

Background

- Less relationally stable, unmarried couple relationships are sometimes concentrated among lower-income population (Cherlin, 2016; Furstenberg, 2014).
- There exists diversity in unmarried unions in terms of relationship stability (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006).
- Relationship statuses can change across time (Cho, Cui, & Claridge, 2018; Lichter, Qian, & Mellott, 2006).
- Following from commitment theory (Johnson, 1999), we predict that individuals' commitment will predict above and beyond demographics (e.g., poverty, race, ethnicity, education) to promote relationship stability.

Research Goals

To understand how each domain of commitment at baseline – personal, moral, and structural – is associated with:

- Couples' relationship status at 15 months
- Couples' relationship status transition from 15 to 36 months, examining both transitions into less stable unions (e.g., married to cohabiting) and into more stable unions (e.g., cohabiting to married).

Conclusions and Implications

- Unmarried parents might benefit from preventions and interventions aimed at addressing specific risks related to lower personal commitment.
- Identifying distinct subgroups of unmarried couples with children in terms of relationship stability, and examining factors that distinguish among these subgroups offers implications for programs that facilitate the formation of more stable family structures.
- Fathers' and mothers' different domains of commitment both matter in understanding relationship status at 15 months.

Methods

- **Participants:** 3,282 couples who were unmarried and had first child together;
- **Analytic Strategies:** Multinomial regression using Bayesian estimation;
- **Measures:** Personal commitment at Wave 0: 8 items, relationship quality; Moral commitment at Wave 0: 1 item, religious attendance; Structural commitment at Wave 0: 2 items, getting married for child's sake;
- Relationship status at 15 months (multinomial): Married, engaged, not engaged but cohabited, and all else (i.e., broke up or still in the relationship but not cohabiting); Relationship status transition from 15 to 36 months (multinomial): Stable (i.e., on the diagonal below), into less stable union (i.e., below the diagonal), into more stable union (i.e., above the diagonal).

		Relationship statuses at 36 months				Total
		All else	Cohabiting	Engaged	Married	
Relationship statuses at 15 months	All else	1,125	193	59	68	1,445
	Cohabiting	418	460	113	63	1,054
	Engaged	132	88	121	100	441
	Married	74	0	0	268	342
	Total	1,749	741	293	499	3,282

Results

	Relationship status at 15 months (versus All else)						Relationship status transitions from 15 to 36 months (versus Stable)				
	Cohabitation		Engaged		Married		Less stable		More stable		
	b	O.R.	b	O.R.	b	O.R.	b	O.R.	b	O.R.	
Tripartite Commitment											
RQ (i.e., indicator for PC; M)	.13	1.14	.82	2.26	.80	2.22	.16	1.17	.33	1.38	
RQ (i.e., indicator for PC; F)	.21	1.24	.40	1.49	.59	1.81	-.07	.93	.08	1.09	
RSA (i.e., indicator for MC; M)	-.01	.99	.004	1.00	.23	1.26	.05	1.05	.02	1.02	
RSA (i.e., indicator for MC; F)	-.11	.90	.03	1.03	.15	1.16	-.02	.98	.08	1.08	
IMC (i.e., indicator for SC; M)	.05	1.05	-.05	.95	.19	1.21	-.10	.91	-.05	.95	
IMC (i.e., indicator for SC; F)	.07	1.07	.15	1.16	.15	1.16	.22	1.25	.02	1.02	

Note. Red, Bolded coefficients were significant at .05 level and with notable effect. RQ = Relationship Quality, PC = Personal Commitment, RSA = Religious Service Attendance, MC = Moral Commitment, IMC = Implications of Marriage for Children, SC = Structural Commitment, M = Mothers, and F = Fathers. We controlled for the potential confounding effects of BSF sites by adding dummy codes of the 8-category nominal variable into the model. To simplify the presentation, coefficients for pathways involving BSF sites were not presented but available upon request. |

For covariates, we controlled for age, education, race/ethnicity, income, multi-partner fertility, locations, and BSF intervention. Some effects emerged in fathers' reports. That is, fathers in race/ethnicity minority group, with low income, and having child with prior partner were less likely to enter in stable relationship union.

