

Determinants of Marriage Among Jewish Young Adults: The Role of Religion, Endogeneity, and Social Networks in the Marriage Market

A Dissertation Proposal Presented to
the Faculty of the Heller School for Social Policy and Management
Brandeis University, Waltham, MA

By
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Growing individualism and secularism, delay of age at first marriage, alternative arrangements of cohabitation, and high rates of divorce suggest that the structure of marriage in America has been dramatically transformed over the past decades. For many ethnic and religious minorities who perceive their culture and identity as an asset to individuals, their community, and society, these changes threaten established norms of cultural retention and transmission of identity. This study evaluates the role of religion and social networks in the lives of Jewish young adults and the factors that lead to marriage.

The proposed study employs a mixed-method longitudinal design to observe the determinants of marriage and specifically evaluate the role of religion and social networks in the marriage market. Research hypotheses were drawn primarily from Becker's "Theory of Marriage" and an integrated theoretical framework is presented that draws from multiple theoretical perspectives including rational choice theory, social network theories, and gender theory. The study has three principal aims: Operationalize how current Jewish young adults engage in marriage and family formation; Evaluate the role of social networks and formal social institutions in the marriage market; Explore how Jewish young adults make choices in the marriage market with regards to endogeneity.

The study uses a sample of eligible applicants to the Taglit Birthright Israel program. Wave 1 surveyed applicants from 2001-2004, with subsequent cohorts added in the second and third wave of the study. The study population of Jewish young adults (ages 24-37) ranges between 600 and 2000 depending on the variables used for analysis. The quantitative analysis uses ordinal logistic regression analysis to model predicted probabilities of marriage and the likelihood of endogeneity. Discrete-time survival analysis with right censoring will also be employed to model event occurrence (marriage) between the three time periods. A sub-sample of respondents will be contacted using a stratified purposive sampling strategy for qualitative interviews, which will be coded and analyzed using Atlas.ti software for patterns and anomalies.

Findings from this dissertation contribute to a broader understanding of marriage in the 21st century and highlight the particular challenges facing religious and ethnic minorities and the social institutions that support and serve them. As marriage continues to be one option of many for new cohorts of young adults, it is important to understand who marries, whom they marry, and what value they see in the institution. Limitations of the study include possible interaction of mortality and selection bias, and the generalizability of the findings to other religious or ethnic minority groups.

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