

Cross-national differences in continuing childbearing in re-partnering – the role of partnership context

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Background and motivation

- Given that cohabiters may differ from their married counterparts in their individual characteristics, such as gender-role and family attitudes, individuals who have experienced dissolution of cohabiting union may show different continuing childbearing behaviour than divorcees.

Previous research on continuing childbearing after union dissolution:

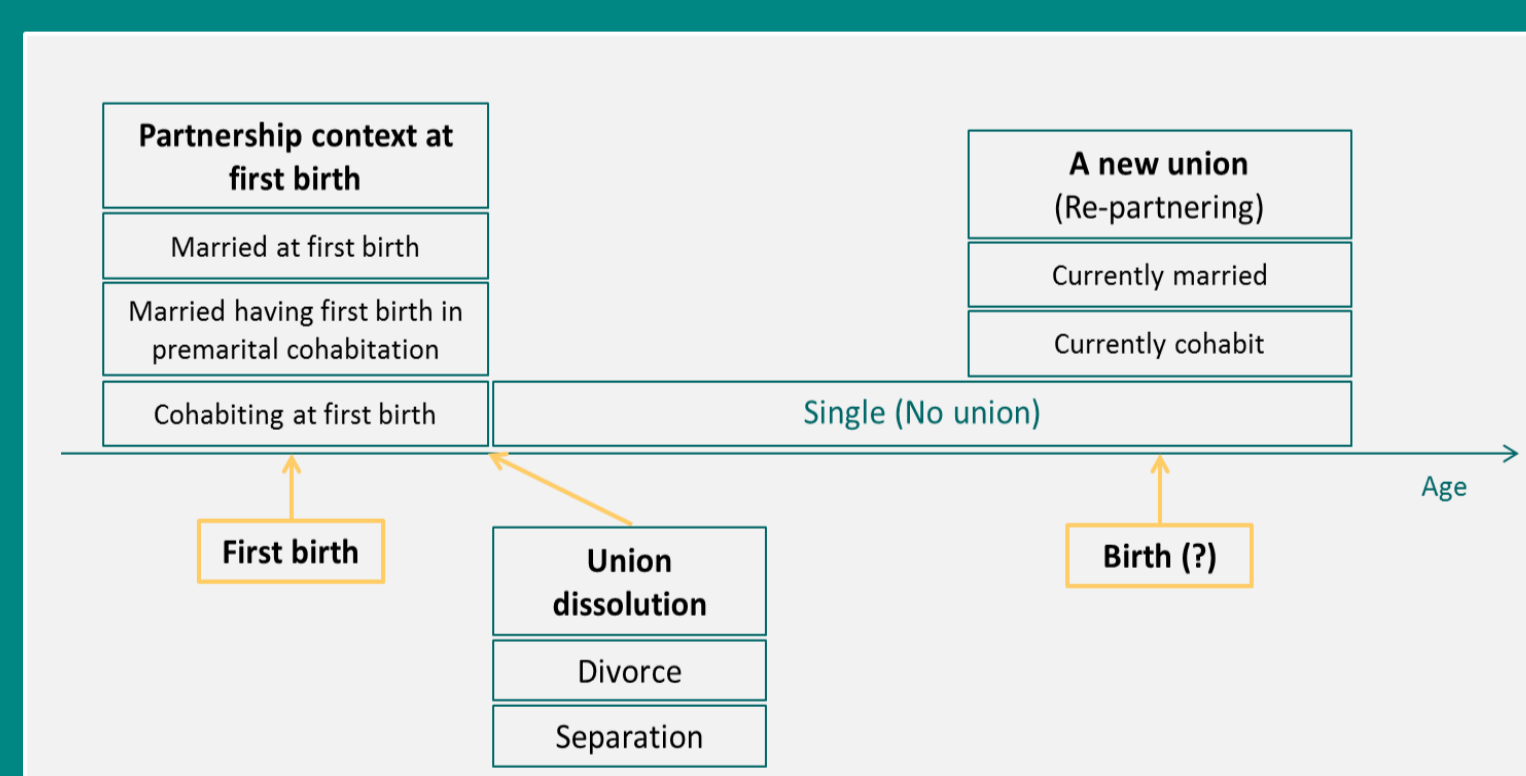
- New established unions often produce an additional child.
- The majority of studies have mainly analysed continuing fertility of re-partnered divorcees. Less is known about childbearing within new partnership after a dissolution of cohabiting union.
- Most of the previous research on childbearing after union dissolution (mainly in stepfamilies) is based on data from the United States.
- While there are some studies on continuing childbearing after union dissolution in European countries, only a few of them aim at cross-national comparison using comparative data and methods.

Objective of the study

Research questions:

- What is the role of partnership context on fertility decisions after divorce or separation?
- Does the union status at first birth and the one of a subsequent union matter for continuing childbearing?
- Do people cohabiting at first birth differ in their continuing childbearing after union dissolution from their counterparts married at first birth?
- Do currently married people differ in their fertility decisions after divorce or separation from their currently cohabiting counterparts?

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.



Author's illustration.

Data – Harmonized Histories

A unique and powerful cross-national data set containing cleaned and standardised partnership and fertility histories collected from individuals within various European surveys:

- the British Household Panel Survey, the Dutch Fertility and Family Survey, the Swiss Household Panel Survey, the Polish Employment, Family and Education Survey, the Spanish Fertility Survey, and the Generations and Gender Surveys in Belgium, France, Germany, Austria, Norway, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Russia.

It enables a broad cross-national comparison of numerous family demographic processes, such as marriage, cohabitation, childbearing and union dissolution.

Sample, variables and method

Table 1. Description of the data set. Partnership context at first birth and at birth after union dissolution.

Country in Harmonized Histories	Number of women with first birth within a union	Partnership context at first birth (in %)		Union dissolution (separation or divorce) before age 50 (*)	Re-partnering	Child after union dissolution	Partnership context at birth after union dissolution (in%)			Excluded from the analyses because of
		in cohabitation	in marriage				Being single	in cohabitation	in marriage	
Austria	1,035	31.7	68.4	22.7	51.4	23.7	21.3	45.1	33.6	Small and young sample
Belgium	1,561	8.9	91.1	20.1	59.4	19.7	23.2	47.5	29.3	Small sample
Bulgaria	4,087	6.1	93.9	8.6	34.3	22.2	19.4	27.8	52.8	Less union dissolutions
Estonia	3,241	14.1	85.9	30.9	65.4	37.5	15.3	37.3	47.5	INCLUDED
France	3,139	17.6	82.4	16.2	56.0	24.7	28.6	45.4	26.0	INCLUDED
Hungary	4,352	3.2	96.8	20.2	55.5	26.9	23.0	17.1	60.0	INCLUDED
NDL	2,626	9.1	90.9	15.2	47.2	16.8	43.4	13.3	43.3	Less union dissolutions
Norway	3,794	27.8	72.2	27.3	55.2	25.2	26.6	45.1	28.3	INCLUDED
Poland	1,195	5.2	94.8	8.7	26.9	34.6	52.8	33.3	13.9	Small and young sample
Romania	4,048	5.4	94.6	10.0	40.6	20.9	19.2	27.4	53.4	Less union dissolutions
Russia	4,383	9.2	90.8	30.6	48.9	25.3	13.3	25.9	60.8	INCLUDED
Spain	4,538	4.9	95.2	6.9	36.6	15.8	36.2	36.6	27.1	Less union dissolutions
UK	2,436	9.2	90.8	20.0	62.6	25.6	29.1	26.8	44.1	INCLUDED

Note: (*) Union dissolution of women who had a first birth within partnership; percentage whose unions dissolved. Weights were applied if available. Sources: *Harmonized Histories, author's calculations.*

Sample selection:

- Women who had a first birth within partnership (marriage, cohabitation) and experienced union dissolution (divorce or separation) before age 50.
- Women age 15 to 50 years born before 1975.

Main covariates:

- Time after union dissolution, Union status at first child, Current union status, Women's age at union dissolution, Age of the youngest child at union dissolution, Number of children at union dissolution and Women's education.

Dependent variable: Birth of a child after union dissolution.

- Start of the process: 9 month after union dissolution.
- End of the process: birth of a child after union dissolution or censoring (if no birth within 15 years after union dissolution, age 50 or interview).

Method: Discrete time hazard model: $\log\left(\frac{P_{it}}{1-P_{it}}\right) = \alpha_t + \beta_1 x_{it1} + \dots + \beta_k x_{itk}$

Results (1)

Table 2. Relative risks (odds ratios) of having a child after union dissolution. Main effect.

	France	UK	Norway	Russia	Estonia	Hungary
Union status at first birth						
Married at first birth	1	1	1	1	1	1
Cohabiting at first birth and afterwards	2.366*** (-0.53)	1.140 (0.27)	1.075 (0.17)	0.717 (0.18)	0.962 (0.18)	1.401 (0.51)
Cohabiting at first birth and subsequently married	1.285 (-0.53)	1.842 (0.76)	1.495 (0.35)	0.938 (0.33)	1.284 (0.36)	1.889 (1.96)
Current union status						
Currently single	0.071*** (-0.02)	0.115*** (0.03)	0.065*** (0.01)	0.020*** (0.00)	0.046*** (0.01)	0.077*** (0.02)
Currently married	1	1	1	1	1	1
Currently cohabiting	0.511** (-0.13)	0.514** (0.11)	0.465*** (0.08)	0.372*** (0.06)	0.480*** (0.07)	0.385*** (0.09)
Person-months	45260	50799	76989	94298	67782	53665
Number of women	553	585	940	1039	789	615
Number of events	108	139	218	226	259	150

Current union status matters for childbearing after union dissolution. Union status at first birth matters for continuing fertility only in France.

Controlled for: Time after union dissolution, Age at union dissolution, Age of the youngest child at union dissolution, Number of children at union dissolution and Women's education; Standard errors in parentheses; Significance level: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05. Sources: *Harmonized Histories, own calculations.*

Results (2)

Table 3. Relative risks (odds ratios) of having a child after union dissolution. Interaction effect.

	France	UK	Norway	Russia	Estonia	Hungary
Interaction between union status at first birth and current union status						
Currently single	0.182*** (-0.05)	0.260*** (-0.06)	0.166*** (-0.04)	0.051*** (-0.01)	0.094*** (-0.02)	0.209*** (-0.06)
Cohabiting at first birth and afterwards – Currently cohabiting	1.746 (-0.58)	1.913 (-0.68)	1.291 (-0.29)	0.668 (-0.29)	0.835 (-0.21)	1.637 (-0.84)
Cohabiting at first birth and afterwards – Currently married	6.253*** (-2.54)	2.080 (-0.83)	2.973*** (-0.84)	2.207* (-0.76)	2.548** (-0.80)	4.107* (-2.64)
Married at first birth – Currently married	1.596 (-0.48)	2.320** (-0.59)	2.448*** (-0.52)	2.630*** (-0.43)	1.950*** (-0.31)	2.671*** (-0.67)
Married at first birth – Currently cohabiting	1	1	1	1	1	1
Cohabiting at first birth and subsequently married – Currently cohabiting	1.770 (-0.81)	a.	1.884* (-0.55)	0.860 (-0.45)	1.328 (-0.52)	a.
Cohabiting at first birth and subsequently married – Currently married	2.283 (-2.39)	a.	1.178 (-0.87)	2.561 (-1.37)	3.053* (-1.34)	a.
Person-months	45260	50799	76989	94298	67782	53665
Number of women	553	585	940	1039	789	615
Number of events	108	139	218	226	259	150

Controlled for: Time after union dissolution, Age at union dissolution, Age of the youngest child at union dissolution, Number of children at union dissolution and Women's education; Standard errors in parentheses; Significance level: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05. Note: a. For the UK and Hungary, the categories "Cohabit at first birth and subsequently married – Currently married" and "Cohabit at first birth and subsequently married – Currently cohabit" are assigned to the categories "Married at first birth – Currently married" and "Married at first birth – Currently cohabit", respectively, due to a small number of observations. Sources: *Harmonized Histories, author's calculations.*

Partnership context matters for the risk of continuing childbearing after union dissolution.

Being currently married matters the most for the risk of continuing childbearing after union dissolution.

In most cases, transition from cohabitation to marriage after first birth does not matter for the risk of continuing childbearing after union dissolution.

Conclusions

In all studied European countries we found similar patterns of partnership context for continuing childbearing:

- Subsequent union status has a much stronger impact on fertility after union dissolution than the partnership context at first birth.
 - Generally, women married and cohabiting at first birth do not differ in their childbearing after union dissolution.
 - Currently cohabiting women have a significantly lower risk of continuing their childbearing after union dissolution than their currently married counterparts.
- Marriage to the next partner is important for continuing childbearing, even or especially for women who had their first birth in cohabitation that did not transition into marriage.
- Partnership context at first birth does not matter for continuing childbearing after union dissolution for those who are currently cohabiting.

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