

Domestic Violence, Divorce, and Well-being: A New Look at Diverging Destinies in Japan

Previous research has documented a strong negative educational gradient in divorce and explored the implications of marital dissolution for mothers' financial and psychological well-being as well as their time with children. Findings are generally consistent with the "diverging destinies" literature's emphasis on socioeconomic bifurcation in family behavior and growing inequality in children's resources and life chances. One key limitation of the existing research on divorce and diverging destinies is the tendency to focus on compositional differences (i.e., higher levels of divorce among low-educated mothers) while largely ignoring relationship differences (i.e., differences with respect to mother's educational attainment in the impact of divorce on correlates of children's resources). A second limitation is the tendency to ignore heterogeneity in the nature of divorce. For example, is the reason for divorce or the context of divorce systematically related to both mothers' socioeconomic status and the implications of divorce? We seek to address these limitations by examining women's exposure to domestic violence as predictor of divorce and its relationships with both mothers' educational attainment and post-divorce emotional well-being (a well-established correlate of parenting quality). We use data from six rounds of a nationally representative survey of mothers aged 20-59 in Japan to answer the following questions: (1) Is divorce preceded by experience of domestic violence more common among low-educated mothers? (2) Is divorce preceded by experience of domestic violence associated with lower levels of subsequent happiness and self-rated health (relative to other divorces)? (3) Is the relationship between divorce preceded by domestic violence and maternal well-being systematically different for low and high educated mothers? (4) Do differences in this relationship mitigate or exacerbate the role of compositional differences in shaping variation in divorced mothers' well-being? Japan is a particularly interesting setting in which to evaluate these questions given relatively high levels of divorce, evidence that exposure to domestic violence is not uncommon, and extreme disadvantage among single mothers. We believe that results can advance our understanding of gender and inequality in Japan while also extending research on diverging destinies in the theoretically and substantively meaningful ways.