

## Study identifies increasing 'marriage migration' to Sweden

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(PhysOrg.com) -- An upsurge in marriages between older Swedish men and young, underprivileged foreign women raises serious questions about gender equality, according to a new report.

In a new 'migration by marriage' study, experts at the University of St Andrews found that over a fifteen year period there has been a 44% increase in young [women](#) moving to Sweden from mainly poorer nations to marry.

The study also found that the poorer the country of birth of the migrant woman, the bigger the age gap between her and her Swedish partner – a finding that experts say raises serious concerns over such women's freedom of choice.

Dr Maarten van Ham and Swedish colleagues looked at instances of international marriages in Sweden between 1990 and 2004, following Swedish media reports on the phenomenon. They examined 40,000 marriage migrants (partners moving to Sweden to marry), half of which were women - and found that over this period there was a 44% increase in female marriage migrants from mainly Asia, Russia and South America. Interestingly, the study also found a marked increase in Swedish women recruiting their male partners from elsewhere in Europe, North Africa and the US.

Dr van Ham from the University of St Andrews explained, "We set out to explore the suggestion that Swedish [men](#) recruiting a partner from

abroad are often older men [marrying](#) much younger women from Asia and Eastern Europe.

“We found that Swedish men marrying women from the rest of Europe, the US and Australia are often of similar age to their partner. However, Swedish men marrying women from Asia or Eastern-Europe are on average ten years older than their foreign partners.”

The researchers attribute the upsurge in figures to an increase in international travel and use of the internet, as well as the search for a better life abroad. They set out to examine the effects of ‘new’ ways of finding a partner in a more globally connected world.

Dr van Ham explained, “In these cases we describe men finding partners, but 'finding' in this case has a wider meaning as people often do not meet in the 'usual' way. We know that increased travel and international dating sites are important, as well as companies that arrange international marriages.”

The researchers suggest that those men who find a partner from abroad are looking for something they cannot find locally, and that older Swedes find it difficult to find younger women with traditional values at home.

Dr van Ham continued, “Older men looking for younger women might find it hard to meet someone locally. A woman from Thailand might be more willing. Also some men look for more traditional values in their partner, and traditional women are difficult to find in Sweden.”

“From the perspective of the marriage migrant it might be beneficial to marry abroad as it gives access to a new country and a better, or at least wealthier, lifestyle in the west.”

“Of course one should not forget that people could simply fall in love.

International travel in work and leisure has increased the probability of meeting potential partners abroad in a more traditional manner,” he commented.

The study is published by the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

Provided by University of St Andrews

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