Family Structure Dynamics and Child Well-Being

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Economic trajectories in childhood depend on:

- **Type and sequencing of family structure change (from single to two-parent household or vice versa)**
- **Children's economic trajectories prior to family structure change**

Analytic steps

- Characterize trajectories of family economic disadvantage during childhood
- Within trajectories, examine the economic consequences for children of movements between single and married parent households
- Consider consequences of economic trajectories and marital transitions for child health and development

Group-Based Trajectory Analysis Using Latent Class Growth Models

Model trajectories of family economic disadvantage for each child/family

Classify children with similar family economic trajectories

Estimate the proportion of children who fall into these different trajectories

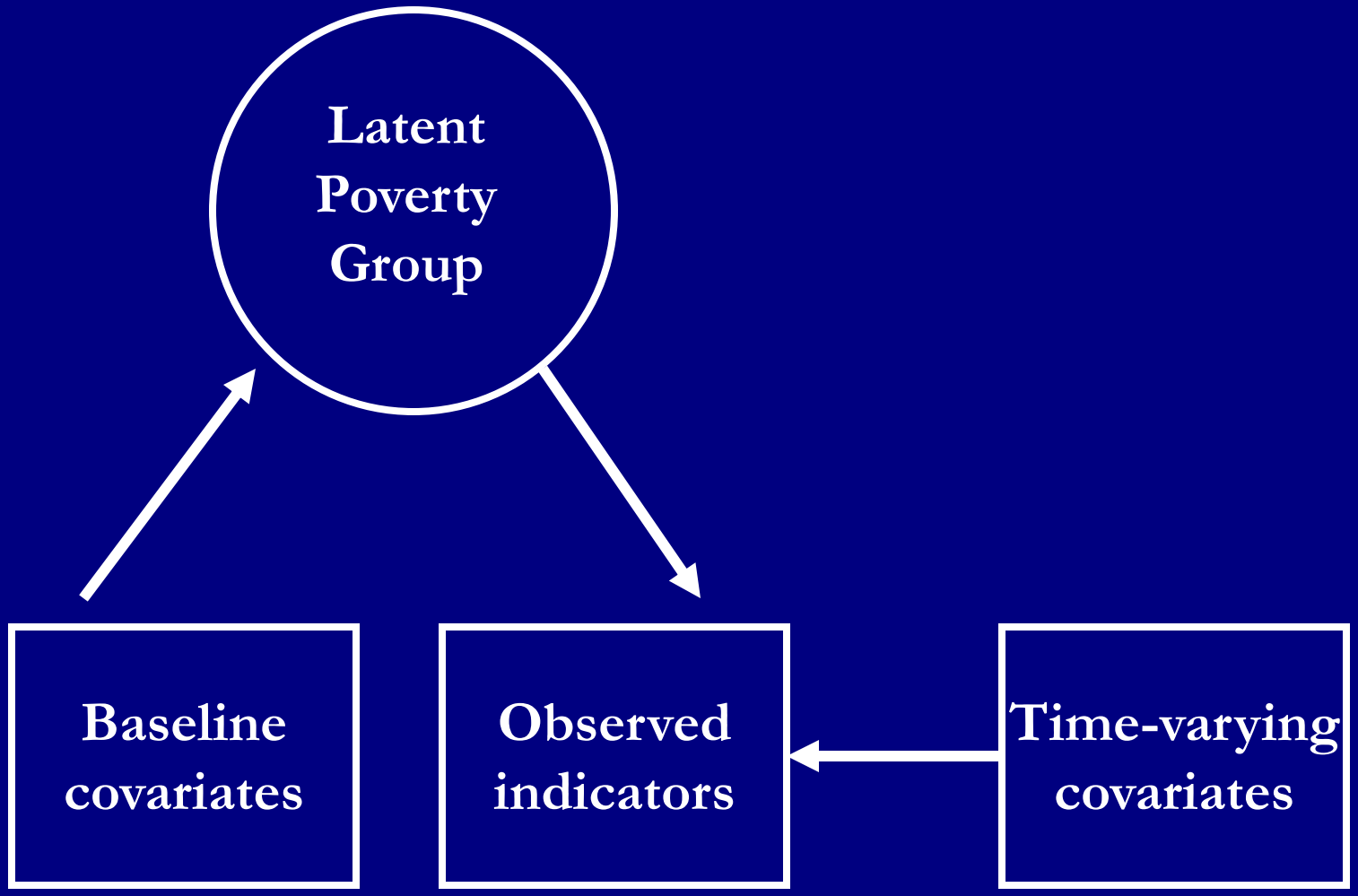
Group-Based Trajectory Analysis Using Latent Class Growth Models

The population is composed of a mixture of groups with distinctive distributions

Group membership is unobserved and represented by a latent categorical variable

Observed indicators at each time point as indicators of latent class

Modeling Framework



Data

Dataset

- Panel Study of Income Dynamics
  Child Development Supplement
  Wave I (PSID-CDS)

Sample

- Children ages 8-12 in 1997

Sample Size

- 942 children

Measures

Family economic trajectories

child annual poverty status from birth

Time-varying covariates

child living with one or two parents

Time-stable covariates

child gender, age, race of head, # children in family, unemployed head, female head, head < high school education

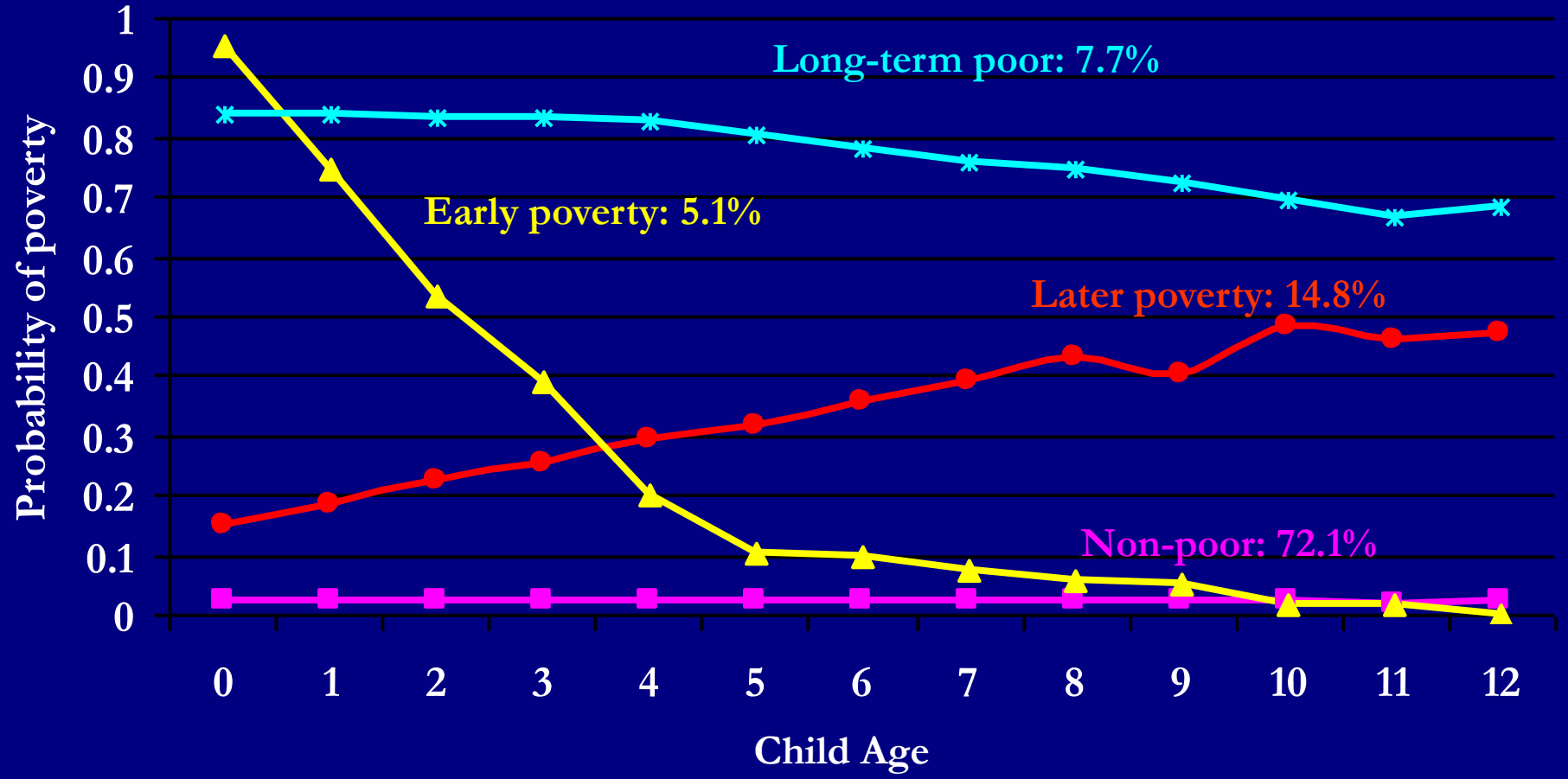
How many latent

trajectory poverty groups?

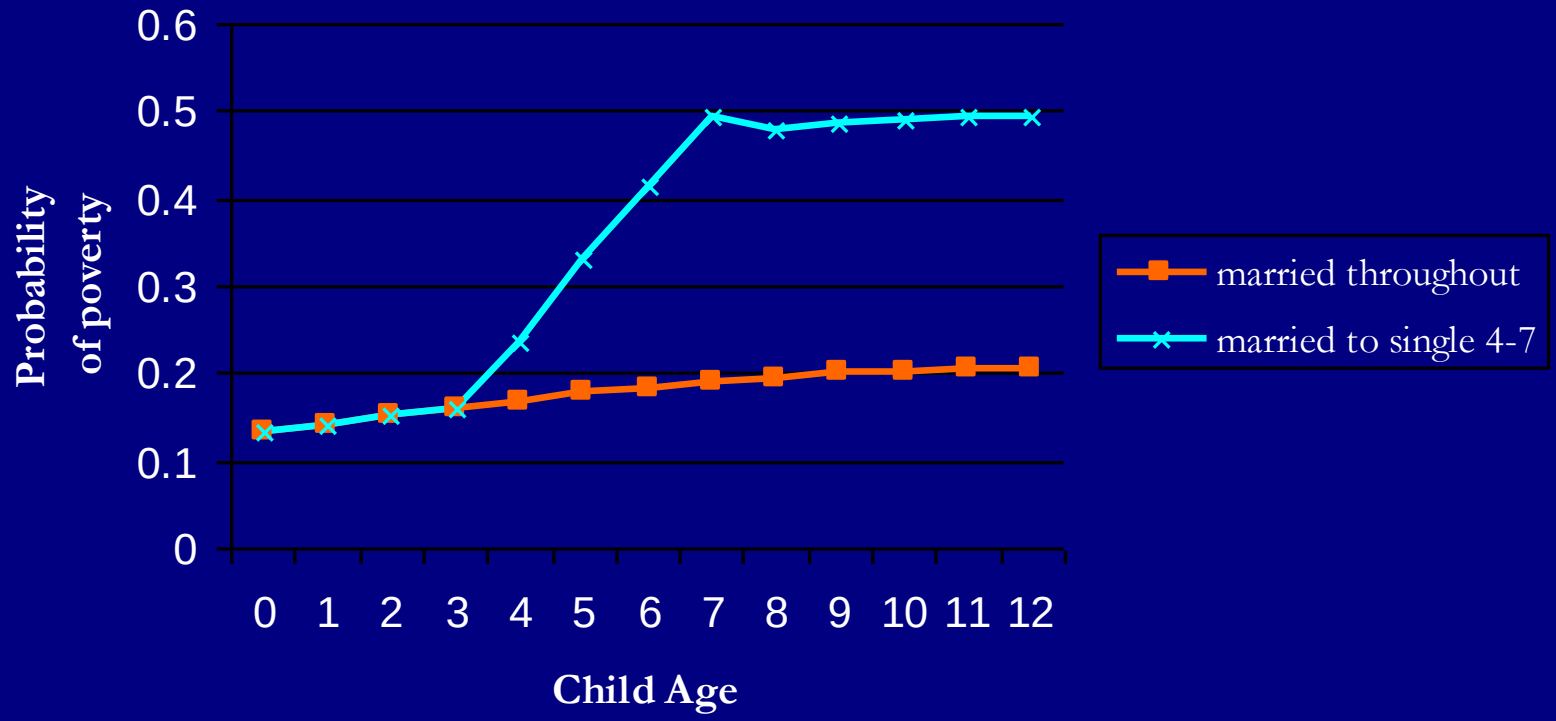
Model Fit

Number of Latent Trajectory Groups	BIC	AIC
3-group solution	-2429.10	-2346.68
4-group solution	*-2392.96*	*-2276.61*
5-group solution	-2431.26	-2280.98

Estimated Probability of Living in Poverty
LCGA: 4-Group Solution



Family Structure Change When Child is 4-7: Later poverty group



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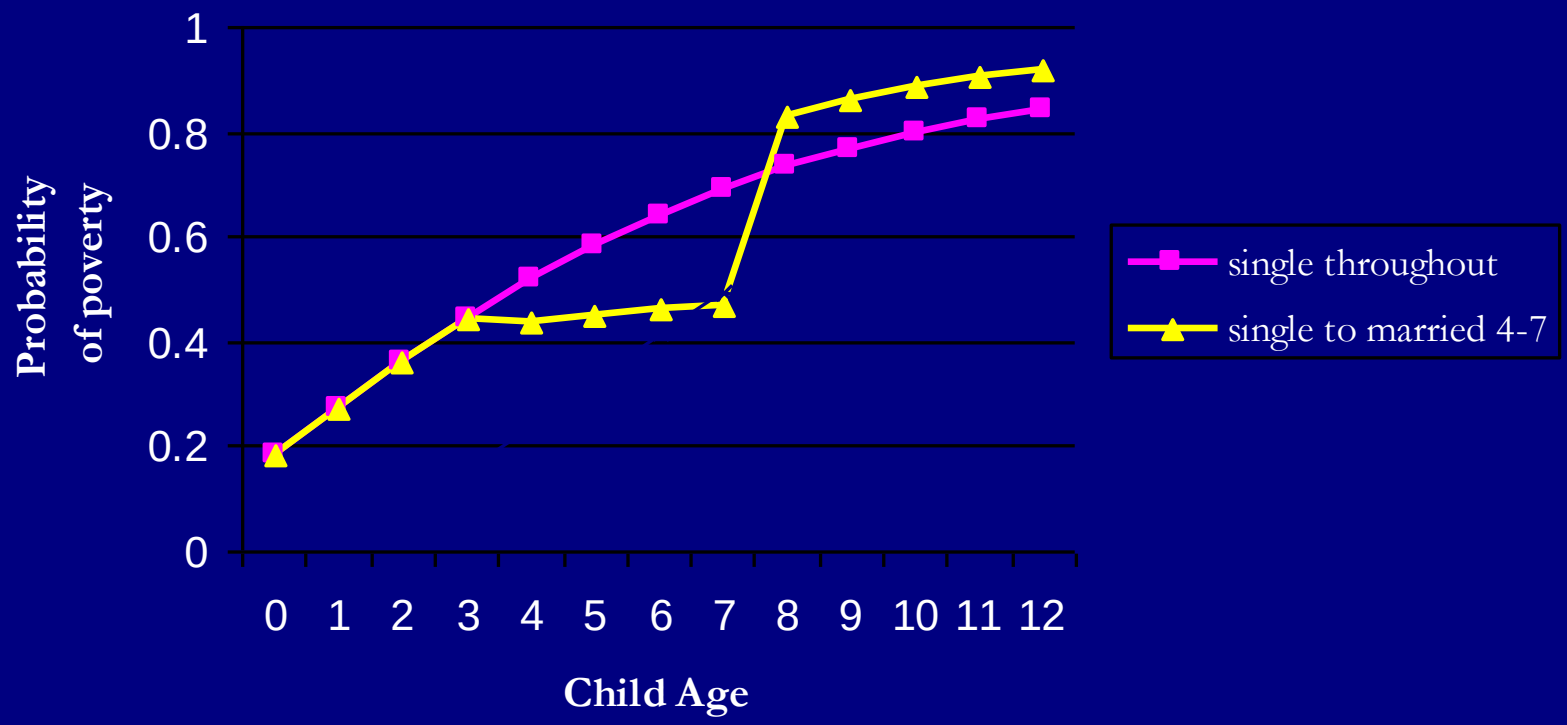
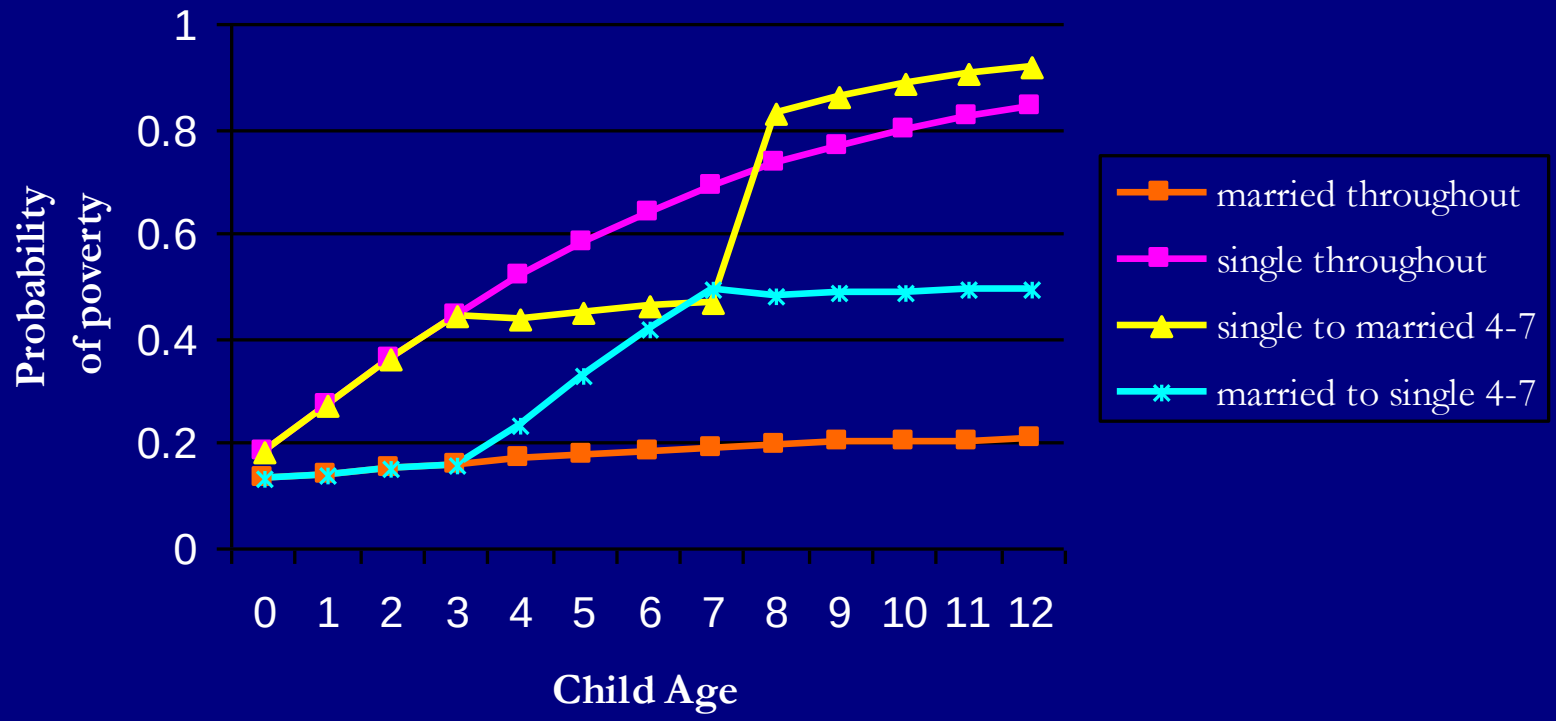
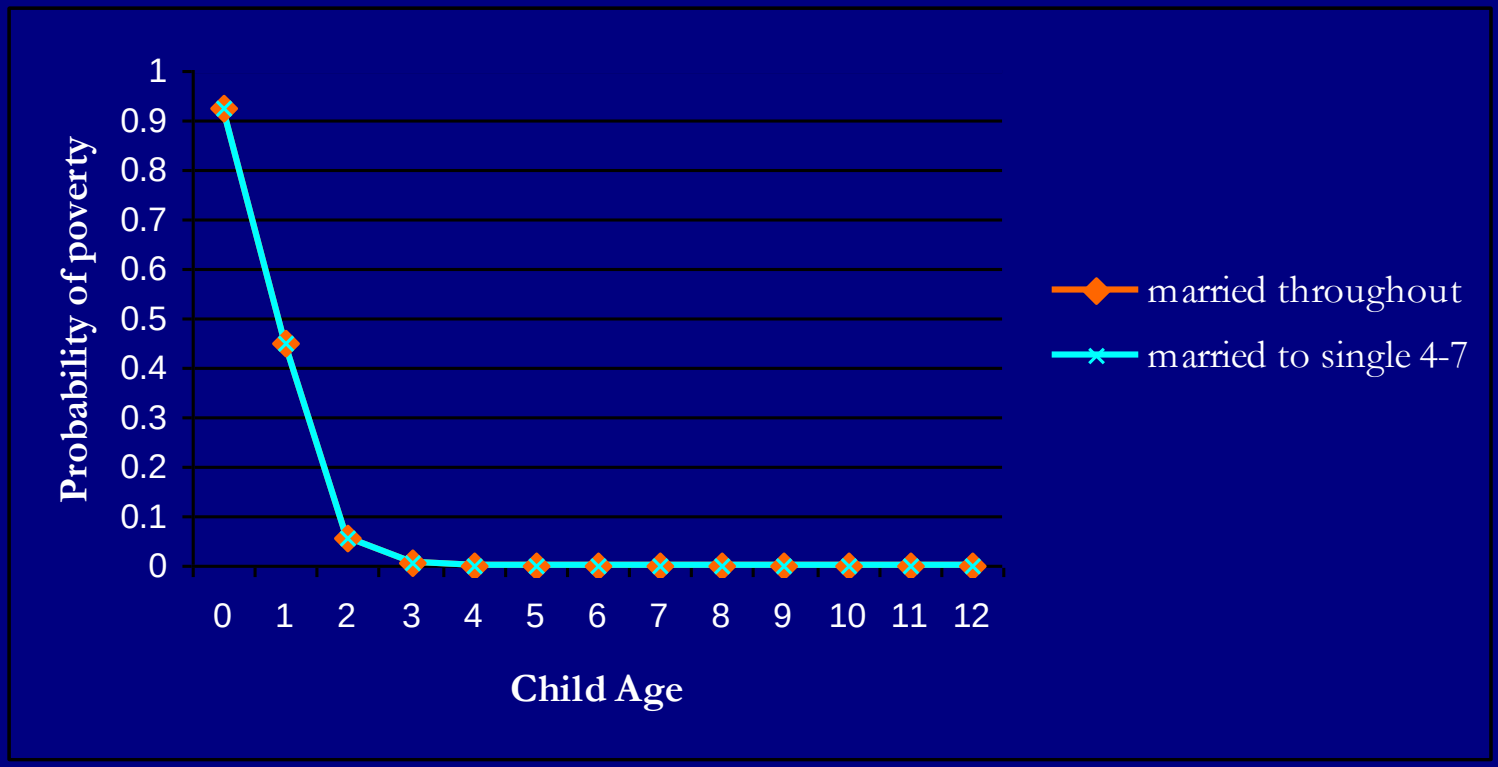


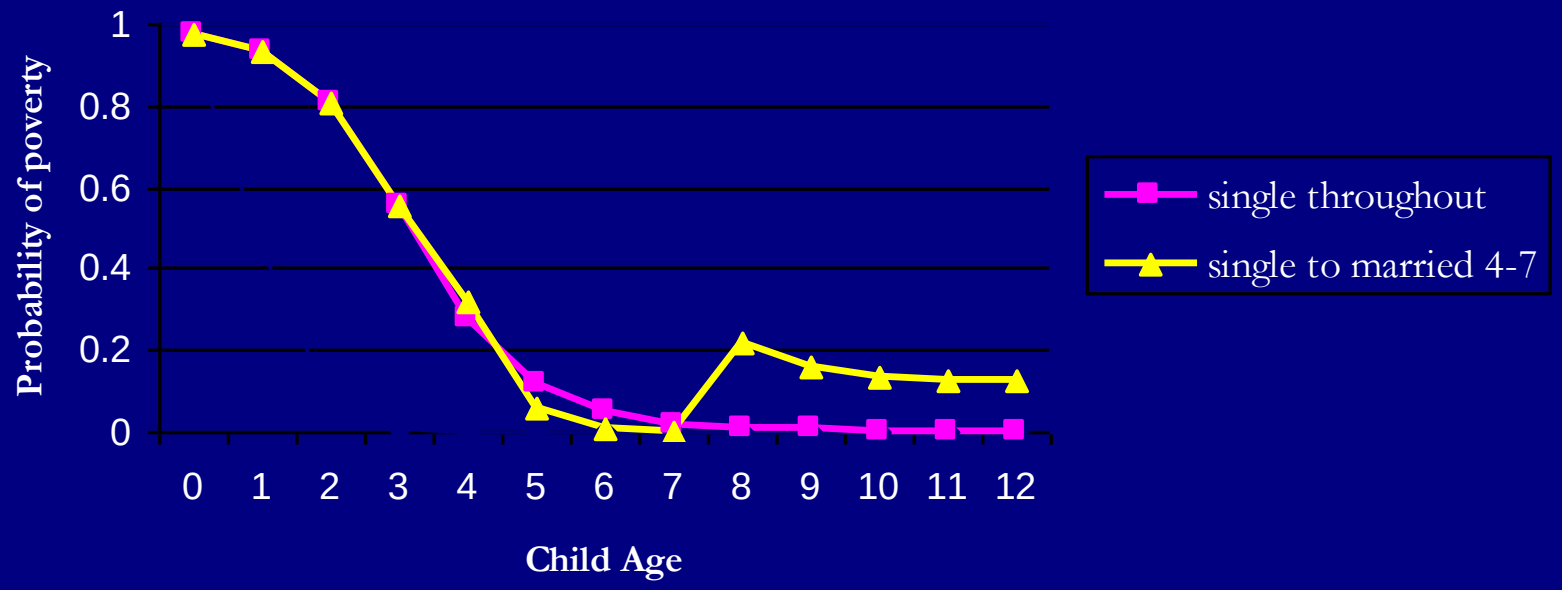
Family Structure Change: Later poverty group



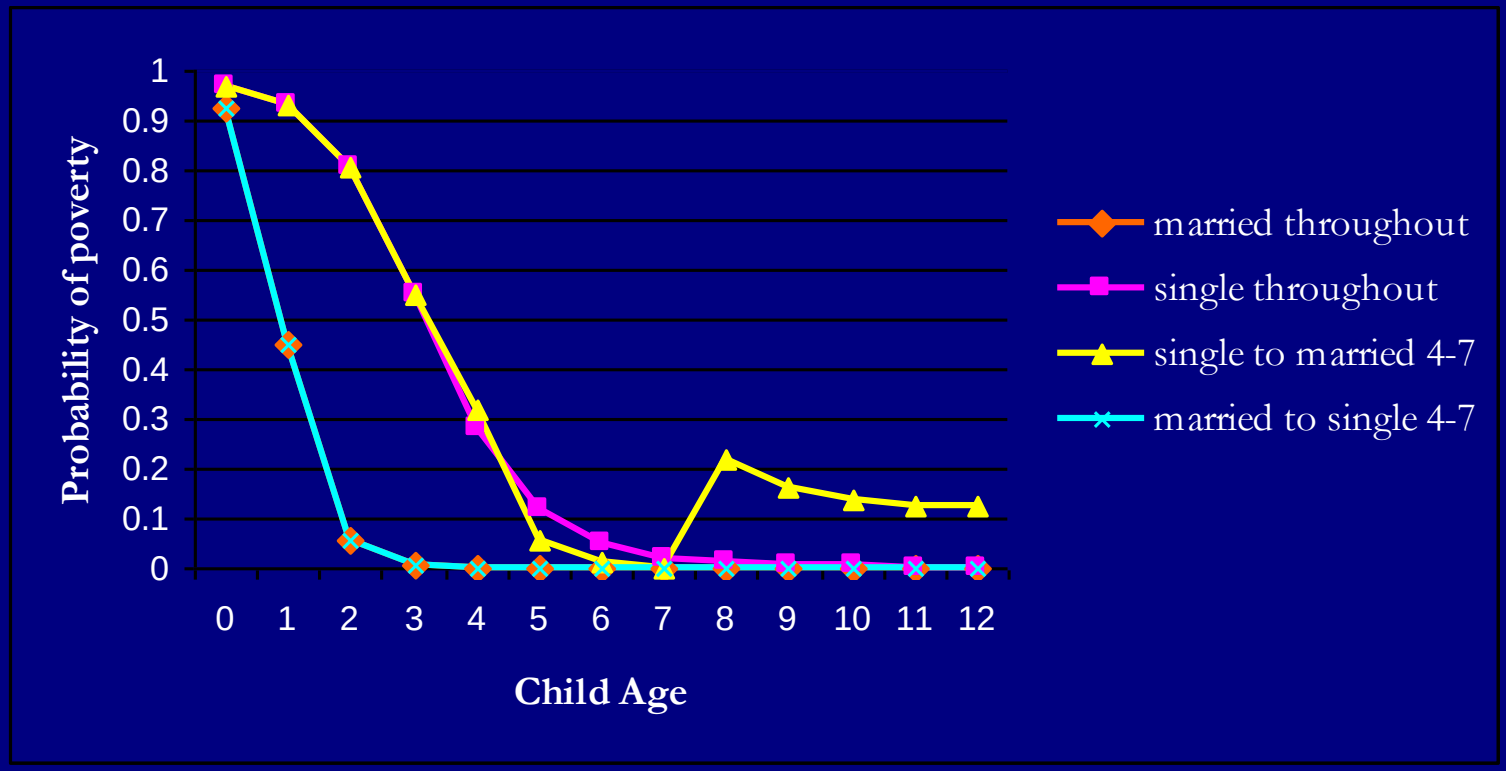
Family Structure Change When Child is 4-7
Early poverty group



Family Structure Change When Child is 4-7
Early Poverty Group



Family Structure Change: Child 4-7 Early poverty group



Summary of Major Findings

- Among children who are persistently poor, marriage and divorce do not alter the risk of poverty
- Divorce accelerates movement into poverty for children who start out life with relatively low probability of poverty
- Among children moving out of poverty, transitions from two-parent to one-parent households do not alter poverty trajectories. However, children who move from single-parent households, to two-parent households, and back again, experience somewhat greater risk of poverty later in childhood

Next Steps

Examine the consequences for child health and development of poverty trajectories and family structure transitions.

Control for other time-varying determinants of poverty trajectories, such as parental health and employment.

Consider additional indicators of family economic circumstances.