Okka ZIMMERMANN, University of Göttingen; Braunschweig Institute of Technology, Germany

TEMPORARY DE-STANDARDIZATION OF PARTNERSHIP FORMATION FOUND IN GGS, WHILE FERTILITY STANDARDIZED CONTINUOUSLY

Keywords: Life courses, Destandardisation, Sequence analysis, family formation, partnership forms

The hypothesis of destandardization, which was prominent in the 1980s and 1990s, has been mainly revised or modified in the new millennium, because it was not supported by empirical results (Kohli 2007). Destandardization is still mainly assumed to affect family formation more than other areas of the life course, mainly not considering the fact, that there may be different developments with regards to fertility and partnerships, and that indications of a new phase of restandardization have been found. Comparative analyses on the question from life course research using sequence analysis is scarce, despite this methodology is often regarded as being superior for the analysis of hypotheses like the one on (de)standardization requiring a holistic approach to life courses ‘considering events in context’ (Elder 1985, Aisenbrey & Fasang 2010).

To close this research gap, this paper tests some modifications and restrictions of the hypothesis of destandardization (destandardization as a temporary phenomenon followed by restandardization, affecting only selected aspects within family related life courses, affecting genders differently) suggested by prior research, but not yet systematically tested with methods of sequence analysis comparing different European countries. Family formation in countries from different European regions (except Eastern Europe) is therefore evaluated based on the data of the first wave of the Generations and Gender Survey using simple versions of Optimal Matching Analysis to calculate average dissimilarities. Because of existing doubts with regards to the methodology, intensive reflections are necessary before deciding on the measures to be used and several measures based on different configurations of Optimal Matching are compared.

The most important conclusion based on the analysis of family related events between the age of 15 and 35 is that the hypothesis of destandardization with regards to family formation needs to be
specified: destandardization affected partnership formation, not family formation, and was only a temporary phenomenon.

Introduction, Methodology

The hypothesis of destandardization, which was prominent in the 1980s and 1990s, has been mainly revised or modified in the new millennium, because it was not supported by empirical results (Kohli 2007). Destandardization is still mainly assumed to affect family related events more than other areas of the life course, mainly not considering the fact, that there may be different developments with regards to fertility and partnerships, and that indications of a new phase of restandardization have been found. Comparative analyses on the question from life course research using sequence analysis is scarce, despite this methodology is often regarded as being superior for the analysis of hypotheses like the one on (de)standardization requiring a holistic approach to life courses ‘considering events in context’ (Elder 1985, Aisenbrey & Fasang 2010).

To close this research gap, this paper tests some modifications and restrictions of the hypothesis of destandardization (destandardization as a temporary phenomenon followed by restandardization, affecting only selected aspects within family related life courses, affecting genders differently) suggested by prior research, but not yet systematically tested with methods of sequence analysis comparing different European countries. Family formation in countries from different European regions (except Eastern Europe) is therefore evaluated based on the data of the first wave of the Generations and Gender Survey using simple versions of Optimal Matching Analysis to calculate average dissimilarities for cohorts born between 1935 and 1969. Because of existing doubts with regards to the methodology, intensive reflections are necessary before deciding on the measures to be used and several measures based on different configurations of Optimal Matching are compared. One major doubt towards Optimal matching analysis is the question of the combination of operations, which are used to overcome differences between life courses and therewith represent the importance attributed to these differences. Different operations overcome different dissimilarities, the relation of the costs for different operations therewith requires (subjective) decisions with regards to the importance of theses dissimilarities. It was therefore decided to use two simple versions of Optimal Matching (Hamming Distance and Longest Common Subsequence), which are based on only one operation and use stable costs, regardless of the type of state exchanged, inserted or deleted. 90% bootstrap confidence intervals were applied to assess the reliability of the changes between cohorts and differences between genders.

Hypotheses

Following a reflection of prior results and theoretical discussions around (de)standardisation of family formation, the following hypothesis were formulated and tested for France, Norway and Italy:

(1) Destandardization of family formation among older cohorts investigated is followed by a period of restandardization among younger cohorts.

(2) Fertility related life courses standardize in Europe.

(3) Partnership related life courses destandardize due to the loosening connection between cohabitation and marriage.

(4) Destandardization is found with regards to two-dimensional life courses combining marriage or cohabitation with fertility.

(5) Life courses of women are more destandardized than those of men, especially with regards to fertility and to a lesser extent with regards to partnership.

Results & Conclusions

Hypothesis (1), (2), (3) and (5) were mainly supported by the results, indicating that results of prior research based on national data can be generalized. Hypothesis (4) was not supported by the results;
standardisation of fertility lead to standardisation of the two-dimensional life courses including one partnership dimension.

The most general hypothesis (1) was supported by data for three-dimensional family-related life courses (including cohabitation, marriage and fertility). France and Norway follow a similar pattern of phases of destandardization and restandardization; In Italy, only female life courses initially destandardize. Destandardization is mainly moderate and not significant, supporting prior findings, that standardising effects remain dominant (Kohli 2007). Despite the general support of hypothesis (1), the underlying assumption of alternating phases of destandardization and restandardization is not plausible, because the phases the result of the combination of two dimensions in which unidirectional developments are identified.

Significant destandardization is found only with regards to the two-dimensional partnership related life courses for respondents born between 1945 and 1959, experiencing their partnership formation mainly in the 70s and 80s. Destandardization therewith seems to have been a temporal phenomenon mainly caused by the loosening connection between marriage and cohabitation. The data showed no restandardization, but a stabilization of dissimilarity with regards to partnership formation, the connection between marriage and cohabitation remains loose. Young men still have more standardized life courses than young women with regards to family formation, presumably due to some events occurring at later stages of their lives. The consistent standardization of fertility (alone or in combination with marriage or cohabitation) as well as the restandardization of one-dimensional life courses of marriage and cohabitation suggest to specify the destandardization hypothesis as follows: Standardising effects of fertility reductions remain highly influential with regards to family formation in Europe, interrupted by a phase of destandardization due to a loosening connection of marriage and cohabitation in the 70s and 80s. In Southern Europe, only women are affected by temporary destandardization, male family-related life courses continuously standardize.

Conclusions are only based on the analyses of three countries, for which reliable data of the first wave of the Generations and Gender Survey was available at the time of performing the analyses. Because these countries represent different European regions, with difference within the regions shown to be small by prior research, the results are assumed to represent a general trend. Results are contradicting some conclusions of previous research, which was based on different definitions of life course states, different measures of life course dissimilarity and partly different life course sections (starting with age 15 or 18, ending with age 30 or 35). Destandardization was in these analyses sometimes found to be more influential (for example Elzinga and Liefbroer 2007), other researchers found differing developments with no clear support for the destandardization nor the standardization hypothesis (Schizzoretti and Lucchini 2002). The main cause for the differences between the results is the different way of incorporating fertility in the analysis. The total number of own children living in the household of the respondent was used in the analyses of this paper, there with distinguishing up to ten different states with regards to fertility. Other researchers only distinguished between respondents with or without children (Elzinga and Liefbroer 2007) or between four states (without, with one, with two, with three and more children; Robette 2010). The latter (resembling more the approach of this paper) also reported standardization of fertility-related life courses for French men and women. Older cohorts were diagnosed to be even more destandardized with regards to fertility than in previous research, because the differences between families (with more than 3 children) was also considered. More destandardization is sometimes also due to different life course sections analysed; for example Elzinga and Liefbroer 2007 analysed life courses until the age of 30, therefore the destandardization of partnership formation is assumed to more influential.

The influence of standardising fertility was therefore more influential in the analysis presented in this paper than in previous research; which is considered to be valuable, because the postponement and reduction of fertility is reflected better. The conclusions are in line with summaries of previous
research (most prominently in Kohli 2007) but add value with regards to the sources of standardization, restandardization and temporal destandardization within the field of family formation as well as by analysing the phenomenon holistically with different configurations of sequence analysis and with comparative international data.

References