

2000 Families – Episode 2

Friends and Social Networks

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Migrants, networks, migration, friendship, friends, generation, family, Turkey, Turkish, important, find, women, Europe, employment status, people, national boundaries, social networks, employment, Turks, closely.

SPEAKERS

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Christine Garrington 00:02

This is the 2000 Families Research Project podcast series looking at the impact of migration across three generations of Turkish families. In today's podcast Professor Lucinda Platt from LSE, talks about early findings from the project about friends and social networks.

Lucinda Platt 00:17

While there are a number of reasons why we might be interested in migrants, friends and social lives, firstly, when people migrate when they move along away from home, they're moving often from their social networks from their sources of friendship and support, and their moving to what is often kind of quite alien context. And in that situation, friends may be particularly important, they may both have fewer opportunities for making friends very easily, particularly on first arrival, but those friends they do make may become more important for their wellbeing. Migration itself often takes place through either family or friendship networks, so people know somebody who's migrated, they follow them. And so it's quite informative to find out about some of those connections. Finally, another reason why I think it's very important to look at migration and friendship networks, is because it gives us information about how far their lives are transnational, how far these friends are still based in Turkey, how far they are making regular contact across national boundaries. We often think of friends being based in neighborhoods, the locality where you live. But of course, that's not really the truth nowadays, people communicate by phone, by Skype, by traveling to other places, and their closest friends may actually be not, not near them at all.

Christine Garrington 01:30

So in the context of The 2000 Families Project, what sorts of things were you looking to find out about friends and family?

Lucinda Platt 01:36

So we were interested in finding out whether they had friends, how many people they knew, what their acquaintanceship network was, and what sorts of friends they had as well. So friends can also be important for when you're trying to get a job, or when you're trying to find out about how you negotiate in a foreign environment. And so we were interested to know whether they had friends that might help them with that, friends who already had a job, friends who were highly qualified. And we were also interested in whether there were impacts of migration on the sorts of people knew. So typically people make friends with people like themselves, were like themselves might be women make friends with women and people who have higher education, make friends with people with higher education. And this is a very common phenomenon. We were interested to see if migrants because they potentially have less choice over their friends actually had more diverse friendship networks.

Christine Garrington 02:25

What sorts of things were the participants in the study actually asked about in this area.

Lucinda Platt 02:30

So they were asked about how many people they knew. So that was what we call acquaintances. And they were also asked about how many friends they had. And then we had a further set of questions to try and dig a bit deeper down into the type of friends they had, where they were asked about up to three, what we call best friends. And about these three best friends, they were asked about the characteristics of their friends, whether they were in employment, what their education was, whether they were Turkish or not. But we also asked about how often they communicated with them. And by what means.

Christine Garrington 03:00

So for this particular piece of research for the book, you started off looking at the size of people's friendship networks, what did you find there, and especially when you compare migrants with those who stayed behind, for example?

Lucinda Platt 03:12

Well we found that for both migrants and those who stayed behind, they knew a lot of people, they had very big acquaintanceship networks. And this was particularly the case for the men. So men knew more people than women and tend to have more friends than women as well. There were fewer differences in the general size of networks between migrants and those who stayed behind than perhaps we might have expected. Though they did look to be a bit smaller for women and they also seemed to be smaller, particularly for friends, in the second generation. So while the migrant Turks had these very extensive social networks, the second generation had narrower social networks.

Christine Garrington 03:47

So you went on to look a little more closely at who those friends were, and the closeness of the relationships that they had. How did you go about that? And what did what did you find there?

Lucinda Platt 03:57

To look at the nature of the friendships, we use these three best friends questions. So that gave us a little bit of a handle on whether migrants and stayer and whether men and women among migrants and

stayer had different sorts of friends. And it also enabled us to look at that question of whether those who were migrants who are second generation who have in Europe actually still retain close contacts with those in Turkey, and counted those as a best friend, but also communicated with them. And we found perhaps, as we might have expected, from existing studies, that there were really very dense ties between Turks in Europe and Turks in Turkey, and they had very regular contact. They didn't have quite the levels of contact they might have had if they'd been in Turkey, but that's hardly surprising. And the levels of communication, you know, phoning or Skyping or visiting were really very, very high for both men and women. What we also found was that we expected that those Turks in Europe would have more diverse friendship networks, as I've mentioned, that they might know more people who were highly educated and also they might know more people in employment regardless of their own employment status, or perhaps exacerbated by their unemployment status. We found actually that it was those in Turkey who are more likely to be higher educated, which was a slightly surprising finding to us. So we did find that migrants had more employed people in their networks. And this was partly conditioned by their own employment status. But partly anyway they had more important people in their networks, which may be related to the need to know other people in employment to getting jobs. Perhaps most interestingly, we found differences between women in Turkey and women migrants, and second generation in terms of the diversity of the network. So while women, by and large, are more likely to have women as friends, this was less the case for women in Europe than it was for women in Turkey. And we also found that Turkish women in Europe were more likely to know employed people, even when you took their own employment status into account. And they were also more likely to know higher educated people.

Christine Garrington 05:53

One of the great things about this particular dataset is that you can look across generations. So you've followed grandparents, parents, children, when you looked at these things across the generations, what picture started to emerge there? What stories did it tell?

Lucinda Platt 06:06

Well then it was a little bit different, because what we found was that those in the second generation who did tend to be younger, obviously, because we are looking across families, and second generation is by and large, going to be younger, that they tended to have smaller friendship networks, which I think I've already mentioned. And there were fewer differences between men and women and second generation. So they had similar size networks, the second generation were less likely to have relatives among their social networks, which was very common for the first generation, again, as you might expect, so they had less family embedded networks. So I think the main differences by generation were the size of the networks, the fact that men and women were more similar in the second generation in the size of the networks and the type of the networks, and also that they were less closely tied to Turkey and less closely tied to relatives.

Christine Garrington 06:55

So what do you think we learned from all this about migration and people's friendship network? Do you think it gives us a different perspective at all?

Lucinda Platt 06:55

There are some areas where I think it improves our understanding of Turkish migration. So there is often a tendency when looking at Turkish migrants to think of women suffering from migration, suffering in terms of risks of socialization, of lacking friends, or potentially having smaller friendship networks. Interestingly, we don't see very much evidence for this because women in Turkey already have smaller friendship networks. And by contrast, what we see is that women in Europe have these more diverse social networks, and they don't seem to face greater risks of isolation. So I think that's one area that is salutary for thinking about Turkish migration. Another area, I've said, it's not surprising, but I think the extent of the way that friendship networks cross national boundaries is very important also, for thinking about the sorts of resources that migrants have available to them. They might not have friends around the corner, but if they've got someone they can contact on the phone, and that may be providing a lot of support, comfort, help, all the things that we expect from friends. The extent of transnational relationships, also it's not just relevant for the migrants themselves, but it's also relevant for the people back home. So the people back home are getting news, the perspective from Europe, they're getting influenced by the way that migrants are thinking and talking and developing and engaging. And I think that's often the bit we miss out of the story. And this gives us the opportunity to look at it more closely.

Christine Garrington 08:19

I wonder if there's any food for thought in terms of what it might be important and interesting to examine more closely in the future, having done this initial look at the data.

Lucinda Platt 08:28

Yeah, so this was quite a preliminary look, it was quite just describing what we had there and seeing if there were any stories that came out of it. The one that I think is interesting to pursue in more detail is this issue of women's diverse networks and migrant women's diverse networks. And to link that in to look at how far that is connected with their own employment histories and employment trajectories, the extent to which that affects their own children as well and how their friendship networks might shape the experiences of the family more broadly. But with a focus on the woman rather than the focus necessarily on the male labor migrant who's often the chief source of interest in migration studies,

Christine Garrington 09:06

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