Childbearing After First Marriage Dissolution: Does Union Status Matter?

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Introduction
- Cohabitation has increased dramatically over the past several decades (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008).
- Past research has typically focused on premarital cohabitation.
- Previously married women are more likely to cohabit than never-married women (Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991).
- This study provides a better understanding of cohabitation’s role in family formation after first marriage dissolution.

Prior Research
- Childbearing is not uncommon after divorce.
- In 2006, about 300,000 previously married women gave birth in that year (Dye, 2008).
- Cohabitation has become an increasingly important context for childbearing.
- Roughly half of the children born to cohabiting mothers increased by 60% (Seltzer, 2004).

Research Questions
1. Are previously married cohabiting women less likely to bear children than remarried women?
2. Are women who cohabit and remarry less likely to bear children while cohabiting than while married?

Competing Hypotheses
1. If cohabiting women are less likely to bear children than remarried women, then cohabitation is a prelude to marriage.
2. If cohabiting women share a similar likelihood of childbearing as remarried women, then cohabitation is an alternative to marriage.
3. Adults are choosing to cohabit rather than marry.
4. Childbearing among cohabitators would be indistinguishable from remarried women.

Data
- 2006-2008 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG)
- A national probability sample of women 15-44 years of age living in households in the U.S.
- These data provide detailed marriage, divorce, cohabitation, and childbearing histories for each respondent.
- N=7,355 women

Analytic Strategy
- Sample: 748 previously married women who formed a co-residential union after their first marriage dissolved (i.e., cohabitation, remarriage)
- Life tables and multivariate discrete-time event history models are presented.
- Controls: respondent’s age at union, parity, race/ethnicity and nativity, how marriage ended, mother’s education, childhood family status, partner’s parity, and partner’s age at union

Dependent Variable
- Dichotomous response measure
  1 = Women who gave birth to a child during their first postmarital union
  0 = Women who did not give birth to a child during their first postmarital union

Main Independent Variable
- Three-Category Union Status Variable
  1. Amelia ends her first marriage, then cohabits
  2. Bernadette ends her first marriage, then remarries
  3. Clariesse ends her first marriage, cohabits, then marries her cohabiting partner

Trends in Repartnering
- Major changes in repartnering have occurred over the last two decades.
  - Cohabitation has increased among the previously married.
  - In the late 1980s, slightly over half (56%) of previously married women cohabited compared to the vast majority (83%) in the late 2000s.
  - Fewer previously married are opting for a “straightforward” path to remarriage.
  - In the late 1980s, almost half (44%) of previously married women “Only Remarried.” In the late 2000s, this group was the minority (17%).

Predicting Births
- By the end of year 1, a lower proportion of “Only Cohabitators” gave birth than “Only Remarrieds.”
- By the end of year 5, the proportion of “Only Cohabitators” who gave birth was indistinguishable from “Only Remarrieds.”
- “Only Cohabitors” show slower timing to childbirth than “Only Remarrieds.”
- By the end of year 2, timing to childbirth increases rapidly among “Combo Cohab/Remarrieds.”
- On average, “Combo Cohab/Remarrieds” marry 2 years after the start of their cohabiting unions.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Independent Variable</th>
<th>Full Model Birth</th>
<th>Hazard Rate SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only Cohabitors</td>
<td>0.45 0.18</td>
<td>1.32 0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Remarrieds</td>
<td>0.76 0.26</td>
<td>1.23 0.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Full Model Birth</th>
<th>Hazard Rate SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Combination Cohabitation/Remarried</td>
<td>0.45 0.18</td>
<td>0.76 0.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion
- Cohabitation after first marriage dissolution has increased over the past 20 years.
- The vast majority of previously married women who formed a co-residential union after their first marital dissolution cohabited.
- “Only Cohabitors” have a similar likelihood of bearing children as “Only Birth of their first child.
- Results support the alternative to marriage hypothesis.
- “Only Cohabitors” show slower timing to childbirth than “Only Remarrieds.”
- By the end of year 5, levels of childbearing among “Only Cohabitors” were indistinguishable from “Only Remarrieds.”
- The majority (55%) of cohabitators eventually marry their cohabiting partner.
- “Combo Cohab/Remarrieds” may begin their unions with similar levels of childbearing as “Only Cohabitors,” but once they marry, their levels of childbirth are on par with “Only Remarrieds.”
- Marriage is the preferred context for childbearing/rearing.

Limitations
- The NSFG 2006-2008 does not provide...
  - Dating relationship histories
  - A number of cohabitation/marital partner characteristics
  - Commitment/relationship quality measures
  - Time-varying indicators of income or education

Future Research
- Multiple partner fertility among previously married women
- Well-being of children born within cohabiting and marital unions
- Blended families formed through cohabitation after first marriage dissolution

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