



# The impact of union context on family stability

## Testing normative influences

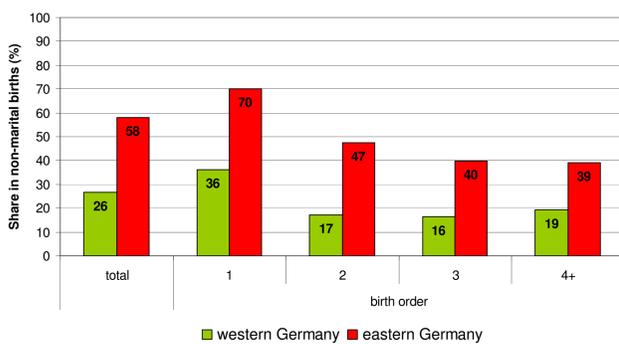
Christine Schnor, Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research

### INTRODUCTION

#### Motivation

- Previous studies have shown that non-married parents have a *higher* risk of dissolution than married parents.
  - This is commonly drawn back on the *negative selection* into non-marital family formation and the lacking commitment character of non-marital unions.
  - **HYPOTHESIS:** The *strength* of selection mechanisms into non-marital family formation should influence dissolution risks.
- *Non-marital unions with children might be more stable if they are less negatively selected.*

#### The German case: Pronounced differences between western and eastern Germany in the share of non-marital births



→ The selection mechanism into marital family formation seems to be less strong in eastern Germany

#### Research question

**Does the higher prevalence of non-marital family formation in eastern Germany has a positive impact on the stability of non-marital unions with children?**

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

#### Norm: Marital family formation

Predominant Norm	Weak Norm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cohabitation accepted as a pre-family stage</li> <li>• most couples decide to marry before first childbirth</li> <li>• Couples remaining in cohabitation do so, because they do not match as marital partners</li> </ul> <p>→ couples cohabiting at first childbirth are <i>negatively selected</i></p> <p>→ they therefore have a <i>very high risk of union dissolution</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wide prevalence of cohabiting families</li> <li>• few „shotgun“ marriages</li> <li>• Couples stay cohabiting during pregnancy because they see no need to marry</li> </ul> <p>→ Couples cohabiting at first childbirth are more heterogeneous with respect to their selective traits</p> <p>→ They have a lower risk of union dissolution than in the setting of strong norms.</p>
<p>→ In a setting of a predominant norm of marital family formation, parents cohabiting at first childbirth have a <i>higher</i> risk of union dissolution compared to cohabiting parents in a setting of a weak norm.</p> <p><i>Blossfeld/ Klijzing/ Pohl/ Rohwer (1999); Steele/ Joshi/ Kallis/ Goldstein (2006); Becker/ Landes/ Michael (1977)</i></p>	

### PREVIOUS FINDINGS

#### Prevalence of cohabitation & stability of unions with a cohabiting birth

positive effect: among cohorts (*Steele/ Joshi/ Kallis/ Goldstein 2006*)  
among countries (*Clarke/ Jensen 2004*)  
no effect across time (*Jensen/ Clausen 2003*)

### METHOD

#### 1. Are unions which cohabit at first birth more stable in eastern than in western Germany?

→ Estimation of a *proportional piecewise linear hazard model* with an interaction of union context and regional information in the hazard model and a stepwise controlling of individual, union and family characteristics.

#### 2. If there is an selection mechanism, is this selection effect stronger in western Germany?

Relative risk of separation after childbirth (proportional piecewise linear hazard model)

$$\ln h(t|X) = \beta_1(t) + \beta_2 X + \beta_3 X(t) + \epsilon + \rho$$

Probability of cohabiting at first childbirth (probit model)

$$y = \alpha_1 + \alpha_2 Z + \delta + \rho$$

### DATA

- The new German family panel **pairfam** (*Panel of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics*, 1<sup>st</sup> wave 2008/09)
- & supplement panel for Eastern Germany **DemoDiff** (*Demographic Differences in Life-Course Dynamics in eastern and western Germany*, 1<sup>st</sup> wave 2009/10)
- initial sample size: 13,891 respondents

#### Sample

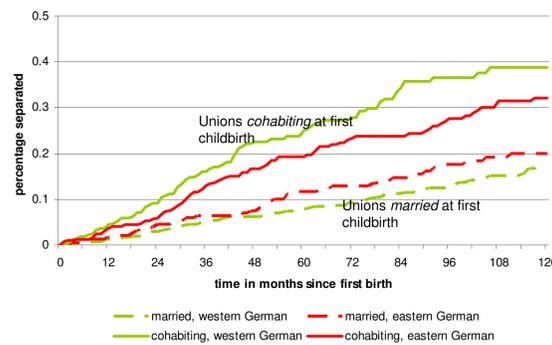
- women of the birth cohorts 1971-73 and 1981-83
- **At the time of first childbirth in a cohabiting or married union with the biological father of their 1<sup>st</sup> child**
- with both birth place and current residence in the same German region

#### Number of cases and events

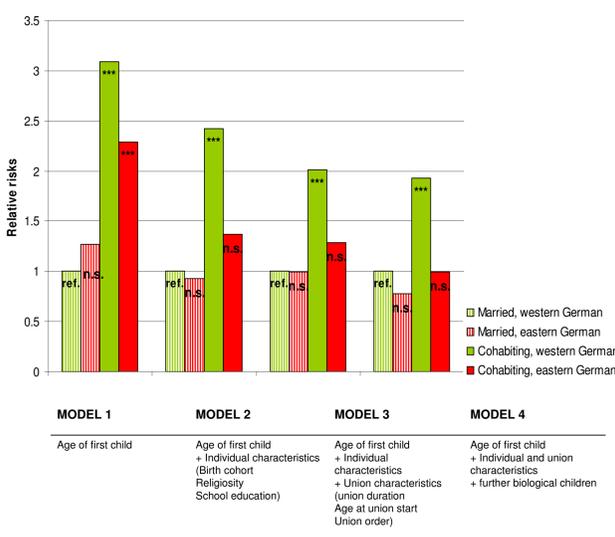
	western Germany		eastern Germany	
Union context at first childbirth	cohabiting	married	cohabiting	married
Subjects	283 (27%)	780 (73%)	379 (61%)	244 (39%)
Events	76	84	83	36

### DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

#### Transition to first separation after first birth by the union context at first birth (Kaplan Meier Failure Estimate)



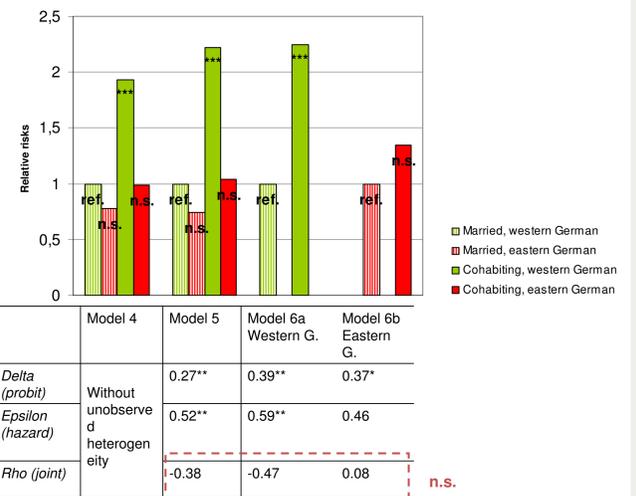
### RELATIVE RISKS OF SEPARATION AFTER FIRST BIRTH



### SELECTION MECHANISMS

**Is the dissolution risk of unions with a cohabiting birth driven by the same unobserved characteristics that influence also the probability of a birth within cohabitation?**

Relative separation risks (resulting of a joint model of the risk of separation (hazard model) and the probability of cohabiting at childbirth (probit model))



**Control covariate (results of model 5)** Affects risk of separation? (hazard model results) Affects probability of cohabiting childbirth? (probit model results)

Religiosity	(-)	(-)
Birth cohort (young)	(+)	(+)
School education	(-) n.s.	(+) n.s.
Union duration until childbirth	(-)	(-)
Age at union start	(-)	(+)
Union order	n.s.	
Age of the first child	(+)	
Further biological children	(-)	

### CONCLUSION

**The effect of the union context at first birth depends on the normative setting:**

1. In a setting with weak norms of marital childbearing couples cohabiting at first birth have lower separation risks than in a setting where marital childbearing is common.
2. If non-marital childbearing is common, the union context at first birth has no significant influence on union stability, in contrast to the case of predominant marital norms.

**The selection mechanism cannot be explained by unobserved individual characteristics.**

### LITERATURE

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