Family Change in Global Perspective

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Overview

- Try to place the growing diversification of family forms in the U.S. and globally in an historical context.

- Begin with a brief discussion of the sources of the change that we have witnessed over the past 50 years.

- Much will be familiar if you are a family demographer.

- Rapid change took social scientists by surprise.

- Discuss how and why change took place and its ramifications for growing social inequality.

- End with a brief discussion of public policy approaches to mitigating some of the impact on children.
Chart SF3.1.A: The decline in crude marriage rates between 1970 and 2009*

Number of marriages per 1000 population

- **2009**
- **1970**
Chart SF3.1.B: Proportion of first marriage
Chart SF3.1.E: The increase in crude divorce rates from 1970 to 2008*

Number of divorces per 1000 population

- Rate in 1970
- Change from 1970 to 2008
Chart SF2.4.B: Changes in the proportion of births out of wedlock from 1970 to 2009*
Chart SF2.1.A: Total fertility rates in 1970¹, 1995 and 2011²
Panel B: The proportion of childless women at age 40
Percent completing transition to adulthood in 1960, 2000, and 2010 using traditional benchmarks, ages: 25 and 35, USA (Census)
Major Descriptive Changes

- Link between initiation of sex and marriage broken down
- Postponement of demographic transitions and later adult transitions
- Weakening of marriage institution, permitting more alternative forms (cohabitation in particular)
- Breakdown of gender-based division of labor
- Delay of family formation and lower fertility
- Growth in non-marital childbearing
- At a country level “convergence to divergence (Billari and Liefbroer, 2010)
- Widening of social class differences in the family in the U.S., Europe, and the Anglo-speaking nations: Emergence of Two-tier Family
Why and How the Change Occurred

- Family adapts to changing environmental and economic circumstances
- Changes occur where there are cultural contradictions and paradoxical: “time honored traditions can no longer be honored” (Mills, 1962)
- Very early marriage pattern was riddled with contradictions
- I had a ringside seat to the changes in my ongoing study of teenage childbearing in Baltimore beginning in the mid-1960s
- The logic of “early marriage” no longer made sense by the late 1970s and early 1980s
- Different responses by affluent and disadvantaged families.
Change Occurred Differently Among Privileged and Disadvantaged

- The widening of social class differences in family types
- Breakdown of gender-based division of labor was experienced differently among low and high income families
  - Marriage unattainable for poor
  - Marriage delayed for well-off
- Development of a two-tiered family system with different family formation patterns
- Was this a cultural or structural change? A mindless debate!
- Reciprocal relationship between economic inequality and family change.
#1 Impending cultural contradictions

- **Sex and Marriage**
  - Rising marriage age increases pressures for premarital sex, but only modest evidence of behavioral changes (Zenos et. al., 2006)
  - Cohabitation as adaptation, not much in evidence

- **Home leaving, (Pre-marital Sex) and Marriage**
  - Will the delay of marriage and the cost of home leaving become intolerable to parents and children?
  - If children move out before marriage, will this in turn increase the likelihood of pre-marital sex?
#2 Gender Role Inflexibilities

- There is Uneven Decline of Patriarchy
  - Patriarchy and Marriage
  - Work and Family Roles have become increasingly incompatible for Women
  - The growth of singlehood in many parts of Asia and the Rapidly Developing world

- Resulting Pressures on Fertility
  - The demands for investment in children are growing, making larger family size more problematic
#3 Growing Demands on Parents and the Intergeneration bargain

- Extension of early adulthood with resulting economic pressures on parents
- Asian families may be well positioned to absorb the changes
- Extended burdens on parents may not be easily repaid in the next generation
- Squeeze on parent-generation is high and
- The squeeze on next generation may be even higher
- More grandparents; fewer grandchildren
- Will educational differences between the generation undercut parental authority?
Policy Choices for New Futures

- Value Dilemmas in future policy decisions
  - What kind of society we shape is a political decision though I would argue that certain choices are likely to promote economic and social well-being
    - Gender equality policies have been generally higher fertility in the West.
    - The extension of free or relatively inexpensive access to tertiary education.
    - Taxing and redistributive policies.
Thank You

- Questions and Comments are Welcome