

Assortative Mating, Intergenerational Mobility of Women and Inequality

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Abstract. Assortative mating is discussed to be one of the drivers of increased income inequality. In this context, assortativeness is measured by similarity of educational attainment of spouses. The general findings is that the probability of both partners having the same educational attainment within a couple has increased over time. As higher education is associated with higher income and vice versa, an increase in assortative mating might lead to a higher concentration of household income and hence a rise in inequality. However, we show that the increase in educational homogamy is not due to a fundamental structural change in mating patterns but rather due to an increase in women's educational attainment and changing labor force participation. Linking assortativeness to intergenerational educational mobility and parental background, our results imply that sorting based on social background has remained stable over the past decades. Therefore, we argue that the rise in assortative mating and its influence on the income distribution of households is rather driven by the rise of women's education and labor force participation. In short, the increase in assortative mating mirrors a process of economic emancipation and increasing participation opportunities of woman and not a change in mating behavior.

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