

## **Family (in)stability after the birth of the first child**

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### **Abstract:**

The current paper focuses on the effect of unplanned status of the first child on the family dynamics, and compares the stability of cohabiting and married families. We use data from first five waves of German panel study PAIRFAM, and employ discrete-time event-history analysis approach. Based on the dataset modified into couple-months, the model is equivalent to logistic regression with the family dissolution as dependent variable. The results suggest that cohabiting and married families respond differently to the birth of an unplanned child.

**Key words:** Family instability, birth of the first child, unplanned childbearing

### **Extended abstract:**

The link between childbearing and marriage weakened considerably over the last decades. Marriage stability weakened as well. At the same time cohabitation became a common and more stable stage of partnership career, and a setting into which children are being born.

Birth of a child is supposed to have a positive effect on partnership and family stability. A huge body of research shows that both birth of a child, and presence of children in marriage, have a positive effect, and stabilize the marital union (Steele et al 2005). However, studies on cohabitation suggest that the effect of children in cohabitation is ambiguous. Despite the rising numbers of children born into cohabitation, for many couples cohabitation does not represent a proper setting for raising a family (Manning 2004). The fact that some 40% of children born into cohabitation are unwanted (Musick 2002), leads us to the assumption that certain conditions have to be met for a positive effect of the birth of a child on family stability.

Getting married and planning a family is still often part of one decision (Billari, Kohler 2000). Moreover, marriage is a crucial partnership transition. Therefore we have to bear in mind that married couples represent a rather selective group.

The current study is devoted to the research on fertility intentions, the success in their realization and their implications for the dynamics of various family forms. It targets the effect of the planned/unplanned status of the first child on the stability of cohabiting and married families. Using data from first five waves (2008-2013) of panel study PAIRFAM (Huinink et al 2011) this research offers an unique view of the demographic behavior of couples within the context of ongoing family change in former East end West Germany. PAIRFAM (among the few current surveys) offers longitudinal multi-disciplinary data on respondents, their partners and whole families and facilitate the researchers' efforts to understand the very working and dynamics of modern family forms.

Discrete-time event-history analysis approach is employed. Based on the dataset modified into couple-months, the model is equivalent to logistic regression with the family dissolution as dependent variable. Several models are estimated to assess the effects of socio-demographic, economic, and attitudinal factors.

The results suggest that the stabilizing role of the birth of a child is present in both marriage and cohabitation, however, parents respond differently to the birth of an unplanned child depending on the marital status of the family.

My PhD thesis "*Fertility (dis)agreement, realized fertility, and partnership stability*" focuses on partnership and family stability, and its determinants. Employing the German Family Panel (PAIRFAM) data for up to seven waves of follow-up survey it uses the opportunity to access full retrospective and prospective information on family dynamics of anchor persons, their partners, parents and children. Having both primary respondents' and their partners' data available provides the main advantage of the current research – continuous assessment of changing demographic, social, and economic characteristics of the couple, alongside to the development in attitudes, satisfaction, life and family plans, its convergence or divergence, and the consequences of the interplay of these factors. The aim of the thesis is to map and explain the ways disagreement

and diverging attitudes towards family and fertility related issues and child related events operate within different partnership and family settings.

The current paper targets the early family stage, the years following the birth of the first child. Whereas the previous part of the thesis did only target cohabitation, namely the effects of fertility plans disagreement among cohabiting couples who didn't have children yet, this paper extends the focus to both cohabiting and married couples. Various forms of fertility disagreement may result in birth of an unplanned child. The difference in stability of cohabiting and married families affected by the (un)planned status of the first child is the core of my current research.

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