant populations who have come to industrialized countries in the past half century, as recent reviews have noted, much less has focused on studying family relationships. These reviews have called attention to the absence of research on the critical role of gender relationships (for reviews see Hugo 1997; Bjerén 1997; Pedraza 1991).

This paper focuses on factors increasing the likelihood that young adults whose parents were born in Turkey, Poland, and Sweden will share the financial and unpaid responsibilities equally between mothers and fathers, with mothers employed and fathers engaged in domestic tasks. We build on a prior analysis of egalitarian attitudes, which showed that while even young Turkish adults expressed surprisingly egalitarian attitudes, they were considerably more

traditional than either young adults of Polish or Swedish origins, and with marked gender differences. We will extend this analysis using longitudinal data to examine in particular the effects of holding attitudes favoring a more traditional versus a more egalitarian balance of work and family when children are young, measured when most young adults are childless and unpartnered, on the actual balance of work and family four years later, when most have partnered and many have become parents. Such attitudes and behaviors reveal the extent to which the adult children of Polish and Turkish origins living in Sweden have accepted normative Swedish family forms or retained family distinctiveness on this dimension.

It seems likely that those with more egalitarian attitudes will form more egalitarian families. For many family behaviors there are close links between attitudes and behavior. People with more positive attitudes toward marriage marry more quickly (Axinn and Thornton 1992; Sassler and Schoen 1999), and those with more positive attitudes toward children have children sooner (Barber 2001). In the context of relatively recent immigration, however, it seems likely that even if young people whose parents were raised in more patriarchal societies have acquired relatively egalitarian attitudes, they may have more difficulty in realizing egalitarian families than the native born of native parents. This is the primary focus of this paper.

We base our analysis on a 1999 survey of young adults in Sweden (Family and Working Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century) and the follow-up survey conducted in 2003. The survey consisted of 2,326 original respondents who were ages 22 and 26, of whom 500 had at least one parent who was born either in Turkey or Poland. This is an exceptionally rich source of data for the analysis of the effects of attitudes on behavior, as it is an ongoing longitudinal survey that contains measures of respondents' attitudes and behaviors. It also contains a detailed set of potential control variables that are related both to attitudes and behavior and that hence we will include in our models.

We focus on the factors increasing adoption of Swedish family forms on this dimension. In addition to examining how attitudes at the original survey shape behavior differentially among

these three groups, we consider the effects of two measures of exposure to Swedish life (education, neighborhood ethnic segregation). We consider as well the effects of a measure of the extent of exposure to Swedish values in the childhood family (parental intermarriage), and a factor suggesting the weakening of familial support for the culture of origin (disrupted childhood family structure).

We expect that such measures of exposure and community control will condition the effects of attitudes about gender balance in work and family on the type of families these young adults form. We further expect that the attitudes of young adults with Swedish-born parents will have more impact on their behavior than the attitudes of young adults whose parents were born either in Turkey or Poland, with the weakest connection for those of Turkish origin. We will also examine whether the link between attitudes and behavior with regard to work-family balance will differ by gender. Are young women with egalitarian attitudes but with patriarchal origins leading the way, so that their partners follow or are the attitudes of young men a constraint, reinforced as they are likely to be by the attitudes of their male friends and relatives? These unique longitudinal data will help address these questions and provide insight into family integration in a gender egalitarian society.

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