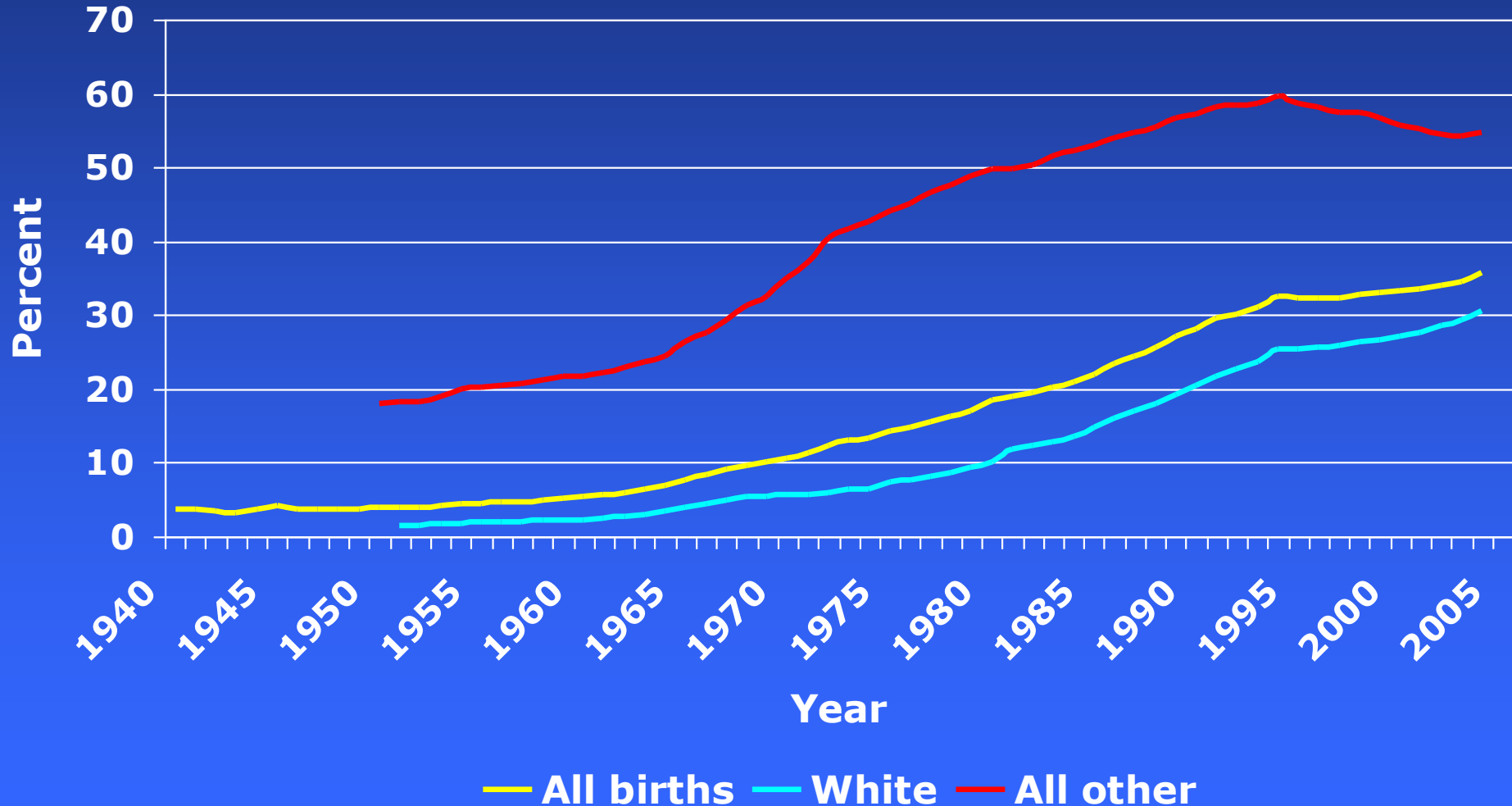


Fragile Families

Sara McLanahan
Princeton University

Births to Unmarried Mothers, U.S.



Motivation

- Increase in non-marital childbearing = *fragile families*
- Multiple/conflicting perspectives on causes and consequences
 - Change in culture; change in economic conditions
 - No negative consequences; serious consequences
- Lack of good data on unmarried couples (especially fathers)
- The Fragile Families Study – 1998-2000
 - 5000 births (oversample of non-marital births)
 - Interviews with mothers, fathers and children
 - Start at the birth (hospital)

The Questions

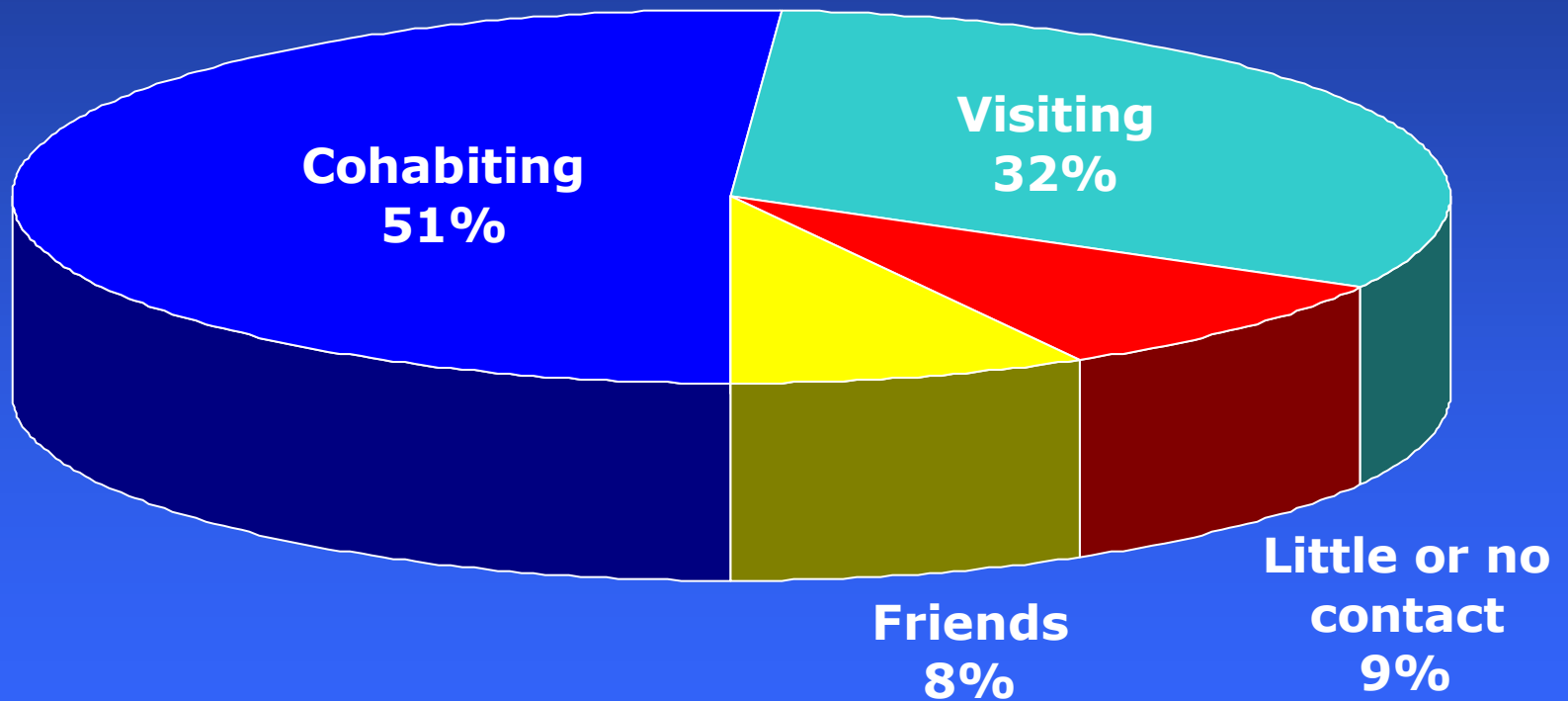
- What is the nature of parental relationships at birth? What are parents' capabilities?
- What happens to parental relationships over time?
- How do family structure & stability affect parental resources (financial and health)?
- How do family structure & stability affect the level and quality of parental investments in children?
- How do family structure & stability affect child cognitive and socio-emotional development?

Question #1

What is the nature of parental relationships at birth? What are parents' capabilities?

- *High hopes and low capabilities*

Relationships at Birth



Father Involvement at Birth

	Total (%)
Gave money/bought things for child	80
Helped in another way	76
Visited baby's mother in hospital	88
Child will take father's surname	92
Father's name is on birth certificate	84
Mother says father wants to be involved	95
Mother wants father to be involved	94

Parental Capabilities

	Mothers		Fathers	
	<i>Married</i>	<i>Unmarried</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Unmarried</i>
Age (mean)	29.3	23.6	31.8	26.8
Teen parent*	3.7 (7.5)	26.0 (44.2)	0.1 (0.4)	14.2 (25.2)
First birth	35.3	45.2	34.7	49.4
Child with other partner [†]	11.7 (17.7)	36.7 (66.6)	17.8 (27.1)	39.7 (68.2)
White, non-Hispanic	48.9	21.9	50.6	17.8
Black, non-Hispanic	11.7	39.2	13.8	43.0
Hispanic	28.6	35.5	29.4	35.0
Other	10.8	3.4	6.1	4.3
Immigrant	28.7	18.3	25.9	17.9
Two parents growing up	61.9	40.3	68.1	42.8

* () = Conditional on first births [†] () = Conditional on higher order birth

Capabilities cont'd

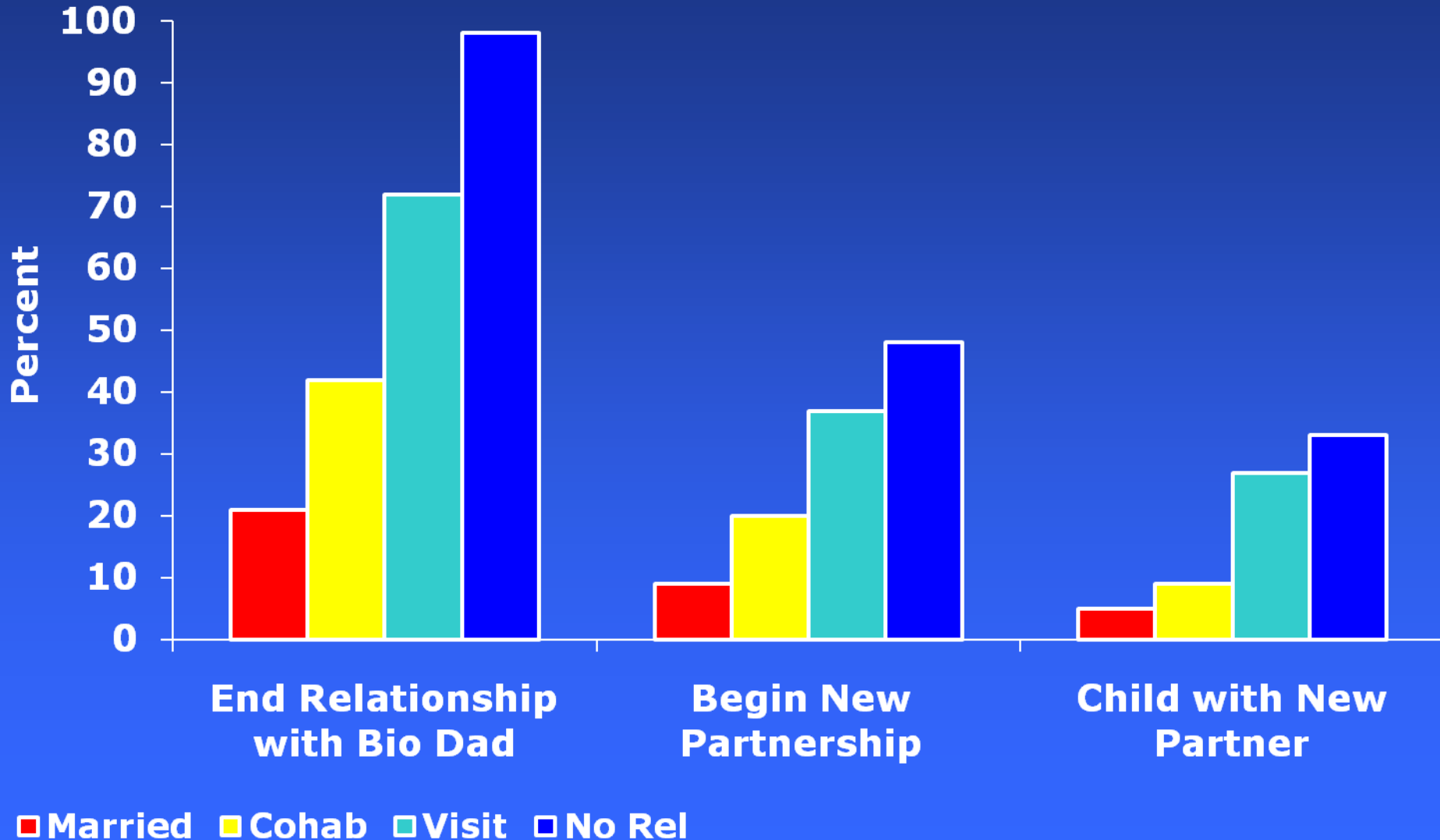
	Mothers		Fathers	
	<i>Married</i>	<i>Unmarried</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Unmarried</i>
<i>Education</i>				
Less than high school	17.8	44.9	18.8	41.3
High school or equivalent	25.5	36.7	21.4	37.6
Some college	21.1	15.8	30.3	17.4
College or higher	35.7	2.4	29.5	3.7
Earnings (\$ mean)	25,618.9	11,114.2	38,568.5	18,801.5
Worked last year	79.3	81.4	95.7	88.4
Poverty status	14.0	42.8	13.2	33.9
Not working at birth	--	--	5.7	23.7
<i>Health^a</i>				
Poor/fair health	10.4	15.8	8.1	14.3
Health limitations	7.1	10.1	5.4	12.1
Depression	13.2	15.9	8.1	13.1
Heavy drinking	2.0	7.8	25.1	27.2
Illegal drugs	0.3	2.4	1.6	8.8
Father incarcerated			8.0	38.0

Question #2

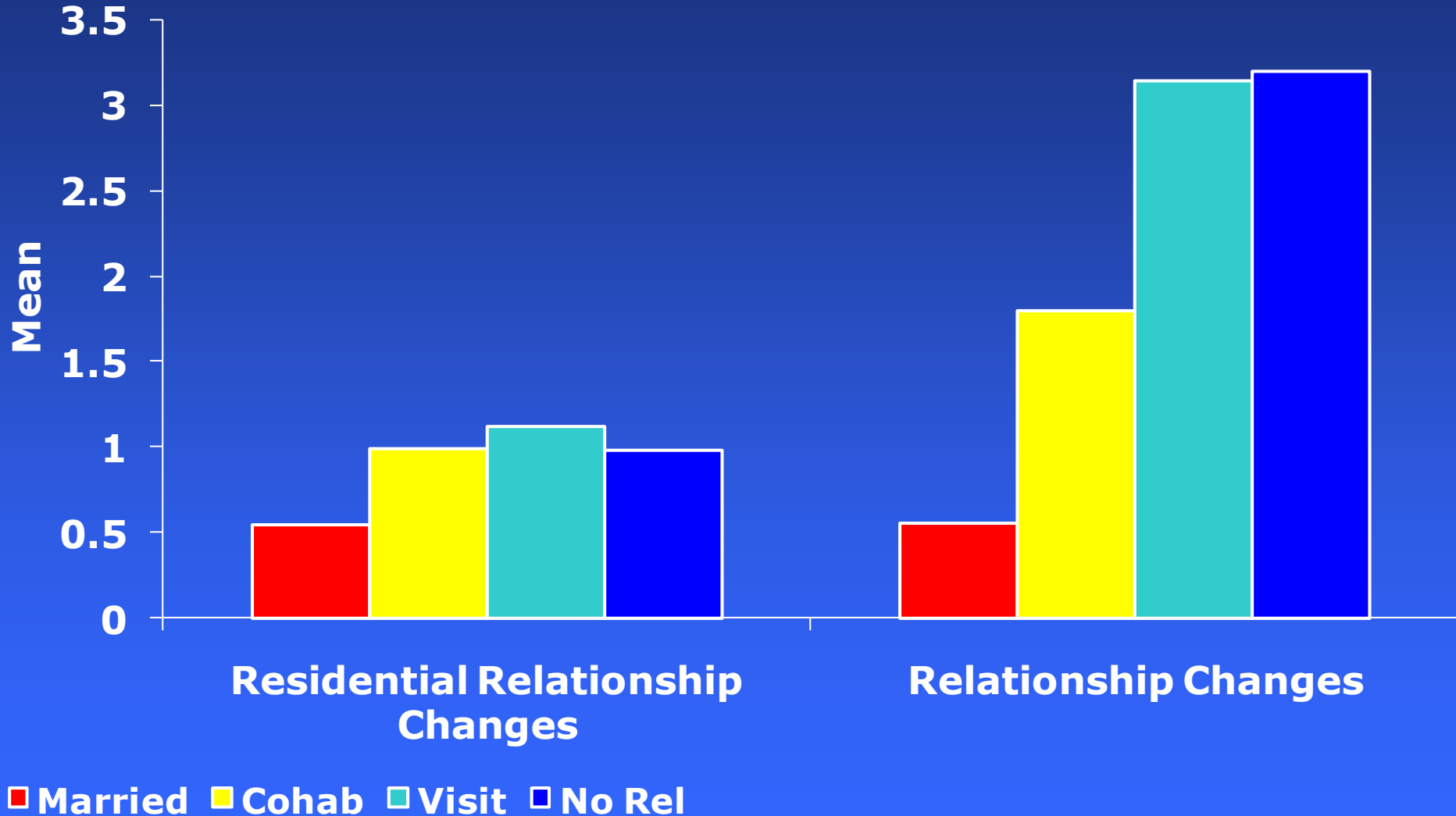
What happens to parental relationships over time?

- *Instability and growing complexity (MPF)*

Relationships thru Age 5



Instability thru Age 5



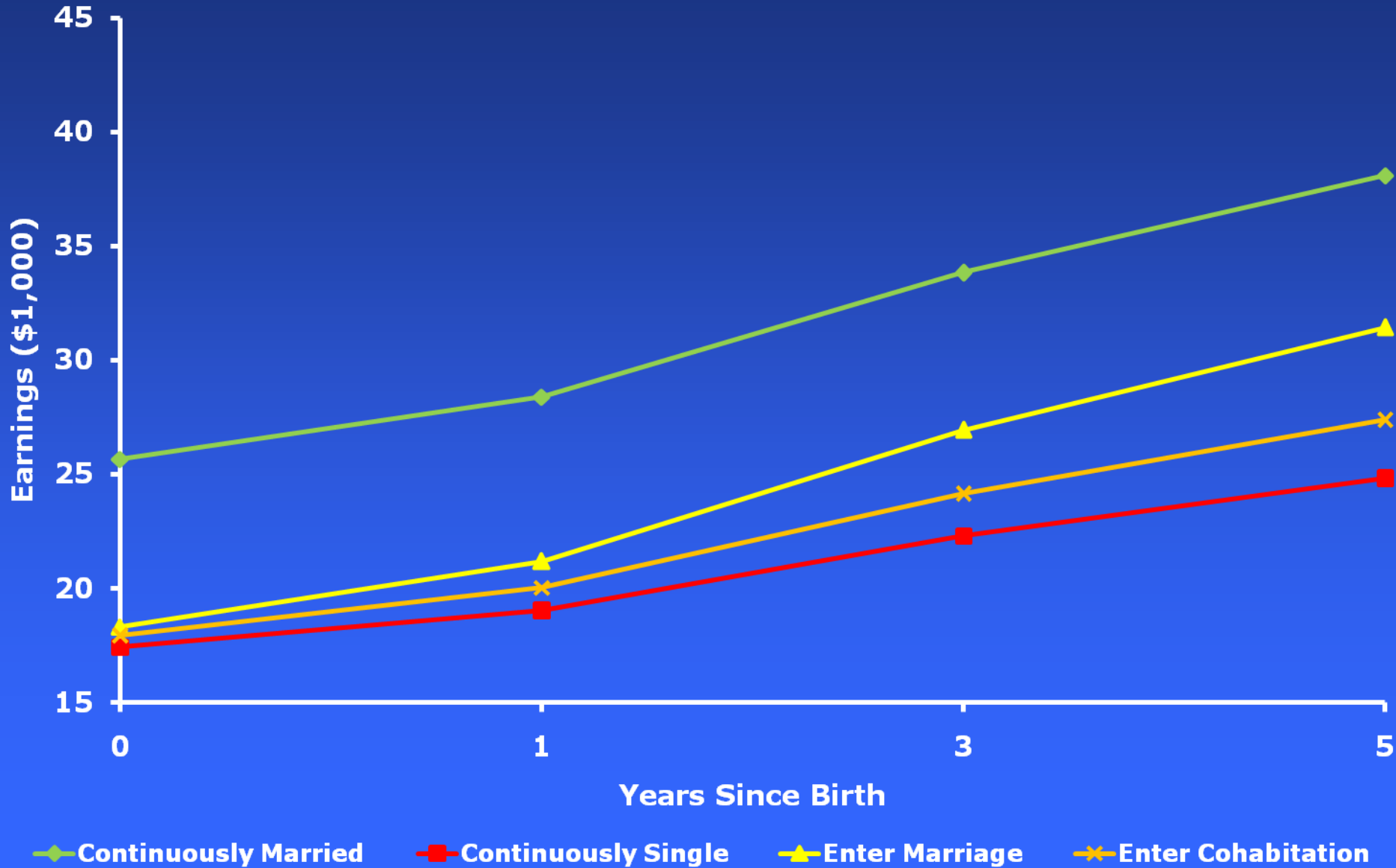
Question #3

How do family structure & stability affect parental resources (financial, health)?

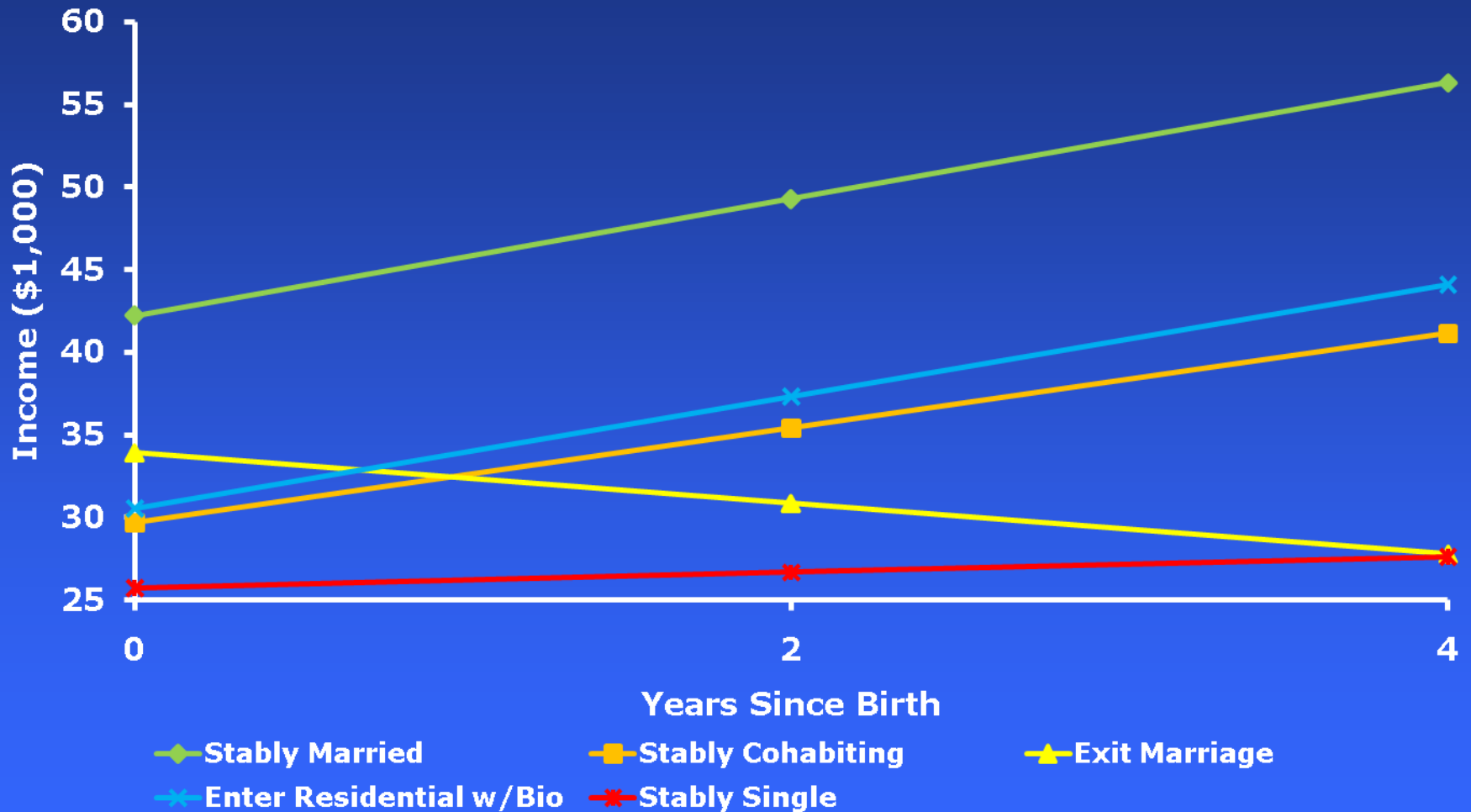
- *Marriage & co-residence increase income*
- *Instability reduces health*

Fathers' Earnings Trajectories

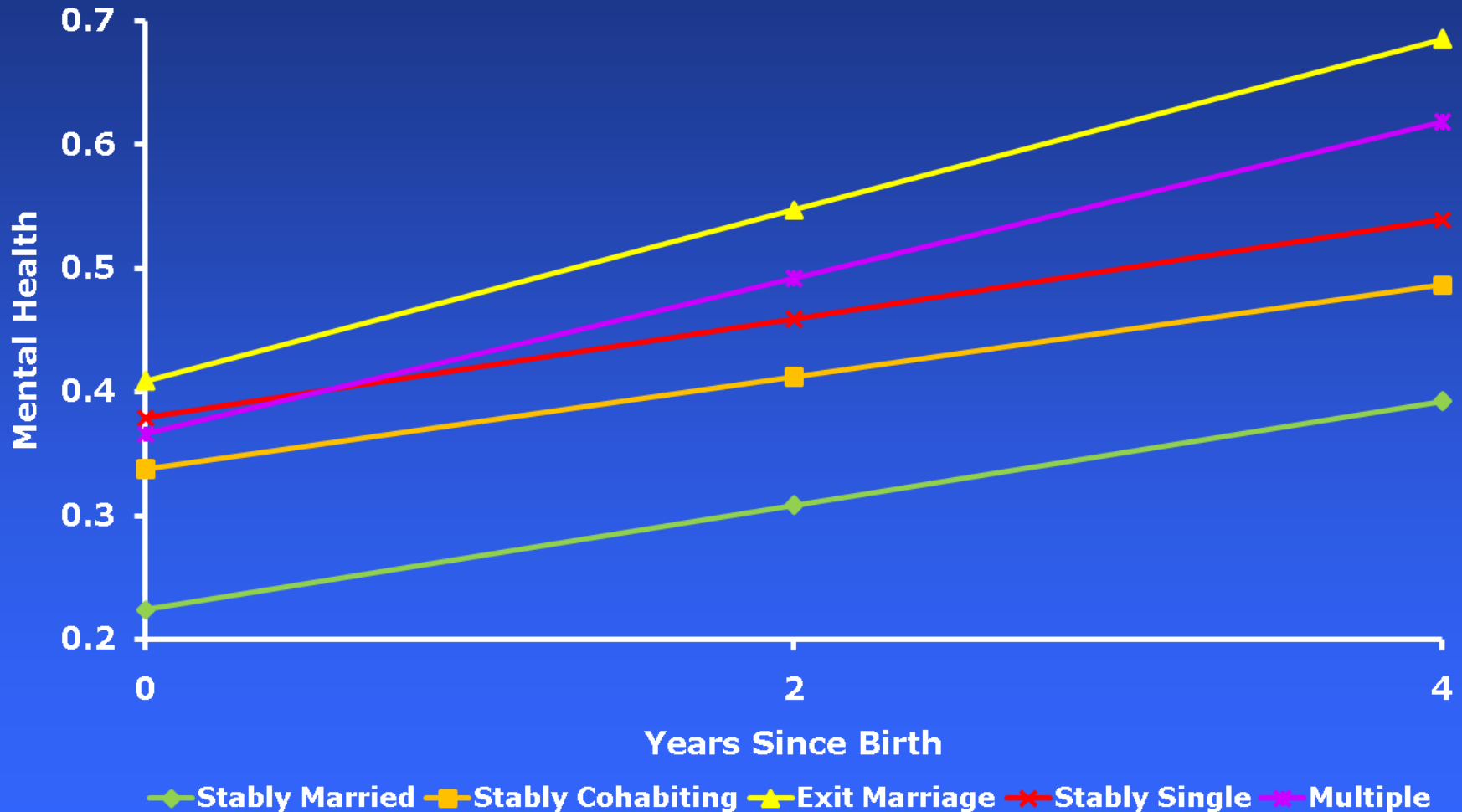
(with controls)



Mothers' Income Trajectories (with controls)



Mothers' Mental Health Problems (with controls)



Question #4

How do family structure & stability affect the level and quality of parental investments in children?

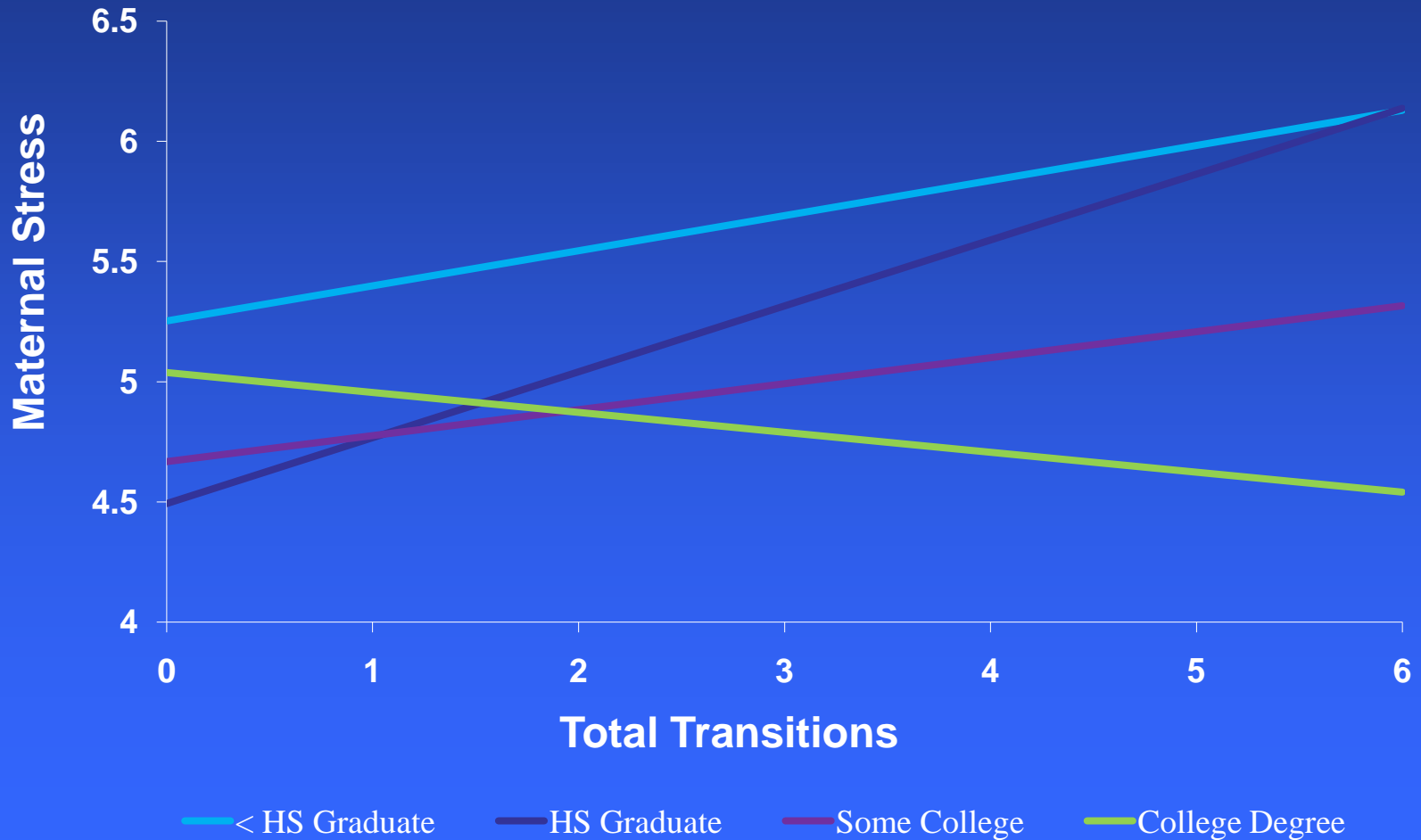
- *Non-residence reduces fathers' investments*
- *Instability reduces mothers' investments, depending on education*

Bio-Father Involvement

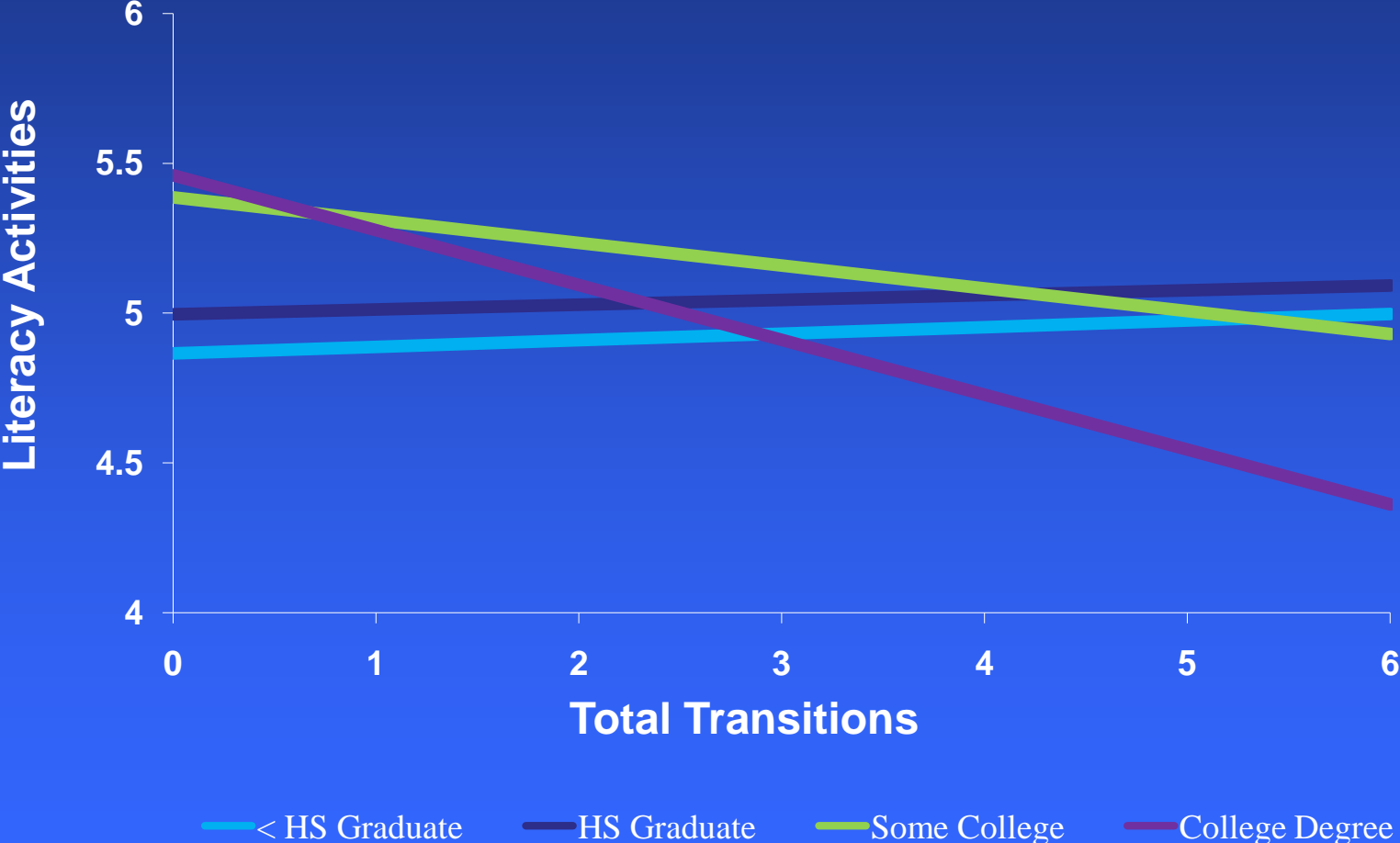
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	Year 1 (%)	Year 3 (%)	Year 5 (%)
<i>All fathers</i>			
Lives with child	51	42	36
<i>Non-resident fathers</i>			
Saw child in past year	88	78	72
Saw child in past month	63	55	51

Instability and Maternal Stress (by Education)



Instability and Literacy Activities (by Education)



Question #5

How do family structure & stability affect child outcomes?

- *Instability reduces cognitive ability*
- *Instability increases boys' behavior problems*
- *Family structure (single and cohabiting parents) increase boys' behavior problems*

Instability and Child Wellbeing

	# Residential changes	Cohabit age 5	Single age 5
Behaviors Problems			
Externalizing (boys only)	.29*	.10	.54*
Social problems (boys only)	.11*	.22*	.36*
PPVT	-.75*	.15	1.67

† p < .10 * p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .01, two-tailed tests

Thank You

National Institute of Child Health & Development (NICHD), California HealthCare Foundation, Commonwealth Fund, Ford Foundation, Foundation for Child Development, Fund for New Jersey, William T. Grant Foundation, Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Hogg Foundation, Christina A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation, Kronkosky Charitable Foundation, Leon Lowenstein Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, A.L. Mailman Family Foundation, Charles S. Mott Foundation, National Science Foundation, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Public Policy Institute of California, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, St. David's Hospital Foundation, St. Vincent Hospital and Health Services, and US Department of Health and Human Services (ASPE and ACF).

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