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Report on

Methodological Issues in Family and Migration Research

National University of Singapore, Singapore
19 - 26 April 2001

Organised by The Asian MetaCentre for Population and Sustainable Analysis

By
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Summary

The aim of this report is to highlight briefly what has been learnt during the course of workshop on methodological issues in family and migration research. It also demonstrates what could be done in this area of research by adopting strong methodological issues.

Brief Report

Organized by the Asian MetaCentre for Population and Sustainable Development Analysis, a high-level training workshop on "*Methodological Issues in Family and Migration Research*" was held at the National University of Singapore during 19-26 April 2001. Prior to this training workshop, Asian MetaCentre has also conducted another international conference/APN workshop on *Migration and the "Asian Family" in a Globalising World*, in Singapore from 16-18 April 2001. Since the workshops were conducted consecutively on common research interest, some participants could therefore attend both the international workshop as well as the training workshop. The principle aim of this report is to give brief description about the migration-training workshop conducted by the Asian MetaCentre.

The purpose of the workshop has been two fold:

i) To offer a high-level training course on the methodological issues of "Asian family and migration" to selected participants who have research interest in the similar field, and

ii) To gear up research activities of scholars in order to generate new research proposals on various issues of "migration and the family" for possible submissions to the Wellcome Trust.

In her opening speech, Associate Professor Brenda Yeoh, principal-investigator of the Asian MetaCentre and Director, Centre for Advanced Studies, explained the primary purposes of the workshop to provide high-level training to interested individuals who can further build their career or to strengthen their capacity building, and she welcomes high quality research proposals from the participants. She also indicated several unexplored important issues of migration research such as missing children's voice and household violence that had been raised during the international workshop on migration.

Two scholars, Dr. Khoo Siew Ean, Demography Program, Australian National University, and Mr. Johannes Pflegerl, Austrian Institute for Family Studies, who have long experiences in migration research were invited to lead the course. In addition, a total of 23 participants from 10 different countries such as Germany, Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, USA, New Zealand, India, Bangladesh, China, and Vietnam were selected on the basis of their experiences and recent interests in this particular field.

Migration research has two established stream – qualitative and quantitative areas of research. This has been observed in the past. In this training workshop instructors are drawn in a way to give equal research importance in both research streams. Dr. Khoo has a long-term experience of quantitative research during her entire career, on the other hand, Mr. Johannes Pflegerl has been involved developing proposals and so far carried out a number of qualitative research in Europe.

Quantitative Approach

Dr. Khoo Siew Ean started her lecture by giving preliminary notions about migration, and family/household, and how migration related information can be obtained from censuses or surveys. She also illustrated various census questions for family and migration research at individual level as well as family/household levels. Emphasis has been given on the methodological issues throughout her lectures. Broadly speaking, the important topics among others were: i) coverage and data quality issues, and ii) demographic and statistical approaches in family and migration research. It has been particularly emphasized that the unit of analysis at a certain level (individual, family, household, or community level) is very important in migration research. A number of practical examples were used to make it clear.

Dr. Khoo also lectured on a broad topic "Methodological issues and approaches in the use of longitudinal or panel data". It was very interesting lecture to the participants as the topic was relatively new in migration research. She delivered her lecture starting with the definition of longitudinal or panel survey, advantages and disadvantages of longitudinal surveys for family and migration, and depicted several examples of longitudinal surveys. Dr. Khoo also illustrated the methodological issues in analysing longitudinal data, record linkages, and "lost to follow-up". Finally, a detailed longitudinal analysis was demonstrated on the basis of the data in family and migration research from longitudinal survey of immigrants to Australia. Participants were enthusiastic to learn the new methodology and there was a friendly discussion on various issues of quantitative techniques in family and migration research.

Qualitative Approach

Mr. Johannes Pflegerl divided his part of the training workshop into four sections. He started by presenting a substantive paper on Family and Migration Research in Europe. This paper gave the participants a good background on the type of research which is being conducted in Europe, as well as a substantive understanding of migration issues in Europe. The remainder of the qualitative research training was divided into three sections: theory, data collection, and data analysis.

During the section on the theory of qualitative research, Mr. Pflegerl lectured on the theoretical background to the qualitative research paradigm. He covered phenomenology, ethno methodology, symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics, and grounded theory. In the data collection section, he focused on several different methods of qualitative interviewing, including semi-standardized, narrative, problem centered and biographical interviews. Mr. Pflegerl gave extensive examples from his own experience of conducting family history interviews with

migrant families in Austria. Participants then had a chance to practice narrative interviewing in a very effective small group exercise. During the section on qualitative data analysis, Mr. Pflegerl covered coding strategies, including the construction of sub categories and types. He then demonstrated the use of sequence analysis, using the Win Max computer program. Participants got to try their hand at sequence analysis, with a quote from one of Mr. Pflegerl's own narrative interviews. Mr. Pflegerl ended the workshop with a common reflection session whereby participants reflected on what they had learnt, what were the still-open questions, and what was important for the future.

On the whole, both of the trainers presented a theoretical overview of their research tradition, followed by practical examples of data collection and analysis. At the end of each section of the course, participants presented their own proposals for family and migration research (about half the participants presented proposals for quantitative research projects, and half presented proposals for qualitative projects). Thorough feedback on the proposals by the trainers and other participants were very helpful. Both trainers encouraged the participants to further develop their proposals and to apply for funding for future research.

The workshop participants had a common substantive interest in migration and its effects on families. Most participants also had extensive research experience. Thus, the participants were able to discuss and compare qualitative and quantitative research approaches, drawing on their own experiences and their knowledge of migration research. A significant feature of the workshop was the high level of involvement of all the attendees. Discussions sparked during the workshop sessions often continued over lunch and tea breaks. All participants expressed their hopes that the contacts and networks they formed during the workshop would be useful for future collaborations.

Conclusion

During the whole workshop the trainers worked very hard to give maximum input to the participants and extended their help in order to develop new ideas for research proposals. The workshop was a great success in pushing the agenda for further research in migration and the family in the context of Asia.