

**Sociodemographic Profile of Children Experiencing Living in a Maternal Cohabiting Household:
Current Estimates and Trends over Time**

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, cohabitation has increased dramatically (Bumpass & Sweet 1989b; Wilhelm 1998; Bumpass & Lu 2000; Casper & Cohen 2000; Raley 2001; Seltzer 2004; Wydick 2007), and a large portion of these couples live with dependents. This means that more children and adolescents are experiencing cohabiting parent households. Recent estimates show that 45% of currently cohabiting women have children present in their household (Casper & Cohen 2000), and about 40% of all children will spend time in a cohabiting parent household before they turn 16 (Bumpass & Lu 2000). Because of this rapid increase, researchers have sought out many answers about this growing family type: cohabiters with children. Studies have examined which sociodemographic characteristics predict women's likelihood of cohabiting generally (Bumpass & Sweet 1989b; Wilhelm 1998; Bumpass & Lu 2000; Casper & Cohen 2000; Raley 2001; Lichter, et al. 2006; Thornton, et al. 2007), and the odds that women will give birth within a cohabiting relationship (Bumpass & Sweet 1989a; Manning 1993; Manning & Landale 1996; Bumpass & Lu 2000; Manning 2001) or cohabit after the birth of a child (Bumpass & Lu 2000). However, prior studies have not given much attention to the characteristics of *children* experiencing cohabiting households, and no studies have examined the trends in how the composition of children in these households have changed *over time*.

It is important to distinguish the sociodemographic composition of children who ever live with their mother and her cohabiting partner (referred to as residing in a "maternal cohabiting household" from this point forward) from the composition of women who cohabit with a child in the household. This is because differential fertility rates across women who do and do not cohabit may cause the composition of sociodemographic traits within a sample of mothers to be different from the composition of traits within a sample of children. Additionally, within cohabiting women, fertility rates could vary across specific characteristics (e.g. poverty or educational attainment) that would then be more or less prevalent in a sample of children who have experienced living in a maternal cohabiting household. And since all the studies about the influence of cohabitation on children necessarily use samples of children, the interpretations of such studies would be more informed by sociodemographic characteristics across a

child sample, rather than across a mother sample. Only a few studies have examined the composition of sociodemographic traits among a sample of children who have lived in a maternal cohabiting household (Graefe & Lichter 1999; Bumpass & Lu 2000; Fields 2003), but none have conducted statistical tests for whether the traits of these children are significantly different from children who do not experience living in a maternal cohabiting household. This dissertation will focus on cohabitation from a child's perspective, not the parent's.

There is also a need for research to be more attuned to changes in cohabitation over time. Because cohabitation has been increasing since the mid-1970's, it is important to acknowledge that the composition of the cohabiting population has changed, and the meaning of cohabitation has changed. Given these shifts, we might expect there to be period or cohort effects in the estimates of which types of children ever live in a cohabiting household, but prior literature has yet to examine whether such time trends exist. Thus, I will use recent longitudinal data (Children and Young Adults of the National Longitudinal Study of Youth, 1979) to address the aforementioned gaps in the literature.

First, I will explore how the proportion of children who ever lived in a maternal cohabiting household before age 18 varies by 9 sociodemographic characteristics: their gender, race/ethnicity, mother's age at child's birth, mother's marital status at the child's birth, mother's educational attainment, household income, household poverty status, region of residence, and urbanicity of residence. And I will test whether the composition of traits among children who live in a maternal cohabiting household are significantly different from the traits of children who do not live in a maternal cohabiting household. Then I will examine the time trends in the composition of children experiencing maternal cohabitation by graphing the changes in the nine sociodemographic traits across age (~life course timing) and birth year (~historical context). This information will help us understand whether the experience of living in a cohabiting household is becoming either more or less evenly distributed among children with different sociodemographic characteristics. For example, it may show that as a child ages or as the prevalence of cohabitation increases over time, poverty is less correlated with a child's probability of experiencing maternal cohabitation.

Background

Consistent with life course theory's focus on linked lives, researchers who have studied the impact of parental cohabitation on offspring have found significant negative effects across a wide variety of economic (Manning & Lichter 1996; Morrison & Ritualo 2000; Manning & Brown 2006), educational (Thomson, et al. 1994; DeLeire & Kalil 2002; Dunifon & Kowaleski-Jones 2002; Manning & Lamb 2003; Brown 2004; Raley, et al. 2005; Kowaleski-Jones & Dunifon 2006), behavioral (Thomson, et al. 1994; Hogan, et al. 2000; DeLeire & Kalil 2002; Dunifon & Kowaleski-Jones 2002; Hao & Xie 2002; Manning & Lamb 2003; Brown 2004; Kowaleski-Jones & Dunifon 2006; Bulanda & Manning 2008), and emotional (Brown 2004; Kowaleski-Jones & Dunifon 2006) outcomes. And we know from life course theory that these negative outcomes can constrain the child's human agency in ways that may continue to impact the child throughout his or her life. But which children are most likely to experience maternal cohabitation? It remains unclear which subgroups of children and adolescents are significantly more likely to experience maternal cohabitation. The answer to this question will shed light on who is most at risk of experiencing the associated poor outcomes, and it may offer clues about whether it is these characteristics or the experience of living with a cohabiting mother that explains these poor outcomes.

There are several studies that predict which *women* are most likely to cohabit (Bumpass & Sweet 1989b; Wilhelm 1998; Bumpass & Lu 2000; Casper & Cohen 2000; Raley 2001; Lichter, et al. 2006; Thornton, et al. 2007). Mother's and children's sociodemographic characteristics are correlated, so this previous research on women provides some clues about the characteristics of children who experience maternal cohabitation. That said, not all women who cohabit will bear children, and parous women who cohabit may do so prior to giving birth their first child. Therefore, it is unlikely that the sociodemographic profile of women who cohabit is the same as the profile of children who experience living with a cohabiting mother.

Studies that establish which types of women are most likely to bear children within a cohabiting relationship also provide clues about the characteristics of children who experience maternal cohabitation (Bumpass & Sweet 1989a; Manning 1993; Manning & Landale 1996; Bumpass & Lu 2000; Manning

2001). That said, these studies do not account for the differential fertility rates among cohabiting women (e.g., poor women may bear more children in cohabiting relationships than women with a higher income). Thus, the sociodemographic profile of children who live with a cohabiting mother could be notably different than the profile of mothers who cohabit.

There are only a few papers that have specifically examined how specific sociodemographic traits are distributed among a sample of children who experience maternal cohabitation (Graefe & Lichter 1999; Bumpass & Lu 2000; Fields 2003), but these studies have not conducted statistical tests for whether the traits of these children are significantly different from children who do not experience living a maternal cohabiting household.

Q1.1: What is the sociodemographic composition of children who experience living in a maternal cohabiting household before the age of 18 compared to children who do not ever experience living with a cohabiting mother?

Life course theory emphasizes that age and historical context both influence how experiences impact a person's life (Elder, et al. 2003). Thus, age and survey year are important factors to account for when studying a child's experiences with family structure. It is likely that the characteristics of children who experience living in a maternal cohabiting household may differ over time as maternal cohabitation has become more normative. Only one study has examined the demographic traits of children who live in maternal cohabiting households across more than one time point (Bumpass & Lu 2000). However, that study only compares the data of samples from two different time points (i.e. 1980-84 and 1990-94), and does not explore any trends in how the composition of children who live in maternal cohabiting households change across incremental units of time, such as age or birth year.

Q1.2: How has the sociodemographic composition of children who experience maternal cohabitation changed across age and across birth year?

My research will improve upon prior studies in multiple ways. First, I will test for statistical differences between the sociodemographic compositions of children who have ever lived in a maternal cohabiting household and children who have not. Second, I will consider how the composition of

children in maternal cohabiting households changes over time by looking at trends in their sociodemographic traits across age and birth year. Third, by using data from the Children and Young Adults of the National Longitudinal Study of Youth, 1979 (CNLSY), I will have biannual surveys from an uncensored longitudinal prospective sample of children who were born between the years of 1979 and 1988 and reached age 17 between the years of 1997 and 2006. Thus, my sample contains more recent data and covers a longer time period than related prior studies, which will be particularly important as I examine the time trends in how the sociodemographic profiles of children who experience maternal cohabitation may have changed over time.

Data

I will analyze data from the Children and Young Adults of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1979 (CNLSY). The respondents in the CNLSY are the biological children of the female respondents of the NLSY-79, which is a nationally representative sample of 12,686 youths who were aged fourteen to twenty two at the time of their first interview in 1979. Beginning in 1986, the children of the female NLSY-79 respondents were interviewed every two years, and this data can be linked to the mother's interview data from the NLSY-79 that has been continued from 1979 to 2006. The child data cover the years from 1986 through 2006, and each biannual survey wave contains child data from the respondents aged zero to fourteen years. Also, starting in 1994, young adult interviews were conducted with the child respondents aged fifteen years or older.

Sample

In order to use only prospective family structure histories, the children in my sample must have been born in 1979 or after. Also, in order to avoid censoring problems and allow for the same length of exposure to the risk of experiencing a maternal cohabiting household, I must only include children in the sample who were able to age out of childhood (i.e. turn 18 years old) by the final available interview in 2006. Therefore, they must not have been born after 1988 (see Figure 1). Also, in order to insure correct family structure measurement, I will limit the sample to respondents who are living in the household of their biological mother (female respondent of the NLSY-79). Therefore, I will have a sample of N=4,073

children. I will use multiple imputation to handle the missing values in my data, so that I can maintain the largest possible sample. I will use the ICE command in Stata to conduct the multiple imputation because it has the most flexibility in specifying the imputation model for each variable (Royston 2005).

Figure 1: Respondent age, by birth year and survey year, for all available respondents in the CNLSY data

Birth Year	Survey Year													
	1980	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006
1970	10	12	14	16	18									
1971-72	8-9	10-11	12-13	14-15	16-17	18								
1973-74	6-7	8-9	10-11	12-13	14-15	16-17	18							
1975-76	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11	12-13	14-15	16-17	18						
1977-78	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11	12-13	14-15	16-17	18					
1979-80	0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11	12-13	14-15	16-17	18				
1981-82		0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11	12-13	14-15	16-17	18			
1983-84			0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11	12-13	14-15	16-17	18		
1985-86				0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11	12-13	14-15	16-17	18	
1987-88					0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11	12-13	14-15	16-17	18
1989-90						0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11	12-13	14-15	16-17
1991-92							0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11	12-13	14-15
1993-94								0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11	12-13
1995-96									0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11
1997-98										0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9
1999-00											0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7
2001-02												0-1	2-3	4-5
2003-04													0-1	2-3
2005														1

Variables

Ever experienced a maternal cohabiting household: In order to construct my variables about children’s experiences with maternal cohabitation, I will create biannual (annual until 1990) measures of the child’s family structure by using data from three specific variables that are based on the mother’s household roster during each of the NLSY-79 interviews: the mother’s marital status, whether a spouse of the mother lives in the household, and whether a partner of the mother lives in the household. Because my focus is on whether the child ever experienced a maternal cohabiting household of any kind, I do not create separate categories classifying whether the child is living in a cohabiting biological-parent or cohabiting stepparent household; likewise, I do not create separate categories for distinguishing between

whether the child is living in a married biological-parent family or married stepparent family. Therefore, the three possible family structure categories are married, cohabiting, or single mother. Another reason why I chose to create the family structure variables this way is because I need to keep as many waves as possible in my sample in order to adequately assess change over time, and, unfortunately, a measure for father presence that would allow for further distinctions is only available after the child interviews start in 1986. After creating the measures for family structure at each wave, I combine the measures from each interview to create cumulative measures at each interview representing whether the child has ever experienced a maternal cohabiting household up to that point in time.

Sociodemographic traits: The other variables I will use in my analyses are age in years, birth year, gender, race/ethnicity (based on mother's race/ethnicity), mother's age at child's birth, mother's marital status at first interview after child's birth (never married, currently married, divorced/separated), mother's educational attainment at each interview, household income at each interview, household poverty status at each interview, region of residence at each interview, and urbanicity of residence at each interview.

Analysis

My analysis will consist of the following steps for each of these nine sociodemographic variables: gender, race/ethnicity, mother's age at child's birth, mother's marital status at child's birth, mother's educational attainment, household income, household poverty status, region of residence, and urbanicity of residence. First, I will use the appropriate method to test for a significant bivariate relationship between the sociodemographic trait and ever experiencing a maternal cohabiting household before the age of 18. That is, if the sociodemographic variable is categorical, I will run a crosstabulation with a Chi-square test for significant differences between the children who have experienced a maternal cohabiting household and the children who have not. Similarly, if the sociodemographic variable is continuous, I will run a t-test for significant differences instead. Second, I will plot the proportions (if categorical) or means (if continuous) of the sociodemographic variable among children who have ever experienced a maternal cohabiting household across each birth year (1979-1988) and across each age (0-17) to examine patterns

in changes over time. Although some of the sociodemographic traits are time-invariant (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, mother's age at the child's birth, and mother's marital status at the child's birth), other variables are time-varying. The measurement of these time-varying variables will change according to the focus of the analysis. For the trends across birth year, I will measure the time-varying variables (i.e., mother's educational attainment, household income, household poverty status, region of residence, and urbanicity of residence) in the interview following the child's birth. But for the trends across age, I will create age-specific measures of the time-varying variables from the biannual interviews.

Summary

I will use longitudinal data from NLSY79 and CNLSY to study children's experiences with living in a maternal cohabiting household. I will determine the sociodemographic profile of children who are at greatest risk of ever living in a maternal cohabiting household, and then I will look for trends in how this profile may have changed across age and across birth year. My research will be an important contribution to the family structure literature because it examines a growing family type, cohabiters living with children, and focuses on the sociodemographic traits of the *children* in these families, rather than on the traits of the *mothers*. It also considers how these traits could change over time, which has never been explored before in the literature on children's experiences with cohabiting parent families.

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