

## **Cohabitation and Children's Family Instability**

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01-02-06

## Abstract

The association between parental cohabitation and children's family instability is the focus of this paper. We use data from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) to produce estimates of children's family experiences with an emphasis on the number of family transitions children experience. We also compare the experiences of children as reported by parents to those reported by children. We find that estimates of children's experience in cohabiting families is reliable and that looking at only marital status transitions greatly underestimates the amount of instability in children's lives. Adding transitions into and out of cohabitation increases our measure of family instability by about 30 percent for White children and over 100 percent for Black children.

**Acknowledgement:** A previous version of this paper was presented at the Annual Meetings of the Population Association of America, Atlanta Georgia, May 8-11. We appreciate the helpful comments and suggestions by Larry Bumpass and those who attended our presentation. This research has received support from the National Center for Child Health and Human Development (Grant Number HD41019-01), and from the Population Research Center at the University of Texas.

## **Cohabitation and Children's Family Instability**

A rapidly growing body of research documents increases in adults' experiences in cohabiting relationships, but fewer studies have investigated the increases in children's experience with a cohabiting parent. From the research documenting the experience of adults, we know that today more often than not marriages occur between two people who are already living together. As cohabiting unions have become more common, they have also become less stable. Whereas once 60 percent of cohabiting unions would result in marriage, now only about half (53%) marry (Bumpass and Lu 2000). Not surprisingly, though the details are less well documented, children are also now more likely to live in a cohabiting household. Cohabitation rates are high among the divorced population, many of whom have children (Bumpass, Raley, and Sweet 1995). Furthermore, an increasing proportion of births take place to cohabiting women (Bumpass and Lu 2000). The net result of these changes is that today between birth and age 16, children can expect to spend an average of 3 years in a single parent family, 1.5 years with a cohabiting parent, and 11.5 years with married parents, including step parents (Bumpass and Lu 2000). Although they provide important insight into the children's family experiences while growing up, these numbers tell us little about the amount of instability children experience in their family life.

The association between parental cohabitation and children's family instability is the focus of this paper. We use data from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) to produce estimates of children's family experiences with an emphasis on the number of family transitions children experience. Importantly, we also compare the experiences of children as reported by parents to those reported by children. Our goal is to boost our confidence in our

measures of cohabitation by investigating how sensitive our estimates of children's experience are to the measurement approach.

## **BACKGROUND**

Our motivation arises from the concern that children whose mothers cohabit are likely to experience unusual amounts of instability in their lives. Previous research suggests that family transitions are stressful for children and that the negative effects of these cumulate (e.g. Cherlin et al 1991; Wu and Martinson 1993; Wu 1996). Cohabitation is itself an unstable family form. Cohabiting unions in general result in marriage only about half the time (Bumpass and Lu 2000), and those that do not result in marriage often dissolve within a couple of years (Bumpass, Sweet, and Cherlin 1991). Furthermore, marriages preceded by cohabitation are more likely to end in divorce. Whether this association is causal is still the subject of debate. Regardless, children whose parents cohabit are likely to experience multiple family transitions throughout their childhood. If parents' transitions in and out of cohabiting unions are as difficult for children as parents' divorce and remarriage, we can expect parental cohabitation to be associated with negative outcomes, such as decreased educational attainment and higher levels of teen fertility.

On the other hand, if most cohabiting parents eventually marry or they stay together until the child reaches adulthood, cohabitation would not be associated with high levels family instability. Most of the research showing high levels of instability for cohabiting couples has combined the experiences of parents and non-parents. The cohabiting unions of parents may be more stable and marriage-like than cohabiting unions of those without children. However, suggesting that cohabiting unions with children are similar to those without children, one recent study shows that children do not increase the stability of cohabiting unions (Manning

2000). The primary goal of this research is to resolve this question: how much family instability is missed when we look only at transitions in marital status?

A second goal is to investigate the quality of our data on parental cohabitation. In contrast to marriage, cohabitation is ambiguous and thus retrospective reports of cohabitation experiences may not be reliable. To address this issue, we evaluate whether we get similar estimates of children's experience with a cohabiting parent using two different analytical techniques, 1) an indirect approach using mother's marital, cohabitation and birth histories to describe children's experiences and 2) a direct approach using retrospective reports of adults about their experiences as children. Previous research has shown that estimates of children's experience of parental divorce from the indirect approach are consistent with estimates from the direct approach (Bumpass and Sweet 1989). Our interest here is whether it is also consistent for measures of children's experience with parental cohabitation and for measures of family instability.

Much of the demographic research examining the effects of parental divorce on children has used the child's reports of family experiences while growing up (e.g. Wu and Martinson, 1993; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Kiernan and Cherlin, 1999). This approach may work better when we ask about transitions involving formal, long-lasting relationships. Even as adults, children may not know their family context during their earliest years and may not know enough about their mother's boyfriends to decide whether they were cohabiting partners. At the same time, children may be more reliable reporters of mothers' cohabitation experiences than mothers since they may have less motivation to omit cohabiting partners from the record. Thus, before producing a description of children's recent family experiences, we compare estimates produced by mother's reports to those produced by child's reports. We provide the details of our approach below.

## DATA AND METHODS

The first part of our analysis examines the robustness of the measures of childhood family experiences. For this analysis, we use data from both the 1987-88 wave of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) and the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG). The NSFH is a national sample of 13,008 adults age 19 and older in 1987-88. Because respondents were asked to provide complete marital and fertility histories as well as information about their household living situations while growing up, these data enable us to construct childhood family experiences for both the respondent generation and their children. The indirect approach involves producing a record for every child born to female respondents. The dates of cohabitation, marriage, divorce, and remarriage are compared to the child's birth date to create variables describing the children's experiences with parental cohabitation and marriage.

The data are less well equipped to estimate children's experiences while growing up using the direct approach. First, these data do not allow us to distinguish between married and cohabiting households. Furthermore, because respondents report their household composition year by year the questioning approach may miss information when respondents experience multiple changes within a year. Nonetheless these data do provide an opportunity to test the robustness some aspects of the marital history data.

Our second source of data is the NSFG. In 1995, the NSFG interviewed 10,847 women age 15 to 44. Similar to the NSFH, these data contain information on the respondent's marriage, cohabitation and birth histories, and we use those data to construct measures of NSFG respondent's children's experiences while growing up. The NSFG also contains information on respondent's experiences growing up, but the NSFG questioning approach differs substantially from the NSFH approach. Whereas the NSFH asked respondents to report their household

composition each year of their childhood, the NSFG asks them to report all changes in household composition and guardians' marital status while growing up. This section of the questionnaire begins by asking the respondent whether her parents were married when they were born and whether her parents ever married. Interviewers then show the respondent a card with examples of living arrangements and ask about the household composition right after the respondent was born. Following, respondents were asked whether they experienced any changes prior to leaving home to be on their own, the reasons for these changes (including the marriage of a cohabiting parent), and the details of their next household composition. This sequence is repeated until the respondent has no more changes to report. Questions about visiting non-custodial parents interleave questions about household composition. An advantage of this approach over that of the NSFH is that it allows respondents to report more than one change in living situation in one year. Another advantage is that it includes information on the starting and ending dates of the custodial parent's marriages and spells of cohabitation. A disadvantage is that this is a much more complicated design, with multiple screening questions and flow-checks. Consequently, the NSFG constructed a series of family composition variables, which we use to characterize respondents' experiences while growing up.

### **Variables**

For this comparison, we constructed five measures of children's experiences between birth and age 12. The first is a dummy variable indicating mother's marital-cohabitational status at birth. The categories for this variable are cohabiting, married, single and other (no parent or missing). For the sample derived from NSFH respondents' reports of experiences while growing up (i.e. the child's perspective), we cannot distinguish between marriage and cohabitation. For the samples derived from combining NSFG and NSFH respondents' marital,

cohabitation, and fertility histories (i.e. the mother's perspective), we must assume that children are living with their mothers, and thus all the children in the "other" category are there because of missing data on mother's marital or cohabitation history.

The second two variables are zero-one indicators of whether there was any change in family status between birth and age 12. The first measure considers only marital-status transitions and transitions into households with no biological parent. We include transitions into households with no biological parent on the assumption that most children who go to live with a grandparent do so because of a parental divorce.<sup>1</sup> We cannot directly test this assumption, but we do examine whether including transitions into households with no biological parent is common enough to make a difference. Our second dichotomous measure of change in family status includes cohabitation transitions. The final two measures are counts of the number of marital transitions and the number of union transitions (marital and cohabitation) between birth and age 12.

### **Analytical approach**

Our first goal is to examine whether we get similar estimates of children's family experiences regardless of whether we ask adults about their lives as children or we ask parents about their marital and cohabitation experiences while raising children. The indirect approach to estimating childhood experiences by using mother's marital, cohabitation, and birth histories depends on some important assumptions. We assume that children always live with their mothers or, if they do not, that the mother's experiences approximate the experiences children have with whatever adult(s) they reside. Suggesting that this assumption is appropriate,

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<sup>1</sup> Our approach is analogous to Bumpass and Sweet (1989), whose measure of experience in a single parent family includes all those who lived apart from either biological parent.

Bumpass and Sweet (1989) show that estimates of the proportion ever living apart from either biological parent derived from children's reports match estimates derived from mother's marital and birth histories. This indicates that the indirect approach is robust, but the finding is not definitive because the direct estimate is derived from cohort analyses, while the indirect estimate is derived from a period approach. Additionally, we would like to extend this result from marriage to cohabitation histories.

Our analyses begin by comparing measures of childhood family experiences for NSFH respondents born between 1960 and 64 to those for children of NSFH respondents born in the same period. We are not comparing children's reports to the reports of those children's parents. Nonetheless, when weighted, the NSFH should accurately represent the population of women giving birth to children between 1960 and 1964 and those reported births should represent the same population that is represented by NSFH respondents born between 1960 and 1964 (Bumpass and Rindfuss 1979).

This comparison allows us to examine whether parent's reports of marital status at birth and marital status transitions match children's. In addition to the assumption of the indirect approach that children always live with their mothers, one other issue complicates this analysis. Data on NSFH respondents' experiences while growing up are much cruder than our information on the respondents' experiences while raising children. Respondents are asked whom they lived with in each *year* between birth and age 19, while we know the timing respondent's marital status transitions while raising children to the *month*. This should not affect the comparison of birth status or whether there were any disruptions while growing up. However, it might affect the count of number of disruptions if there were many changes within a year. Another problem is that the NSFH respondent sample does not allow us to examine cohabitation experience. This encouraged us to investigate comparisons using the NSFG to see

if our finding that data on marital transitions is robust can be extended to our measures of cohabitation. To include the NSFG we must move to the 1970-74 cohort because of sample restrictions.

Unlike the 1960-64 birth cohort comparison, here we can also compare experiences of *cohabitation* from the mother's perspective to the child's perspective. However, whereas the comparison for the 1960-64 cohort is purely by perspective, the comparison for the 1970-74 cohort involves both perspective and data source. Most importantly, all the NSFG respondents are female. Because the sex of a child affects the child's parent's marital and cohabitation decisions (Morgan, Lye, and Condran 1988), this may bias the NSFG estimates. The parents of boys are less likely to divorce than the parents of girls, and thus the reports of marital instability using the sample of NSFG respondents reporting about their experience while growing up may over-estimate the amount of disruption and instability for the total cohort, including men. Furthermore, the questioning approaches used to establish a mother's cohabitation histories in the NSFH differ substantially from the approach used in the NSFG to collect respondent's experiences while growing up. Thus, if there are differences by perspective, we cannot tell whether these result from differences in perceptions or differences in questioning approach. Nonetheless, if differences by perspective are similar across the different cohort comparisons, we increase our confidence that children's perceptions do not match mother's.

Finally, we compare estimates of childhood experiences for the 1980-84 birth cohort using data on children of NSFH and NSFG respondents. Because of the age restriction on the NSFG sample, we limit the analysis to children who were born to respondents less than age 30 at the time of the birth. Experience is truncated in 1987, the year the NSFH data collection began and thus these analyses reflect children's experiences up to age 7. This comparison offers us an opportunity to see whether two different surveys with slightly different questioning

approaches arrive at the same results, when estimates from both data sources use the same perspective (mother's).

### **Estimates of children's recent family experiences**

After establishing the quality of our measures of family experiences while growing up, we estimate the number of household-composition transitions children can expect to experience by the time they reach age 12, and end our analysis with a description of the most typical pathways through childhood. Expanding on previous work by Bumpass and Lu (2000), the analysis uses period multi-state life-tables to estimate the number of changes in family composition children experience before age 12. To do so, we first produce age-specific estimates of the likelihood of moving from one household composition to another in a given month. (This method is appropriate even though some of these transition probabilities are logically zero.) Because some transitions are rare, we calculate the age-specific transition rates for each month from January 1990- February 1990 to November 1994- December 1994. Once we have these transition rates we produce two estimates of the average number of times children experience a change in family type, one using only changes in formal marital status and another including changes in cohabitation status as well as marriage. Finally, we examine the early-life trajectories for a cohort of children born between 1980 and 1984.

## **RESULTS**

Table 1 shows our comparisons of childhood family experiences while growing up for the three birth cohorts, 1960-64, 1970-74, and 1980-84. Focusing first on the 1960-64 cohort, we see that differences in reports of marital status at birth by respondent's perspective (mother or child) are small. According to these reports, about 7-8 percent of the births were non-marital. Replicating previous investigations (e.g. Bumpass 1984), we get similar estimates of the

proportion of children who experience any marital transition regardless of who provides the report (mother or child). Our measures of the proportion ever experiencing a marital status transition and the number of marital status transitions are also similar across perspectives.

Data from the child's perspective also allow us to see what proportion of those recorded as experiencing a parental marital status transition lived apart from their mothers. Our supplemental analyses suggest that a small proportion (3%) of the 1960-64 birth cohort never lived in a single parent family but did live with no parents. For these respondents, our measure of instability captures movement from a two-parent household into a household with no parents. An additional 3% of the 1960-64 birth cohort did not live in a single mother family, but lived with a single father. The fact that the indirect approach produces similar estimates as the direct approach indicates that even for the small minority of children do not live with their mothers throughout childhood, mother's marital histories approximate the actual experiences of children. In sum, our analysis confirms the finding of Bumpass and Sweet (1989) that estimates of the proportion of children experiencing some time in a household without one of their biological parents derived indirectly from mothers marital and birth histories are reliable and likely valid. Our next goal is to see whether it is equally reliable for measures of transitions into and out of cohabitation. Conveniently, the NSFG collected information about transitions into and out of cohabitation from the child's perspective. To include these data in a comparison, we must move to the 1970-74 birth cohort, because of limitations imposed by the NSFG sampling frame.

[TABLE 1 HERE]

To our surprise, the differences by perspective are much larger for the 1970-74 cohort. Reports from the NSFH (mother's) perspective result in a higher proportion of children experiencing any change in their mother's marital status and a higher number of transitions than

reports from the NSFG (child's) point of view. All of the indicators of instability differ significantly across the two data sources. This is not explained by the fact that NSFG sample is all female because girls are more likely than boys to experience the dissolution of their parents' marriage (Morgan et al 1988). Furthermore, from the 1960-64 cohort to the 1970-74 cohort, the NSFG estimates from the mother's perspective show an increase in the proportion of children experiencing a marital transition and the average number of transitions, but the estimates from the NSFG child perspective are no higher in 1970-74 than the NSFG child perspective estimates for the 1960-64 cohort. Taken together these results indicate that there is a problem with the NSFG approach of collecting respondent's experiences while growing up. One reason for this problem might be the complex design of the questionnaire.

Although the problem with the direct estimates from the NSFG cause use some concern, which we discuss below, the most important finding for our purposes is that these results do not indicate that data on cohabitation are unreliable. Reports of transitions, including transitions into and out of cohabiting unions, are as consistent across these two data sources as our measures of marital status transitions. As a final test, we examined whether differences in experiences differ across two data sources using the same perspective (child's). These analyses, using the 1980-84 cohort, show that we get consistent reports on our measures of both marital and cohabitation experiences since birth. The only significant difference arises in the higher proportion of children born to cohabiting mothers as reported in the NSFG.

We began this part of the analysis concerned by the possibility that mother's reports of cohabitation experience were unreliable. We are reassured by the fact that reports of experience in cohabiting families or of transitions into and out of cohabiting households were as consistent as the reports on marital status. At the same time, we find the differences for the 1970-74 cohort

to be surprising and unsettling. The NSFG approach of asking respondents for their household composition each year while growing up is less than ideal for two reasons: it does not allow us to distinguish marriage from cohabitation and it does not allow respondents to report multiple changes in one year. However, the NSFG's attempt to rectify these problems with a more complex questioning design appears to have backfired, resulting in even lower estimates of instability. We believe the discrepancy for the 1970-74 cohort arises because of differences in questioning approach rather than differences in children's and mother's perceptions for two reasons. First, we observe no differences by perspective for the 1960-64 cohort. Second, in the 1970-74 comparison the estimates of marital status at birth are roughly similar, while the estimates of instability differ much more. The question sequence establishing the respondent's parent's marital status at birth is simpler than the sequence establishing changes in household composition thereafter. Thus, we are confident that measures of children's experiences with parental cohabitation are reliably measured by combining NSFG mother's marital and cohabitation histories with their fertility histories.

### **Cohabitation and family instability**

The rest of our analysis examines the degree to which ignoring cohabitation biases our estimates of family instability, using data from the NSFG. In Table 2, our sample is the children of NSFG respondents who were age 0 to 11 at any point from 1990 to 1994 (inclusive). Because the NSFG cannot represent children born to mothers over age 30 in 1980, we limit the analysis to children born to mothers age 30 and younger. Table 2 shows the cumulative number of marital and union transitions by age by race. Children's experiences in the early 1990s imply that the average child can expect to experience 0.63 family changes due to marriage or the dissolution of marriage by age 12. However, looking only at marital transitions grossly underestimates the

level of instability in children's lives. The total number of transitions by age 12, including both marriage and cohabitation is 46 % higher (0.92).

[TABLE 2 HERE]

Figure 1 graphically depicts the results shown in Table 2 for Whites and Blacks. The black area represents the cumulative number of marital transitions by age. The gray area indicates the additional transitions we observe if we include cohabitation. Remember that we do not include movement from cohabitation into marriage as an additional transition, thus the differences in measured levels of instability are not an artifact of cohabitation that results in marriage. For whites, the cumulative number of transitions increases 30 % from 0.69 to 0.90 when we include cohabitation. For blacks, the measure of instability increases much more, 115 % from 0.55 to 1.18. In fact, if one were only to look at marital status transitions, it would appear that African American children's households were on average more stable than Whites'. However, including cohabitation shows that Black households are actually less stable.

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

Clearly, ignoring cohabitation obscures a substantial amount of instability. However, these results do not tell us much about the sources of instability or the variety in children's experiences. Tables 3 and 4 build on previous work by Wu and colleagues (Martinson and Wu 1992; Wu, Bumpass, and Musick 2001), depicting the distribution of family experiences for children born between 1980 and 84. White children's most common trajectory (60%) is to be born into a married parent family that remains intact, at least until the child is age 12. Of the remaining children, the most common path was from marital birth, to marital dissolution, and eventually cohabitation. Because of sample size limitations, we cannot follow trajectories past the first three family types, but to provide some information on the amount of subsequent family

instability the last column of numbers in this table shows a count of the average number of transitions before age 12 for children in each trajectory. The total rows indicate the average number of transitions given mother's marital status at birth. The experience of the 1980-84 cohort was that the average White child experienced .85 transitions before age 12, slightly lower than the estimate of .92 from the period lifetable (Table 2), which is what we should expect if levels of instability were increasing. White children born to married mothers experience an average of .7 transitions, while children born to cohabiting mothers experience an average of 1.3 transitions.

The average number of transitions for the trajectory from marital birth to cohabitation is 3.0, indicating that many of these cohabiting families will split. White children whose mothers do not cohabit following the dissolution of their parents' marriage are about evenly split between those who never reunite and those who marry without cohabiting. By definition, those whose mother never reunites have lower levels of instability; all experienced exactly one transition. However, children whose mothers remarry without cohabiting have about as much instability as those who cohabit, with an average of 2.9 transitions.

[TABLE 3 HERE]

The results in Table 3 provide a mixed picture of cohabitation. On the one hand the results strongly indicate that children whose mothers cohabit experience substantial instability in their family lives while growing up. In an analysis not shown, we calculated the average number of transitions for children who were ever in a cohabiting family and for children who were not in an intact household to age 12, but were never in a cohabiting family. Children who experienced parental cohabitation had much higher levels of family instability, with an average of 2.58 transitions compared to 1.35 for those who were not in intact families but whose mother never

cohabited. On the other hand, while first marriages are more stable than cohabitation, remarriages do not appear to be more stable than reunions began with cohabitation. Regardless of whether mothers cohabit or remarry without cohabiting, the children are likely to experience the end of this second union as well.

Table 4 shows the trajectories for Black children born between 1980 and 1984. Similar to findings of previous research, this table indicates that African Americans have much higher proportions of births born out of wedlock than whites. More noteworthy, the most common sequence of family types for black children starts in a single parent family and is followed by a transition to cohabitation (24%). Similar to the results for Whites, Black marital births have much lower levels of family instability (average .8 transitions) compared to births in cohabitation (average 1.7 transitions). In addition, among marital births, cohabitation following marital dissolution is associated with no higher levels of instability than remarriage following divorce. Thus, again, cohabitation status at birth is associated with higher levels of instability, but cohabitations following divorce are no less stable than remarriages.

[TABLE 4 HERE]

To see race differences in family experiences net of birth status, we examined the distribution of sequences separately for married, single, and cohabiting births in the middle columns of Tables 3 and 4. Among marital births, both Black and White children were most likely to live with both parents, at least until age 12. For Blacks, nearly as many experienced the dissolution their parent's marriage and no further transitions into cohabitation or marriage. For whites, the minority of marital births who experienced their parent's divorce was most likely to next live in a cohabiting family. Among the births to single mothers, both Blacks and Whites were most likely to next live in a cohabiting family. For Blacks, the second most common path

was for the mother to stay single, at least until the child was 12. For Whites, the second most common path was for the mother to marry.

This analysis provides some insight into why levels of marital instability are so similar for Whites and Blacks, but Blacks experience much more union instability (Table 2). Whites are not likely to experience any parental divorce, but if they do, they are likely to remarry. In contrast, Blacks are more likely to experience a single parent family, but given that they do, they are also much less likely to experience a (re)marriage. African American children experience high levels of *union* instability, however, because a high proportion (almost a quarter) start life with a single mother who subsequently cohabits, and children in this sequence experience high levels of union instability, averaging 2.1 transitions.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The main goal of this analysis was to investigate the contribution of cohabitation to children's family instability. However, because transitions into cohabitation are more ambiguous than transitions into marriage, we began our analyses by investigating whether measures of cohabitation are as reliable as measures of marriage. We are reassured by the strong correspondence between mother's and children's reports. And, although, the discrepancy with the estimates from direct approach using the NSFG cause some concern, we find no evidence that measures of cohabitation are any worse than measures of marriage, and estimates of both are probably quite good using the indirect approach.

Turning to our substantive interest, we find that adding transitions into and out of cohabitation increases our measure of family instability by about 30 percent for White children and over 100 percent for Black children. Furthermore, children who live with a cohabiting mother experience much higher levels of family instability than children whose parents are not

married, but whose mother never cohabits. These findings have important implications for research investigating the impact of family experiences while growing up on children's well being and their transition to adulthood. Recent studies show that family instability, measured by transitions into and out of married-couple households is strongly associated with negative outcomes for children (Wu 1996; Wu and Thomson 2001). This research suggests that we should also investigate the impact of transitions into and out of cohabiting households.

Although we have demonstrated that adding transitions into and out of cohabitation increase our measures of family instability, this research does not provide evidence for or against the position that cohabitation *causes* family instability. Cohabiting births experience more instability than marital births, but those who cohabit are different from those who do not in ways that also increase marital instability. Their marriages would probably had higher dissolution rates had they married instead of cohabited. Furthermore, cohabitation following marital dissolution is associated with no higher levels of family instability than remarriage without cohabitation. Both trajectories are associated with high levels of instability. This is partly because the new unions add one transition to the total, but it is also because mothers who form new unions are at high risk of seeing that new partnership end. Our goal was not to identify whether cohabitation causes family instability. Rather we wished to know how much family instability is missed when we examine only marital transitions. The answer is that a substantial amount of instability is missed. This suggests that future research should investigate the impact of transitions into and out of cohabiting unions as well as marriage on children's well-being.

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Table 1. Comparison of Childhood Family Experiences by Perspective, Data Set, and Birth Cohort

|  | 1960-64 <sup>2</sup> |                      | 1970-1974 <sup>2</sup> |                      | 1980-1984 <sup>3</sup> |                      |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
|  | Child Report (NSFH)  | Mother Report (NSFH) | Child Report (NSFG)    | Mother Report (NSFH) | Mother Report (NSFG)   | Mother Report (NSFH) |
| Any Marital Transition                     | 23                   | 26                   | 21                     | 34 *                 | 20                     | 21                   |
| Number of Marital Transitions <sup>1</sup> | 1.5                  | 1.5                  | 1.4                    | 1.7 *                | 1.3                    | 1.2                  |
| Any Union Transition                       |                      |                      | 24                     | 35 *                 | 23                     | 24                   |
| Number Union Transitions                   |                      |                      | 1.6                    | 1.9 *                | 2.3                    | 2.3                  |
| Birth Status                               |                      |                      |                        |                      |                        |                      |
| Cohabiting                                 |                      |                      | 4                      | 4                    | 9                      | 7                    |
| Married                                    | 91                   | 90                   | 86                     | 82 *                 | 75                     | 75                   |
| (Single)                                   | 7                    | 8                    | 9                      | 12                   | 16                     | 18                   |
| Other/Missing                              | 2                    | 2                    | 2                      | 1                    | 0                      | 1                    |

<sup>1</sup> Among those who had any. Includes transition from married parent household into a household with no parents.

<sup>2</sup> Experience up to age 12.

<sup>3</sup> Experience up to age 7 of children born to mothers less than age 30.

Table 2. Cumulative number of Transitions by Age by Race

| Age | Total    |                        | White    |                        | Black    |                        | Hispanic |                        |
|-----|----------|------------------------|----------|------------------------|----------|------------------------|----------|------------------------|
|     | Marriage | Marital & Cohabitation | Marriage | Marital & Cohabitation | Marriage | Marital & Cohabitation | Marriage | Marital & Cohabitation |
| 1   | 0.06     | 0.09                   | 0.07     | 0.10                   | 0.06     | 0.11                   | 0.04     | 0.06                   |
| 2   | 0.13     | 0.19                   | 0.15     | 0.20                   | 0.11     | 0.22                   | 0.09     | 0.13                   |
| 3   | 0.18     | 0.28                   | 0.21     | 0.29                   | 0.15     | 0.36                   | 0.12     | 0.19                   |
| 4   | 0.24     | 0.37                   | 0.27     | 0.39                   | 0.21     | 0.46                   | 0.17     | 0.25                   |
| 5   | 0.30     | 0.45                   | 0.34     | 0.48                   | 0.26     | 0.56                   | 0.21     | 0.31                   |
| 6   | 0.36     | 0.53                   | 0.39     | 0.55                   | 0.32     | 0.67                   | 0.28     | 0.39                   |
| 7   | 0.42     | 0.61                   | 0.45     | 0.62                   | 0.38     | 0.77                   | 0.33     | 0.45                   |
| 8   | 0.45     | 0.67                   | 0.50     | 0.69                   | 0.39     | 0.85                   | 0.36     | 0.52                   |
| 9   | 0.50     | 0.73                   | 0.54     | 0.74                   | 0.43     | 0.93                   | 0.41     | 0.58                   |
| 10  | 0.54     | 0.79                   | 0.59     | 0.79                   | 0.48     | 1.02                   | 0.45     | 0.63                   |
| 11  | 0.58     | 0.85                   | 0.63     | 0.84                   | 0.51     | 1.12                   | 0.48     | 0.69                   |
| 12  | 0.63     | 0.92                   | 0.69     | 0.90                   | 0.55     | 1.18                   | 0.53     | 0.79                   |

Table 3: Early Life Trajectories, White Children born 1980-84

|                   |                  | Percent<br>Distribution<br>Unconditional<br>on Birth Status | Percent<br>Distribution<br>Conditional on<br>Birth Status | Average<br>Number of<br>Transitions |     |
|-------------------|------------------|---|---|-------------------------------------|-----|
| Marital Birth     | Intact to age 12 | 60  | 70  | 0                                   |     |
|                   | Split            | Never Re-union  | 7   | 8                                   | 1.0 |
|                   |                  | Cohabit   | 14  | 16                                  | 3.0 |
|                   |                  | Remarry w/o<br>Cohabiting                                   | 5   | 6                                   | 2.9 |
|                   | Total            | 86  | 100   | .7                                  |     |
| Non-Marital Birth | Single Birth     | Single to age 12  | 1   | 15                                  | 0   |
|                   |                  | Cohabit   | 4   | 49                                  | 2.3 |
|                   |                  | Marry   | 3   | 36                                  | 1.8 |
|                   | Total            | 9   | 100   | 1.8                                 |     |
|                   | Cohabiting Birth | Split   | 2   | 31                                  | 2.2 |
|                   |                  | Marry   | 3   | 64                                  | 0.9 |
|                   |                  | Cohabit to age 12   | 0   | 5                                   | 0   |
| Total             | 5                | 100   | 1.3   |                                     |     |
| TOTAL             | 100              |   | .85   |                                     |     |

Table 4: Early Life Trajectories, Black Children born 1980-84

|                   |                  | Percent<br>Distribution<br>Unconditional<br>on Birth<br>Status | Percent<br>Distribution<br>Conditional<br>on Birth<br>Status | Average<br>Number of<br>Transitions |     |
|-------------------|------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|-----|
| Marital Birth     | Intact to age 12 | 20   | 51   | 0                                   |     |
|                   | Split            | Never Re-union   | 13   | 33                                  | 1.0 |
|                   |                  | Cohabit  | 5  | 13                                  | 2.6 |
|                   |                  | Remarry w/o Cohabiting   | 1  | 3                                   | 2.8 |
|                   | Total            | 38   | 100  | .8                                  |     |
| Non-Marital Birth | Single Birth     | Single to age 12   | 17   | 35                                  | 0   |
|                   |                  | Cohabit  | 24   | 50                                  | 2.1 |
|                   |                  | Marry  | 7  | 16                                  | 1.7 |
|                   | Total            | 47   | 100  | 1.3                                 |     |
|                   | Cohabiting Birth | Split  | 8  | 52                                  | 2.4 |
|                   |                  | Marry  | 5  | 36                                  | 1.1 |
|                   |                  | Cohabit to age 12  | 2  | 12                                  | 0   |
| Total             | 15               | 100  | 1.7  |                                     |     |
| TOTAL             | 100              |  | 1.14   |                                     |     |

Figure 1: Cumulative Number of Marriage and Cohabitational Disruptions by Age by Race

