

Family Dissolution Process and Children Smoking Behaviour: What has lit the cigarette?

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Abstract

Children of divorce fare worse in many outcomes, including smoking. However, existing research inconsistently agreed on whether the effects are causal or are driven by other factors (i.e., selection effects). Low attention has been played so far on whether effects on children are mainly attributable to the family dissolution process and, thus, on externalising behavioural response to conflictual family milieu, or to the parental separation event, which may not only represent a stressful event per se, but it may also lead to lower parental control.

This paper aims at investigating youth's smoking paths over the family dissolution process in the UK by disentangling the effect due to pre-separation phase from the separation event. Finally, since weak evidence has been provided on socio-economic inequalities in smoking behaviours among adolescents (i.e., the equalization hypothesis), this research will explore heterogeneity across socio-economic groups.

Data are drawn from the UK Household Survey (a.k.a. Understanding Societies) collected between 1994 and 2018. The analytic sample consists of youths (10-15 yrs) who live with both biological parents when first observed (6,230 youths, 26,557 person-years). Preliminary findings from Random-effects & Fixed-effects panel regression (LPM) models show that regular smoking increases with separation event and later on. Further analyses will involve Splines – growth curves models.