

# **Immigration, contraception, and abortion in urban Russia: The role of legal status and ethnicity \***

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## **Abstract**

Migrants' reproductive behavior is typically examined through the prism of disruption and adaptation. We engage these theoretical perspectives to compare contraceptive use and recourse to induced abortion between native and migrant women in the Russian Federation. We use mainly survey data collected in 2012-13 in three Russian cities. The survey sample included working women aged 18-40—international migrants from three Central Asian countries as well as Russian natives. The analyses focus in particular on the role of migrants' legal status as well as of their ethnic background. The results of the preliminary logistic regression and proportional hazards models point to instructive variations by nativity, legal status, and ethnicity. These models will be further refined and will be complemented by analyses of data from in-depth interviews with survey respondents and health care providers to better understand the constraints and barriers faced by migrant women in accessing reproductive care services.

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## **Background**

Considerable cross-national scholarship has examined the association between migration and fertility (e.g., Agadjanian et al., 2011; Brouckerhoff 1995; Brouckerhoff and Yang 1994; Chattopadhyay et al., 2006; Lee 1992; White et al., 2008). This scholarship has typically entertained two main perspectives: the “disruption” hypothesis, which posits that migration is associated with a decline in fertility immediately before and after the move and the “adaptation” hypothesis, which states that migrants gradually adapt their fertility preferences and behavior to those dominant in destination areas. In addition, selection into migration, which may be associated with distinct reproductive propensities, has also been of concern (Goldstein and Goldstein 1983). Accordingly, the literature on migration and fertility regulation is typically cast within these frameworks. However, with respect to international migrants, due mainly to data limitations, this literature usually ignores variations in migrants’ legal status, which may be highly consequential for migrants’ access to reproductive health-related information and services. Likewise, the scholarship does not adequately consider the diversity of migrants’ ethnocultural backgrounds and their manifestation in migrants’ reproductive preferences and choices. This paper addresses these gaps in the literature focusing on migrants in the Russian Federation (hereafter also Russia), the second largest recipient of international migrants in the world which has received remarkably little attention from demographers in general and migration scholars in particular.

## **Conceptual approach**

The study examines variations in contraceptive use and recourse to abortion between migrant and non-migrant women as well as within different subgroups of migrants. Of primary interest in the study are differences across types of migrant legal status and among migrants of different ethnic provenance. The conceptual model engages the main theoretical perspectives on migration and fertility and adapts them to the Russian context and to the specifics of international migrants’ legal, economic, and sociocultural experiences in that context. In particular, we posit that migrants’ legal status and trajectories significantly constrain the processes of disruption and adaptation that typically characterize migrants’ reproductive behavior. At the same time, we

argue that these processes are also greatly imprinted by migrants' ethnocultural backgrounds and their group migration experiences.

## **Context**

### *Migration to the Russian Federation*

After the breakup of the USSR, the Russian Federation has become a major destination for international migration and currently hosts the second largest number of international migrants in the world (after the United States). The vast majority of international migrants in Russia come from the countries that once made up the Soviet Union, with three nations of Central Asia—Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—accounting for a large and growing share. Citizens of those nations do not need a visa to enter the Russian Federation, and most Central Asians arrive in Russia, at least initially, as tourist, private visitors, or temporary labor migrants. Whereas Moscow, the Russian capital and by far the largest city, has been a primary magnet for these migrants, the destinations of migration flows have been diversifying to include other big Russian cities. Although labor migration from Central Asia began as almost exclusively male, women have come to constitute an increasingly large share of the migration flow. Most of these migrants, men and women alike, have irregular status (e.g., lacking migration registration, residential registration, or work permit) and therefore are often marginalized, harassed, and exploited by their employers and law enforcing officials. Central Asian migrants' ethno-racial background (most are darker-skinned, often with poor command of the Russian language) and religion (most, if not all, are Muslim) add to their economic and legal marginalization (Menjívar, Agadjanian, and Zotova 2012). Despite many similarities, the three groups differ from each other in their ethno-cultural background as well as their migratory history. Thus Kyrgyz and Uzbeks speak similar Turkic languages, and are therefore ethnoculturally close, whereas the Tajik language is of Iranian stock. At the same time, Uzbeks and Tajiks represent traditionally sedentary Central Asian populations whereas Kyrgyz are traditionally a nomadic group whose sedentarization is historically recent. Although all three groups are Muslim, the influence of Islam is generally the strongest among Tajiks, followed by Uzbeks. The Islamic influence is generally weakest among Kyrgyz. Finally, Tajiks have the longest history of migration to Russia, triggered initially by a five-year civil war that started shortly after Tajikistan's independence. The Uzbek labor migration began in earnest later, although because of the sheer size of the reservoir of potential

migrants (Uzbekistan is by far the most populous nation in Central Asia) Uzbeks now numerically predominate among Central Asians in Russia. Finally, the Kyrgyz migration is the most recent.

### *Contraception and abortion*

Contraceptive use was quite low in the former Soviet Union, and was disproportionately skewed toward the intra-uterine device. In more than two decades after the breakup of the Soviet Union, contraceptive use has increased in its successor states but still remains low by international standards even though there is some cross-country variation in contraceptive prevalence. The historically and continuously low levels of contraceptive use in the former Soviet Union is partly related to high reliance on induced abortion. Legalized in 1954, abortion on request has been widely available since that time and has remained a major method of fertility regulation in many parts of the former USSR up to these days.

While basic health care services, including reproductive health care, are provided to Russian citizens and legal residents through compulsory national medical insurance, irregular migrants are typically excluded from those services and must resort to expensive fee-based private providers.

### **Data & Method**

Data used in this study come primarily from a survey of working women conducted between October 2012 and March 2013. The survey was carried at two main sites, the cities of Moscow and Novosibirsk, and an additional site, the city of Yekaterinburg. The survey sample totaled 941 women aged 18-40, and included representatives of all three migrant groups of interest—Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Uzbek—as well as a control group of non-migrant (native) women. Because the vast majority of female Central Asian migrants work in eateries (mainly as waitresses and cleaners), semi-formal produce and clothing bazaars (as stall owners and/or vendors), and formal retail and grocery stores (as sales clerks and cleaners), the survey focused on women working in these industries.

To sample women working in eateries and formal retail, a time-location approach was used (see Agadjanian and Zotova (2012) for a detailed description of an application of the time-location approach in a Russian setting). A three-stage sampling procedure was used. At the first

stage, each city's territory was parceled into squares of approximately 5 km<sup>2</sup>. In a randomly selected sample of these squares all eateries and retail outlets were recorded. At the second stage, eateries and retail outlets were randomly selected from the lists. At the final stage, women aged 18-40 who were migrants from the three Central Asian groups and non-migrants (the control subsample) working at the selected establishments were approached for a survey interview and approximately the same time of the day (if more than one eligible woman works at a given establishment, one was randomly selected). For the bazaar subsample, first, bazaars were randomly selected from the list of each city's bazaars and then in each selected bazaar, women were selected using a random-walk algorithm (if the selected bazaars did not yield the target number of respondents of each ethnicity, additional bazaars were added). As a result, of this sampling procedure, approximately one-third of the sample in the two main sites came from each of the three types of workplace—retail, eateries, and bazaars. In the additional experimental site, Yekaterinburg, only bazaars were included due to budget limitations. In all three sites, the sample was more or less evenly split among the four ethno-provenance groups.

All survey participants were administered a fully structured questionnaire through a face-to-face interview in the language of their choice. The survey instrument included questions of respondents' sociodemographic background, ethnocultural and socioeconomic characteristics, and histories of their partnerships, reproduction, and migration. Among unique features of the data is the distinction between migrants of different legal statuses at the time of survey. In addition to the survey, semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with a purposefully selected fraction of the survey respondents. The interviews focused on the women's sexual and reproductive experiences, among other themes. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted reproductive health care providers who work primarily with international migrants.

To test our conceptual framework, we subdivide the sample into three groups based on their migration/legal status: native Russians (regardless of prior experience of internal migration); migrants who are Russian citizens or permanent residents; and migrants who are neither citizens nor permanent residents (we label the two migrant groups as "regularized" and "irregular", respectively, for simplicity of presentation). Within the migrant subsample, we also distinguish among the three ethno-provenance groups—Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and Uzbeks. It should be noted that the two dimensions have important overlaps: thus native Russians (i.e., Russian citizens by birth) also have the highest degree of exposure to Russian sexual and reproductive culture, which,

compared to Central Asian cultures, is typically more permissive and more open to induced abortion (among other features). Russian citizenship and permanent residence can also be seen as measure of immigrants' exposure to that culture (regardless of duration since migration). We start with descriptive analysis of variations of contraceptive use and experience of induced abortion across the three legal-status groups and the three ethno-provenance groups. We then fit a series of multivariate logistic regression models and proportional hazards models predicting these outcomes from the covariates of interest and controlling for individual demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

## **Preliminary results**

### *Contraceptive use*

Table 1 shows current contraceptive prevalence in the three legal-status groups. The groups have comparable levels of overall contraceptive use, clustering around the sample average of 42%. However, when we break contraceptive use down by type of method, a stark contrast between native Russians, who greatly favor short-term methods (mainly condoms), and immigrants, who use both short-term and longer-term types of methods. Interesting differences between the two migrant subgroups—greater reliance on short-term methods among regularized migrants vs. greater use of longer-term methods by irregular migrants—can also be observed. The pattern of differences is suggestive of greater assimilation of regularized migrants compared to their irregular counterparts.

Table 1 here

Table 2 shows the distribution of contraceptive use in the migrant subsample by ethnicity. Uzbek women have the highest prevalence, largely due to noticeably greater use of longer-term methods. Variations in short-term method use are minor, with Kyrgyz women having a slightly higher prevalence than the other two groups.

Table 2 here

Table 3 presents results of an initial multinomial logistic regression analysis in which the outcome can take one of three values—no use, short-term method use, and longer-term method use. These results confirm the bivariate patterns: native Russian women have a significantly lower level of longer-term contraceptive use and higher level of short-term method use than either groups of migrants, regardless of age, education, partnership characteristics, sexual frequency, work-related characteristics, and place of residence. Table 4 fits the same regression for migrants only. While no difference between the two legal-status groups transpires, Uzbek women display a significantly higher likelihood of using a long-term method relative to not using any method. Among other results, interestingly, years spent in Russia show a positive association with short-term contraceptive use (although this effect is only marginally significant).

Tables 3 and 4 here

#### *Induced abortion*

Table 5 displays the shares of pregnancies ending in induced abortion by nativity and legal status. Native women clearly stand out: slightly over half of their pregnancies were aborted, more than half the rate among migrants. This pattern agrees with the earlier observed pattern of disproportional reliance on short-term methods among native women. Yet, intriguing differences within the migrant subsample also emerge. Thus, regularized migrants aborted a noticeably higher share of their pregnancies than did irregular migrants. However, the two groups demonstrate contrasting patterns before and after migration: while for pregnancies that occurred before migration the share of aborted pregnancies is higher among regularized migrants, compared to irregular migrants, the reverse is true for pregnancies that occurred after migration.

Table 5 around here

In Table 6, we look the share of pregnancies ending in abortion through an ethnocultural lens. It shows a stark contrast between the two Turkic groups, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, on the one hand, and Tajiks, who are characterized by the strongest influence of Islam and correspondingly greater cultural conservatism. Interestingly, this group also reported by far the lowest number of pregnancies prior to migration, a fact that requires further investigation.

Table 6 here

Table 7 presents the results of a proportional hazard (Cox) models predicting first abortion among the entire sample (Column 1) and in the migrant subsample (Column 2). These preliminary results are provided for illustrative purposes and will be further fine-tuned as we continue work on the paper. The results point to instructive differences across the three groups, which parallel the patterns displayed in Table 5. Thus Russian natives have a significantly higher risk of resorting to abortion than the two migrant subgroups, but between the latter, the risk of first abortion is significantly higher among regularized migrants. The difference between the two migrant subgroups is confirmed in the migrant-only model, which also account for timing of migration and ethno-provenance. The model also confirm the earlier observed ethnic pattern—abortion risks among Kyrgyz and Uzbeks are identical and are much higher than those among Tajik women.

Table 7 here

Finally, Table 8 shows the results of three multivariate binomial logistic regression models predicting occurrence of abortion in the migrant subsample. We should stress that the statistical associations displayed in these models are not meant to suggest causality. The first model (Column 1) predicts the lifetime likelihood of having had an abortion. The earlier observed pattern is confirmed: regularized migrants are significantly more likely to have experienced an abortion than irregular migrants regardless of other factors. The same pattern is maintained when we look separately at the pre- and post-migration periods (Columns 2 and 3); however, in the former period, the difference is less pronounced and is not statistically significant. With respect to ethnicity, the pre- and post-migration models show interesting differences: while both Turkic groups differ from Tajiks significantly in the pre-migration period, in the post-migration model, the difference between Tajiks and Kyrgyz is not statistically significant. This result also calls for further investigation.



Table 8 here

### **Next steps**

As we prepare the paper for presentation, we plan to refine the regression analyses to better account for the selection factors and other possible mechanisms that may affect migrants' use of contraception and recourse to abortion. Interactions between migration status and sociodemographic and partnership characteristics will also be explored. Ethnic differences will be interpreted in light of the three groups' cultural backgrounds and migration history. In addition, we will take advantage of data from in-depth interviews conducted with a subsample of the survey respondents, as well as interviews with providers of reproductive services. These data could shed important light on the sociocultural, economic, and institutional constraints and challenges surrounding migrants' reproductive decisions and choices. Finally, we will relate our findings to the cross-national scholarship on migration and fertility and to the literature on migrants' access to and utilization of sexual and reproductive health services.

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Table 1. Contraceptive use among migrants and non-migrants

	None/ traditional methods		Modern methods						Total	
			Short-term		Long-term		Any			
Legal status	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Non-citizen/non-resident migrants	278	58.3	65	13.6	134	28.1	199	41.7	477	100
Citizen/resident migrants	92	55.1	41	24.6	34	20.4	75	44.9	167	100
Native Russian	142	59.2	96	40.0	2	0.8	98	40.8	240	100
Total	512	57.9	202	22.9	170	19.2	372	42.1	884	100

*Note:* Infertile and currently pregnant excluded.

Table 2. Contraceptive use among migrants by ethnicity

	None/ traditional methods		Any modern methods						Total	
			Short-term		Long-term		Subtotal			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Kyrgyz	126	59.7	41	19.4	44	20.9	85	40.3	211	100
Uzbek	109	48.9	32	14.4	82	36.8	114	51.1	223	100
Tajik	135	64.3	33	15.7	42	20.0	75	35.7	210	100
All migrants	370	57.5	106	16.5	168	26.1	274	42.5	644	100

*Note:* Infertile and currently pregnant excluded.

Table 3. Multinomial logistic regression of contraceptive type (none/short/long-term), all women

	Short-term vs none			Long-term vs none			Long-term vs short-term		
	Est	SE		Est	SE		Est	SE	
Intercept	-2.11	0.37	***	-4.31	0.62	***	-2.20	0.65	***
<i>Migration Status and Experience</i>									
Migrant – not a Russian citizen/resident [Migrant – a Russian citizen/resident]	-0.08	0.28		0.08	0.33		0.16	0.34	
Non-migrant	0.57	0.28	*	-3.21	0.78	***	-3.78	0.79	***
Moscow [Novosibirsk/Yekaterinburg]	-0.16	0.21		1.93	0.32	***	2.09	0.34	***
<i>Demographics</i>									
[Age under 26]									
Age 26-30	0.05	0.26		0.66	0.42		0.61	0.44	
Age 31-35	-0.40	0.31		-0.12	0.45		0.28	0.48	
Age 36-40	-0.52	0.32		-0.06	0.46		0.46	0.50	
[High school completion or less]									
Vocational school	0.61	0.25	*	0.55	0.28	†	-0.05	0.32	
Some college or more	0.84	0.25	***	-0.28	0.33		-1.11	0.36	**
Number of children ever born	0.60	0.12	***	1.28	0.14	***	0.68	0.15	***
Co-resident partner [No partner or elsewhere]	0.82	0.21	***	1.44	0.29	***	0.62	0.31	*
Last sex was 12+ months ago [In 12 months] <sup>a</sup>	-2.46	0.55	***	-1.96	0.46	***	0.50	0.67	
<i>Work Characteristics</i>									
Works in retail	-0.22	0.25		0.08	0.34		0.31	0.36	
Works in eatery [Works in bazaar]	-0.04	0.25		0.13	0.34		0.17	0.37	
Higher-level occupation [lower-level]	0.76	0.27	**	0.53	0.43		-0.23	0.43	
All salary is paid officially [Not all salary paid officially]	-0.17	0.23		-0.19	0.29		-0.02	0.32	
Total monthly income	0.00	0.01		-0.03	0.02	†	-0.03	0.02	†

Note: N=884 (not infertile and not pregnant); -2LL = 1168.87

Table 4. Multinomial logistic regression of contraceptive type (none/short/long-term), migrant women only

	Short-term vs none			Long-term vs none			Long-term vs short-term		
	Est	SE		Est	SE		Est	SE	
Intercept	-2.84	0.62	***	-4.87	0.75	***	-2.04	0.80	*
Migrant – not a Russian citizen/resident [Migrant – a Russian citizen/resident]	0.24	0.35		0.05	0.37		-0.18	0.39	
Moscow [Novosibirsk/Yekaterinburg]	-0.05	0.31		2.05	0.35	***	2.10	0.37	***
Years spent in Russia	0.06	0.04	†	0.02	0.04		-0.04	0.05	
Kyrgyz	0.17	0.36		0.06	0.39		-0.11	0.41	
Uzbek [Tajik]	0.26	0.34		0.84	0.34	*	0.58	0.38	
[Age under 26]									
Age 26-30	0.17	0.38		0.61	0.44		0.45	0.49	
Age 31-35	-0.11	0.45		-0.05	0.49		0.06	0.54	
Age 36-40	-0.94	0.51	†	-0.32	0.52		0.61	0.60	
[High school completion or less]									
Vocational school	0.86	0.34	*	0.56	0.31	†	-0.30	0.35	
Some college or more	0.93	0.34	**	-0.22	0.36		-1.15	0.39	**
Number of children ever born	0.52	0.15	***	1.23	0.15	***	0.70	0.16	***
Co-resident partner [No partner or elsewhere]	1.56	0.30	***	1.83	0.32	***	0.27	0.37	
Last sex was 12+ months ago [In 12 months] <sup>a</sup>	-2.22	0.66	***	-1.81	0.47	***	0.41	0.76	
Works in retail	-1.07	0.38	**	-0.37	0.36		0.70	0.42	†
Works in eatery [Works in bazaar]	-1.04	0.37	**	-0.49	0.37		0.56	0.43	
Higher-level occupation [lower-level]	1.06	0.42	*	0.81	0.47	†	-0.25	0.47	
All salary is paid officially [Not all salary paid officially]	0.46	0.33		0.24	0.32		-0.22	0.37	
Total monthly income	-0.01	0.01		-0.02	0.02		-0.01	0.02	

Note: N=644 (not infertile and not pregnant); -2LL = 804.65

Table 5. Percent of pregnancies ending in abortion by migration status

	Before the last migration			After the last migration			Total
	N	Pct	Abort./ preg.	Pct	Abort./ preg.	Pct	Abort./ preg.
Non-citizen/non-resident migrants	509	14.2%	(104/734)	35.3%	(30/85)	16.4%	(134/819)
Citizen/resident migrants	185	21.2%	(53/250)	28.1%	(34/121)	23.5%	(87/371)
Native Russian	246		n/a		n/a	50.2%	(210/418)
Total	940	16.0%	(157/984)	43.9%	(274/624)	26.8%	(431/1608)

Table 6. Percent of pregnancies ending in abortion among migrants by ethnicity

	Before the last migration			After the last migration			Total
	N	Pct	Abort./ preg.	Pct	Abort./ preg.	Pct	Abort./ preg.
Kyrgyz	230	18.7%	(63/337)	34.2%	(27/79)	21.6%	(90/416)
Uzbek	235	20.0%	(85/425)	42.2%	(27/64)	22.9%	(112/489)
Tajik	229	4.1%	(9/222)	15.9%	(10/63)	6.7%	(19/285)
All Migrants	694	16.0%	(157/984)	31.1%	(64/206)	18.6%	(221/1190)

Table 7. Cox hazard model of first abortion for all women

	All women			Migrant women only			
	Est	SE	HR	Est	SE	HR	
Birth date (century month)	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	
Migration (=1, time-dependent)	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.09	0.25	1.10	
Legal status							
Non-citizen/non-resident migrant	-0.72	0.19	**	0.49	-0.42	0.21	*
[Citizen/resident migrant]							
Native Russian	0.49	0.18	**	1.63	n/a	n/a	n/a
Ethnicity among migrants							
Kyrgyz					1.61	0.31	***
Uzbek					1.24	0.31	***
[Tajik]							1.00
-2LL	2455.20			1332.85			
N	937			692			

Note: Migration indicates a time-dependent predictor of the last migration to Russia; †  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 8. Logistic regression of induced abortion among migrant women

Parameter	First abortion			Abortion before migration			Abortion after migration		
	Est	SE		Est	SE		Est	SE	
Intercept	-3.22	0.60	***	-4.56	0.81	***	-3.63	0.82	***
Migrant – not a Russian citizen/resident [Migrant – a Russian citizen/resident]	-0.73	0.30	*	-0.48	0.35		-0.90	0.43	*
Previous abortion (before migration)									
Moscow [Novosibirsk/Yekaterinburg]	-0.08	0.26		0.29	0.30		-0.72	0.38	†
Years spent in Russia							0.03	0.04	
Kyrgyz	1.83	0.36	***	2.41	0.46	***	0.78	0.51	
Uzbek [Tajik]	1.38	0.34	***	1.65	0.45	***	1.16	0.48	*
[Age under 26]									
Age 26-30	1.51	0.42	***	1.76	0.59	**	1.26	0.56	*
Age 31-35	2.42	0.42	***	2.85	0.57	***	1.59	0.55	**
Age 36-40	2.23	0.43	***	3.04	0.59	***	0.87	0.62	
[High school completion or less]									
Vocational school	-0.23	0.27		-0.11	0.31		-0.12	0.41	
Some college or more	-0.31	0.30		-0.48	0.35		0.06	0.43	
Works in retail	-0.99	0.32	**	-1.20	0.38	**	-0.29	0.44	
Works in eatery	-0.73	0.32	*	-1.14	0.39	**	-0.12	0.47	
[Works in bazaar]									
Higher-level occupation [lower-level]	-0.27	0.38		0.36	0.43		-1.02	0.62	†
All salary is paid officially [Not all salary paid officially]	0.19	0.28		0.53	0.33		-0.20	0.42	
Total monthly income	0.00	0.01		-0.01	0.02		0.01	0.02	
-2LL	515.86			398.71			283.57		
N	694			694			694		

Note: †  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$