

Research Project on the Intergenerational Transmission of Family Formation

Attitudes: Do Fathers Play a Role?

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The relevance of this research topic to Singapore can be established based on two related reasons. Firstly, Singapore is currently experiencing low birth rates (TFR decreased from 1.74 in 1993 to 1.26 in 2003) accompanied by decreasing marriage rates (from 8.22 per 1,000 resident population in 1997 to 6.87 in 2002) and increasing divorce rates (from 1.57 per 1,000 resident population in 1997 to 1.72 in 2002). This is a salient issue since Singapore's main resources are its people. Secondly, an equalization of gender in terms of employment as can be seen from increasing female labour force participation (from 50.6% in 1993 to 53.9% in 2003) must occur with an equalization of gender in terms of childrearing (co-parenting). If not, then a decline in maternal involvement without a corresponding increase in paternal involvement may lead to severe negative consequences on the family and family formation.

The general theme of the research project is the importance of paternal involvement in childrearing. It is well documented that paternal involvement plays a big part in the development of a child's emotional, cognitive, and social skills (for a comprehensive survey, consult Allen and Daly (2002)). Furthermore, attitudes of parents as perceived by children may affect the formation of the latter's attitudes. Axinn and Thornton (1996) study the intergenerational influences on attitudes toward family formation, particularly the influence of parents' marital dissolutions and parental attitudes toward premarital sex, cohabitation, marriage, family size, and divorce on the attitudes of their children. Here, parental attitudes are considered as an intervening and socializing mechanism for the child's attitude formation. Their study focuses on the attitudes of mothers and their influence in the family formation attitudes of their children. The results of their study suggest that mothers' attitudes have a statistically significant influence on their children's. Rish, Jodl and Eccles (2004) explore whether the quality (in terms of reported "closeness") of father-adolescent relationships have an effect on adolescents' attitudes toward divorce. The authors conclude that "[f]eeling close to a father—regardless of father type—is associated with boys' confidence in the stability of their future marriages.

The main focus of this project is to study the intergenerational transmission of family formation attitudes (e.g. marriage, divorce, family size, etc.) from fathers to their children. In line with this, the project attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there empirical evidence of intergenerational transmission of family formation attitudes from fathers to sons/ fathers to daughters in Singapore and is the influence of paternal attitudes on children's family formation attitudes significant, holding other factors such as family structure, race and religion, level of maternal involvement constant?

3. Can policies such as Paternal Leave, Flexi-Time arrangements, Family-related activities in work, etc. that encourage paternal involvement and positive attitudes toward family formation affect or improve the kind of equilibrium in the marriage and labour market?

The methodology to be pursued in this research project is as follows. First, I shall conduct a survey (questionnaires would be similar to the one used by Axinn and Thornton (1996) in their 18-year panel study¹) on JC or Secondary students and their fathers² to gather data on their attitudes toward family formation, degree of perceived closeness of father-child relationship, and other relevant economic and noneconomic variables. Second, I shall conduct interviews to determine qualitatively the possible modes of intergenerational transmission and socialization with respect to these attitudes. Third, the project shall employ a Simultaneous Equations Model to test whether attitudes of fathers affect attitudes of children and to what extent. Fourth, a stylized theoretical/mathematical model of intergenerational transmission of attitudes similar to Ho (1998) but applying a general equilibrium framework that incorporates both marriage and labour markets shall be developed. Lastly, this model shall be calibrated in order to run simulations to examine the effects of policies that encourage increased paternal involvement and more positive attitudes of fathers toward family formation on equilibrium characteristics of the marriage and labour markets.

References

- Allen, Sarah and Kerry Dale (2002). "The Effects of Father Involvement: A Summary of the Research Evidence." *The FII-ONews*. Vol. 1, 1-11.
- Axinn, William G. and Arland Thornton (1996). "The Influence of Parents' Marital Dissolutions on Children's Attitudes Toward Family Formation." *Demography*. Vol. 33 No.1, 66-81.

¹ Though technically, the study is a panel study, relevant items such as data on attitudes of children and mothers that were collected and actually used are cross-sectional in nature.

² If it is not feasible to get direct responses from fathers, then the questionnaire would be modified to get the perceived paternal attitudes from the point-of-view of the child.

Ho Kong Weng (1998). *Two Essays on Occupational Mobility*. PhD Dissertation submitted to The University of Chicago.

Rish, Sharon C., Kathleen M. Jodl and Jacquelynne S. Eccles (2004). "Role of Father-Adolescent Relationship in Shaping Adolescents' Attitudes Toward Divorce." *Journal of Marriage and Family*. Vol. 66, 46-58.

Statistics on Marriages & Divorces. Singapore: Department of Statistics, 2002.

Yearbook of Statistics. Singapore: Department of Statistics, 2004.

Budget Proposal:

<i>Expense</i>	<i>Amount</i>
Survey-related expenses (materials, transport, "incentives" if needed, etc.)	\$500
Interview-related expenses (transport, "incentives", cassette tapes)	\$200
Research-related expenses (printing of articles, photocopying, access to certain Articles not available in the library, purchasing of books if necessary)	\$150
Production of Thesis (printing and binding)	\$50

Total	\$900