

Final abstract of paper to be presented at EPC 2006

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Title: Risk of dissolution of families with children. An analysis of married and cohabiting couples with children.

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Abstract

The present study provides an analysis of the risk of dissolution of married and cohabiting couples with children in Norway. The study is based on register data on family status and individual characteristics of cohorts of parental couples with their first common child born in the period 1987 - 2001. The dataset contains longitudinal information on further family development, with yearly update on family status (still cohabiting, married or split up), as well as later births, and for cohabiting parents - transition to marriage, until end of 2002.

We use event history analysis to estimate the risk of a break-up, controlling for the available parental characteristics at time of first birth (i.e. age, earlier childbirths, education, marital status), as well as time varying covariates after birth of first child (i.e. parents' income, later births, and for cohabiting parents; possible transition to marriage).

Earlier studies based on survey data have shown that cohabiting couples have a higher dissolution risk than married couples, also when comparing cohabiting and married couples with children and controlling for demographic and socio-economic background variables. During the period of analysis, cohabitational unions have gradually become a more accepted and common way of forming a family. The share of children living with cohabiting parents has increased from 5 to 15 per cent, and today almost half of all firstborn babies are born to parents living together without being married.

Through the present study we will address questions like whether the same significant difference in dissolution risk between cohabiting and married parents is found for the more recent cohorts of parental couples. Whatever level of dissolution, what risk factors have an influence on the dissolution risk, and do they have the same effect on both cohabiting and married couples?