Child outcomes

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Family complexity in children's lives: A European perspective
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Due to the dramatic rise in non-marital cohabitation and childbearing, separation, repartnering, and multi-partner fertility, complex families have become increasingly common. Although a vast body of evidence is available on these family transitions, surprisingly little research has investigated children's experiences of family change and family complexity across Europe. This paper takes an innovative child-centred life course approach and focuses on family complexity across children's life courses in 21 European countries. I study children's propensity to experience family transitions leading to complex families (e.g., parental separation, lone parenthood, parental repartnering, the birth of half-sibling(s), becoming a stepsibling). I ask: How does the incidence of family complexity change across children's lives? At what age do children experience complex family transitions and how long do they remain in complex families? What is the role of cross-national differences in family regimes, welfare states, and policies for family complexity in children's life courses? I use life tables and survivor functions to study the incidence, timing, and duration of different transitions leading to complex families in children's lives. I combine data from the Harmonized Histories and the Generations and Gender Surveys (rounds I and II). Preliminary results show that family transitions leading to complex families are most common in Northern and Western European countries. In these countries, children also experience complex family transitions earlier and remain in complex families for longer than in Southern Europe and Central and Eastern Europe. This study highlights the importance of focusing on children's experiences across their life courses in Europe.

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Genetic and Contextual Influences on Early Childhood Education Utilization in Norway
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Research Question

How do heritable traits interact with contextual factors to influence early childhood education and care (ECEC) utilization during Norway's major childcare expansion?

Background

Norway increased ECEC access for toddlers (ages 1-2) in the early 2000s, with attendance rising from 40% in 2002 to 80% in 2008. Little is known about how child and parent characteristics jointly shape childcare decisions during policy expansion.

Data

Population-wide genetically sensitive data on 68,000 parent-child trios from the Norwegian Mother, Father and Child Cohort Study (MOBA) linked to administrative records. Primary outcomes include age of entry into childcare and participation before 18 months, with municipality-level childcare availability as the key moderator.

Methods

Using family-based polygenic indices for educational attainment, cognitive skills, personality, mental health, and neurodevelopmental differences, we examine:

1. Gene-environment correlation: How children's and parents' heritable traits influence childcare utilization

2. Gene-environment interaction: How childcare availability moderates genetic influences, potentially decreasing non-random selection with increasing availability

The study leverages random allocation of children's genotypes (conditional on parental genotypes) to

estimate causal effects of children's individual differences on childcare participation.

Potential Applications

Findings will inform policy by revealing how genetic factors interact with structural conditions in determining ECEC access, potentially helping policymakers design more equitable childcare systems that accommodate diverse child needs while removing barriers to utilization.

The effect of timing of the divorce on children's educational outcomes

Sanna Huikari - University of Oulu, Janne Lehto - University of Oulu, Matti Koivuranta - University of Oulu, Marko Korhonen - University of Oulu

There is a large body of literature on the impact of family dynamics on children's well-being and life chances. One branch of this literature explores the effects of family dissolution, particularly on children's human capital formation. Our study focuses on examining the role of the timing of divorce in relation to educational outcomes, using a siblings-fixed effects estimator on population-wide administrative register data for cohorts born between 1987 and 2021 in Finland. The outcome measures are mathematics grades and Finnish grades in the last year of compulsory education (around age 16), and the completion of high school (general upper secondary school), i.e., passing the matriculation examinations. Our results show negative effects of early family dissolution on math grades at the end of compulsory schooling and on high school completion. Regarding Finnish grades, only children who experience a dissolution just prior to receiving their grades appear relatively disadvantaged. Our results might reflect that mathematics skills rely more on cumulative knowledge than reading skills.

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Does Maternal Early Marriage Influence Gender Bias in Child Well-Being?

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Early-marrying women are shown to exhibit a greater preference for sons. In this study, we examine whether, and to what extent, the preferential treatment of boys in early childhood is linked to the practice of early female marriage in Pakistan. Using pooled data on 167,151 children under age five born to 45,260 women between 1952 and 2018, we employ fixed-effects and instrumental-variable strategies to assess gender-specific differences between children born to early- and late-marrying women. Our findings provide strong evidence that maternal age at marriage does not influence gender disparities in child outcomes. We analyze a broad set of indicators related to perinatal care, child healthcare, nutrition, and early childhood development. Across all these dimensions, we find no systematic differences in the treatment of boys and girls based on maternal age at marriage. This result holds regardless of the child's birth order, family sex composition, or the mother's birth cohort, education, location, or wealth status. Additionally, we find no evidence that demographic transition has played a role in shaping these patterns. However, some evidence suggests that boys born to early-marrying women are more likely to survive past their fifth birthday compared to girls. This effect is particularly pronounced for children of women who married before age 16 and those whose husbands married before age 18. Our results remain robust across a wide range of alternative strategies and sensitivity analyses. These findings underscore the persistence of deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that continue to grant women greater agency for bearing sons.