IUSSP Workshop on the Transition to Adulthood in Industrialized Countries

Organized by the

IUSSP Scientific panel on the transition to adulthood in developed countries

Minutes of the first meeting, 7-9 August 2003, Calgary

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1. OUR MISSION

1a. Mission statement

Our aim is three-fold: (1) to describe the transitions to adulthood both historically and cross-nationally; (2) to explain the transition to adulthood patterns and their underlying sources of variability; and (3) to understand the consequences of these patterns for individuals and societies.

As part of our Group, the notion of transitions to adulthood refers to the acquisition of various adult roles including the transition from school to work, the transition to financial independence, the transition to residential independence, the transition into partnership (through cohabitation or marriage) and the transition to parenthood. We are also interested in additional markers of the transition to adulthood such as subjective markers.

The aim of our Group is to take a comprehensive approach to the study of the transition to adulthood in order to describe and explain the bundling of these transitions, i.e. their timing and sequences. Our Group also aims at contributing to the literature by examining the influence of macro-level characteristics on individuals' transitions to adulthood (i.e. the interplay of macro and micro factors). More specifically, we are interested in the extent to which country-level characteristics create opportunities and constraints that result in specific young adulthood trajectories.

We are also interested in the intra- and inter-country differences in the transition to adulthood, in their related determinants, and historical trends.

1b. Our conceptual framework

In line with our mission, our conceptual framework (see Figure 1) captures the influence of macro-level variables (such as the employment market and welfare state) on micro-level transition to adulthood.

[Figure 1 about here]

1c. About the transition to adulthood: age and geographical coverage

Numerous studies on the transition to adulthood focus on the period between the age of 18 and 34 years old. However, these age boundaries should not be considered as fixed. Instead, the beginning and end point may be slightly different depending on the research questions. For example, in some studies the legal age at leaving school (which is below 18 years old in some countries) may be used as a starting point. And in view of the considerable delay in the entry into parenthood, the end point may be extended beyond age 34 if needed.

As to the geographical coverage, our broad focus is on developed countries. However, the selection of countries may vary across studies depending on various considerations including the availability of data, and the opportunities that countries may offer in terms of social, political, and economic changes (in the 'natural experiment' tradition). In some studies, welfare state typologies (such as that of Esping-Andersen) may be used as an analytical framework and may dictate the choice of countries (in order to include countries representative of each welfare state regime). In other studies, it may be interesting to extend the analysis to emerging nations or newly industrialized countries in order to capture the impact of rapid economic changes on the transition to adulthood.

1d. Methodology

Traditionally, the analysis of the transition to adulthood has been done separately for each event (or transition). What the literature is missing are more comprehensive descriptions and analyses of the whole transition to adulthood. The presentation by Francesco at the Calgary conference was particularly useful in drawing the distinction between two different schools of thoughts: (1) The event-based, or "causality" school of thought; and (2) The algorithmic, or "holistic" one. Francesco then discussed recent developments in the field of sequence analysis.

In terms of specific methods of analysis:

- For the analysis of single-transitions, one usually carries out an event-history analysis (Cox model). There are numerous examples in the literature, including John Z. Zhao; Fernando Rajulton; Zenaida R. Ravanera (1995). 'Leaving parental

homes in Canada: effects of family structure, gender, and culture'. Canadian Journal of Sociology, winter. vol 20 no 1 p31-50.

- For the analysis of multiple transitions, one can use:
  - o Event-history analysis with other adult statuses as time-dependent covariates. We have stressed that this approach, often referred to as the "Causal approach" may not be the best for causal analysis. In particular, when common unobserved factors (i.e. personality traits, value orientations, and unobserved characteristics of the family of origin) affect simultaneously more than one pathway to adulthood, mutual impact may be over- or under-estimated. For instance the impact of getting married on becoming a parent can be overestimated using a simple hazard equation because both depend on the intentions to build a family.

  - o Simultaneous hazard equations: One possibility to overcome the causality problem mentioned earlier is to use simultaneous hazard equations (Lillard, 1993). In this approach, pathways are modeled simultaneously and the dependence on common (time-constant) unobserved factors may be taken explicitly into account, and estimates of the effect of one adult status on other pathways may be estimated without bias due to spurious dependence. Assuming that unobserved factors are distributed according to a multivariate normal distribution, the package aML allows one to estimate such models.

  - o Sequence analysis: Hazard models focus on the time-to-event as the dependent variable. Simultaneous hazard models focus on several time-to-event variables. Representing life courses as sequences of states allows one to analyze whole sections of life courses as a 'package', thus including explicitly information on timing of events, on their sequencing and where appropriate on their quantum. Such sequences can be used to derive sophisticated descriptions of the transition to adulthood and to compare the transition to adulthood as a whole across time and place. They can also be input for techniques such as Optimal Matching Analysis, which derive a matrix of distances (or dissimilarities) between individuals. The dissimilarity matrix can be input for cluster analysis and thus allows one to derive ideal-types of transitions to adulthood. A simpler approach analyses life courses represented as sequences of events instead of sequences of states; this is important for elaborate description but looses information on the duration between events.

- For the analysis of cross-national variations, three methods have traditionally been used:
  - o So-called parallel analyses where the same regression model is run separately for each country. A specific statistical test can then be used to test whether or not the regression coefficients for the different countries are statistically different. Note however that this method tells us nothing about why the countries are different (if the coefficients are found to be

statistically different across countries). Example: Gornick, Janet C. and Jerry A. Jacobs. 1998 "Gender, The Welfare State, and Public Employment: A Comparative Study of Seven Industrialized Countries." American Sociological Review. 63(5): 688-710.44.

- o Pooled regression with country-dummy: the assumption here is that the regression coefficients for the various individual-level variables are the same in all countries. A series of country dummies is then added to test whether countries are statistically different – after controlling for country-specific differences in the composition of the population (as captured by the micro-level variables). Note however that this method tells us nothing about why the countries are different (if the dummies are found to be statistically significant). Example: Stack, S. and R. Eshleman. (1998) "Marital Status and Happiness: A Comparative Analysis." Journal of Marriage and the Family. 60

- o Pooled regression with macro-level variables: the idea here is to replace the country dummies by relevant macro-level variables in order to see what characteristics of countries explain uniqueness. Example: Blanchflower, David G. and Richard B. Freeman, editors Youth Employment and Joblessness in Advanced Countries. 2000 Series: (NBER-C) National Bureau of Economic Research Conference Report.

Software for the analysis of the transition to adulthood

- For the preparation of data, one can use the softwares TACOS or TDA. It is also possible to write a small command file in STATA to do the same thing.

- For the analysis, one can use STATA or ROCANOVA.

1e. Data sources

As preparation for the workshop, Anne and her Team at the University of Calgary prepared a compilation of various datasets that can be used for the study of the transition to adulthood. Anne will revise this document and we agreed that it should be posted on the web.

Because of our interest in the macro-micro relationships, it would be important to include macro-level variables in our analyses. Anne and her Team at the University of Calgary have been working on a cross-national database of macro-level indicators for the OECD countries and for the period 1970-1999. The database is available on-line: http://soci.ucalgary.ca/fypp. Anne hopes to add new variables during the coming year.

2. DESCRIPTION OF OUR PROJECTS

2a. Core projects / immediate

- 'Census Project' --- This project was initiated by Beth and uses national census data to study the combination of various transition-to-adulthood statuses by age and gender. Beth has already completed the first part of this project on the basis of U.S. data from 1900 to 2000. Beth, Francesco, Ann (Evans), Arnie, Kei and Anne all expressed interest in the project and offered to contact census offices to inquire about the availability of census data.

    o Beth will complete the paper she presented and submit it to a journal and the PAA session on the transition to adulthood.
    o Beth will carry out further analyses on various subgroups (by race/ethnicity; rural/urban).
    o Beth and Francesco will explore new descriptive measures to apply to cross-sectional data.
    o Beth and Francesco will explore the possibilities of replicating the analysis using data from other countries, including Canada, Australia, Italy, UK.
    o Anne will investigate with David Coleman about the availability of census data from various countries.
    o Beth and others will explore funding possibilities to support the acquisition, cleaning and harmonization of national census data.

- 'Transition to adulthood: the behavior and values of university students' --- Francesco has access to data collected in a non-representative sample of university students (mostly Economics, Statistics, or Social Sciences students); surveys have been conducted in Australia (Ann Evans is the key person for Australia), Bulgaria, France, Italy, Japan (this is a representative sample), Poland, Romania, Russia, US (Brown University and U South Carolina). The survey is mostly on reproductive health, partnership and sexual behavior. Some questions refer to age norms and sanctions and the plan is to analyze the comparative data on norms in collaboration with Rick.

- 'Financial self-sufficiency as an indicator of the transition to adulthood' --- This project is to be based on data from the European Community Household Panel. Arnie and Frank will work on this project. The aim is to analyze cross-national variations in the age at which young adults attain financial self-sufficiency. One may possibly include longitudinal data from the US and Canada (PSID and SLID). Frank will by September/October write an outline of the ideas for this project. In general it will build on work already undertaken by Aassve, Mazzuco and Mencarini (analysis of poverty using the ECHP). The analysis will expand on the work by Smeeding who performs a similar analysis based on cross sectional survey data. The aim is to work out a research proposal which can be used for funding purposes. The ESRC (UK research council) might be a good candidate for possible funding for this project.

- 'The norms and values of family, marriage, parenthood, and children: Are there cross-national patterns?' --- This project will use extant cross- national surveys (including the World Value Survey and the ISSP) to examine cross-national differences in values and attitudes that may have implications for cross-national variations in patterns and timing of family formation (e.g., purpose of marriage, purpose of having children, ideal number of children, attitudes towards parental responsibilities, maternal employment, and single parenthood, etc.). Kei, Anne, Frank will work on this project.

- 'The transition to adulthood: evidence based on FFS data' ---- This project is an extension of the chapter written by Beth & Anne for the MacArthur Network. It will use event-history analysis to describe the transition to adulthood in Canada, USA, Italy, Germany, and Sweden and to analyze some of its micro-level determinants.

2b. Core projects/ depending on funding

- 'Historical trends in the norms and values of young adults' --- Rick.

- 'Consequences of the transition to adulthood for individuals and societies' --- several of us are interested in this topic. However, we felt that priority to this topic will not be given by our group during the first two years of our activities as it is important to describe and explain patterns of the transitions to adulthood before being able to assess their consequences. Other people who may be interested in this topic include Janet Gornick (State University New York), Nancy Folbre (University of Massachusetts) and Sawako Shirahase (Japan).

2c. Satellite projects

- Immigration and the transition to adulthood ---- While the group agreed that immigrant youth are an important part of the research agenda on the transition to adulthood in developed countries, projects on this topic will not be part of the core ones during the first years of the Group. A summary of some of these projects appear below:

  o Comparison of immigrant generation and health and social-psychological outcomes in Canada (using the NLSCY) and the USA (Add-health). Jenny may work on this topic.

    o 'Immigration, communities, and demographic structure' --- This project is led by Beth (with Katharine Donato). The project involves and analysis of urban-immigrant communities in the U.S. and focuses on the demographic structure of immigrant and native-born groups.

This research highlights the age-related socio-economic characteristics of urban-immigrant groups, particularly those of children and youth. An extension of this project may involve using census data from other countries (Canada, France, Germany, Australia).

- o 'The life-course of Mexican, Costa Rican, Nicaraguan, Puerto Rican, and Dominican youth in the USA' --- This project is led by Beth.

- 'The process of growing up: the precursor phases of the transition to adulthood' --- Although the focus of our group is on young adult years, we are also interested in earlier transitions that occur during adolescence such as the first romantic relationship, the entry into sexual activity; and which may have an impact of the timing and sequence of later transitions. Jenny's work on subjective markers of puberty could be an important addition to our group.

- 'The changing context of parenthood'---- As a result of the individualization of the transition to adulthood, the context in which young adults make their transition to adulthood has changed enormously. This project aims at describing this change and at examining its consequences. It also includes an examination of changes in the investment in children.

- 'Parenthood project' --- This project aims at examining cross-nationally the socio-economic differences in parental investment into children including parenting style, resources, and management. The first step of this project will be done based on Canadian data. Future funding may allow the extension of this project to other countries. This project will be led by Anne & Frank.