

INTERMARRIAGE IN AUSTRALIA: PATTERNS BY ORIGIN, GENDER AND GENERATION

By

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Objectives and scope of the study

The paper examines patterns of intermarriage by comparing the ancestry of spouses in couple families using data from the 2001 Census. Patterns of intermarriage are examined by origin and gender for the first, second and third generations, with a particular focus on intermarriages between persons of non-English speaking background and native-born Australians. The paper also examines the extent of inter-racial marriages and the extent that in-group marriage in the second generation is occurring within the same generation or whether there is a propensity to seek marriage partners from the parental homeland

Background

Intermarriage is often considered as a powerful indicator of the social and cultural integration of immigrants and their children. Marriage between persons of migrant background and the native-born may be considered an indicator of the social interaction between the immigrant community and mainstream society. The incorporation of immigrant groups into the host society can also be hastened by marriage between the immigrant and native-born (Bean and Stevens 2003).

The study of intermarriage as an indicator of immigrant incorporation dates back to the early years of the 20th century when Drachsler (1920) examined the marriage patterns of European immigrants in America. In Australia, studies of intermarriage before 1980 have also focussed on European immigrant groups since there was little migration of non-Europeans to Australia before 1970. These studies show that the intermarriage rates vary by origin, with people born in Western European countries such as Germany or the Netherlands being more likely to intermarry with the native-

born than people born in Southern European countries such as Greece or Italy (Price 1982). More recent studies examining intermarriage among the second generation show similar patterns by ethnic origin (Price 1994). There were also considerable differences in the rate of intermarriage with the native-born among more recent migrants from different Asian countries (Penny and Khoo 1996).

Data

The paper is based on ancestry and birthplace data from the 2001 Census. The last time an ancestry question was asked in the census was in 1986. Thus the 2001 Census presents the first opportunity to examine intermarriage patterns for ethnic groups of more recent migrant origin. The combination of information about people's ancestry and their parents' birthplace (whether born in Australia or overseas) also enables them to be identified as first, second or third-plus generation Australians of a particular ancestry.

Intermarriage is examined according to the ancestry of spouses in couple families where both spouses were present in the household on census night¹. Couple families include couples who are married as well as couples in de facto relationships. The spouses are examined according to their first or sole ancestry response only². This might overestimate the extent of intermarriage if it was the spouses' second ancestry response, not the first, that was the same as their partner's first ancestry.

The 2001 Census did not collect information on timing of marriage or start of a de facto relationship. Therefore it was not possible to determine for couples where at least one partner was born overseas whether they had married before or after arriving in Australia or whether their migration was related to their marriage. However, comparisons can be made with marriage registration statistics in relation to intermarriage patterns for the first generation. The marriage registration statistics by birthplace of brides and grooms marrying in Australia show patterns by origin that are closely correlated with the patterns shown for the first generation by the census ancestry data.

¹ If a spouse was absent from the household on census night no information on the absent spouse's ancestry was collected.

² 79 per cent of the population stated only one ancestry in the census.

Preliminary findings

There is considerable variation in the intermarriage rate by ancestry. In the first generation, the proportion of men with spouses of a different ancestry ranges from 83 per cent for those stating American ancestry to 7 per cent for those stating Korean ancestry. For women, the range is from 85 per cent for those of Thai origin to 9 per cent for those of Macedonian origin. In the second generation, the range is even larger: from 97 per cent men and women of American ancestry to 8 per cent of men and 14 per cent of women of Vietnamese ancestry.

As expected, for most ancestry groups, the likelihood of intermarriage increases from the first to the second generation and from the second to the third-plus generation. The increase is quite striking for some of the groups of non-English-speaking origins. For example, while 10-20 per cent of the first generation of Greek origin had spouses of a different ancestry, 35-45 per cent of the second generation partnered a person of different ancestry, and the proportion among the third generation increased further to about 80 per cent. Similarly for the Lebanese, the proportion marrying outside the ethnic group increased from 15 per cent for men and 12 per cent for women of the first generation to 38 per cent for men and 27 per cent for women of the second generation to 77 per cent for men and 69 per cent for women of the third generation. These patterns indicate increasing social interaction between second and third generation Australians of different ethnicities that will result in a steady increase of Australians of mixed origins.

Different patterns of intermarriage by gender are observed for groups of different ethnic origins. Among the Asian origin groups, women are more likely than men to marry outside the ethnic group, but this is not so among people of most Southern European or Middle Eastern origins. Men of Greek, Italian, Lebanese or Turkish origin are more likely than their female counterparts to marry outside the ethnic group. The Asian pattern reflects the view in many Asian societies that women leave their families when they marry whereas men continue the ancestral line. Therefore it is more important that men marry within the ancestry group. In Middle Eastern and Southern European societies, women are more protected within the family while men

have more freedom to mix outside the ethnic community, resulting in their being more likely than women to meet a partner outside the ethnic group (Penny and Khoo 1996).

Analyses of in-group marriages among the second generation show that many second generation women of Middle Eastern origins - or perhaps their parents - still look to the parental homeland for marriage partners, more so than their male counterparts who are more likely to find marriage partners from within the second generation in Australia.

The differences in intermarriage patterns by ethnic origins that are observed in the second generation indicate differences in the rate of incorporation of different migrant groups into Australian society.

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