Parents' relationship quality, parental divorce and children’s well-being*

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1 Abstract

One of the main topics of the sociological literature of divorce is to gain insight on the children’s well-being during the phases of the parents’ relationship crisis and after the divorce. Some studies aimed to make comparisons between the children of intact and divorced families. They are inspecting the family characteristics such as parental conflict before separation (see among others Sigle Rushton and McLanahan 2004, Amato 2010). It is quite well stated that one of the main interesting feature is the parents’ previous relationship quality, as well as the divorce (see Jekielek 1998, Hanson 1999). One way to investigate this topic is to control for many characteristics before the marriage dissolution and also to include some measures related to the children’s wealth before and after the event of divorce. In fact, in such a context, to assess experimental results is methodologically difficult or even impossible.

As suggested in Amato (2010) the findings of studies that focus on the average effects of parental divorce may be contradictory and open to multiple interpretations, since researchers can view marital discord either as a cause of divorce or as part of the divorce processes. Another method of investigation is that to study the effects of divorce on children. According to the results of many researches the children’s wealth of those living in high-conflict marriages is better after the divorce. On the other hand, the dissolution of low-conflict marriages can damage the children’s lives (see Amato et al. 1995, Booth and Amato 2001).

By relaying on European data of the Millenium Cohort Study we attempt to understand the features illustrated above taking into account as suggested by Hanson (1999) the well-being and cognitive ability of young children. To our knowledge, only the study of Fomby and Osborne (2010) has focused on very young children. We also consider the children’s externalizing problems which are related to: conduct and hyperactivity-inattention, emotional symptoms, peer problems, and prosocial behaviour (Goodman 1997). We consider the partnership breakdown and the partnership quality as focal variables as well as we relay on some control variables such as socio-demographic characteristics of the family. We show the results related to a first explorative analysis of the available data in order to consider the appropriate model. The confounded due to parent’s decision should be considered to assess properly the causal questions related to the research problem.

*Presented at the meeting of the FIRB (“Futuro in ricerca” 2012) project “Mixture and latent variable models for causal-inference and analysis of socio-economic data”, Roma (IT), January 01-23, 2015
References


