

# Parental Separation and Children's Opportunity for Education in Japan: Focus on the Effects of Demographic Changes on Intergenerational Reproduction of Social Inequality

SAITO Tomohiro

In this article, we examine the "diverging destinies" thesis derived from the second demographic transition theory, which predicts the reinforcement of intergenerational reproduction of inequality according to social-economic background. The diverging destinies thesis posits that the experience of family instability or transition, such as divorce, early childbearing, and cohabitation, has been concentrated among socio-economically disadvantaged families, and growing up in non-intact families restricts an individual's chances of socio-economic attainment. However, there have been few researches that have tested whether, as the diverging destinies thesis predicts, such demographic and familial changes are factors amplifying inequality of socio-economic opportunity in contemporary Japanese society.

We use micro-level datasets of the 5th and 6th National Survey on Family in Japan to examine the relationship between the growing proportion of non-intact family and inequality of children's educational attainment between social classes. Multilevel model and Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition approach revealed three main findings: (1) children who experienced parental separation are less likely to attain tertiary education than do their counterparts; however, (2) the educational attainment of children with highly educated mothers are significantly negatively influenced by the experience of parental divorce; and (3) these differential effects of parental separation offset the positive influence of class divergence in family formation on the intergenerational reproduction of inequality.

In conclusion, these findings do not support the diverging destinies thesis, and rather, confirm the stability of trends in inequality of educational opportunity, as repeatedly shown in social stratification research.

Keywords: second demographic transition, diverging destinies thesis, educational attainment, intergenerational reproduction of inequality