



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.
 - Throughout the 1990s, the proportion of children born to cohabiting mothers increased by 60% (Seltzer, 2004).

Research Questions

- Are previously married cohabiting women less likely to bear children than remarried women?
- Are women who cohabit and remarry less likely to bear children while cohabiting than while married?

Competing Hypotheses

- If cohabiting women are less likely to bear children than remarried women, then cohabitation is a prelude to marriage.
 - Cohabitation is the last step in the courtship process before marriage.
 - Cohabitors would either end their relationship or transition to marriage prior to the birth of their first child.
- If cohabiting women share a similar likelihood of childbearing as remarried women, then cohabitation is an alternative to marriage.
 - Adults are choosing to cohabit rather than marry.
 - 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=7,356 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
 - Amelia ends her first marriage, then cohabits
 - Marriage Ends → Cohabitation
 - Amelia Only Cohabited = "Only Cohabitation"
 - Bernadette ends her first marriage, then remarries
 - Marriage Ends → Remarriage
 - Bernadette Only Remarried = "Only Remarriage"
 - Clarisse ends her first marriage, cohabits, then marries her cohabiting partner
 - Marriage Ends → Cohabitation → Remarriage
 - Clarisse Both Cohabited and Remarried = "Combination Cohabitation/Remarriage"

Three-Category Response Variable

- Amelia: "Only Cohabitation"
 - Marriage Ends → Cohabitation
- Bernadette: "Only Remarriage"
 - Marriage Ends → Remarriage
- Clarisse: "Combination"
 - Marriage Ends → Cohabitation → Remarriage

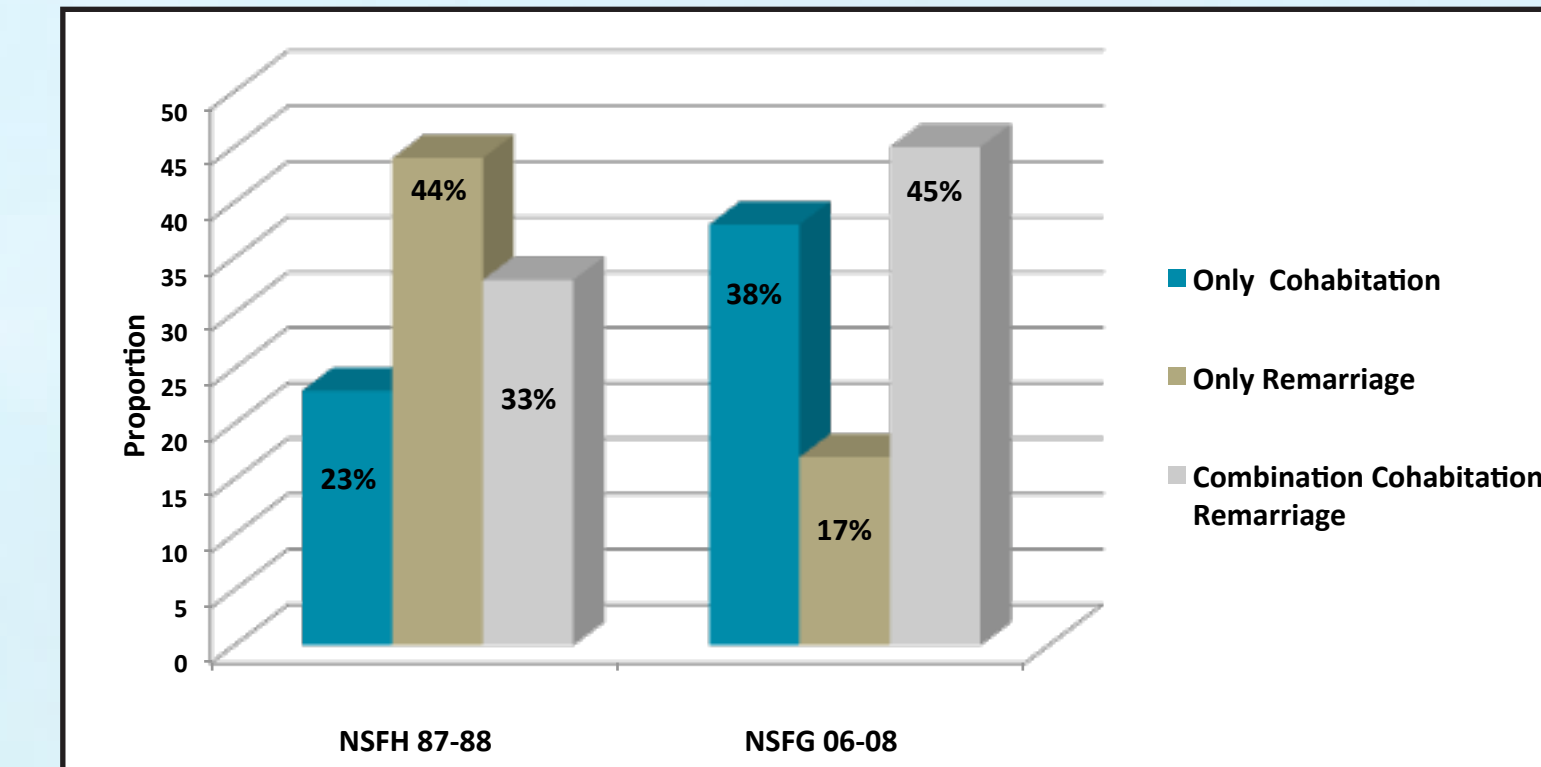
Four-Category Response Variable

- "Only Cohabitation"
- "Only Remarriage"
- "Combination Cohabitation"
- "Combination Remarriage"

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%).

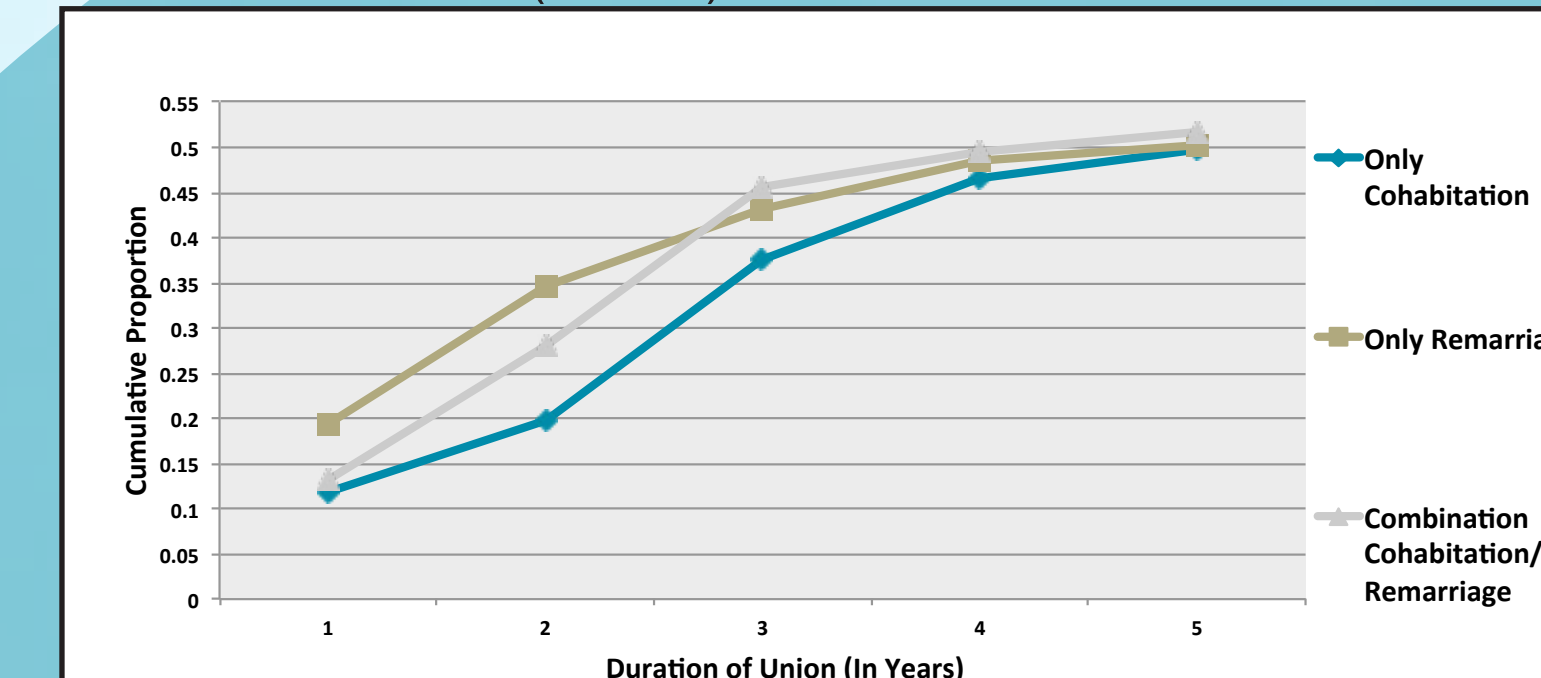
Figure 1
Union Status Among Previously Married Cohabiting and Remarried Women



Predicting Births

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

Figure 2
Predicting Births Among Previously Married Cohabiting and Remarried Women (N=748)



Only Cohabitors vs. Only Remarrieds

- There is no statistically significant difference in the likelihood of childbirth among "Only Cohabitors" and "Only Remarrieds."

Table 1
Multivariate Discrete-Time Event History Predicting Births for All Postmarital Cohabiting and Remarried Women

Main Independent Variable	Full Model Birth	
	Hazard	SE
Union Status (reference = Only Remarriage)		
Only Cohabitation	0.94	0.26
Combination Cohabitation	0.59 *	0.18
Combination Remarriage	1.32	0.45

p < .05*
Source: 2006-2008 National Survey of Family Growth
Note: Model includes all control variables

Combination Cohabitation/Remarrieds

- Women who cohabited then remarried are significantly less likely to bear children while cohabiting than while married.

Table 2
Multivariate Discrete-Time Event History Predicting Births for All Postmarital Cohabiting and Remarried Women

Independent Variable	Full Model Birth	
	Hazard	SE
Union Status (reference = Combination Remarriage)		
Combination Cohabitation	0.45 *	0.18
Only Cohabitation	0.45	0.18
Only Remarriage	0.76	0.26

p < .05*
Source: 2006-2008 National Survey of Family Growth
Note: Model includes all control variables

Conclusions

- 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 Remarrieds."
 - 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 cohabiting/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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