

The varying impact of early parenthood on the socio-economic outcomes of childhood refugees

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Abstract

Study background

Compared to immigrants from high-income countries, those from lower income origins exhibit slower and less successful integration on a range of important outcomes. Moreover, the role of parenthood in this process has received very little attention, despite the fact that parenthood is a known source of socio-economic disadvantage for mainstream populations. We respond by carrying out a case study of Sweden.

Objective

Our main research questions are: (1) *What is the impact of early parenthood on the socio-economic outcomes of childhood refugees?*, (2) *How does this compare to the impact for non-refugees?* and (3) *How do these impacts vary by age, sex and immigrant origin?*

Data and methods

We use register-based data that cover the entire population of immigrants to Sweden who were born from 1971-1980 and arrived in Sweden as refugees aged under 19, as well as a comparable group of ancestral natives. We estimate various models of SES – education, employment and income – on parenthood over the life course, separately for men and women, conditional on birth cohort, birth order, and mother fixed effects.

Results

Our results show that childhood refugees who become parents early in life will experience constraints upon their acquisition of education and income, but that these constraints are much larger for female refugees. This result holds after controlling for various sources of confounding. They are not substantively different in magnitude from the effects of parenthood for ancestral natives, but they do represent a larger relative impact.

Main conclusions

Parenthood is a significant source of socio-economic disadvantage for refugees, with impacts that persist across the life course, in particular for women.