

INTENDED & UNINTENDED CHILDBEARING AMONG COHABITING WOMEN IN THE US, 1990'S TO 2010

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Short Abstract

Births to cohabiting women have increased dramatically over the past several decades. Research has focused on the meaning of cohabitation and childbearing decisions within these unions. We add to this literature by using the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) to look at marital status at both conception and delivery, look at trends in births to women in cohabiting unions, and examine the role pregnancy intentions have on marital or cohabiting status at birth. We analyze data from the 1995, 2002 and 2006-2010 NSFG's to trace the rise in births within cohabiting unions. Descriptive analyses show that over half of cohabiting women have unintended births compared with 23% of married women. The percentage of cohabiting births that are unintended has remained about 50% since 2002; however, further analyses will reveal whether this percentage represents a change from a decade earlier.

Extended abstract

Nonmarital childbearing has increased over the past several decades. In 1980, 18% of all births occurred to unmarried women, compared to 41% of all births in 2010 (Martin et al., 2012; Ventura, 2009). This increase means that in 2010, 1.6 million babies each year were born to women who are not married compared with 666,000 in 1980 (Martin et al., 2012).

Nonmarital childbearing is usually assumed to involve the absence of one parent. As a result, one of the concerns with the increase in nonmarital childbearing is that children raised without two parents experience more family transitions, less stability and may have fewer economic resources to support the child (Ventura 2009; Manning and Brown, 2006; Cherlin, 2010; Bumpass and Lu, 2000).

However, data from the 2006-2010 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) showed that there has also been an increase in the percentage of recent births in the United States that occur to women in cohabiting unions. In 2002, 14% of recent births occurred within a cohabiting union compared with 23% of recent births in 2006-2010—an increase of 60%, to about 1 million births per year. (Martinez et al, 2012).

The effect of births in cohabiting unions compared with births in marriages and outside of a union depends on the characteristics of the unions and the parents. On the one hand, it is possible that children born into a cohabiting union may have better outcomes than children born to single parents because two parents have access to more financial and social network resources. On the other hand, cohabiting unions are known to be less stable than marriages: 49% of cohabitations break up in 5 years, compared with 20% of marriages (Bramlett and Mosher, 2002). Similarly, cohabiting couples tend to be less affluent and less educated than married couples (Copen et al., 2012).

Another concern with nonmarital childbearing is that a large proportion of births outside of marriage occur to women who did not intend the conception and may not be prepared to care for a baby (Mosher et al 2012; Institute of Medicine, 1995). While 77% of recent births to married women were intended, 49% of recent births to cohabiting

women and 33% of recent births to women outside of an union were intended (Mosher et al., 2012, Figure 2).

This paper uses several cycles of the NSFG to look at trends in births to cohabiting women in the United States. We address several questions:

1. How has childbearing to cohabiting women changed in the last two decades?
2. How much of the recent increase in non-marital childbearing is accounted for by births to cohabiting women?
3. How does the increase vary by the mother's socioeconomic background and race?
4. How many non-marital conceptions result in cohabitation or marriage at the time of the birth?
5. What proportion of births to cohabiting women are intended?
6. What are the multivariate determinants of having a recent birth within a cohabiting union?

Data and Methods

The National Vital Statistics System has measured nonmarital childbearing since the 1940s, but it does not contain information on whether the mother was cohabiting at the time of delivery. The NSFG, a multistage probability sample of the household population the United States, fills this gap. The NSFG consists of in-person interviews on a wide array of topics related to fertility, family formation, reproductive health and both marriage and cohabitation histories (Groves et al, 2009; Martinez et al, 2012; Mosher et al, 2012).

This study examines data from the 1995, 2002 and 2006-2010 NSFG's to trace the rise of nonmarital births in the U.S. by race and Hispanic origin, education and other characteristics. Specific focus is given to understanding these trends for cohabiting women. The NSFG is the only source of national data on unintended pregnancies and births therefore we will also be able to look at trends in the intendedness of births within cohabiting unions. This distinction provides additional information on the nature of nonmarital childbearing over time.

A standard measure of unintended pregnancy was used to measure intended and unintended pregnancy (Mosher et al, 2012). This measure is based on a series of questions asking women to report on their intentions right before the pregnancy. This measure classifies pregnancies into 3 categories: intended (the pregnancy occurred at the right time or later than she wanted), mistimed (the pregnancy occurred too soon) and unwanted (the pregnancy occurred at a time when she wanted no future pregnancies). These analyses measure only pregnancies ending in a live birth in the 5 years before the interview to minimize recall issues and to show a clear trend over time. Because these analyses focus on live births, we refer to intended and unintended pregnancies as intended and unintended births.

We identify the marital status at recent birth using the recode RMAROUT6 provided in the pregnancy public use file. It has been collapsed as currently or formerly married at time of birth, cohabiting at time of birth, and not married nor cohabiting at time of birth.

We look at trends in the marital and cohabiting status of births in the past 5 years. In addition, we look at trends in the profile of recent births that occurred within different marital statuses. Independent variables examined with regard to marital status at birth include: race and Hispanic origin, respondent's mother's education (a measure of SES), whether the respondent lived with 1 or 2 parents at age 14, whether respondent's own biological parents were married at respondent's birth, the respondent's parity, current insurance level, whether received public assistance in the past 12 months, and percent of poverty level for respondent's household.

Preliminary Findings

Q1: How has childbearing to cohabiting women changed in recent decades?

Table 1 shows that by the 2006-10 NSFG, 23% of recent births were to mothers cohabiting at the time of delivery; of the 4.25 million births in 2008, 990,000 or about 1.0 million births per year were to cohabiting mothers.

These 1.0 million births were an increase from just 601,000 births born to women in a cohabiting union in 2002, or 14% of recent births. In both 2002 and 2006-10, about half of these births were intended and half unintended. Births to cohabiting women in both 2002 and 2006-2010 were more likely to be unintended (51%) than births to married women (just 23% unintended).

Q2: How much of the recent increase in non-marital childbearing is accounted for by births to cohabiting women?

Table 1 shows that in 2006-2010, the percentage of all births to unmarried non-cohabiting women was 17%, a decrease from the 21% found in 2002. Also during this time period, births within marital unions decreased from 64% in 2002 to 60% in 2006-2010. The decrease in recent marital births and births to unmarried, non-cohabiting women between 2002 and 2006-2010 suggests that births to cohabiting women accounted for all of the increase in births to unmarried women over this time period.

Q3: How does the increase in births to cohabiting women vary by the mother's socioeconomic background and race?

Table 2 shows the number of births to cohabiting women in the 5 year period before each survey. Births to cohabiting women increased sharply during this time period from 3.0 million births reported in 2002 to nearly 5.0 million births reported in 2006-2010. Births to cohabiting white women doubled, from 1.15 million in the 5 years prior to 2002 to 2.22 million in the 5 year years prior to 2006-2010. The increase among black women was less marked. Looking at changes by the cohabiting woman's mother's education, most of these births occurred to mothers from less-educated households. Births to cohabiting women from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are still relatively rare. For example, in the 5 year period before 2006-2010 428,000 births occurred to women whose mothers had a college degree compared to 1.7 million births to women whose

mothers had less than a high school education. Similarly, births to cohabiting women occur primarily to those with low incomes.

Table 3 shows that in the 5 year period prior to 2006-2010, births to cohabiting women occurred most often to non-Hispanic white women (45%), followed by Hispanic women (32%) and non-Hispanic black women (16%). This is different than in 2002 when births to cohabiting women were equally likely among non-Hispanic white women and Hispanic women. It is also noteworthy that in both 2002 and 2006-2010 the majority of births outside of a union occur to black women. Only 8.7% of births to cohabiting women occurred to women whose mothers had college degrees compared with 33% of women whose mothers had less than a high school education. Births to cohabiting women were much more likely to be living in households who received public assistance, were currently insured by Medicaid and were living at less than 1.5 times the poverty level.

Q4: How many non-marital conceptions result in cohabitation, compared with marriage?

Some women may experience changes in their living arrangements between conception and the birth of a child. Table A shows relationship status at conception by relationship status at delivery by birth intentions in 2006-2010. About 15% of women who were cohabiting at conception had married by the time of the birth and 6.6% had broken up. Among cohabiting women who went on to marry, there was no difference in the percentage of recent births that were intended. Among cohabiting women, those that had an unintended birth were more likely to have broken up by the time of the child's birth (10%) compared with those that had an intended birth (3.7%). Women who had a pregnancy outside of a union were more likely to transition to a cohabiting union by the time of the delivery (20%) than to a marriage (6.5%).

Q5: How much of the rise in births to cohabiting women is intended?

We find that the proportion of births in cohabiting unions that were intended by the mother at conception was about 50% in most sub-groups in both 2002 and 2006-10 (Table 1). The final version of this paper will determine if that represents a change from a decade earlier.

Q6: What are the multivariate determinants of having a recent birth within a cohabiting union?

The PAA version of this paper will perform a multivariate analysis to determine the multivariate predictors of births, unintended births, and unintended births to cohabiting women.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Our results reveal that about 1 million births in the United States per year in recent years occurred to cohabiting couples. It appears that much of the recent increase in births to unmarried women may be occurring to cohabiting women. Furthermore, it appears that the percent of recent births to cohabiting women that are unintended is much higher compared with births within marriages.

For the final paper, we will look at whether there has been change over time in the intendedness of births. Also, we plan to examine the multivariate determinants of fertility within cohabiting unions. The multivariate analyses will include factors that may be associated with the almost doubling of births to cohabiting women over time. These analyses will evaluate the question of whether the recent changes in births to cohabiting women reflect a demographic shift in the population “at risk” (e.g. cohabiting women who have a birth) over time. These findings will advance our understanding of the correlates of births to cohabiting women and adds to the extensive body of literature on unintended births and its consequences for women and their children in the United States.

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Table A. Marital or cohabitation status at time of conception by marital or cohabiting status at time of delivery to women 15-44 years of age: U.S., 2006-2010

Marital or cohabiting status at conception	Marital or cohabiting status at delivery			
	Total	Married	Cohabiting	Not cohabiting
Married	100.0	99.4	0.0	0.5
intended	100.0	99.8	0.0	0.2
unintended	100.0	98.1	0.0	1.9
Cohabiting	100.0	14.7	78.7	6.6
intended	100.0	15.0	81.3	3.7
unintended	100.0	14.3	75.1	9.6
Not cohabiting	100.0	6.5	20.4	73.0
intended	100.0	8.7	19.0	72.3
unintended	100.0	5.4	21.1	73.4

Table 1. Marital or cohabitation status at time of delivery of births in the last 5 years to women 15-44 years of age:
U.S., 2006-2010

U.S., 2000-2010

Characteristic	All births in the past 5 years						
	Number of births in thousands	Total	Married	Unmarried			
				Subtotal	Cohabiting	Not cohabiting	
Percent distribution (standard error)							
Total, 1995	Total			to be done for final paper			
Total, 2002	Total	21,018	100.0	64.4 (1.6)	35.6 (1.6)	14.3 (1.0)	21.3 (1.2)
				100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Intended			76.9 (1.2)	43.8 (1.9)	48.7 (3.1)	40.5 (2.3)
	Unintended			23.1 (1.2)	56.2 (1.9)	51.3 (3.1)	59.5 (2.3)
Total, 2006-2010	Total	21,161	100.0	59.7 (1.6)	40.3	23.4 (1.2)	16.9 (1.1)
				100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Intended			76.6 (1.5)	42.5 (1.9)	49.2 (2.3)	33.1 (2.4)
	Unintended			23.4 (1.5)	57.5 (1.9)	50.7 (2.3)	66.9 (2.4)

Table 2. Percent of births within the past 5 years who were within a cohabitating union and intendedness of those of cohabiting births to women 15-44 years of age:
U.S., 2002 and 2006-2010

Characteristic	2002						2006-2010					
	All recent births		All recent cohabiting births				All recent births		All recent cohabiting births			
	Number in thousands	% cohab	# cohab births		intended		Number in thousands	% cohab	# cohab births		intended	
Total	21,018	14.3 (1.0)	2,998	100.0	48.7 (3.1)		21,161	23.4 (1.2)	4,950	100.0	49.3 (2.3)	
Hispanic origin and race												
Hispanic	4,242	24.5 (2.5)	1,039	100.0	52.1 (5.3)		4,546	34.5 (1.9)	1,568	100.0	51.7 (2.5)	
Not Hispanic or Latina:												
White, single race	12,309	9.3 (1.1)	1,151	100.0	44.7 (4.8)		11,600	19.2 (1.4)	2,223	100.0	48.8 (4.3)	
Black or African American, single race	2,818	20.6 (2.7)	581	100.0	45.5 (6.7)		3,256	24.4 (1.7)	794	100.0	42.8 (5.2)	
Respondent's mother's education												
No high school diploma or GED	7,508	20.4 (1.9)	1,200	100.0	53.5 (4.7)		5,753	28.7 (2.2)	1,650	100.0	51.6 (2.8)	
High school diploma or GED	5,888	13.4 (1.6)	1,005	100.0	48.6 (5.1)		7,141	24.5 (2.0)	1,747	100.0	47.8 (4.5)	
Some college, no bachelor's degree	4,332	10.8 (1.6)	468	100.0	*		4,677	23.2 (2.0)	1,087	100.0	45.9 (5.1)	
Bachelor's degree or higher	3,099	7.2 (1.8)	222	100.0	*		3,426	12.5 (1.9)	428	100.0	51.9 (7.0)	
Parental living arrangements at age 14 years												
Both biological parents	14,599	10.3 (0.9)	1,509	100.0	50.6 (3.9)		13,288	19.9 (1.5)	2,651	100.0	51.3 (3.0)	
Other	6,419	23.2 (2.1)	1,490	100.0	49.4 (3.9)		7,873	29.2 (1.6)	2,300	100.0	47.0 (3.5)	
Percent of poverty level												
0-149 percent	7,789	23.4 (1.8)	1,825	100.0	50.0 (3.7)		8,589	33.1 (1.6)	2,846	100.0	52.3 (3.0)	
150-299 percent	5,522	12.4 (1.5)	686	100.0	55.5 (5.6)		6,140	23.1 (1.9)	1,419	100.0	52.5 (4.2)	
300 percent or higher	6,856	3.7 (0.8)	251	100.0	*		5,593	6.5 (1.4)	*	*	*	

Table 3. Characteristics of women aged 15-44 who had a birth within the past 5 years by marital or cohabiting status at time of delivery : U.S., 2006-2010

Characteristic	2002			2006-2010		
	Married	Cohabiting	Not cohabiting	Married	Cohabiting	Not cohabiting
	Column percent			Column percent		
Hispanic origin and race	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Hispanic	16.4 (1.2)	34.7 (4.0)	21.9 (2.7)	17.7 (2.6)	31.7 (3.5)	20.9 (2.7)
Not Hispanic or Latina:						
White, single race	69.7 (1.6)	38.5 (3.7)	38.5 (3.0)	65.9 (2.8)	44.9 (3.1)	29.5 (3.0)
Black or African American, single race	6.03 (0.6)	19.4 (2.8)	31.7 (2.8)	7.6 (1.0)	16.0 (2.2)	41.9 (3.8)
Respondent's mother's education	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No high school diploma or GED	22.8 (1.4)	40.0 (3.4)	35.8 (2.9)	23.4 (2.3)	33.3 (3.2)	32.2 (2.7)
High school diploma or GED	36.1 (2.0)	33.5 (3.4)	36.0 (2.4)	33.3 (1.8)	35.3 (2.9)	33.1 (2.3)
Some college, no bachelor's degree	22.7 (1.7)	15.6 (2.2)	17.4 (2.0)	22.5 (1.6)	22.0 (2.0)	20.8 (2.3)
Bachelor's degree or higher	17.9 (1.1)	7.4 (1.9)	10.0 (1.3)	20.2 (1.6)	8.7 (1.5)	12.5 (1.9)
Number of biological children	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
One child	25.4 (1.2)	32.9 (2.9)	35.0 (2.4)	21.1 (1.4)	32.1 (2.1)	31.9 (2.4)
2 or more children	74.6 (1.2)	67.1 (2.9)	65.0 (2.4)	78.9 (1.4)	67.9 (2.1)	68.1 (2.4)
Parental living arrangements at age 14 years	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Both biological parents	76.4 (1.4)	50.3 (3.3)	61.2 (2.8)	72.0 (1.9)	53.5 (2.5)	43.2 (2.5)
Other	23.6 (1.4)	49.7 (3.3)	38.8 (2.8)	28.0 (1.9)	46.4 (2.5)	56.8 (2.5)
Biological parents married at time of respondent's birth	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Yes	92.5 (0.8)	74.2 (3.2)	73.2 (2.1)	88.8 (1.0)	73.5 (2.2)	52.3 (3.0)
No	7.4 (0.8)	25.8 (3.2)	26.8 (2.1)	11.0 (1.0)	25.8 (2.2)	46.0 (3.0)
Current insurance status	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Private	73.5 (1.5)	25.4 (3.2)	37.1 (2.9)	69.5 (2.3)	26.3 (2.2)	19.7 (2.3)
Medicaid	9.6 (1.1)	41.2 (3.4)	36.0 (2.7)	11.6 (1.4)	39.7 (2.7)	45.6 (2.7)
Medicare or other gov't health care	3.2 (1.2)	8.4 (2.7)	7.6 (1.3)	2.85 (0.6)	2.9 (.63)	6.3 (1.5)
Not covered or only single service plan	13.6 (1.2)	24.9 (3.1)	19.0 (1.9)	16.0 (1.7)	31.0 (2.6)	28.5 (2.8)
Whether R received public assistance in the calendar year before the interview	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Yes	29.6 (1.8)	76.4 (3.1)	74.2 (2.1)	34.0 (2.3)	76.6 (2.5)	84.2 (2.1)
No	70.4 (1.8)	23.6 (3.1)	25.8 (2.1)	66.0 (2.3)	23.4 (2.5)	15.8 (2.1)
Percent of poverty level	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
0-149 percent	25.7 (1.6)	66.1 (2.9)	63.4 (3.0)	28.5 (2.0)	61.5 (2.4)	69.2 (3.0)
150-299 percent	29.2 (1.8)	24.8 (2.6)	23.0 (2.9)	32.1 (1.7)	30.6 (2.3)	22.1 (2.7)
300 percent or higher	45.1 (1.8)	9.1 (1.9)	13.6 (2.3)	39.4 (2.1)	7.9 (1.6)	8.8 (2.0)