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INTRODUCTION

The rising female labour market participation in recent decades entailed the challenge for parents to negotiate work and family responsibilities and organise childcare. Formal childcare is considered as an important policy instrument to alleviate the parent-worker conflict and increase maternal labour force participation. While Belgium is among the European countries with the highest availability of formal childcare, female labour market participation and uptake of childcare is substantially lower among migrant populations. Female labour market participation differs strongly across ethnic groups, and Belgium has one of the largest employment gaps between migrant and native women (Maes et al., 2019). Motherhood negatively affects employment to a larger extent among women of migrant origin (Kil et al., 2018a). In this paper we explore the migrant-native differentials in the uptake of different childcare arrangements. We investigate the uptake of both formal, informal or mixed formal & informal childcare, while taking account of different supply-side characteristics such as the availability of local (subsidized) childcare and the presence and characteristics of close kin.

OBJECTIVES AND/OR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this paper we try to understand if and how access to (in)formal childcare arrangements differs for families with varying migrant backgrounds and how this affects their childcare decisions. Previous research has highlighted the difficulties of migrant families in reconciling work and family (Wall and José, 2004; Schober and Spiess, 2013). Limited access to and knowledge on formal childcare provisions made many families rely on strategies such informal care, mothers cutting back on working hours, bringing children to work or leaving them alone. These strategies were especially predominant among vulnerable families. Wall and José (2004) also pointed to the lack of informal networks, especially among first generation unskilled labour migrants. Previous research indicated that there are a number of reasons why parents with a migrant background are less inclined to use formal childcare, these reasons include personal preferences and cultural reasons, but also local availability of childcare services, the cost and quality of childcare and access to information (Fram and Kim, 2008; Miller et al., 2014; Seibel and Hedegaard, 2017).

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In Belgium uptake and provision of formal childcare is among the highest in Europe (Mills et al., 2014), but there are strong socio-economic gradients in the uptake of formal childcare and there are also some indications that lower income families have less access to informal care (Ghysels and Van Lancker, 2009; Van Lancker and Ghysels, 2012). Not only are high-income families more able to spend on high quality childcare, there are also indications of spatial inequality, with childcare facilities being less available in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Vandenbroeck et al., 2008; Burchinal et al., 2008).

While families with a migration background often have a lower socio-economic status and live in neighbourhoods with less access to services, having access to good quality childcare might be especially important since early enrolment in childcare might positively affect child development, school-readiness and in the case of migrants, language skills (Fram and Kim, 2008). If migrants also have a lack of informal childcare options, children could end up alone or be cared for by an older sibling (Wall and José, 2004). It is therefore important to study how access to and uptake of formal and informal care is stratified by migration background.

In this paper we investigate the uptake of different childcare arrangements by migration background. Using data from the 2001 Belgian census we distinguish between first and second generation mothers from Southern European, Eastern European and neighbouring countries (Germany, the Netherlands and France) as well as Turkey and Morocco. This allows us to contrast groups which have experienced diverse migration trajectories and experience different levels of labour market integration. According to the qualitative research by Wall and Jose (2004) these are important predictors of childcare arrangements. Additionally we are able to include some information on informal and formal childcare availability. Contextual data such as the number of childcare places as well as the number of subsidized places are included. For a subset of families we are also capable to include information on grandparents. This allows us to analyse the influence of grandparental availability on childcare strategy. We have information on the proximity, work and health status of grandparents. This extensive amount of information allows us to generate valuable insights in the uptake of childcare arrangements among mothers with a migration background, while distinguishing between demand-side and supply-side factors.

DATA AND METHODS

We use data from the 2001 Belgian census which provides us with information on the uptake of (in)formal childcare for children born between the 1st of January 1996 and 30th of September 2001. By means of multinomial regression we model uptake of formal, informal and mixed (formal & informal) childcare arrangements in 2001 by migration background. We include both first and second generation migrants.

First generation migrants are not born in Belgium, while second generation migrants have at least one parent that was not born in Belgium. Additionally we control for a number of individual and household-level characteristics, such as educational level of the mother, age at first birth, and migrant background. We do not include actual labour market position of the mother because it is endogenous with the uptake of childcare. Instead we include an indicator of employment opportunities, which is based on labour market participation of women without children, but with similar socio-economic characteristics. We estimated the probability of being employment as well as the probability of being full-time versus part-time employed of women without children, taking account of their socio-demographic characteristics such as age, migration background, municipality and educational level. As an indicator of informal childcare potential, we include availability of grandparents by controlling for spatial proximity and characteristics of grandparents. We include contextual information on childcare coverage at the municipality level, the number of subsidized places, and type of childcare that is available at a local level (crèches and/or daymothers).

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

We estimated different multinomial logit models with childcare strategy as the outcome variable. The base category is having no childcare strategy, meaning the child is cared for by one of the household members, presumably the parents. In the first figure we show the results of using formal childcare as the main care strategy as opposed to no care by migration status. In the second and third figure we contrast using informal care only versus no childcare and using a combination of formal and informal care as opposed to no care by migration status.

In the first model, we did not yet include any control variables and we can see that in all cases, mothers with a migrant background are less likely to use any type childcare arrangement - whether formal, informal or mixed – as compared to Belgian mothers. The only exception are second generation Eastern-European mothers, who are somewhat more likely to use informal care, as opposed to no care at all.

In the second model we included educational level of the mother as well as her age at first birth and the age of the eldest child. Including these variables accounts for some of the differences in uptake of childcare among some migrant groups. Especially with respect to the uptake of formal care as opposed to no care (figure 1) we see a decline in the differences between native Belgian mothers and second generation Turks and Moroccans as well as first generation Turkish mothers. In the third model local childcare coverage was included. This was a significant predictor which explains some of the variation in uptake of formal childcare or mixed childcare between native Belgian mothers and mothers with a migrant

background and supports previous research indicating that formal childcare is not equally available and is especially lacking in neighbourhoods with a high concentration of migrants. In the fourth model we included employment opportunities. This indicator clearly reduces differences in uptake of formal care between Belgian mothers and first generation mothers from neighbouring countries, first generation Eastern European mothers, first and second generation Moroccan mothers and first generation Turkish mothers. In our last model we controlled whether the maternal grandmother is known or not. By adding this variable, we see that the lower uptake of informal care among first generation migrants is explained to some extent.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

The explanatory effect of the variables varies over the different migrant groups considered, and within groups between the first and second generation. Noteworthy is that migrants do not seem to substitute formal childcare by informal care, except for second generation Eastern-European mothers. Controlling for different socio-demographic characteristics and structural constraints, significantly explains differences between first generation and native women, but substantial differences remain between second generation Turkish, first and second generation Moroccan women and native Belgian mothers. This implies that other determinants inhibit the uptake of family policies among these groups. Previous research already demonstrated that the unstable labour market trajectories among these mothers hinder uptake of different family policies in Belgium (Maes et al., 2019; Kil et al., 2018b) .

The next step will be to improve our analyses by including additional variables, such as the proportion of subsidized formal childcare slots and number of adults present in the household. Unlike expectations, mothers with a migrant background do not seem to make more use of informal care. In additional analyses we will explore the variation in uptake of informal care by including information on the grandparents, such as their employment status, self-rated health and distance.

FIGURE 1 – FORMAL CHILDCARE VS. NO CARE BY MIGRATION STATUS

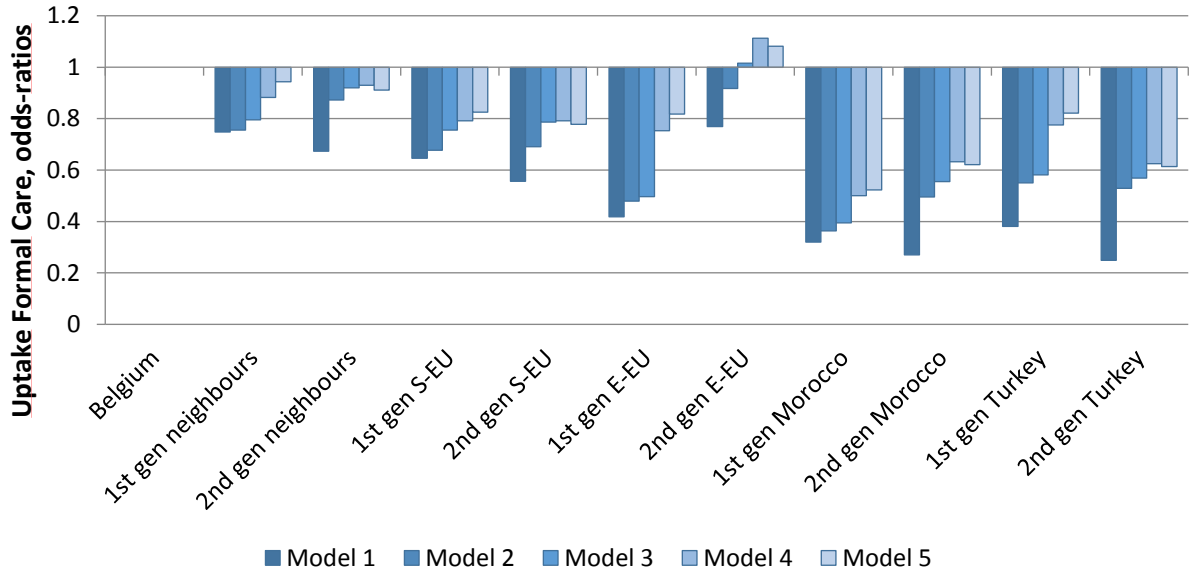


FIGURE 2 – INFORMAL CHILDCARE VS. NO CARE BY MIGRATION STATUS

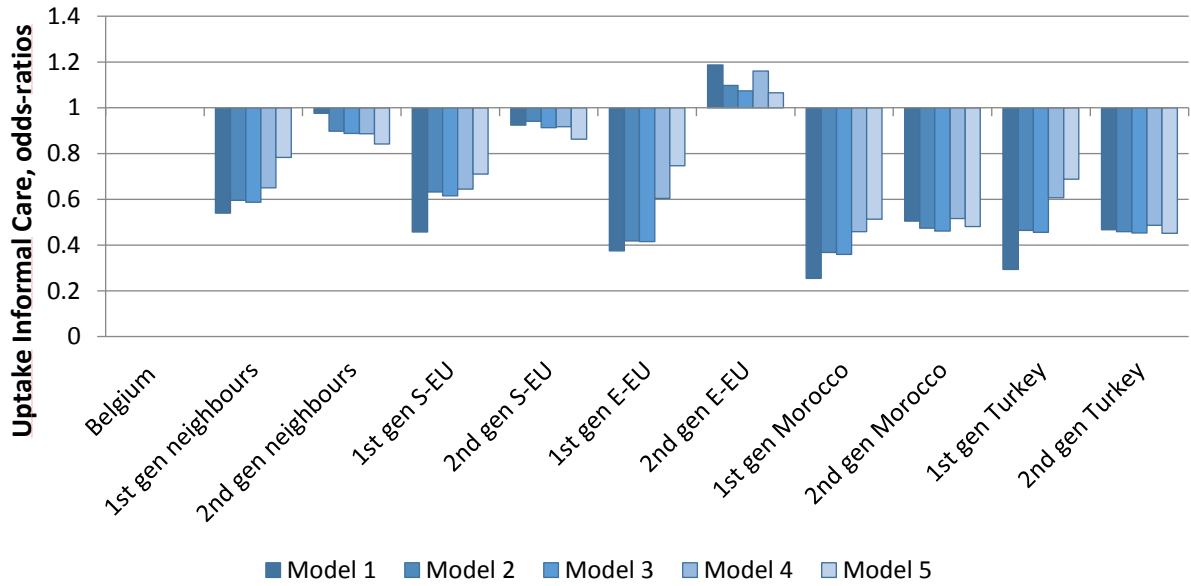
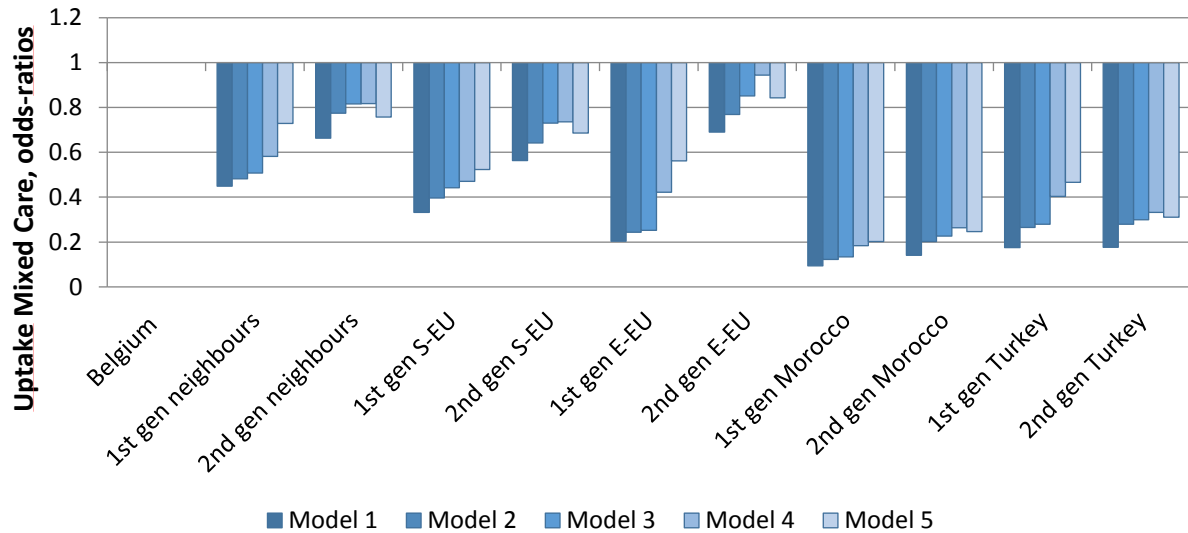


FIGURE 3 – MIXED CHILDCARE (FORMAL & INFORMAL) VS. NO CARE BY MIGRATION STATUS



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