

FAMILY MATTERS

The gendered impact of parental separation on adolescent wellbeing in Germany

Hertie School
of Governance



FACTS

Family as an institution in Europe is rapidly evolving, from a standard “nuclear family” model (a household with a married heterosexual couple and their biological children) to a variety of lifestyles, including partnership with no children and homosexual partnerships

In Germany alone, the share of newborn children whose parents are unmarried has **more than doubled** in the last 25 years, from 15% in 1990 to around 35% in the year 2015

What's the impact of family structure, and parental separation on adolescent wellbeing?

Existing research points to a **strong intergenerational impact of divorce**, through transmission factors such as poorer socioeconomic status (due to a single parent income), and childhood stressors such as parental discord and frequent changes of schools and neighbourhoods.

I examine this hypothesis using measures of self-reported well-being of around 8000 adolescents using the German Family Panel (pairfam) data. In particular, I examine self-reported scores on two scales - Emotional Symptoms and Conduct Problems, where higher scores indicates more problems. I also control for parents' ethnicity, education and income

FINDINGS

Adolescent girls report more borderline/abnormal symptoms of Emotional problems than boys

Adolescents with unmarried parents report higher conduct problems on average than those with married parents

In particular, **adolescents with divorced parents report a higher level of conduct problems**, by 0.22 units than those with married parents.

