

Are good fathers penalized on the remarriage market?

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December 11, 2015

Abstract

Since the beginning of years 2000, French laws about child custody after a divorce have widely changed. In the majority of cases, mothers still get the custody of children, leaving one week-end over two and half of holidays to fathers. Despite this persistence, shared custody spreads out significantly. A recent report by Carrasco and Dufour (2015) shows that between 2003 and 2012, the proportion of cases where shared custody is chosen after a divorce increased from 12 to 21%. This percentage declines to 17% if we include separations of unmarried partners. Using a new French dataset called EPIC, we propose to test the assumption that men who get the shared custody of their children may be penalized on the marriage market as they may be seen as more risky matches compared to the other types of fathers. We assert that this assumption has more chance to be verified if divorced men are massively matched with childless women on the remarriage market. If on the contrary, they are matched massively with divorced mothers having the custody of their children, these "good fathers" may not suffer any kind of penalty. To test this, we implement a logistic regression model where the dependent variable is binary and equal one if the studied man is engaged in a new cohabiting union and zero otherwise. Our main independent variables are the type of custody of children from previous unions, the socio-economic characteristics of studied men and the characteristics of the new partner if any.

Keywords: Child custody, remarriage, civil unions, fatherhood.

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Since the beginning of years 2000, French laws about child custody after a divorce have widely changed. In the majority of cases,¹ mothers still get the custody of children, leaving one week-end over two and half of holidays to fathers. Despite this persistence, shared custody spreads out significantly. A recent report by Carrasco and Dufour (2015) shows that between 2003 and 2012, the proportion of cases where shared custody is chosen after a divorce increased from 12 to 21%. This percentage declines to 17% if we include separations of unmarried partners.

In the case of shared custody, involvement of fathers in children's everyday life is supposed to be as high as this of mothers. These "new fathers" may be perceived as less attractive matches on the remarriage market. Indeed, they may have less time to devote to building a new family with their new mate and regular presence of their kids implies family schemes which are much more complex compared to fathers who don't share child custody with their ex-wife. Furthermore, the risk that children from first unions reject fathers' new partners is not negligible. In this paper, we try to quantify to which extent these fathers who go for shared custody are penalized on the remarriage market. The existence of such a penalty is far from evident. Indeed, after a divorce (that occurs on average around 40 yo, Insee), men may remarry a childless woman or a mother and each of them could have been married or not in the past. Among childless women, men sharing the custody of their children with their ex-wife may indeed be seen as more risky matches for the reasons we have cited above. But among mothers who most of the time have a full or shared custody of their own children, these men may be seen as a good match. Indeed, these fathers send a signal to the marriage market: they value quite strongly family ties and have renounced to geographical and/or professional mobilities after their divorce to keep going taking care of their kids. Said differently, among all potential mates, they may be those who will be most able to reconstruct a family with a divorced mother. The characteristics of the remarriage market then have a strong importance. If divorced fathers are often matched with divorced mothers, they may not pay such a high penalty. On the contrary, if they are mainly matched with childless never-married women, they may be penalized strongly.

A new French dataset called EPIC (Etude des Parcours Individuels et Conjugaux) allows us to test the assumption that "good fathers" are penalized on the remarriage market. EPIC has collected data for 7,825 males and females aged between 25 and 64. These persons have been interviewed about their past and present unions; the dataset delivers precise dates about unions formation and disruption as well as the number of births and the type of arrangement

¹Carrasco and Dufour (2015) show that this is the case in 73% of separations. **Carrasco C. and Dufour D. (2015) Les décisions des juges concernant les enfants de parents séparés ont fortement évolué dans les années 2000. Infostat Justice, 132.**

for the custody of children after the last disruption. Unions are not necessarily marriages, they also cover civil unions (PACS: Pacte Civil de Solidarité). Thanks to this dataset, we can easily compare remarriage trajectories of men sharing child custody with their ex-wives to these of men not sharing custody.

The dataset EPIC contains a large set of socio-economic variables that will allow us to use multivariate regressions. Our population of interest is composed of those men who experienced the disruption of a cohabiting union in the past. Our dependent variable will be binary and equal one if the studied man is engaged in a new cohabiting union and zero if he is not currently engaged in such an union. Our main explanatory variables are the presence of children from previous unions, the type of arrangement in terms of children custody, education and characteristics of the prospective mate like her childlessness status, the type of arrangement she has in terms of children custody with her ex-husband and her education. Obviously, we will use the time lag between the interview and the last union disruption as the variable measuring the exposure time to the risk of entering in a new union. Environmental variables like the proportion of divorced men and women in the region of living will be taken into account in order to approximate as best as possible the characteristics of the local remarriage market.

The dataset EPIC is not the first one allowing to investigate the impact of shared custody on men's remarriage trajectories. This could also be done with Gender and Generation Surveys provided by the Gender and Generation Program that delivers data for France.² Nevertheless, data proposed by GGP have been collected in 2005, a date too closed to the reforms of French laws regarding shared custody. Said differently, the change in the law offers a quasi-natural experiment to quantify the impact of shared custody on remarriage rates at the individual and aggregate levels. Using EPIC rather than GGP allows a better evaluation of this impact as the first dataset gave almost 10 more years to reforms to produce their first effects. Data from GGP will be used as a robustness test of our main regressions.

²GGG data for France issue from the survey ERFI (Etude des Relations Familiales et Intergénérationnelles).