

The Influence of Parental Divorce on Children's Life Course in Japan

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Purpose of the study

This study attempts to investigate the influence of parental divorce on children's life course in Japan. Like other developed countries, Japan has increased the number of marital disruptions over the past decades. The Japanese crude divorce rate jumped from 0.93 per thousand in 1970 to 1.81 in 2015. Admittedly, the absolute value of the Japanese figure is lower than those in European countries and the U.S.A. For instance, the crude divorce rate reached fully 2.4 in Sweden and 3.0 in the U.S.A. in 2016. Yet, the Japanese divorce rate is, undoubtedly, boosting its pace of increase, coming nearer to the European counterparts.

As a consequence of an increase in the number of divorces, more children spend part of their lives in lone-parent households. For example, 79.5% of Japanese lone-mother households with dependent children resulted from a marital breakdown in 2018. Moreover, since the level of household income is, on average, lower for lone-parent families than two-parent families, it follows that a considerable number of children grow up in poverty. In fact, more than half of the lone-parent households fell into relative poverty in Japan in 2013. Thus, it can be argued that parental divorce endangers the well-being of children's daily lives in the short term.

Motivated by a drastic increase in the number of marital disruptions, many studies have hitherto investigated the underlying causes of divorces in Japan. Despite a difference in the extent of influence, the findings of previous research, as a whole, suggest that an improvement in women's economic positions such as employment status and earning capacity is strongly linked to dissolving marital unions. It, therefore, follows that a socio-economic change in

Japan is one of the driving forces of breaking up marital unions.

On the other hand, however, little has been so far done to examine the impact of parental divorces on children's life-course in Japan. As mentioned above, a considerable number of lone parent households derived from divorces tend to be socially and economically underprivileged. This tendency is particularly seen in female-headed lone families. As is well known, children of such a family occupy a disadvantageous position in educational and occupational attainment. Hence, we cannot rule out the possibility that the patterns of leaving home, union formation and fertility may differ between children with parental divorce and those without it. Little is, nevertheless, known regarding the influence of parents' marital disruption on children's life-course. Taking this point into consideration, the present study addresses the impact of union disillusion on children's life-course in Japan. In particular, the focal point of the study is to examine the effect of parental divorce on children's leaving home, union formation and fertility.

Background

The conventional wisdom has it that marital breakdown has various socio-economic and psychological impacts on the lives of children. Among them, three aspects are essential to an investigation of children's life course. First, divorce has an influence on the financial well-being of children. As is well known, lone parents have less money to spend for their children. In particular, the socio-economic hardship of a lone parent' household reduces investment in children's education, leading to a dropout of school in an early stage of life. Furthermore, it may be that economic necessity encourages children to take an adult role early by forcing them to enter the labour market. Thus, it is theoretically assumed that parental divorce leads to early home-leaving, early marriage, or early parenthood. Secondly, marital disruption exerts an influence on children's socialization. For instance, under the process of the primary

socialization, daughters of a single mother may learn that women are capable of managing a family alone. As a result of this, when daughters experienced the unhappy end of parental marriage in childhood, they are more likely to stay lone mothers than daughters from two-parent families. In addition, since marital disruption tends to disturb the internalization of traditional social norms and values by parents, children who experienced parental divorce are likely to have more positive attitudes toward pre-marital sex and nonmarital cohabitation. In this case, it is expected that children of divorced families are more inclined to enter into cohabiting relationships. Thirdly, union dissolution produces stressful family environments for children. The quality of environments in the natal home is an important factor of leaving the parental home and entering into marriage. It is less likely that children who grow up in comfortable environments with warm and intimated relationships among family members leave a natal home early and rush into marriage as a means of getting away from a negative family environment. Hence, it is theoretically presumed that children who grow up in an unpleasant disrupted family are more likely to experience an early separation from their parental home and family formation.

Based on these theoretical hypotheses, previous studies have hitherto investigated the influence of parental divorce on children's life course, but their findings are mixed. The reason for this is that data and analytical methods used by these studies are different. At the same time, however, it should not be overlooked that they hardly consider family characteristics and children's demographic attribute. More specifically, sufficient attention is not paid to the social class of family and the age of children when a marital breakup occurred. Admittedly, economic deprivation caused by a marital breakup may drive children to an early home-leaving and early union formation. Yet, a change in the standard of living after a divorce differs among social classes. Thus, it may be likely that children of the upper class are less economically deprived after their parents get divorced. If this is the case, parental divorce does not always lead to an

early home-leaving and early union formation. Similarly, even if the internalization of traditional norms and values is hindered by parental divorce, it may hardly affect grown-up children's attitudes toward marriage and childbearing. In short, the important thing is when a child experiences his/her parents' divorce. Moreover, the assessment of family environments also depends on the age of children. If children have already come of age, they may be indifferent to estranged relationships among family members. In this case, marital dissolution will hardly affect children's life course. It is, therefore, essential to consider the social class of family and the age of children when we examine the influence of parental divorce on children's life course.

These factors are of particular importance to an investigation regarding Japanese divorces. The main reason for this is that a considerable number of Japanese married couples do not get a divorce until their children come of age, even if the psychological relationship between a husband and wife has already broken up. As mentioned before, if the impact of marital disruption is affected by children's age, the parental divorce of such a kind may hardly have an influence on their life course. Focusing on social classes and children's age, therefore, this paper attempts to examine the impact of parental divorce on children's home-living, marital union and childbearing.

Data and Methods

Data come from the Japanese Generations and Gender Survey. This is a nationwide panel survey which was conducted from 2004 until 2013. The targeted population of the survey is Japanese men and women between ages 20 and 69. In order to investigate the influence of parental divorce on children's life course in Japan, we selected male and female respondents between age 20 and 45 when the first wave of the survey was carried out. By using event-history analysis, we examined the effects of respondents' parental divorce on their leaving

home, marriage and cohabitation, and first childbirth. Furthermore, the present study employed a respondent's occupation, employment status and income as independent variables. Moreover, our analytical model included a respondent's age and sex as demographic variables. A respondent's marital status also was used in the analysis of first childbirth. We employed a parents' educational qualifications and occupation before marital dissolution as an indicator of the social class of a family in which a respondent grew up, and examined the influence of pre-divorce family characteristics on children's life course. Besides, our analytical model included age when a respondent experienced his/her parental divorce. This variable is prepared to investigate whether children's demographic attribute at the time of parental divorce affects their life course.

Results

First of all, our results showed that parental divorce hardly increased the risk of children's leaving their natal home. In other words, the timing of leaving home does not differ between respondents who experienced parental divorce and those who did not. Furthermore, children's age at parental divorce also had no significant effect on the risk of leaving natal home.

Secondly, the probability of entering a consensual union was higher for children whose parents got divorced. In particular, when teenage children experienced parental marital dissolution, the risk of cohabitation became considerably high. Moreover, compared with children of upper social class, those of lower-class origin yielded a higher risk of cohabitation when their parents broke up a marital union in their early childhood.

Thirdly, no difference in the probability of getting married was observed between children whose parents got divorced and those who did not. It hence follows that the patterns of marriage do not have a bearing on parental marital disruption. Rather, socio-economic factors such as occupation and income played a crucial role in respondents' marriage behaviour.

Fourthly, a marital breakup did not exercise a discernible influence on the probability of having a first child. In other words, the experience of parental divorce does not lead to either early parenthood or late parenthood. Furthermore, this relation held true even when children's age at parental divorce and the social class of their origin were controlled.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study, first, finds that marital dissolution increases the risk of children's entering cohabitation. This tendency is clearly observed for children who experienced parental divorce in their early childhood. Moreover, even after controlling the influence of children's socio-economic status, a marital breakup led to a high probability of cohabitation. As far as these findings show, the psychological impact of parental divorce on children may affect the pattern of their life course.

In the second place, marital disruption does not affect the risk of children's leaving home. Also, the relationship between parental divorce and children's home-leaving did not differ between social classes and children's age at marital dissolution. Hence, we may argue that family environments in which children experienced parental divorce do not play a crucial role in the timing of home-leaving.

Thirdly, the results of the present analysis revealed that the risk of bearing a first child did not differ between children who experienced parental divorce and those without it. In other words, the pattern of family building is hardly affected by a marital breakup. Thus, judging from the findings of our analysis, it is safe to say that marital disruption in childhood does not always have a negative influence on family formation.

Keywords: Life-course, Marital disruption, Japan, Socio-economic Status, Pre-divorce conations

