

The Neighbourhood Effect on Formation of Mixed-Ethnic Unions in Britain

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Abstract

Although developed societies are becoming increasingly ethnically diverse, relatively little research has been conducted on mixed-ethnic unions (married or cohabiting). Those studies which have been undertaken demonstrate that mixed-ethnic unions account for a small fraction of total couples, but they are growing in number. In England and Wales, the number of mixed-ethnic unions increased by 65% between 1991 and 2001. While this may be evidence of an increasingly multi-cultural society we know little about the factors that influence where these unions form and whether such couples seek out mixed-ethnic neighbourhoods. Our study uses data from the ONS Longitudinal Study (LS) and Scottish Longitudinal Study (SLS), which are based respectively on a 1 percent and 5 percent sample of the total population in England and Wales, and Scotland. This is the first British study to examine neighbourhood effects on the formation of mixed-ethnic unions. There is some recent evidence from the US that mixed-ethnic couples are indeed more likely to choose to live in mixed-ethnic neighbourhoods, but this research is based on cross-sectional data. Therefore it is not possible to determine whether mixed-ethnic couples are more likely to live in mixed-ethnic neighbourhoods because they formed there or because they moved there. Our longitudinal analysis allows us to tease out the relative importance of these two processes and to further our understanding of the formation of mixed-ethnic unions.

References

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