

Premarital births no longer predict breakups

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Examining changes in parental unions near the time of childbirth, social science researchers have found that premarital births do not predict breakups so long as couples marry – at some point – after a child is born.

In the early 1990s, couples who cohabited, had a premarital birth and later married were 60 percent more likely to divorce than couples that married before having a child. A decade later, those same kinds of couples had no higher chance of breaking up than couples who had children after marriage.

"Results support the notion that cohabitation has become a more normative part of the family formation process," said Kelly Musick, Cornell associate professor of policy analysis and management in the College of Human Ecology. "The increasing stability of [cohabiting couples](#) and the declining importance of marriage timing – relative to parenthood – suggests that many parents may be jointly planning marriage and childbirth as the quality and commitment of their relationships grow. And that is with little regard to which comes first," she said.

Musick and Katherine Micheltore, Ph.D. '14, of the University of Michigan have published "Change in the Stability of Marital and Cohabiting Unions Following the Birth of a Child" this month in the journal *Demography*.

Using data from the 1995 and the 2006-10 National Survey of Family Growth, the researchers examined the stability of couples – married and

unmarried – who have had a [child](#) together as births among cohabiting couples increased in the last two decades. The researchers showed no change in the stability of unions with children between the 1995 and 2006-10 periods, with an estimated 17 percent of all couples with children separating within five years.

"Cohabiting couples tend to have less education and income than married [couples](#), and it may be that those who do not marry are a particularly disadvantaged group," said Musick. "Marriage is less a silver bullet than it is an outcome of a whole set of factors linked to stability and security that help parents stay together."

More information: "Change in the Stability of Marital and Cohabiting Unions Following the Birth of a Child." *Demography* pp 1-23 18 September 2015. [DOI: 10.1007/s13524-015-0425-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-015-0425-y)

Provided by Cornell University

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