

Children's sex affects parents' marital status

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Parents with a boy and a girl are more likely to stay married, or get married if they were unmarried when their children were born, than those with two boys or two girls according to new research from ANU economist Dr Andrew Leigh.

About eight out of ten parents are married, while one in ten parents have never married and one in ten are divorced. Could parents' decision to get married, stay married or divorce be related to the sex of their children?

In an analysis entitled *Does Child Gender Affect Marital Status?* Dr Leigh analysed 60,000 families from the past five Australian Censuses. He found small but significant effects of the sex of children on their parents' marital status.

“Among two-child families, parents with two children of the same sex are 1.7 percentage points less likely to be married than parents with a boy and a girl,” Dr Leigh reported.

“It appears that parents are more likely to be married if they have both a boy and a girl than if they have two boys or two girls.

“Surveys of parental attitudes suggest that these effects are more likely to be driven by fathers than by mothers.

“On one level, the fact that children's gender affects marital status may seem surprising. But it is consistent with another well-known fact, which is that families with two children of the same sex are significantly more

likely to try for a third child than families with a boy and a girl.

“If having two children of the same sex increases the chance that some parents will have a third child, then it is perhaps not surprising that it also increases the chances of separation.”

The study also tested whether sons or daughters had a differential effect on marriage rates, and found no evidence of such an effect.

“While United States research has shown that parents of daughters are more likely to divorce, I find no such impact in Australia,” Dr Leigh reported. “But among two-child families, one of each seems better for relationships than two of a kind.”

Source: Australian National University

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