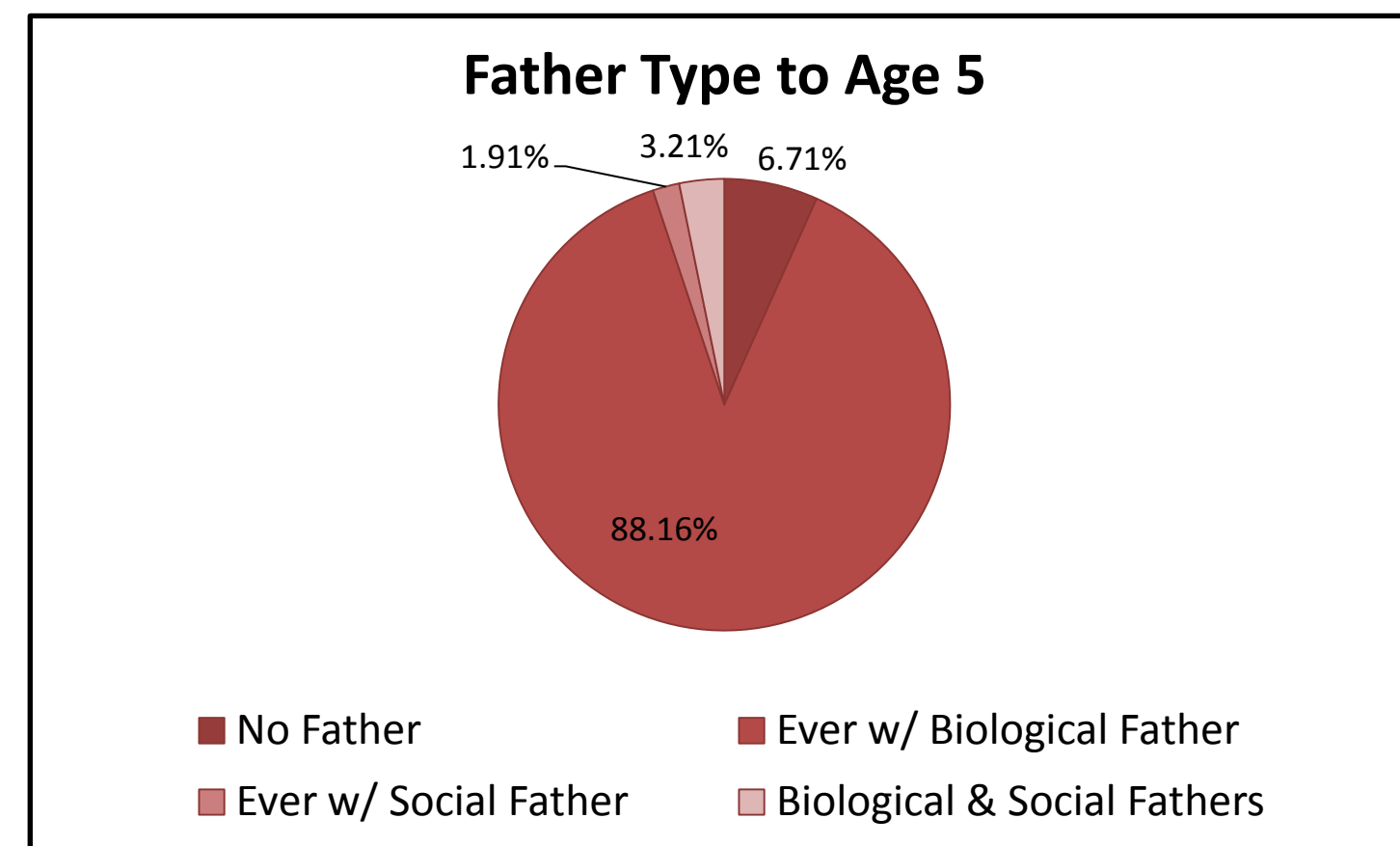
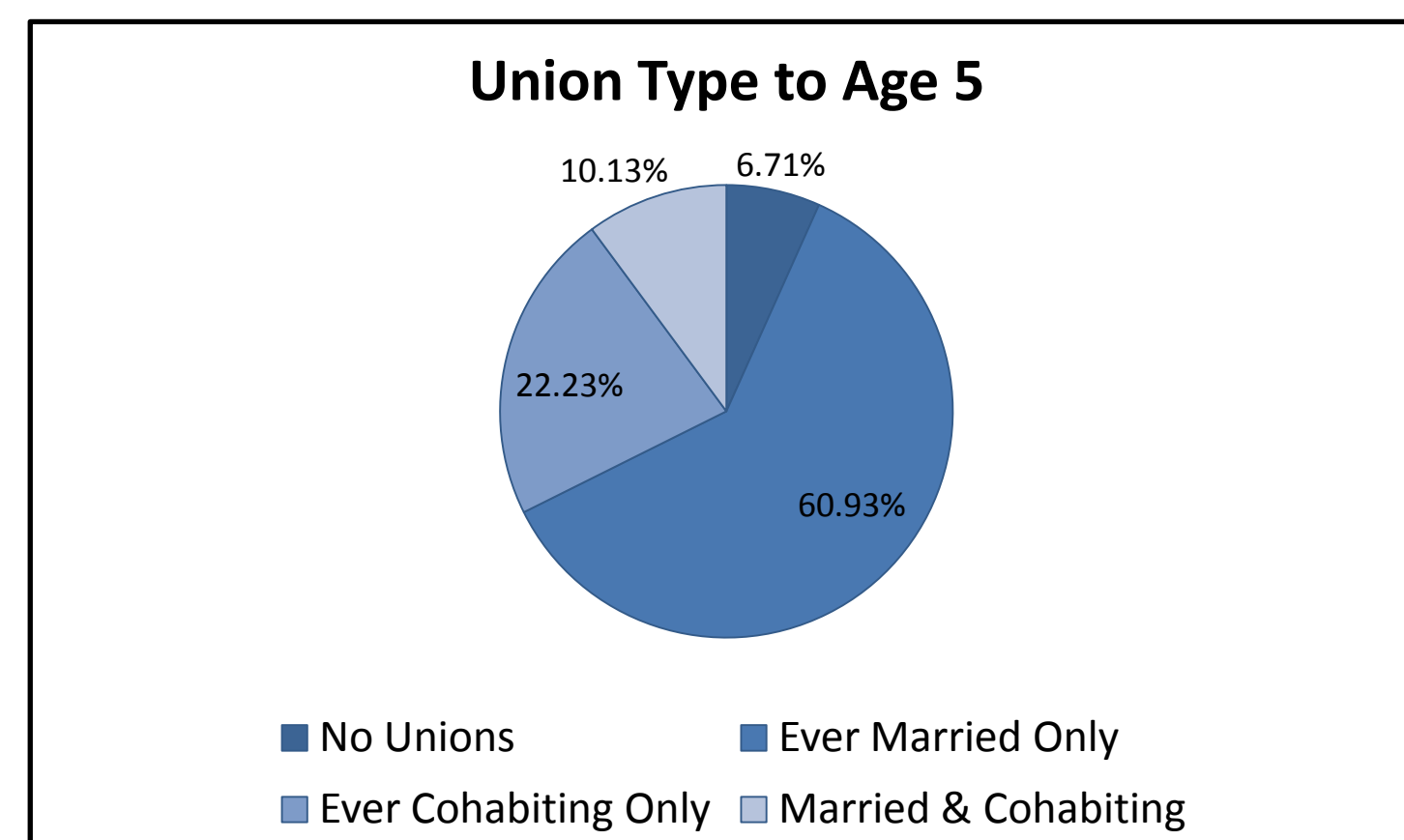




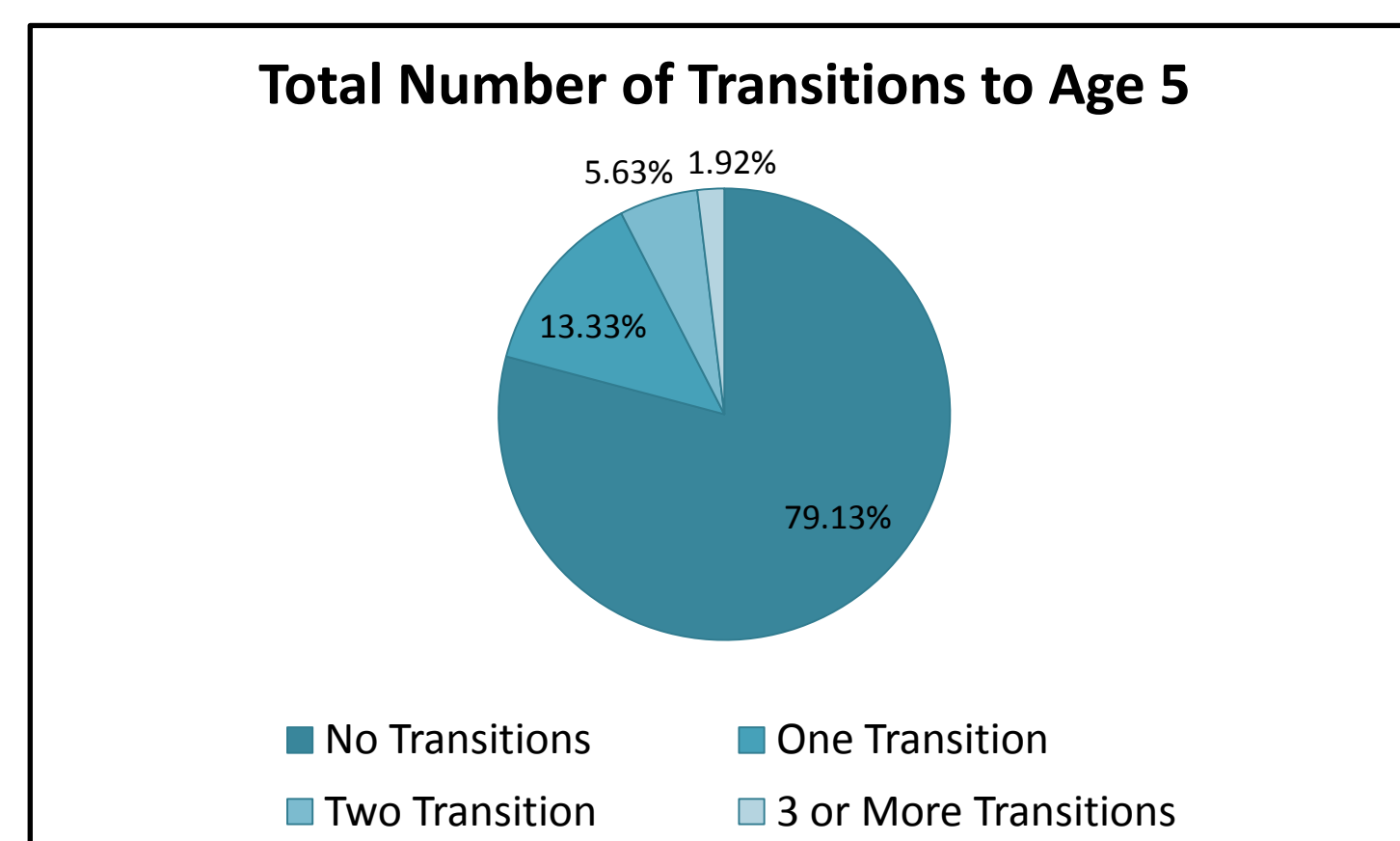
Family Change Trajectories and Children's School Readiness in the United Kingdom



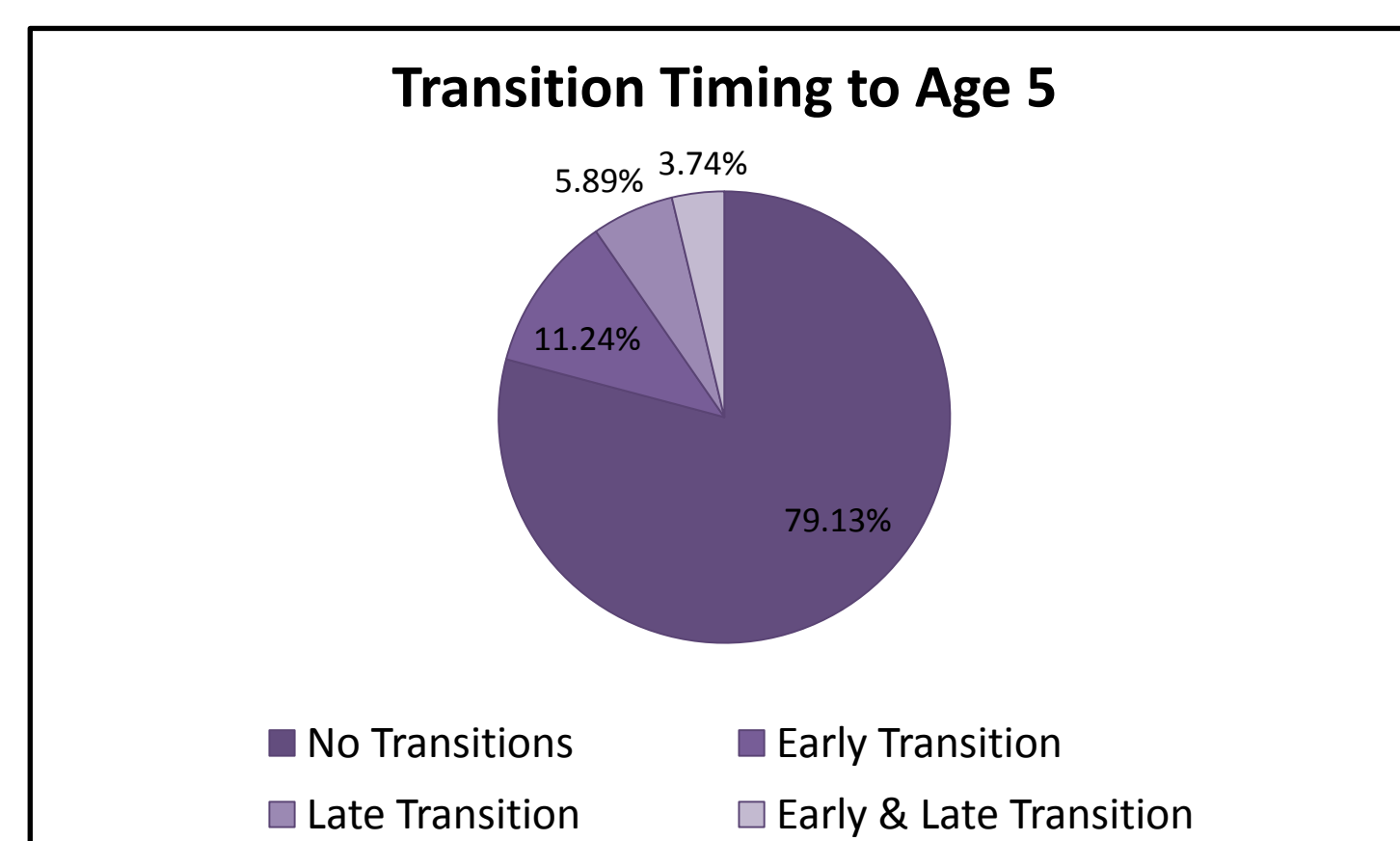
About 9 percent of children have never lived with their biological father by age 5.



About one-third of children have spent some time in a cohabiting union. Only 7 percent have lived continuously with a single mother.



By age 5, nearly one-quarter of children have experienced some change in family structure, but relatively few have experienced frequent change.



Early family transitions (by age 3) occur about twice as often as later transitions (between ages 3 and 5).

Current Research

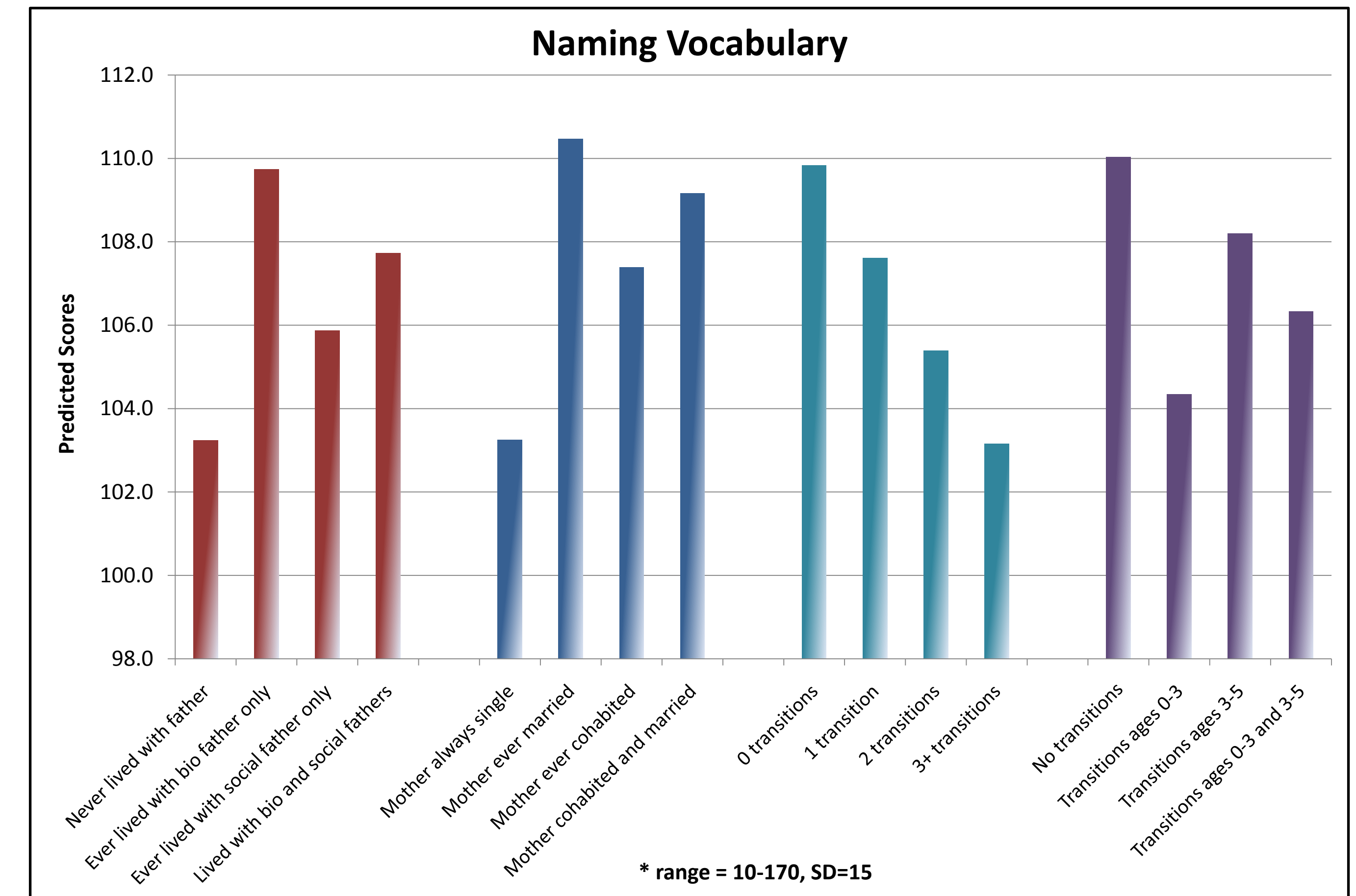
- A history of family structure instability is strongly associated with children's compromised school readiness.
- Current research has started to unpack family structure instability to determine when it matters most. Is instability most challenging when children...
 - **Father presence:** ...spend less time with biological fathers or more time with social fathers?
 - **Union history:** ...spend more time in cohabiting or single parent households compared to married parent households?
 - **Frequency:** ...experience a relatively high number of transitions, with only a short time spent in any household type?
 - **Timing:** ...experience family instability earlier or later in the life course?

The Challenge

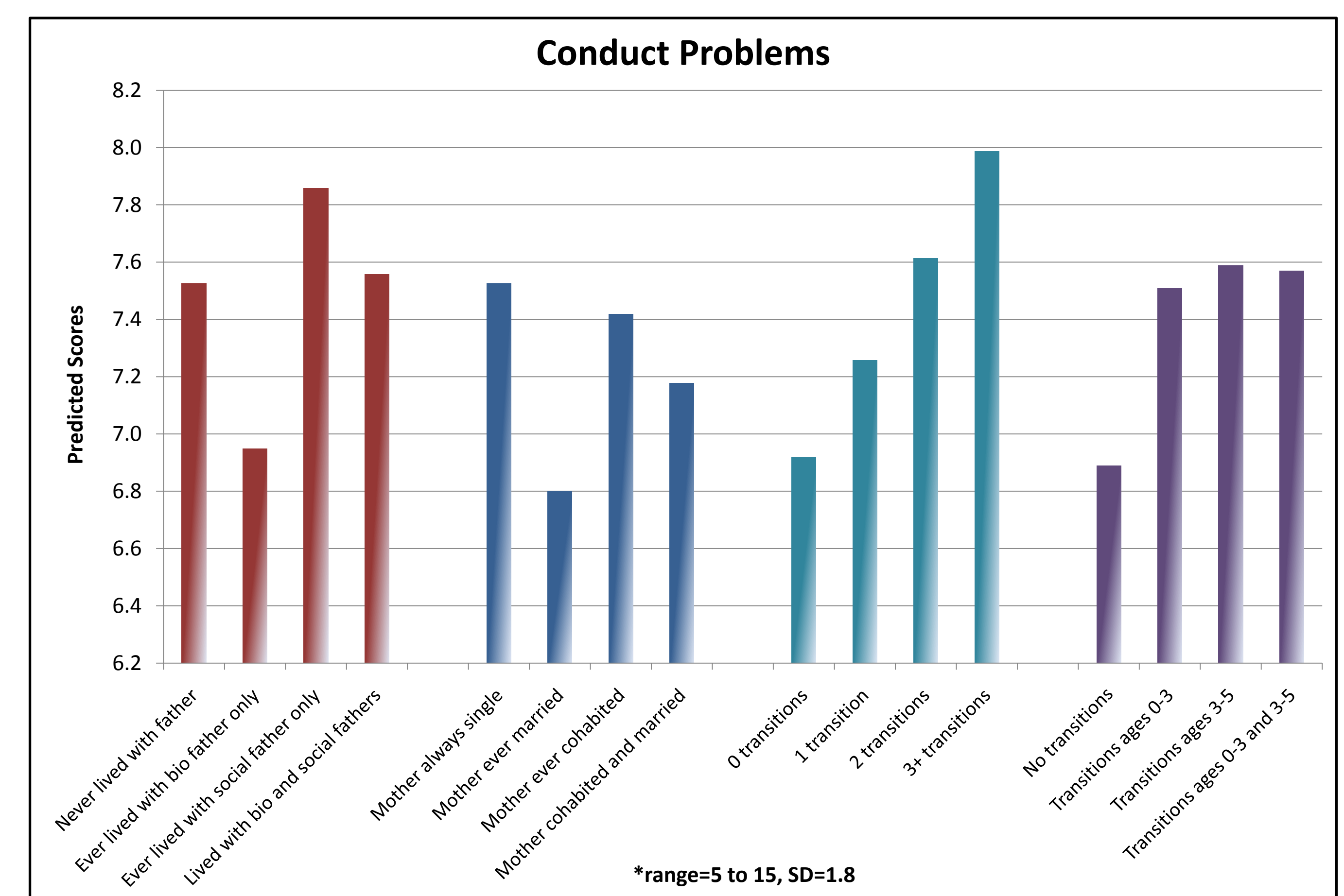
- Small cell sizes often hamper scholars' efforts to consider all of these dimensions of family structure change in a single analysis.
- In the United Kingdom's Millennium Cohort Study (a nationally-representative, longitudinal study of children born in 2000-01), we find variation in all of these dimensions of family structure change (see figures at left).
- We also find that these dimensions of family change have distinctive relationships with two commonly used indicators of school readiness when children are 5 years old: Naming Vocabulary and Conduct Problems (see figures at right). Our findings highlight the need for a measure to capture the multidimensional nature of instability.

The Solution

- Our goal is to use latent class growth analysis to develop an indicator of the latent construct of instability that uses all of these components simultaneously. We hope that this method will produce theoretically valid and conceptually useful measures of family instability to explore how family structure is associated with the reproduction of social inequality.



When looking at family structure history from the perspective of father presence or union history, children who have lived with a continuously single mother have the most compromised vocabulary scores. Children living with social fathers only or in cohabiting families also have lower scores. It appears that early family transitions are more strongly associated with children's diminished vocabulary scores at age 5 than are later transitions.



Time with a social father or in a cohabiting union is associated with more frequent conduct problems. Overall, father presence appears to have more explanatory power than union history in explaining conduct problems. The fact of experiencing family transitions at all appears to be more salient than the timing of transitions.