

## **H333250044 - Multilevel Multiprocess Models for Partnership and Childbearing Event Histories**

The modern family is becoming increasingly complex. Cohabitation and divorce are common, while 'shotgun' weddings are less so. Does pregnancy increase the likelihood that cohabiting couples will get married? Are couples less likely to separate when they have young children? What effect does the presence of children from previous partnerships have on the stability of a married or cohabiting union? These are some of the questions that can be answered using new models developed by researchers at the University of Bristol and the Institute of Education using data from the 1958 cohort from the National Child Development Study and the 1970 British Cohort Study. The research looked at the link between partnership transitions and childbearing and developed a methodology that takes account of the multiple influences on decisions about childbearing and partnerships as well as features such as multiple partnerships and different kinds of union.

### **Key findings**

- Women who are prone to unstable relationships are more likely to conceive during cohabitation.
- Having pre-school children with a partner reduces the risk of a relationship breaking down, for both married and cohabiting couples.
- The presence of school-age children from a previous partnership has no effect on the risk of breakdown, for either married or cohabiting women, or on the odds that a cohabiting couple will get married.
- Cohabitation and having children within a cohabiting partnership was more common for the later cohort.
- Although there has been a decrease in 'shotgun' marriages the marriage rate for both cohorts was higher during pregnancy, but declined once the child was born.
- Cohabiters born in 1970 were less likely to split up during the first and third trimester of pregnancy, while pregnant members of the 1958 cohort were no more or less likely to separate than non-pregnant women.
- Women who cohabit quickly, and those who move quickly from cohabitation to marriage, also tend to have shorter marriages.

### **About the study**

The research was conducted by Dr Fiona Steele and Professor Harvey Goldstein (University of Bristol), and Professor Heather Joshi and Dr Constantinos Kallis (Institute of Education) as part of the ESRC Research Methods Programme. Details can be found at <http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods/>

The research developed a methodology for the analysis of event history data, where there are correlated histories, repeated events, multiple states and competing risks. To avoid biased results on the link between childbearing and decisions about cohabitation and

marriage, the researchers used a simultaneous equations model in which partnership transitions are modelled jointly with the probability of having a child.

A project webpage is available on the Centre for Multilevel Modelling website at [www.mlwin.com/team/mmpceh.html](http://www.mlwin.com/team/mmpceh.html)

### **Key words**

Partnerships, marriage, childbearing, cohabitation