

How are Children Linked to Current Cohabitors' Expectations of Marriage?

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Abstract

This project examines whether having children is linked to expectations of marriage among cohabitators who reported being engaged or having plans to marry when they started living together. Children from prior relationships or the current relationship are associated with lower expectation, but being pregnant is associated with higher expectations.

Children, Cohabitation, & Marriage

Most marriages are preceded by cohabitation but fewer cohabiting unions are transitioning to marriage – why?

- Most cohabitators expect to marry
 - Only a third are engaged or report definite marriage plans at start
- Maybe the growing presence of children?
 - More births are occurring in cohabiting unions
 - More cohabitators are bringing children from past relationships into their new unions
- Raising children remains a common ideological reason for marriage in the U.S.
- Raising children during cohabitation may reduce a common motivation for marriage
 - Growing approval of raising children in cohabiting unions

Research Question

Among engaged cohabitators or those with definite plans to marry, is the presence of children linked to expectations of marriage?

- Variation by ‘type’ of children

Shared children

- Already a two-parent family
 - Stress of early parenthood
- Less likely to expect to marry?*

Currently pregnant

- ‘Magic moment’ of hopefulness
- More likely to expect to marry?*

Step-children

- Lack of clear guidelines about stepparent roles
 - Potential jealousy over ex-partners
- Less likely to expect to marry?*

Other Key Factors

- Union factors
 - More concrete marriage plans – such as formal engagement – increase odds of marriage
 - Prior union experiences and longer durations of cohabitation likely reduce expectations of marriage
- Socioeconomic and demographic factors
 - Less advantaged men and women are less likely to marry overall and less likely to transition from cohabitation to marriage

Data

- National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), 2011-2015 cycle
 - Nationally representative survey of 20,621 men and women aged 15-44
- Analytical sample:
 - Currently cohabiting (N = 2,621)
 - In response to the question: “At the time you began living together, were you and [partner] engaged to be married or did you have definite plans to get married?”, reported “yes, engaged to be married” or “not engaged but had definite plans” (N = 867)
 - Valid responses on key covariates (N = 861)

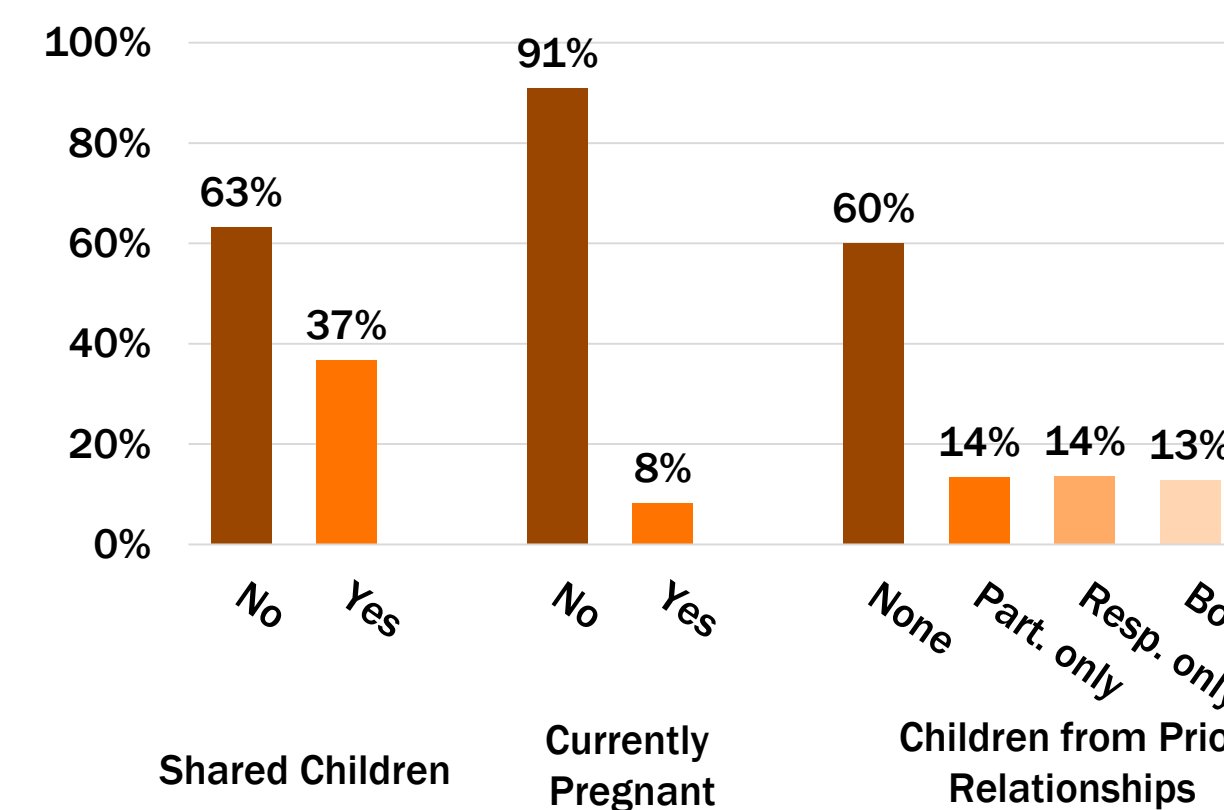
Variables & Method

- Dependent variable: marriage expectations
 - “Do you think you and [partner] will marry each other?” Definitely yes, probably yes, probably no, definitely no, don’t know
 - Dichotomized into “Definitely yes” vs. all other categories
- Key independent variables: children
 - Shared children (yes/no)
 - Currently pregnant (yes/no)
 - Children from past unions (none, partner only, respondent only, both)
- Control variables include union variables and socioeconomic/demographic characteristics
- Analyses are weighted

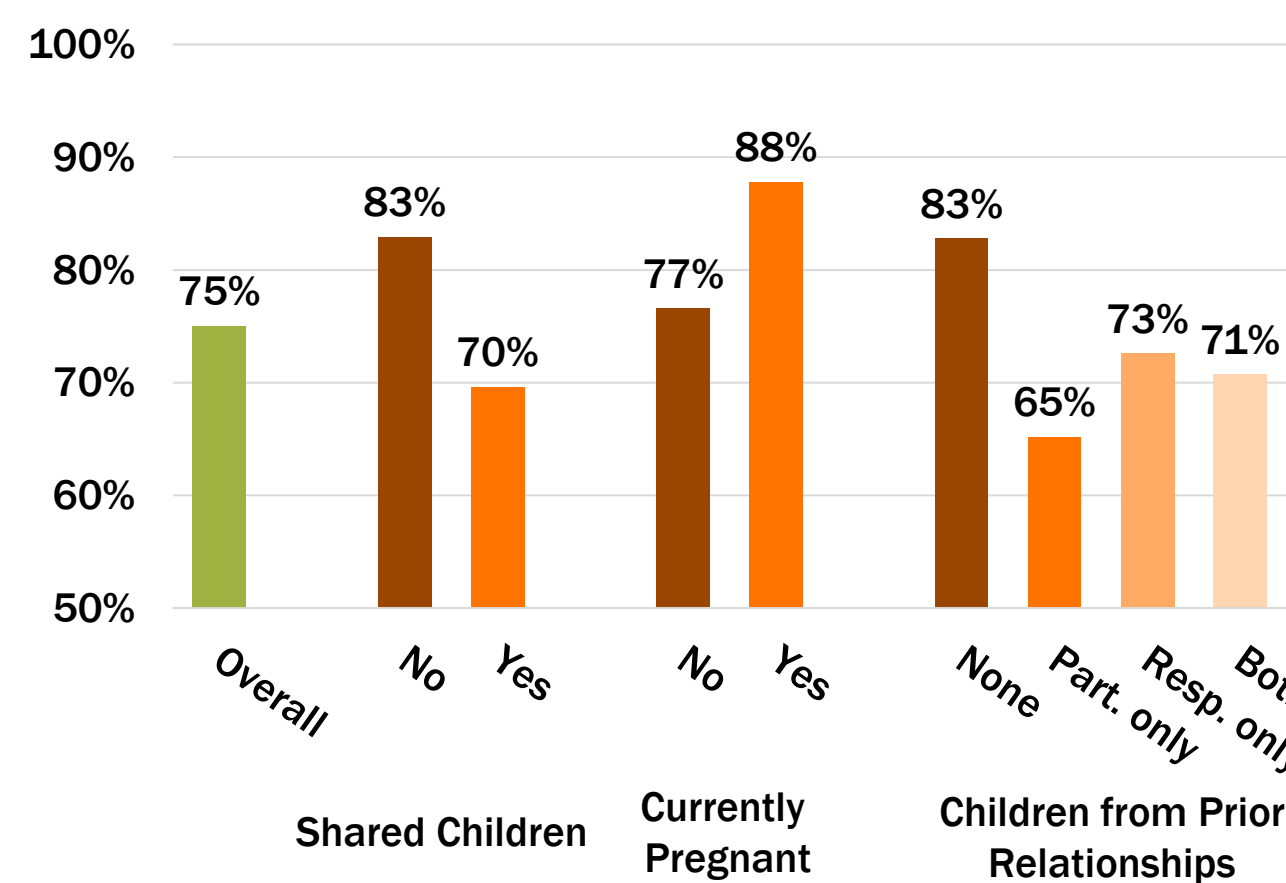
- Approach: nested logistic regression models; all models control for engagement vs. plans

- Model 1: Children only
- Model 2: Children + union variables
- Model 3: Children + union variables + socioeconomic/demographic characteristics

Presence of Children



Proportion Who Think Will Definitely Marry



Odds Ratios from Logistic Regression: Definitely Marry vs. Any Other Response

	Model 1: Children Only	Model 2: Children + Union Variables	Model 3: Children + Union Variables + SES/Demo.
Shared Children - Yes	0.45 ***	0.46 *	0.55 *
Currently Pregnant - Yes	2.36 *	2.44 *	2.39 *
Children from Prior Relationships			
None	--	--	--
Partner only	0.41 *	0.45 *	0.37 **
Respondent only	0.56	0.56	0.52 *
Both have children	0.38 **	0.39 **	0.49
Unweighted N	861	861	861

*p ≤ 0.05, **p ≤ 0.01, ***p ≤ 0.001

Note: Models contain covariates as indicated in header; not shown for brevity.

Multivariate Findings

- Among men and women with strong initial marriage plans, those with shared children were less likely to expect to definitely get married than those without children
- BUT, being pregnant actually increased the odds of expecting to definitely marry
 - Only for those with no shared children (not shown)
- Generally, having children from past relationships was linked to lower expectations

Summary

- Having children, or expecting a child, is associated with marriage expectations among cohabitators with strong initial marriage plans
 - Challenges of childrearing?
 - Institutionalization of cohabitation?