

Some formerly cohabiting couples with children keep romantic relationship

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(PhysOrg.com) -- When low-income cohabiting couples with children decide to no longer live together, that doesn't necessarily mean the end of their romantic relationship.

A new study suggests that about one in four of these couples who split their households still maintain some type of [romantic relationship](#).

"When people have studied the end of cohabiting relationships, they have generally assumed that it would end in marriage or end in a permanent breakup," said Claire Kamp Dush, author of the study and assistant professor of human development and family science at Ohio State University.

"But there seems to be a significant proportion who no longer live together, but aren't completely giving up on being a couple."

That continued relationship could be beneficial for their children, Kamp Dush said.

"Children whose parents are still romantically involved are going to see the parent they don't live with more often, and that's generally good," she said.

"Research has shown that father involvement is beneficial for children, and that involvement is one benefit we could see if couples continue a romantic relationship even after they stop living together."

In the new study, published recently in the journal [Family Relations](#), Kamp Dush examined factors that are related to couples maintaining their relationship after moving apart.

Data from this research project came from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, which examined low-income unwed mothers and fathers who had children in the United States between 1998 and 2000.

Kamp Dush's work included 1,624 mothers who were cohabiting at the birth of their child. The mothers were followed for five years after the birth.

About 46 percent the sample split their households within three years, and 64 percent did so within five years. Of those who moved apart, 75 percent ended their romantic relationship.

About three-quarters of these black mothers no longer lived with their partner after five years, compared to 52 percent of Hispanic mothers and 57 percent of white and other-race mothers.

These black mothers were also significantly more likely than Hispanic and white [mothers](#) to continue a romantic relationship after moving away from their partner.

Kamp Dush found that couples who stayed connected after moving apart tended to have two factors going for them: they had more relationship "investments" with each other and had less family chaos.

Relationship investments included things like pooling money, having a joint checking account or credit card, or having a second baby together.

"These investments help bring [couples](#) together and make it less likely that they will totally separate," she said.

“But if you have a lot of family chaos – things like inflexible job arrangements, child care problems and constant moving – it is harder to create and maintain family routines and time together, and hence cohabiting parents are more likely to permanently separate.”

The study found that each additional indicator of family chaos increased the odds of a couple breaking up by 22 percent.

“There are clear disadvantages to the simultaneous end of living together and a romantic relationship, particularly when children are involved,” Kamp Dush said.

“The negative effects of divorce for children are clearly documented and cohabitation dissolution likely has similar impacts on [children](#) when it ends in breakup.”

From a policy perspective, Kamp Dush said the results point to the importance of providing good and flexible jobs and quality child care to low-income parents in order to help them stay together.

“If a mother can’t change her work schedule to deal with sick kids or other issues, it just adds to the chaos of their [family](#) life. And more chaos means it is less likely they will stay romantically connected to their partners,” she said.

Provided by The Ohio State University

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