

Research Project Title—Fertility Variation among Oklahoma American Indians: How Migration, Resources, and Ethnicity Shaped Women's Reproductive Lives

Official NSF Project Title—How Migration, Resources, and Ethnicity Shaped Female Fertility

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ABSTRACT

Worldwide, millions of people are currently displaced by adverse conditions such as civil war, economic strife, religious persecution, and natural disasters. How the United States responds to such crises is both a major humanitarian concern and a policy concern for the 21st century. Migration under duress has multiple, often interacting, consequences. Some, such as economic and cultural disruption are evident; others, such as long-term biological effects, unfold more subtly over time. The overarching research goal of this project is to understand one of those long-term effects, the impact of migration on female fertility. Moving to a new region might impact fertility directly given the physiological costs of long distance movement, but also indirectly, as the costs and benefits of reproduction change. This is an understudied question that is of interest to policy makers concerned with migrant welfare; scholars who seek to understand the connections between human experience and human biology; and the migrants themselves as they seek to establish new lives under difficult conditions. The research will be conducted by Dr. Mary Towner (Oklahoma State University) and Dr. Kermyt Anderson (University of Oklahoma). The problem requires longitudinal data, so they will use historical demographic data that are available for American Indians in Oklahoma.

Between 1828 and 1887, tens of thousands of American Indians with diverse cultural histories migrated to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma) under United States government removal policies. It is well-known that they incurred significant economic and social costs, including loss of resources and high morbidity and mortality. Little is known, though, about how female fertility was affected. The overarching research goal of this project is to understand the impact of migration, access to resources, and ethnicity on fertility variation across American Indian women in historical Oklahoma. Ethnicity captures diverse cultural traditions, social norms, and population history. Fertility contrasts between ethnic groups may be particularly acute when migration brings people of different ethnicities together and as ethnic groups experience differential access to resources. To meet the project goal, the researchers will use a three-levelled methodological approach: 1) a cross-sectional sample of Oklahoma women drawn from the 1910 United States Federal Census, 2) a longitudinal database of women, reconstructed from historical records, and 3) cross-cultural ethnographies to assemble information on Oklahoma tribes. Together, these complementary levels of data and analysis will be brought to

bear on predictions stemming from three specific research questions. Research Question 1: What was the extent of fertility variation in early Oklahoma and how was it patterned across women? Research Question 2: What was the long-term impact of migration and relocation on fertility? Research Question 3: How did cultural history shape fertility at the population level? The findings of this project will be informative to both scholars and policy-makers working on questions of fertility, migration, and ethnicity, as well as those with a particular interest in American Indian populations. The project will also benefit society by supporting graduate student training and providing undergraduates--including American Indian students--an opportunity to engage in STEM research.