

# FORSCHUNGSKOLLOQUIUM

## *“The consequences of family complexity for children”*

Empirical research has demonstrated a negative association between parental union dissolution, predominantly divorce, and their children’s educational outcomes. However, theoretical arguments posit that overall family stability may be more crucial than single transitions, such as union dissolutions.

In this project, we propose a more comprehensive perspective, measuring how family complexity evolves over the childhood of children and its relationship to outcomes using Dynamic Sequence Complexity Indices based on their parents’ partnership history. Our methodological approach provides a more comprehensive and dynamic measure of children’s family life complexity than those employed in previous studies, such as a simple count of household transitions.

In a first study we introduce the dynamic measurement for family complexity, examining its evolution across the early life courses of children by birth cohort. Our findings indicate that children’s family complexity has increased dramatically over time, with the two most recent cohorts experiencing a markedly higher number of family transitions and greater family unpredictability at younger ages compared to older cohorts. Building on this finding, we proceed to examine the relationship between the increasing complexity of family structures and educational outcomes. We initially focus on the UK, where we apply fixed-effects regression models to estimate the link between family stability and educational outcomes. We utilize different sequence complexity indices to measure family stability. Subsequently, we utilise them as the primary covariate in a series of fixed-effects regression models, with the objective of comparing their efficacy with the transition to union dissolution. The result will shed light on the long-standing question of whether it is union dissolution itself that impacts children’s outcomes or rather the overall family stability in the long run.

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