



Household formation rules, fertility and female labour supply: Evidence from post-communist countries



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ABSTRACT

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This paper explains how household formation rules affect the fertility and labour supply of women in the Former Soviet Union and neighbouring countries. Women who bear a male first child in countries dominated by traditional, patrilocal households are shown to have substantially lower subsequent fertility from those whose first child is female. Where households are generally nuclear, male first borns do not reduce subsequent fertility. Middle-aged women in more patrilocal contexts often work less if their first child is male, despite reduced fertility and being more likely to reside with a daughter-in-law. In more nuclear contexts, they tend to work more. These findings suggest that household formation rules are strongly related both to women's demand for sons and to the direction of intergenerational transfers. *Journal of Comparative Economics* 41 (4) (2013) 1167–1183. Department of Economics and Finance, University of Guelph and University of Central Asia, MacKinnon Building, Rm. 743, Guelph, ON, Canada.

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1. Introduction

Sons are the key intergenerational link where women move to their husband's natal residence upon marriage. In the Caucasus and much of Asia, marriages have traditionally been arranged, and new brides move to their in-laws' residence. The wedding of a son, usually the first born, implies that his mother will have extra help in the house, and that the mother's role in home production will be reduced. This patrilocal pattern of household formation contrasts with that of developed countries today, where households generally consist of parents and children and marriages are chosen by partners. The economic implications of these different rules governing household formation have been little examined theoretically or empirically.

This paper compares the importance of first born sons to the fertility and labour supply of women across Former Soviet Union countries with different household formation rules, and with other countries in the immediate neighbourhood. For seventy years the Soviet Union explicitly attempted to modernise household formation rules in the southern republics by banning child marriage, the veil, dowry, and polygamy, permitting divorce, encouraging family planning, and making the education of girls free and compulsory. A major reason for the six year *Basmachi* rebellion before the consolidation of Soviet power in Central Asia was resistance to radical changes in the organisation of family life.¹

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¹ See, for example, Dragadze (1984), Buckley (1997), Edgar (2003), Edgar (2006), Olcott (1981), and Ritter (1985).

Countries with predominantly nuclear families, and marriage chosen by partners, tend also be characterised by transfers between non-coresident generations, from the elderly towards the youngest.² This contrasts with the patrilocal context where monetary transfers tend to be greater amongst coresident family, and to flow from the young to the elderly.³ The economic importance of monetary transfers occurring around the time of patrilocal household formation, through dowry and brideprice exchanges, is well-recognised.⁴

Information on household composition and work outside of the home is contained in most household survey data, but has been little used to compare the distribution of a woman's labour over the lifecycle in patrilocal and nuclear households. When a woman's son marries in the patrilocal context, her workload is substantially lightened, because of a generational hierarchy amongst a household's women.⁵ A deferred compensation system for women in patrilocal households may be enforced by intergenerational violence within gender.⁶ Household formation rules may not only have large implications for the direction of monetary transfers across generations, but also for the allocation of non-market time of individuals, particularly women, across their working lives.

This paper examines the hypothesis that women's bargaining power is weaker in patrilocal families, where they are the daughter-in-law and not the wife of the household head. As a result, social norms about household formation impact the fertility and labour supply of women over their lifecycle. In the patrilocal marriage contract, but not the nuclear, women commit to producing sons. A patrilocal index including 44 developing countries is first derived. It is then shown that, in countries that are strongly patrilocal, a male first born causes women both to have fewer children and to be less likely to be employed by age 40–49. In contrast, where nuclear norms dominate, these effects are not found. The paper proceeds as follows. In the following section, the data are introduced and summary statistics presented. Section 3 introduces the patrilocal index and discusses economic differences between patrilocal and nuclear households. Section 4 estimates the causal effect of having a male first born on two outcomes for women aged 40–49: The number of children she has born, and whether or not she works outside the household. Section 5 concludes.

2. Data and summary statistics

All publicly available, nationally representative household survey data from the Former Soviet Union, Albania, Turkey, and South Asian countries are employed. Aside from the Former Soviet Union samples, Turkey and South Asian countries are included because they border, respectively, the Caucasus countries and Central Asia. Long before Soviet attempts to modernise households, these countries were linked by the conquests of the Mongolian hordes, and by the Silk Road trading route. Albania, which was once part of the vast Ottoman Empire, is included as a former communist, but not Former Soviet Union country for which the necessary data is available.

The data come primarily from the DHS (2011), which always include full fertility histories of women under 50. The DHS samples include: Albania 2008, Armenia 2005, Azerbaijan 2006, Bangladesh 2007, India 2006, Kazakhstan 1999, Moldova 2005, Pakistan 2006, Turkey 2003, Ukraine 2007, and Uzbekistan 1996. As well, some World Bank household surveys, notably those from Kyrgyzstan taken in 1996, 1997, and 1998, Tajikistan from 1999, 2003 and 2007, and Russia from 1992, include the necessary fertility history. The samples are here restricted to women 40–49 who have had at least one live birth, and in the case of Pakistan to women who have ever been married.⁷ In practise, this restriction eliminates about 10% of women in Russia and Azerbaijan, 6% in Armenia, and less than 5% in all other countries.⁸ The DHS data have been recently employed by Filmer et al. (2009) who examine the association between existing numbers of sons and subsequent fertility behaviour. Filmer et al. do not explicitly examine the link between household formation rules and women's fertility and labour supply at mid-life, and do not focus on Former Soviet Union countries.

Some women in the samples will still bear children after the survey takes place. Still, childbearing in the 40s is not related to the sex of the first born in these samples. In Data Appendix A, I demonstrate that there are no differences in the probability

² Kuhn and Stillman (2004) document the redistribution of old-age pension income in Russia by pensioners to their non-resident adult children. Cheuk and Uhlenberg (2010) discuss both the time and monetary contributions of grandparents to children's upbringing in Russia and other countries with nuclear household norms.

³ The importance of intergenerational transfers to economic development was first demonstrated theoretically by Samuelson (1958). Samuelson recognised that the age structure of the population suggested that intergenerational trading would be important to economic decisions of individuals. Lee (2003) describes the evolution of net flows across generations in hunter-gatherer, agricultural and industrialised societies. Consistent with these ideas, Kochar (2000) finds that only about 8% of elderly household members in rural Pakistan received monetary transfers from non-resident children, while about 85% received transfers from resident sons. Pakistani elders benefit from increased household public goods provision when their sons work more. Grogan (2007) shows that Tajik children living in three-generational, patrilocal, households obtain less education as a result.

⁴ See, for example, Goody and Tambiah (1973).

⁵ For descriptions of the traditional mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship in patrilocal societies, see for example, Mandelbaum (1948) and Miller (1999) for India, Rahim (1988) for Bangladesh and Pakistan, Falkingham (2000) and Harris (2006) for Tajikistan, UNICEF Azerbaijan (2009) for Azerbaijan, and Wallis (1923) for Armenia.

⁶ For example, using fifteen case studies from Mumbai, Fernandez and Fogli (2009) shows that mother-in-laws enforce their will over daughters-in-law by both direct violence and by inciting their sons to violence. Chan et al. (2009) find that a major correlate of violence inflicted on pregnant women in Hong Kong is conflict with in-laws. For studies of violence directly related to marital transfers see, for example Bloch and Rao (2002) and Panda and Agarwal (2005).

⁷ In the 2006 Pakistan DHS, only women who have ever been married are administered the fertility questionnaire. Where more than one DHS survey exists for the country, the most recent is employed.

⁸ It would clearly be of interest to examine the impact of bearing a male first born on all subsequent life outcomes of women. Unfortunately, fertility data is generally not collected for women older than 50, either in the DHS or World Bank surveys.

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