

Child and adult deprivation in reconstituted households, age and gender inequalities

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Background: The unitary model of the household, which assumes that resources are allocated equally within households has come under fire. Indeed, there is growing evidence that households do not share resources evenly among their members. The majority of research on intra-household inequality has focused on couples, and finds that women have less access to household resources compared to men, and find a positive association between female income and access to household resources (Bennet, 2013; Guio and Van der Bosch, 2019; Karagiannaki and Burchardt, 2020). Additionally, women are found to be more likely to prioritise children's needs and to reduce their own expenses when becoming parents compared to men (Dema-Moreno and Díaz-Martinez, 2017). Research comparing children and adults is scarcer, but growing. Households are generally found to prioritise children (Gabos et al., 2011; Main and Bradshaw, 2016). To date, relatively little attention has been given to whether and to what extent household characteristics affect intra-household inequality between children and adults.

Reconstituted couples tend follow more individualised patterns of resource sharing compared to first partnerships (Vogler, 2005; Bennett, 2013). This is likely to have an impact on children access to resources, particularly where they are children to only one of the couple members. However, no research exists on this phenomenon to date. Using a pooled sample for 22 European countries this paper explores the association between household composition and the intra-household allocation of resources between children and adults and between adult members of the household.

Research questions and hypotheses:

- RQ1. Is there an association between household composition child deprivation and intra-household inequality? Does living with a non-parent affect children risk of deprivation?
 - H1.1 Children are less likely to be deprived when living with both parents compared to children living with one or no parents. This association remains after controlling by household income.

- RQ2 What is the association between parenthood and deprivation? How does it intersect with gender?
 - H2.1 Couple members who are parents are more likely to sacrifice their needs compared to non-parents
 - H2.2 Mothers are more likely to go without compared to fathers
 - H2.3 Non-mothers are more likely to go without compared to non-fathers

Data and sample: The paper exploits the 2014 ad-hoc material deprivation module of the EU-SILC. The module is unique in that it collected material deprivation data for children as well as individual adults in the household (in addition to the usual material deprivation questions collected at the household level), enabling the study of intra-household allocation of resources.

For the purpose of this research couple households with children are households with at least one child aged 2 to 15, where there are two adults and the adults are either partners or parents to the children. The selection of the 2-15 age range is dictated by the availability of child

deprivation data in the EU-SILC. The child sample is formed by 37569 children aged 2-15 living in couple households. The adult sample contains 51005 adult living in couple households with children.

Focusing on couples allows reducing variability by excluding extended and single adult households which may have different sharing patterns. The analysis distinguishes between couples where all children are shared, those where at least one child is not related to one or both members of the couple.

Preliminary findings: In line with previous literature, the results indicate that that European households tend to prioritise children. However, children in reconstituted couples are more likely to be deprived compared to children living with both parents. This increased vulnerability could be a resources effect (e.g. reconstituted households may be poorer), or a distribution effect (e.g. if such households distribute resources differently). Results suggest that both factors play a role. Reconstituted households are more likely to be deprived (at the household level) than non-reconstituted households, and to have at least one adult who is deprived. However, the positive association between living with one parent and being deprived remains after controlling for household resources (household income and household deprivation) in a regression model.

Analysis of deprivation among adults in the household suggest that it tends to be the parent (chiefly mothers) who are more likely to be deprived, compared to the non-parent member of the household. The discussion considers the implications of the findings for age and gender inequalities within households. This article will be of interest to those studying and/or working in the fields of poverty, gender inequality and/or intra-household dynamics.

References

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