

Family Instability, Romance and Marital Expectations in Young Adulthood

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Abstract

Over the last few decades, Taiwanese families have experienced drastic changes in both structure and function. Most noticeable changes pertain to the rise of divorce as well as the decline of marriage and fertility. The demographic trend alerts us that while the lack of motivation in getting married and raising children may have various factors, we argue that family experience is one significant reason. Hence, this study intends to explore the potential impact of family instability on the incentive of family formation in Taiwan. Two types of family instability--namely, parental divorce and parental conflict—are examined with a focus on its consequent influence on children's romantic relationships and marital expectations. Since previous studies emphasize more on the academic achievement and psychological well-being as outcome variables (Amato, 2010), it will be interesting to investigate the effect of earlier family instability on children's later experience, particularly the development of intimate relationship.

Using data from Taiwan Youth Project (TYP), an attempt is made to delineate the effect of parents' marital disruption and parental conflict on children's romantic relationship formation as well as the marital expectation in young adulthood. In addition, a special effort is made to distinguish the timing of parental divorce and parental conflict on the process of forming intimate relationship. Young adults with parents divorced before age 12 are compared with those whose parents divorced during adolescence. Preliminary results show that the effect of parental divorce and conflict on young adults' outcome varies by children's age when parental divorce occurred. Young adults who experienced parental divorce during adolescence are more likely to have negative expectation of marriage. On the other hand, children whose parents divorced before age 12 are more likely to be involved in romantic relationships and have more boy/girl friends. The implications of changing family structure on future family systems are briefly discussed.