

Study: Cohabiting interracial parents less likely to stay together than married counterparts

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Credit: Keira Burton from Pexels

Multiracial children's experiences of family instability differ significantly depending on whether their parents were married when the child was born, a new international study published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* has found.

While multiracial children born to cohabiting [parents](#) are more likely than their single-race counterparts to experience [family instability](#), that increased risk does not exist for multiracial children born to married parents, according to research by Western University's Kate Choi, in collaboration with Rachel E. Goldberg from the University of California.

The rising number of interracial unions and multiracial individuals might be seen as a sign that racial distinctions are diminishing, but the reality is much more complicated, said Choi, associate professor of sociology.

"Although attitudes towards interracial unions have become much more favorable, some interracial couples continue to report ostracism from friends and families after the formation of these unions," said Choi, an expert in racial and socioeconomic inequality. "Families are also more likely to oppose longer-lasting unions than dating."

Differences in the intensity of family opposition may help generate the variations in multiracial children's risk of experiencing family instability, the study suggested. Multiracial children born to [married parents](#) may have extended families who are more accepting of interracial unions, or the parents may have relationships that are strong enough to overcome the challenges of intermarriage. Those born to cohabiting parents also may be at higher risk because extended-family opposition intensified following a pregnancy, putting a strain on the parents' relationship.

While the study is based on U.S. data, most research on racial and ethnic disparity shows that what's happening in the United States is also transpiring in Canada even though the national narrative might be different, said Choi.

"For the most part, we have seen a lot of consistencies between the U.S. and Canada in patterns of racial/ethnic disparities. Furthermore, roughly

15 percent of Canadians report that they would never marry someone outside of their race," said Choi [citing a recent Ipsos poll](#). "This suggests interracial couples will experience the same challenges in Canada as they do south of the border."

Inequalities based on race and [socioeconomic status](#) are on the rise across North America, and research into diversity and equity must continue, said Choi. She noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has unveiled and heightened disparity and discrimination for racialized communities.

"That higher shares of [multiracial](#) children are born in cohabitation suggests that a new disadvantaged group may be emerging: a population who are more likely to experience [family](#) instability which is linked to poorer academic and socio-emotional outcomes," said Choi. "Our results suggest that systemic racism and unfavorable attitudes towards interracial unions may have created this disadvantaged group."

More information: Kate H. Choi et al. Multiracial Children's Experiences of Family Instability, *Journal of Marriage and Family* (2021). [DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12763](https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12763)

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