

Tore Lindbekk, NTNU, Trondheim

THE LASTING IMPACT OF FAMILY PATTERNS

Studies from various countries have explored the impacts of parents' divorce and some other family conditions on the careers of offspring (see summaries in Havemann and Wolfe 1995, Blake 1989). Strategies and emotional conditions emerged that interfered with school careers and adjustment to working life. According to Blake 1989, single parent-children on average «lost» two years of education. They often were little able to get jobs and keep jobs. Other conditions might add to these difficulties, as large sibling numbers (Blake 1989), or that the mother had to work outside the family (according to Havemann and Wolfe 1995, the working mother effect vanished after the time together between mother and child had been considered). More generally, it was observed that attitudes and strategies brought about by family break-up, commonly lasted beyond the youth period, and coloured the descendants' general integration into economic life and their own family careers (King 2002, Ho and Brinton 1996-97, Biblarz and Guttainen 2000). Some-times patterns of adjustment were established that included inheritance of class status (Stenberg 2000).

These studies mainly focused after divorce-conditions. Those of single parent-families more generally were peripheral to the researchers' interests. However, after divorces have become more common, the emotional strains have diminished (Sun and Li 2002:472-488). Many parents acquired a taste for a more autonomous life style, which lessened wishes for remarriage. Also, steadily more children were borne, whose parents had never considered establishing a common household (Dizard and Godlyn 1990: 143-144). Following these developments, one may hypothesize: after the emotional costs by break-up of partnership became less disturbing, single parent-families organized their lives less differently from other families. Also, it is probable that the conditions of (the increasing number of) households that were "single" all the time, diverged even less from the average.

In this paper we shall attempt to measure the career impacts of various family patterns more precisely. This issue will be done within the context of a broader follow up study that even observed the impacts of education and class. Our main material relates to a representative 7 percent sample of the Norwegian population born 1964 to 1967, altogether 20500 individuals. A more limited analysis considers those born 1954 to 1963 (N=50950). The material include the individuals who participated in the four Work Force Surveys in 1990 (this subsample makes up 20.3 percent of the total sample).

In 1980, the 1964-67 cohort was 13 to 16 years old. 10.1 percent of the members of belonged to households that (according to the 1980 census material) had just one – a female’ “omsorgsperson”, 1.8 percent had (just) one male such person, while 88.1 percent had both male and female “omsorgspersoner”. 74 percent of the youths from single mother-families of 1980 had belonged to a “couple-household” in 1970, 26 percent had just one “omsorgsperson” even in 1970. Implication: the “consistent” one parent-families were few even during this recent period.

The single mothers of 1980 did not deviate much from other mothers. 9.7 percent of those who headed single-families both 1970 and 1980, had completed a higher education programme, against 8.0 percent of the “new” single mothers and 7.2 percent of those in couple-families (see table 1). In all three categories, more than 60 percent had just compulsory education. 44.2 percent of the single mothers (1980) were in paid work in 1970 (against 39.1 percent of those who belonged to couples). The individual incomes reported was NKR 53.200 for the single mothers (against NKR41.200 for other mothers). That year, 5.3 percent of the single mother jobs were in the «service classes» (Goldthorpe’s classes I and II, Cf. Gooderham 1992), against 5.4 per cent of the jobs of mothers belonging to couple-households. Even the manual work-numbers (Goldthorpe’s classes VI, VII, and IX) were close (11.6 against 12.1 percent). Conclusion: in school levels, job experiences and social class, the single mothers of 1980, differed little from other mothers (of same age).

But income statistics for 1996, nevertheless, (Social Trends 2000:40) shows that the single parent-families with children 7-11 years were disadvantaged financially. Their average income per “consumption unit” (after taxes and transferances) was 77, against 123 in “other” families with children of the same age (average for all households=100). Aamodt, Jørgensen and Aamodt (2002) reported from Denmark and Sweden that the proportion of single mothers with incomes below poverty level is growing. Large differences in living conditions have emerged between these family types despite the parity of some initial resources.

Table 2 shows the educational attainments of the offspring from various family categories until 1992, when the cohort members were 23 to 26 years old. Clear differences in average levels of educational attainment appear between family types. The youths from single parent families especially were much behind in percentages with some higher education.

Irrespective of family pattern, the material shows strong impacts of the mothers' level of education. Between the children of mothers with just compulsory schooling and those of mothers with a long higher education, there was an average difference of 2.1-2.2 years of schooling.

TABLES 1, 2, 3, 4 ABOUT HERE

The (OLS) regression analysis in table 2 entered mother's education (related to a scale with 5 steps), and family type, plus the mother's work status (1980), number of sibling in the household, gender, and an interaction term between gender and family type (boys' extra losses/gains by a single mother-condition).

Statistically significant educational effects appear for all these factors, except the interaction term. Under comparable conditions, a «single» status reduced attainment levels by 0.56 years, and higher education percentage by 8.3 per cent. While the school attainment effect was *negative* by large sibling numbers, a *positive* effect of working mother condition appeared. The interaction term, showing if the boys were «punished» more severely than the girls by a single mother-condition, indicated that such an effect was real for attainment levels, but not for higher education numbers.

But the most important finding is: the “single” pattern produced clear, consistent and quite large attainment losses for both genders, even after the mothers' levels of education and work participation had been accounted for. But it also is clear that Blake's estimate of the amount of that loss - two years - is much too large.

What negative factor counted most for the attainment differences between the two family patterns, the loss of a family member or that of being in a family with just one adult member? Table 3 compares the attainment levels and higher education numbers of youths from former couple-families (1970) with those in families with just one adult person even in 1970. The attainments averages were 11.2 against 10.8, the higher education percentages 14.9 percent against 5.6 percent. The offspring from families with just one “omsorgsperson” both years, fared worse than those from families with a divorce experience (but we can not rule out that some of the changes from two to just one “omsorgsperson” were due to deaths).

But we also observe (table 4) that the former partner's class and level of education was important for the offspring's school attainment.

We hypothesized that the inequalities due to family patterns were diminishing. A comparison with the attainments of the 1954-57 cohort (grouped by family pattern 1970) do not support this. Within the earlier cohort, the average attainment level

difference between descendants from single mother families and families with two “omsorgspersoner” was 0.39 years, the higher education difference 4.5 percent. These differences are smaller than those in table 3.

Did the impacts of family pattern extend into job life? Data from the Work Force Surveys 1990 was used to investigate how the various youths fared occupationally that particular year (a year with large unemployment numbers in relation to Norwegian experience).

TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE.

A subsample from the Work Force Survey 1990 related to the 1964-67 cohort when they were 23 to 26 years old (N=4060). After those who were students or in military service had been left out, those not in paid work last week was found to be 14.6 percent among youth from “couple-families”, against 31.8 percent among those from single mother-families. Educational attainment differences explained part of this difference. However, irrespective of education, the descendants from single mother-families had 3 to 4 percent larger percentages not in work.

Table 5 presents figures for the cohort born 1954 to 1963 (N=10.100). The table shows that the employment impacts of family pattern lasted beyond the youth phase. But they did not just reflect the differences in education levels between the two groups. Among the “school elite”, the proportions with no paid work last week, differed just little. But among those with less than three years of upper secondary schooling, the rates for persons from single mother families doubled those for sons and daughters from couple-families. The differences was even larger in numbers who were outside the work force more generally..

Conclusion.

Observed in this study was that the educational attainment differences between youth from single mother-families and couple-families were not diminishing, even though they were smaller than formerly estimated by Blake 1989. We also found that the educational attainments of youth from single mother-families with a divorce background, deviated less (from the general average) than those for youth from families that were “single” even in 1970. The impacts of background family patterns widened by the entry into economic life as an adult. The “single” background reinforced the a general trend towards occupational marginality among men and women with small school qualifications. The figures indicate that the narrow network of the one parent-condition was more

disturbing for (offspring's) careers than the emotional strains by the parents' divorce.

In initial resources, the women who became single mothers were on par with those who established (and remained in) couples. For the offspring, the single-family background served as a departure point for downward mobility.

REFERENCES

- Biblarz, T. and Guttainen, G., 2000: Family Structure and Children's Success. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62:553-548
- Blake, J. 1989: *Family Size and Achievement*. University of California Press.
- Dizard, J. and Gadlin, H. 1990: *The Minimal Family*. University of Massachussets Press.
- Halo, L. and Brinton, M. C., 1996-97: Productive Activities and Support Systems of Single Mothers. *American Journal of Sociology*: 1305-1344.
- Halskov, T., Schultz Jørgensen, P. and Polakow, V. 2000: *Tab af rettigheder. Sårbare enlige mødre og deres barn*. (Loss of rights. Vulnerable single mothers and their children), Copenhagen, Hans Reitzel.
- Havemann, R. and Wolfe, B. 1995: The Determinants of Children's Attainments. A Review of Methods and Findings, *Journal of Economic Literature*, 33:1829-1878
- King, V., 2002: Parental Divorce and Interpersonal Trust in Adult Offspring. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64:642-65.
- Pedersen, W. 1996: Marginalitetens reproduksjon, *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning*, 37: 3-23.
- Social Trends, 2000*. Oslo, NOS.
- Stenberg S. Å. 2000: Inheritance of Welfare Reciprocity. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62:228-239.
- Sun, Y. and Li, Y., 2002: Children's Wellbeing during Marital Disruption Process. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64:472-488.
- Aamodt, J., Jørgensen, B. and Aamodt, L. 2002: Enlige mødre – familier med store Psykososiale belastninger (Single mothers, families with large psych-social difficulties), *Nordisk sosiale arbeid*, 2002:

ABSTRACT

The study compares the careers of youth until age 36 from single mother-families and «traditional» families (i.e. headed by a couple). The two sets of mothers were similar in educational and occupational resources. The offspring nevertheless diverge clearly in educational attainments and (corrected for levels of education) in proportion who got into paid work.. The career-setback following single mother-backgrounds was mostly the same for boys and girls. Main material for analysis: A seven per cent sample of the cohorts born 1954 to 1965, from the combined census bank of the NOS. In addition to that: the NOS Education Registry and the 1990 National Employment Surveys. The attainment criteria mainly relate to the year 1990.

Table 1. Mother's level of highest education 1980. By Family Pattern 1980 and 1970.1964-65 cohort.Percentages.

Mother's education	Two parent family both years	Two parent family 1970 , Single Mother-fam.1980	Single mother-family 1970 and 1980
Higher education Completed 3 years	7.2	8.0	9.7
secondary	7.1	5.4	5.6
Short secondary	18.9	20.2	20.9
Just compulsory	66.8	66.4	63.8
Sum	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	8670	734	268

higher

Outputs

cohort.

Table 2. Education levels and number with education.(1992). Impact of Family Traits.. from (OLS) regression analysis. 1964-65

	Education level (s.e.)	Higher educ. (s.e.)
Constant	11.59 (0.06)	21.4 (1.3)
Mother's educ.*	0.35	7.3
Single mother Status	(0.02)	(0.7)
1980	-0.57	-8.3
Mother occ.active 1970	(0.10)	(2.1)
Sibling number	0.23	3.7
Son	(0.05)	(1.0)
Son*single mother family	-0.07	-1.4
	(0.02)	(0.5)
	-0.16	-7.4
	(0.04)	(0.9)
	-0.14	2.3
	(0.14)	(3.0)

Note: i paranthes: standard error.

* per two years of educ. Beyond compulsory.

Table 3. Average level of highest education and higher education percentages 1992. 1964-1967-cohort.

Family pattern 1980	Education level average	Percent with higher education	N
Couple	11.72	20.50	17.100
Single mother	11.05	11.80	2.050
Single father	10.99	11.18	373

on
Youths

Table 4. Impact of "father's" education and occupation (1970)
Offspring's level of education. (OLS) regression analysis.
from single mother families (1980). 1964-67 cohort.

	Education level (s.e.)	Higher educat. (s.e.)
Constant	10.22 (0.09)	13.7 (2.2)
Mother's education*	0.22 (0.05)	0.5 (0.1)
Mother in occ.(1970)	0.18 (0.07)	-2.4 (1.7)
Sibling number	-0.15 (0.08)	-5.3 (2.5)
Son	-0.17 (0.13)	0.2 (0.1)
Father's educ.(1970)*	0.13 (0.05)	0.2 (0.2)
Father :prof. occ.(1970)	0.13 (0.02)	- (0.2)
Father: worker (1970)	-0.33 (0.14)	-5.5 (2.5)

Note. as to Table 2.

gender,

Table 5. Percent not in paid work last week (1990). By
level of education and family pattern 1970. 1954-1963 cohort.
Material from Work Force Survey.

Education level	Family with two parents 1970		Single mother family 1970	
	Sons	Daughters	Sons	Daughters
7-11	12.8		18.3	
12	23.1		35.5	
13-16	7.3		8.4	
	21.1		21.5	
	5.5		9.4	
	6.7		10.1	
Percent without work	9.3	20.7	17.9	31.3
Of these: not in work force.	5.7	18.7	8.7	22.2
N	4016		4441	
	359		499	