

Life Course Triggers of Residential and Housing Tenure Changes among Immigrants and Their Descendants in the UK

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Research aims

One area of research which does not have sufficient attention is the role of life course events in triggering residential mobility and housing changes for immigrants and their descendants in the UK. Previous research has looked at this relationship in continental European countries without distinguishing immigrants and their descendants or comparing to the native population, focusing on among groups, or only controlling for immigration status (de Valk & Billari, 2007; Falkingham et al., 2016; Ferrari & Pailhé, 2017; Kleinepier & de Valk, 2016, 2017; Lacroix & Zufferey, 2019; Lei & South, 2016; Mikolai & Kulu, 2018; Warner & Sharp, 2016). Few studies have examined life course events and residential mobility together for immigrants and their descendants, none for the UK (Lacroix et al., 2020). Previous studies in the UK which look at the aforementioned life course domains study them separately rather than interconnectedly and those which look at them simultaneously do not account for residential mobility.

This study looks at residential and housing tenure changes in relation to changes in partnership, birth parity, and employment for immigrants and their descendants in the United Kingdom (UK) using a multilevel event history analysis and a competing risks framework.

Background

A large body of literature has found that life course events are strongly related to residential mobility (Clark, 2013; Clark & Huang, 2004; Falkingham et al., 2016; Kulu, 2008; Kulu & Steele, 2013; Michielin & Mulder, 2008; Mikolai & Kulu, 2018; Mulder & Hooimeijer, 1999; Mulder & Wagner, 2010; van Ham & Feijten, 2008; Warner & Sharp, 2016). Migrant groups are a unique population because of their heterogeneous subcultures, which affect their cultural practices and residential preferences (Kulu et al., 2019). Hence, among different migrant groups and generations, the intensity of and the emphasis and importance placed on a life course event in affecting a residential ‘trigger’ is likely to be different across migrant groups and generations.

Family events are important predictors of residential mobility because they change housing preferences and needs and allow for the pooling of resources (Clark et al., 1997; Mulder, 2006; Mulder & Wagner, 1998; Wilson & Kuha, 2018). Family events have been established a key predictor of moving due to the aforementioned cultural values which (de)emphasise the importance of family life. As immigrants and descendants face disadvantages in the UK housing market, very important life course events, such as marriage, may be the most important residential ‘trigger’ as many migrant groups, except Western groups, are not very likely to cohabit (Finney & Harries, 2015; Kulu & González-Ferrer, 2014; Shankley & Finney, 2020). In addition, immigrants from South Asian and Caribbean backgrounds show higher first birth risks than the native population and at earlier ages. Larger families, especially among the Pakistan and Bangladesh

groups, may also increase the likelihood of a residential mobility and, indeed, multiple moves across the life course (Kulu et al., 2017; Kulu & Hannemann, 2016; Lacroix et al., 2020; Michielin & Mulder, 2008; Wilson & Kuha, 2018). Hence, groups who exhibit highly heterogeneous partnership and fertility patterns may be more residentially mobile due to housing preferences and needs changing more frequently compared to other groups with more stable family careers.

Employment changes are closely tied to residential changes as moving for a job and moving for better economic opportunities are intertwined. Studies have shown that entering full time employment and becoming unemployed increases the likelihood of moving in the short-term and in the long-term, albeit the latter is lower for employed individuals (Kim, 2014; Warner & Sharp, 2016). Groups who experience housing disadvantage in the UK are also most likely to experience employment disadvantage and vice versa (Finney & Harries, 2015; Jivraj & Khan, 2015; Lukes et al., 2019; Shankley & Finney, 2020). Immigrants and their descendants with unstable labour market participation may have a greater propensity to move when unemployed as the importance of securing a job to maintain housing and familial stability is paramount. Furthermore, for immigrants, their skills and the labour demand in the local area may not be aligned, particularly after migration, which may force them to move and expand their labour market search. Indeed, residential changes are more likely to be for employment reasons for migrant groups compared to the native population (Gurak & Kritz, 2000; Schündeln, 2014). Conversely, over time, immigrants may accumulate labour market knowledge and skills which allows them to accumulate wealth for their housing careers and to provide resources to their descendant counterparts. Groups with stronger labour market careers therefore may complete residential changes due to a job upgrade (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003).

Compared to other high income, Western countries, the UK has experienced migration flows from across the globe. In addition, some groups, particularly the Indian and Chinese groups, show stronger labour market performance and housing trajectories compared to the native population, whereas in other European countries, migrant disadvantage is emphasised more (Algan et al., 2010; Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Harrison et al., 2025; Mikolai & Kulu, 2024). These groups have different socio-demographic characteristics and reasons for moving to the UK.

Data and methods

Our study uses the first fourteen waves of Understanding Society (UKHLS) which spans the period between 2009 and 2024. The UKHLS is one of the largest nationally representative household panel surveys in the UK and is particularly suitable to study immigrants and descendants. The UKHLS has an ethnic minority boost sample (in waves 1 and 6) to increase the numbers of sample members from an ethnic minority background. This dataset is most appropriate for our study because, first, it has precise and reliable information, including the month and year of the event, on residential, partnership, childbearing, and employment changes for all members of the sample, even if they only appear for a few waves. Second, due to the aforementioned sample

power for immigrants and descendants, we can analyse more detailed origin group categorisations by migrant generation and origin country for the biggest migrant groups in the UK.

Our study uses two methods. First, we study the risk of a residential move for immigrants and descendants, in comparison to the British native population, by partnership status, birth parity, and employment status which are estimated using piecewise constant hazard models. Second, we use a competing risks approach to estimate the risk of moving to two competing housing tenure types: 1) homeownership and 2) renting. We study the risk of entering homeownership or renting by partnership status, birth parity, and employment status.

Findings and preliminary discussion

The main findings from our study are, first, compared to partnered natives, partnered immigrants, except European and Western, are more likely to move and partnered descendants are similarly likely to move. All unpartnered groups, except European and Western, second generation Pakistani and Bangladeshi, and second generation Other unpartnered individuals, are similarly likely to move as unpartnered natives. Second, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, and African immigrants are more likely to move as order of conception increases, which is the opposite for the native and European and Western groups. Descendants are most likely to move at first conception with similar risks at no conception and second or higher conceptions. Third, except the European and Western group, employed and unemployed immigrants are more likely to move than employed and unemployed natives, but similarly to natives among employed descendants.

Fourth, regardless of partnership status, Indian and Pakistani and Bangladeshi immigrants and descendants are similarly likely to move to renting and more likely to move to homeownership than partnered natives. Partnered immigrants and descendants are similarly likely to move to homeownership as partnered natives, with partnered descendants more likely to move to homeownership than their immigrant counterparts. Fifth, the Indian and Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups are more likely to move to homeownership with any conception compared to their native counterparts. They also have the strongest differences between first and second or higher conceptions, with a greater risk of homeownership and a lower risk of renting. For other groups, including natives, as order of conception increases, the risk of moving to renting decreases. Sixth, regardless of employment status, the Indian and Pakistani and Bangladeshi immigrants are more likely to move to homeownership than employed natives, especially for Indian employed descendants. Employed descendants in other groups are more likely to move to homeownership and less likely to move to renting than their immigrant counterparts and have similar risks to the natives, except employed Indians.

Overall, the differences between migrant groups and generations reflect assimilation, cultural associations, and socio-economic resources, especially among groups with cultural preferences and norms that do not align with those of the native population. The findings related to

partnership status highlight the importance of social and cultural networks or lack thereof in affecting residential mobility. We also highlight the value and meaning attached to partnership which is crucial to consider in a life course approach particularly for migrant groups. For the conception results, stronger fertility norms and the necessity for moving when having a child to optimise living arrangements, explains the clear patterns, and in some cases, highlights housing disadvantage and strong cultural differences, we observe between migrant groups, generations, and the native population. Among the descendants, their fertility and housing patterns are aligning with the native population. Finally, the employment findings stress the importance of local labour markets and socio-economic (dis)advantage in determining settling patterns and residential (in)stability, particularly in the absence or presence of strong ethnic networks. Using a life course approach to understand the residential mobility of immigrants and their descendants by examining key life course triggers is not well understood in the current literature. Improving our understanding on which life course events are most consequential in the relocation of immigrants and their descendants is important in understanding their socio-economic integration, under a backdrop of increasing lifecourse complexity, particularly for a subgroup that is socio-demographically heterogeneous (F. Billari, 2004; Coulter et al., 2015; Coulter & Scott, 2015; Kulu et al., 2019; Lesthaeghe, 2014). Their differences in cultural perceptions and practices challenges how we view life course triggers and decisions as well as the unique socio-economic barriers that they face, particularly structurally, which contributes to debates on choice and constraint in the life course.