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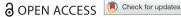# 'Kids' in between? Views on work, gender, and family arrangements among men and women of migrant descent in Sweden

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ABSTRACT

This study used qualitative interviews to explore perceptions of labour market participation in relation to gender norms and parenting ideals among employed Swedish men and women of migrant descent. Using an abductive thematic approach, we demonstrate how the respondents viewed labour market participation from different perspectives. The females saw it as a source of emancipation, whereas the men primarily viewed it as a means of providing for a current/future family. While our respondents depicted themselves as dedicated to social norms of gender equality, they expressed gender-biased views on work and family. The respondents' immigrant heritage also influenced their views on labour market participation, gender and family. Gender inequalities in the parental generation motivated them to arrange their work and family lives differently, and the Swedish social and political context offered them incentives and opportunities to be more gender-equal than their parents. We view and analyse these findings from a life course-perspective, showing how cultural and contextual influences affect respondents' perspectives on work and family arrangements.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette enquête s'appuie sur des entretiens qualitatifs afin d'explorer les liens entre la perception de la participation au marché du travail et les normes de genre et idéaux de parentalité chez les actifs et actives suédois issu.e.s de l'immigration. Mobilisant une approche abductive et thématique, nous démontrons quelles sont les représentations de nos répondant.e.s sur la participation au marché du travail selon différentes perspectives. Tandis que les femmes y voyaient une source d'émancipation, les hommes la considéraient avant tout comme un moyen de provenir à leur famille, présente ou à venir. Alors que nos enquêté.e.s se décrivaient comme engagé.e.s en faveur des normes d'égalité de genre, ils et elles ont exprimé des visions genré.e.s sur le travail et la famille. Leur héritage lié à l'immigration a aussi influencé leurs représentations de la participation au marché du travail, du genre et de la famille. Les

inégalités de genre caractérisant la génération de leurs parents les ont poussé.e.s à organiser leurs vies professionnelles et de famille différemment et le contexte social et politique suédois leur a offert des incitations et des opportunités pour réaliser une plus grande égalité de genre que leurs parents. Nous étudions et analysons ces résultats à partir d'une perspective sur de cycle de vie, en montrant comment les influences culturelles et contextuelles affectent les représentations des répondant.e.s sur le travail et la vie de famille.

Introduction

Like other Nordic countries, Sweden is known for policies aimed at promoting a gender-equal division of work at home and in the labour market (Lundström & Andersson, 2012). In 2018, Swedish women's employment rate was 66.3%; around four percentage points lower than for men, which is well below the average OECD gender gap of 12 percentage points (OECD, 2018). However, gender disparities in Sweden persist, including a gendered pay gap, occupational segregation, and gendered differences in uptake of parental leave and part-time work (Grönlund & Öun, 2018; Grönlund, Halldén, & Magnusson, 2017). Research demonstrates how gender inequalities are reproduced in multiple ways in Swedish families (Björk, 2017), but less is known about how individuals of migrant descent understand work in relation to family obligations. Many studies examining experiences of work and parenthood among individuals of immigrant background in Sweden have focused on immigrant women (e.g. Lamb & Bougher, 2009; Mussino & Duvander, 2016), while immigrants' descendants, especially men of migrant descent, have been scarcely investigated.

The work and family arrangements of immigrants' descendants form a relevant topic from a social work perspective. Public and institutional discourses in Sweden tend to 'ethnify' the work and gender arrangements of migrants and their descendants, without accounting for how gender, ethnicity, class, and generational changes interact in a national and global perspective (cf. Fahlgren & Sawyer, 2005).

In this article, we focus on individuals born in Sweden to parents who migrated from non-Western countries. As Louie (2004) argues, the migrant trajectories of immigrant parents influence the ways in which their children shape their lives. Immigrants often have expectations of their children to attain educational and occupational goals in the host country, and transfer such optimism to their children (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016). In light of this, immigrant parents may *expect* their children to do well in school and on the labour market, to make migration worthwhile (Dreby & Stutz, 2012).

The Swedish context offers an interesting case. Like other Nordic countries, the Swedish policy model is known for encouraging both men and women to participate on the labour market and in caring for children (Edström, 2009). In this study, we examined how employed male and female descendants of immigrants in Sweden perceived labour market participation in relation to gender norms and parenting ideals.

Work, family and gender from a life course perspective

In this article, the life course paradigm has proved to be a useful framework to explore and analyse our empirical data. The life course framework identifies connections between

social change, and trajectories within the context of family and community across time and place. Thus, it links biographies to social change, by framing how individuals' lives develop in relation to time and place in social contexts (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003; Hagestad, 1990). In their every-day lives, people respond to external conditions that frame how individual choices and decisions are made. This theoretical perspective is useful for understanding how the multifaceted social and cultural contexts, including their parents' migration biographies, affect our respondents' perceptions, choices and actions. Life course sociologists have also used the perspective to better account for 'multiple, interlocking interfaces between men and women and work and family over time' (Han & Moen, 1999, p. 101). In this study, we have not performed a time-sequential collection of data, but included analysis of the intergenerational influences on and changes of family and work.

We employ four concepts used in life course theory to analyse our material; (1) cultural and contextual influences, (2) linked or interdependent lives (3) transitions and turning-points and (4) adaptive strategies (cf. Wethington, 2005). The first of these concepts, cultural and contextual influences, accounts for external factors that impact the life experiences and trajectories of individuals. Such factors may for example relate to childhood context, gender, social norms as well as the impact of broader political arrangements (Elder, 1995). Socio-cultural contexts in childhood and adolescence contribute to people's life trajectories, as do the institutional arrangements affecting their life choices and pathways (Hagestad, 1990).

Secondly, the life course perspective element 'linked lives' has special relevance in migration analysis (Jasso, 2003). Immigrants' children have been described as the 'engines of migration', since they are an important aspect of parents' decision to migrate and start up new in another context (cf. Jasso, 2003, p. 340). With regard to this, it is important to consider how immigrants' descendants are influenced by their parents, e.g. in terms of parents' expectations on them to make migration-related sacrifices worthwhile.

Thirdly, transition and turning points are used to include changes, which could be sudden, overwhelming or of great impact, that occur in individuals' life-situations and trigger trajectories and adaptive strategies (Wethington, 2005). We think of the multiple changes associated with migration movement (cultural, political, social, financial, institutional), which produce turning-points in everyday life. Although immigrants are the ones confronted with a number of turning-points, research shows that their children's life trajectories are affected by their parents' confrontations with abrupt changes in the settlement process (Dreby & Stutz, 2012; Louie, 2012; Smith, 2002).

Finally, the concept of adaptive strategies deals with how external conditions affect people's decision-making processes. With regard to this, we have paid attention to how the respondents perceive their opportunities for combining paid work and family obligations. Such opportunities may relate to the social, cultural and political context in which they live. Against this background, the sections below account for relevant aspects of the sociocultural and political context of immigrants' descendants in Sweden.

Work, family and gender in a Swedish context

An important contextual aspect to consider in the current study is that our respondents grew up in a country where increased labour market participation among women and

engagement in childcare among men has been a goal of Swedish policymakers since the early 1930s. The decades following have seen adjustments of various policy areas in order to promote gender-equal participation in both the labour market and parenting (Edström, 2009; Lundqvist, 2011). Examples of policies aimed at promoting gender equality include individualised tax reforms, publicly financed childcare, and paid parental leave of up to 240 days per child for each parent (Björnberg, 2013; Lundqvist, 2011). To encourage Swedish parents to share parental leave days more equally, a number of reforms have been introduced. For example, three months of non-transferable parental leave days are reserved for one parent, and extra benefits are afforded to parents who share parental leave days equally (Lundqvist, 2011). Accordingly, maternal employment in Sweden is among the highest in OECD countries. In 2014, about 82% of Swedish women with at least one child aged 0–14 participated on the labour market (OECD, 2019).

Most Swedes support the idea of gender equality and tend to see themselves as more gender-equal than people in other countries (Edlund & Öun, 2016). Studies show that Swedish fathers are becoming increasingly focused on family obligations, for example by cutting down work hours after having children (Larsson & Björk, 2017). Despite these positive developments, however, many gender disparities persist on the Swedish labour market and in Swedish families. Women are underrepresented in senior managerial positions, in private company boards, among entrepreneurs, and in well-paid jobs (OECD, 2017), and take responsibility for most of housework and child-rearing (Grönlund & Öun, 2018). Although the parental leave scheme is gender neutral, 75% of parental leave days are used by mothers (OECD, 2017). Moreover, Swedish fathers spend about 40% less time with their children on work days than mothers do (Larsson, 2007).

Hence, while the ideal of gender equality is strong among Swedes, and many policies have been introduced to support it, gender inequalities continue to be reproduced (Björk, 2017; Scott & Stanfors, 2011). These gender inequalities have been discussed with reference to Swedish family policies. For example, policies enabling work interruptions and the right to part-time work may not only facilitate work-family reconciliation, but also harm women's career advancements. The right to work part-time or take parental leave can discourage recruiters in the private sector from investing in female employees (Grönlund et al., 2017; Mandel, 2012). This risk is particularly prominent in highly regulated labour markets (cf. Estévez-Abe, 2005). Moreover, with the prevalence of 'family-friendly' jobs in the public sector, these factors can contribute to occupational gender segregation (ibid.).

Work, family and gender in a context of migration

Various explanations have been provided by scholars examining the generally unfavourable labour market outcomes of immigrants' descendants in Sweden and other West-European countries. While some of these explanations focus on the institutional and structural arrangements of host countries (e.g. Crul & Mollenkopf, 2012; Guiraudon, 2014), others have concentrated on cultural conceptions in immigrants' families (e.g. Neuman, 2018; Pessin & Arpino, 2018).

A recurring theme in the field of ethnic and migration studies is that immigrants' culture is conceptualised as something that is simply transported from one context to another, or from one generation to the next (cf. Erel, 2010). Cultural explanations may partly account

for the labour market participation of immigrants' descendants (Reisel, Lessard-Phillips, & Kasinitiz, 2012). However, cultural impacts on immigrants' descendants are often presented statically, without accounting for the meanings attached to social and economic practices (Nadim, 2014). For example, interest-based explanations conclude that women of migrant descent are interested in gender-egalitarian beliefs for emancipating purposes, whereas men are more inclined to preserve unequal gender arrangements because gender equality undermines their personal positions of power (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004).

This article has a more elaborative approach to studying cultural and contextual influences: we view cultural conceptions as being produced, employed, and deployed differently depending on social background, gender, and how individuals subjectively assess objective opportunities and constraints. As explained by Nadim (2016), immigrants' descendants draw from moral understandings of gender and work in their families and ethnic communities, but also from the wider social and national context. From this perspective, views on work and family arrangements are products of individuals' specific life conditions, and influence the ways in which they understand work and engage with the labour market.

In relation to this background and our theoretical framework, this study aims to answer three main research questions: (1) How do descendants of immigrants perceive and reflect upon their participation on the labour market? (2) How do they perceive incentives and possibilities to combine paid work and parenthood?, and (3) How are these perceptions related to practices of gender and work life in the parental generation?.

Method and materials

Procedure

This article is based on qualitative, semi-structured interviews. This approach is useful for the current study since we have been interested in capturing respondents' subjective perceptions. As highlighted by scholars (e.g. Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014; Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2008), qualitative interviews are suitable when the study is focused on people's subjective views, and allow for a more in-depth understanding of respondents' feelings and assessments of their living conditions.

Sampling strategy and sample

This study focused on individuals born in Sweden to parents born in non-Western countries. We initially searched for respondents through social media advertising. The sample achieved through this methodology appeared too uniform, and so we sought a more varied sample by advertising in a daily cost-free newspaper distributed to 1.2 million readers in mid- and southern Sweden. These combined methods of advertising increased the variety of the sample with respect to gender, parents' socioeconomic background and geographic location. The respondents lived in northern, mid-, and southern Sweden, in small, medium-sized, and larger cities. They were geographically spread across the country from Umeå in the north to Malmö in the south.

The sampling methodology had a purposeful approach (Palinkas et al., 2015), entailing that we searched for individuals who were in employment, in order to explore their views

on labour market participation. All respondents had been employed for at least six months, and most had at least three years of work experience.

Altogether, twenty-three individuals reported an interest to participate in the study. Of these, two did not fulfil the selection criteria, since one of them was not born in Sweden and the other was unemployed. Twenty-one individuals aged between twenty-five and thirty-five years, were selected for participation, and of these, twelve were women and nine were men. The sample included respondents both with and without children; five women and two men had children at the time of the interview.

Although we did not select individuals based on their education, most individuals who reported an interest to participate in the study had a university degree. Seventeen of them had obtained a university degree, while the remainder had completed vocational and secondary education ($n = 4$). A possible reason for this may be that we deliberately chose to recruit respondents who had been employed for at least six months. As Olofsson ([2018]) has stated, the knowledge-based sectors of the labour market in Sweden have expanded, and most long-term, stable jobs today require higher education. Moreover, research shows that immigrants' descendants enrol in higher education to decrease the risk of labour market discrimination (Urban, [2012]), and so many of those who are in stable job-positions have completed higher education.

The majority of our respondents had parents who migrated from countries located in the Middle East ($n = 20/21$). This is not surprising, considering that many immigrants who have migrated to Sweden from non-Western countries over the past couple of decades are from the Middle East. The parents of our respondents were from Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Pakistan, Palestine, and Lebanon. Respondents' ethnic background did however not always match their parents' birthplace. In fact, all our sample of descendants of immigrants from Turkey had a Kurdish or Syrian/Assyrian origin.

Many respondents grew up with unemployed parents. Of the twelve women, four grew up with both parents working, four with neither parent working, one with an employed mother and an unemployed father, one in a single-parent household with an unemployed mother, and two with unemployed mothers and working fathers. Of the nine men, two grew up with both parents working, one in a single-parent household with an employed mother, and six with unemployed mothers and working fathers.

Data collection

The interviews took place during September 2015 and January 2016, and were performed face-to-face, by telephone, or via a videoconference computer programme. We offered these different options to facilitate and enhance motivation to participate in the study. While some researchers still view digital interviewing with scepticism (Fontana & Frey, [2008]), others maintain that technological advances have created digital environments with the same trustful interviewer-interviewee relationship as face-to-face interviewing (Iacono, Symonds, & Brown, [2016]). In our experience, digital interviewing is beneficial for environmental, time-efficiency, and cost-reducing reasons.

The respondents were informed of the conditions and the aim of the study, including the right to withdraw participation at any stage, and then gave their consent. Approval from the Regional Ethical Review Board was granted before data collection began (ref: 2015/025).

Analytic strategy

We used an abductive thematic analysis (see Rambaree & Faxelid, 2013), meaning that we moved back and forth between our theoretical understanding and the empirical findings (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The abductive approach is characterised by entering the research process with already-existing knowledge, and then working one's way towards a more detailed and elaborated understanding (Aliseda, 2006). In the current study, this entailed beginning the investigation with insights gained from earlier studies but without a fixed theoretical frame, then interpreting previous knowledge in relation to respondents' perceptions, and vice versa, respondents' perceptions in light of existing findings in the field. In this process, the life course theory was found to be a relevant frame for analyses.

The interviews were conducted with reference to an interview guide constructed at the beginning of the data collection process (Bryman, 2012; Repstad, 1999). The interview guide contained open-ended questions about the respondents' upbringing, their parents' background, their occupational aspirations and attainments, the influence of family members, and meanings attached to having a job. These tentative themes developed into more specific empirical themes after collection and analysis of data.

We first interpreted and analysed the data by scanning through the data material for text segments that answered our research questions (Silverman, 2015). The codes emerging from this process were recorded in a codebook, including their frequencies and links between all codes. These codes were formed into themes with the help of the ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software package, which was used to create a network view showing how codes co-occurred and were interrelated (Friese, 2014). Hence, although we started the data collection with question areas relevant to the study, these areas developed into more specific themes as we alternated between our pre-understanding of the research aim and the empirical data that emerged.

Results

In this section, we present and discuss our results in terms of four themes related to the research aim. Since the material revealed that the male and female respondents interpreted labour market participation in distinct ways, we present their views separately in the first two themes, focusing on the female respondents in the first theme and the male respondents in the second.

Work, motherhood, and female independence

Many of the women saw employment as an important step towards increasing their individual agency. They did not primarily see employment as a means to provide for their families, but rather as a way of becoming independent in relation to a current or future male partner. As Elder et al. (2003, p. 11) states, 'planfulness and its behavioural expression depend on context and its constraints'. This means that people construct their lives by making decisions and actions in relation to social, cultural and political frameworks of opportunity and constraint. These findings relate to scholarly discussions about the economic dimension of women's empowerment (Ross, 2008) and women's inclinations to adopt gender-egalitarian attitudes for emancipating purposes (Röder & Mühlau, 2014).

The women in this study saw labour market participation as a way of challenging unequal gender norms and practices. A 25-year-old woman [IP1] explained why labour market participation was important for her:

> IP1: When I was in Turkey [parents' home country], I saw a lot of things […] I had close relatives who had a hard time with their husbands, and I said, 'Just do it, just leave the bastard.' But they were like, 'She can't, who'd take care of her [financially]?' And I thought to myself, if I'm ever in the same situation, I don't want to be thinking, 'I'm not going to be able to take care of myself.'

As discussed by Haas (1986), motives behind women's wage-earning can involve aspects that go beyond mere instrumental approaches of financial support. Women may participate in the labour market for self-fulfilling reasons (cf. Nadim, 2014), or to increase their personal level of agency in a relationship, as expressed by IP1 above. These findings also demonstrate how the women linked parents' lives to the forming of their own lives.

Furthermore, the women's views on labour market participation as a route to independence were present among women brought up in families with a clearly gendered organisation of work. These women made decisions to exceed their parents' socio-economic situation for empowering purposes (cf. Jasso, 2003). Some of them actively used career achievements to increase their personal level of authority. From these women's perspectives, a prestigious job position enabled them to make their voices heard and increased their possibilities to achieve gender equality, as exemplified by a 35-year-old woman working as a manager at a wood-processing company [IP12]:

> IP12: My husband, my parents, my relatives, my family, I think it makes them respect me somehow. […] a higher job position is a confirmation … like, 'Hey, I have something to bring to the table,' […] and it forces them into treating us as equals.

These findings demonstrate how the cultural context of the respondents influenced their choices and actions (Wethington, 2005). Conceptions of work as a meaningful activity may vary depending on how individuals interpret their life situation and life conditions, including aspects of gender and ethnicity. In the quotation above, it becomes clear that the respondent [IP12] is affected by the high value placed on career achievement, and cultural definitions of a higher job position as a driver of 'generalized esteem in the community' (Haller & Portes, 1973, p. 52). Here, we reveal how an orientation towards work among female descendants of immigrants, were shaped by their perceptions of unequal gender norms and arrangements in the social context. Perceptions of oneself as a member of a vulnerable group may promote compensatory behaviour, for example seeking career advancement (cf. Sania Ali, Dahlstedt, & Hertzberg, 2018). For the women in this study, such compensatory behaviour appeared as efforts to reach independence through wage-earning and/or through holding prestigious job positions.

However, the results also reveal that cultural norms dictating the characteristics of a 'good mother' could hamper the career ambitions of the women. Earlier studies focusing on Swedish women's ambiguous relations to work and childcare (e.g. Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001) show that Swedish women are concerned about combining work and child-rearing. Similarly, while virtually all our female respondents expressed strong aspirations to obtain a secure labour market position and many were keen to 'climb the career ladder', they were also unsure how far these aspirations could be fulfilled while having children.

IP12 explained that she was 'constantly torn' between her career and family obligations. She had been brought up by a present and engaged mother who had given up work after having children, a choice that the respondent described as 'unfortunate'. Unlike her mother, she had made a different choice and decided to combine a career with being a parent:

> IP12: I consider myself an ambitious person; work is important, it sort of defines me. Of course I struggle with work-family balance, but I identify strongly with what I do. So I have to work […] But I try to put my family first, and I make sure my employer knows that.

While the women generally had strong occupational aspirations, they also tended to adapt these aspirations to parenting ideals. Such ideals influenced their career ambitions, and also helped shape the choices some of them made before entering the labour market. In the excerpt below, a woman [IP8] describes the options available to her after applying to university. Earlier in the interview, she had expressed a life-long interest in acting, and said her father encouraged her to apply to medical school, but ultimately she chose to study psychology:

> IP8: I could have chosen medical school, but I didn't want to be 'that kind of parent', because you have to be a mother and a doctor at the same time. I could also have chosen acting school, but it's the same thing there … with inconvenient working hours. I couldn't be as involved at home […] When I have a family, it must be possible to create a balance.

We identify several interesting points in the forming of the respondent's [IP8] work-family life course. The parents expressed expectations of career fulfilments for her, probably rooted in a view on children as 'engines of migration' (cf. Jasso, 2003) and of making their sacrifices of migration worthwhile (Dreby & Stutz, 2012). However, the respondent's expression of choosing the 'second best' academic profession and life course trajectory seems to be a compromise to handle conflicting interests. This compromise appeared as wanting to fulfil her own and parents' will by choosing an academic branch (instead of becoming an actor), while also putting emphasis on future family obligations and not becoming 'that kind of parent'. The above expression of female gender-conflict when ambitions of career and motherhood interfere with one another, relates to earlier research on how Swedish majority women generally perceive work-family reconciliations (e.g. Abrar Reshid, 2017). Moreover, the tendency to make a career trade-off to reconcile work and family duties is also a common strategy among Swedish women (ibid). These career trade-offs imply that women's occupational aspirations do not necessarily reflect their actual interests and career ambitions. According to Grönlund et al. (2017), in Sweden such 'balanced' commitments to work and family obligations are more evident among women than men.

Provision for the family and engagement as fathers

While the women in this study mainly justified labour market participation in terms of independence and personal levels of agency, the male respondents put more emphasis on financial aspects. For men, the meaning of paid work largely lay in providing for a current or future family. In contrast to the women, they did not express ambiguity over having children in relation to labour market participation. Rather, the idea of parenthood

motivated them to aim for financial advancement and occupational attainments, as illustrated by a 32-year-old man [IP5]:

> IP5: It's been important, to me, to get a job before having a family, because I don't want to have children without first being able to provide for them financially. Also, […] to not just have any job, but one that requires an academic degree. Because it gives stability.

The emphasis on earnings and career advancement among the men was repeatedly linked to notions of parenthood during the interviews, including the idea that being a good father primarily meant being able to financially provide for the family. While our female respondents had more varied backgrounds with regard to parents' employment, the men were predominantly brought up by fathers who were sole providers. The impact of 'linked lives' (Wethington, 2005) can be distinguished in the perceptions of these male respondents, who justified their views on work-family arrangements with reference to childhood memories of their own fathers. In retrospect, they viewed their fathers' roles as single providers negatively, and strove to be more involved in childcare and housework. While all of the men interviewed aimed for financial security, some men also articulated a prioritisation of family over work, which meant being an active and present family figure. A 32-year-old man [IP16] exemplified this:

> IP16: I worked there for about a year and a half. But then I felt like, 'This isn't for me.' There were a lot of night and weekend shifts. And I felt like, 'I want a regular daytime, 9-hour job.' […] I prioritize my family over my career. [Now] I can come home early and take care of my child, clean, buy groceries, etc.

We can here see that the life course trajectory is linked to the influence of parents, in the sense that the male respondents' emphasise fatherhood and work reconciliation, in contrast to their fathers (cf. Wethington, 2005). Ideals of gender equality and involved fatherhood are increasingly pervading the labour market participation of Swedish men (Larsson & Björk, 2017). In line with this, our findings demonstrate how ideals of gender-equal arrangements were motivated with reference to the Swedish context, as exemplified by a 25-year-old male compliance specialist [IP7]:

> IP7: It has to be like, concentrated on equality […] Especially when you can do that, like here in Sweden. […] I wouldn't mind being a stay-at-home-dad under those conditions. […] Swedish society is very gender-equal, and obviously you're affected by that if you live here.

In this quotation, IP7 refers to both the political context (possibilities for gender-equality) and the social norm of gender equality in Sweden. As discussed earlier cultural and contextual influences play a central role in forming people's life course trajectories (Wethington, 2005). As demonstrated in the quotation above, social norms about gender equality formed parenthood ideals for the male respondents, while the political context contributed to perceptions of possible courses of actions. These results suggest that the Swedish welfare state's emphasis on a gender-equal division of work influences how male descendants of immigrants perceive their roles as workers and fathers.

The interviews also demonstrated that views of labour market participation in relation to gender norms among both male and female respondents were influenced by their immigrant heritage. In the following section, we discuss how immigrant parents may influence perceptions of work-family reconciliation among their descendants.

Intergenerational changes in work and family arrangements

Because the respondents grew up in Sweden, they considered themselves to have better opportunities than their parents to practice gender-equal household arrangements. Their positive attitudes towards gender equality were repeatedly linked to parents' gender arrangements. Views on labour market participation as a route to independence were especially prominent among the women brought up by unemployed mothers. They were influenced by their parents' life course trajectories on work and family, but in a way that led them to diverge from these trajectories rather than reproduce them (cf. Han & Moen, 1999). This was illustrated by a 25-year-old woman [IP1], and a 26-year-old man [IP13] who explained their own ideals of work and gender in contrast to their parents' gender practices:

> IP1: My mum doesn't work, and she does everything at home. I guess it's a habit they brought with them from Turkey. […] But it's different for us, because we've lived a different life here [in Sweden]. Both men and women can work here. […] And my mum never had the chance to study, so I thought, 'Then I'm going to study.' And my mum stayed home, and so I thought. 'I'm getting a job.'

> IP13: Mum stayed home and took care of everything, and dad worked. […] Because they brought their routines [from the country of origin] with them to Sweden. […] But it's understandable that they lived like that, because I know how it is in the Middle East. Sweden is different … and that has influenced us children. We live in more gender-equal ways.

These results illustrate that despite growing up with gendered organisations of family life, gender equality was a strong social norm among these descendants of immigrants. In fact, the quotation from IP1 suggests that unequal gender arrangements may have a reversed influence on descendants of immigrants because they view their own living conditions as different from their parents'. Reversed influences from immigrant parents' socioeconomic situation on their descendants have been discussed by other scholars (cf. Sania Ali et al., 2018). Our results indicate that ambitions of exceeding parents' socioeconomic situation also encompasses views on work in relation to gender arrangements.

The male respondents also perceived influences from their parents on their views on labour market participation, most prominently among those who grew up in single-earner households. While these men perceived labour market participation primarily as a means to provide for their families, in retrospect they viewed their fathers' position as the *single* provider negatively, as it meant their fathers were absent from home most of the day. They interpreted the single-earner position in light of their own negative experiences of it during their upbringing, as illustrated by a 26-year-old man [IP13]:

> IP13: It's mainly because I want […] to spend time with them [the family]. I know it will be different from how it was with my dad. […] I don't blame him or anything, because I know he didn't have a choice, but I want to give my family more of a social life than my dad gave us.

The meaning the men attached to the role of fatherhood can be better understood if reviewed in relation to the Swedish social and political context, which strongly emphasises and facilitates active parenting among both men and women. When IP13 stated that his father 'didn't have a choice', he highlighted the different social and political contexts that he and his father had been subject to. The men also showed resistance to the lack of reconciliation between parents with regard to housework, as illustrated by one 32-year-old [IP16]:

> IP16: I think that, unconsciously, I've decided to avoid the role my father had. Like, he didn't help at all at home […] my mother did it all […] raising four children on her own, cooking dinner, cleaning the house […] I don't want my children to see their mother being worn out like that.

Other than positioning themselves as providers, the men considered it important for them to be available and present as fathers, and to share housework. We interpret such dual commitments to work and family in relation to their experiences of unequal gender arrangements in the family of origin. Throughout the interviews, they repeatedly justified their parenting ideals in relation to the Swedish context, which they considered offered possibilities for gender-equal arrangements. These findings are in line with earlier studies highlighting processes of changing masculinities among Swedish men. For example, Björk (2017) shows that Swedish men who had chosen part-time work to care for their children related their choices both to traditional notions of masculinity and to gender-equal ideals of being involved parents. Similarly, in this study, notions of 'good fatherhood' among the male respondents involved expectations of duties as bread-winners, while also being involved family figures.

Parental encouragement of gender-equal family arrangements

Our respondents expressed a parental encouragement to employ gender-equal family arrangements in terms of sharing work and family obligations between men and women, even when the parents themselves employed a gendered division of work and care for the family. Earlier studies show how immigrant parents often discourage their children from following in their footsteps, motivating this with reference to the national context (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016). Concepts such as 'immigrant optimism' and 'immigrant bargain' (Smith, 2002) entail that immigrant parents imagine better opportunities for their children in the host country and adapt their parenting practices to such images. Our results support these arguments, and suggest that although immigrants themselves may employ gendered divisions they may encourage their sons and daughters to act otherwise. For example, a female respondent [IP1] described her parents' gender arrangements as unequal, but also said she was strongly encouraged by particularly her father, to pursue higher education and independency:

> IP1: He [her father] always said, and I'll never forget this, 'Don't be dependent on your husband's wallet. Have your own.' And it hasn't been like that for me. I have my own. […] He was always tough on us when it came to schoolwork. Especially us girls, because he wanted us to be independent.

Immigrant parents' encouraging their daughters to occupational attainment may also emerge from their own experiences of gender oppression in the country of origin. Our results suggest that such experiences may be important influences on views of labour market participation among immigrants' descendants, as illustrated by a 28-year-old woman [IP22] who perceived gender inequalities experienced by her mother, as an important driver for her own occupational aspirations:

> IP22: For mum, it's always been like, 'Of course you have to be someone.' She's more of a feminist […] It's because of how it was in her home country […] where she was always subjected to domination. In Sweden, it was different, here she had power, she had a say in things, her

words meant something. I think that's why she's like, 'Women can,' […] and subconsciously, I think, this has also affected me.

From a life-course perspective, our results show that parents' migration and settlement process may produce turning-points for descendants of immigrants in forming views on family, gender and work (Dreby & Stutz, 2012; Louie, 2012). Thus, migration may be accounted for as a force to interrupt the intergenerational transmission of unequal gender attitudes for immigrants' descendants (Spierings, 2015). Both our male and female respondents considered themselves to have better opportunities to employ gender-equal family arrangements than their parents, who grew up in less gender-egalitarian countries. Negative childhood experiences and perceptions from parents' country of origin may drive immigrants' descendants to arrange their lives differently. Such intergenerational changes may be amplified by gender-equal political arrangements (Soehl, Fibbi, & Vera-Larrucea, 2012).

Discussion

In this article, we aimed to explore perceptions of labour market participation in relation to gender norms and parenting ideals among men and women of migrant descent in Sweden. The male and female respondents saw labour market participation in different ways; while both genders stressed aspects of an engaged and involved parenthood, there were gender-biased differences in how they viewed labour market participation in relation to parenthood. While all respondents expressed positive attitudes to gender equality, our female respondents were more ambiguous towards combining motherhood with employment, as opposed to the male respondents who saw work and career advancements as a prerequisite to start a family. These views reflect studies portraying women in Sweden as more concerned about combining labour market participation with motherhood (e.g. Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001; Lampic, Svanberg, Karlström, & Tydén, 2006). People do not draw only on familial and cultural conceptions in making decisions about work and family arrangements, but also on the social and structural characteristics of the societies in which they live.

Furthermore, our findings suggest that migration may facilitate and pave the way for intergenerational change in labour market participation and gender arrangements, if the structural and institutional conditions are conducive to such changes (Erel, 2010).

Our results are congruent with earlier studies showing that gender norms of immigrants and their descendants may change in relation to institutional and structural conditions (e.g. Röder & Mühlau, 2014). We have shown that both men and women of migrant descent challenge and reinterpret gender norms and practices of the immigrant generation, and actively make references to the Swedish social and political context in doing so. Other, 'interest-based', explanations for gender attitudes among immigrants and their descendants in Western countries depict women of migrant descent as more inclined to support gender equality since it is in their best interests (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004). Conversely, men of migrant origin are depicted as less supportive of gender equal work-family arrangements since these may undermine their personal level of authority (cf. Westin, 2003). Our findings support the argument that women of migrant descent are highly inclined to participate in paid work for emancipating purposes. However, we did not find that men of migrant descent were less supportive of gender-equal work-family arrangements; rather, they expressed support of such arrangements,

since this allowed them to participate on the labour market while also being present and engaged in the family (Björk, 2017).

Katz (2014) conceptualises immigrants' descendants as 'kids in the middle', demonstrating how they are affected by their immigrant heritage but have experiences and living conditions that go far beyond those of their parents. The respondents in this study were influenced by their immigrant heritage. Thus, they expressed ambitions to break with parents' unequal divisions of gender, which contradict studies arguing that work and family arrangements of the immigrant generation are reproduced among immigrants' descendants (cf. Nadim, 2016).

Because parents' migration is often motivated by providing children with better life chances (Jasso, 2003; Smith, 2002), intergenerational changes in gender arrangements may in fact be expected and welcomed by immigrant parents. This interpretation supports the view that parents' migration affects the lives of immigrants' descendants in ways that transcend the immigrant experience (cf. Louie, 2012). From this perspective, a migration-specific capital (cf. Erel, 2010) may be distinguished regarding intergenerational changes in gender arrangements.

Our results highlight the importance of considering combined influences of the welfare state context and of immigrant parents in examining the incorporation of immigrants' descendants into Western European societies. In light of this, public debates and institutional discourses on labour market participation, gender arrangements, and culture among immigrants and their descendants must account for the differences in gender, the social and political context, and generational change.

This study focused on perceptions of labour market participation in relation to gender norms and parenting ideals. Learning more about these issues requires research on how immigrants' descendants actually practice work-family arrangements in Sweden. Moreover, our sample mostly contained of high-educated individuals who participated on the labour market. In order to gain a broader perspective, future research should address the subjective views on labour market participation, gender and parenthood among individuals of more varied backgrounds.

Disclosure statement

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