

# **Re-marry, re-cohabit or reconcile? How demographic and socio-economic factors are related to the different exits from lone motherhood.**

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## **Introduction**

Previous research has demonstrated a preference for repartnering in the form of a cohabitating union rather than a marriage among lone parents (Böheim and Ermisch, 1998) and when examining repartnering of all individuals (Ermisch and Francesconi, 2000; Wu and Schimmele, 2005; Skew, Evans and Gray, 2009). Cohabitation is also the dominant mode of first partnership (Ermisch and Francesconi, 2000); a relevant point to note when one considers that single never-married lone mothers may well be partnering for the first time. However, while several general repartnering studies (none of which are conducted in the UK) and studies of first union formation have shown that there are different factors associated with forming each respective union type (Berrington and Diamond, 2000; De Graaf and Kalmijn, 2003; Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martin, 2008; Wu and Balakrishnan, 1994; Wu and Schimmele, 2005), no study has examined how the determinants of repartnering might differ depending on the choice of new partnership among lone mothers specifically. Furthermore, the issue of reforming a prior union rather than forming a new partnership has rarely been addressed in any of the repartnering literature.

This paper seeks to contribute to our understanding of the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of lone mothers which are associated with these two exits from lone motherhood. Of particular interest are: how the route of entry into lone motherhood affects the choice of new union type and the extent of partnerships which are reconciliations.

## **Data and method**

This paper uses data collected by the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) between the years 1991-2005 (Waves 1-14). The BHPS is an annual nationally representative survey which interviews every adult member of a sample of around 5000 households amounting to around 10,000 individual interviews. The sample for analysis in this study includes women

that become a lone mother over the life of the panel. These women are tracked over subsequent waves until they enter either a marital union, a cohabiting union, their children grow-up (hence they are no longer defined as lone parents), or they are lost from the study. Overall the sample consists of 515 lone mothers (1,600 person-years). A three-level dependent variable indicates if a lone mother formed a cohabitation, a marriage or remained a lone mother. In terms of independent variables, of particular interest is the route of entry into lone motherhood (i.e. through the breakdown of a cohabiting union, through the dissolution of a marriage or through giving birth whilst single and never-married). Other independent variables include: age, number and ages of children, previous union history, ethnicity, education, economic circumstances (including income and employment), social background factors, religion, region & health.

Initially, a descriptive analysis explores the choice of partnership type, and answers questions such as what proportion of those that repartner are reforming a prior union rather than forming a new relationship. A multinomial hazard model is subsequently used to investigate how the effects of the explanatory variables on repartnering might differ depending on the types of new unions formed. In particular testing for the significance of route of entry into lone motherhood in the model allows us to determine whether different types of lone mothers choose different types of second unions.

## **Results**

Just over 40 per cent of the sample are found to repartner, with around three quarters choosing to cohabit rather than marry, supporting previous findings of an overwhelming preference for lone mothers to enter a cohabiting union rather than a marriage (Böheim and Ermisch, 1998; Ermisch and Francesconi, 2000).

Increasing age is negatively associated with (re)marriage and (re)cohabiting, but other variables are only significantly associated with one of the two exits from lone motherhood. With respect to forming a marriage, it is demographic variables that appear to be more important than socio-economic variables, with age, type of lone mother, number of children and ethnic group all significantly related to the probability of (re)marriage, but social class the only socio-economic variable to be significantly related to (re)marriage. For forming a

cohabitation, apart from age only GHQ score and employment status have any significant influence over the chance of (re)cohabiting.

There is some indication that those who were previously married are more likely to re-marry than other types of lone mothers. However, much of this is a result of women reconciling a marriage with a previous partner. After these women are removed from the model the difference in the probability of re-marrying between types of lone mother is reduced and no longer significant. Whether this is as a result of the reduction in sample size after removing these women meaning that there is not enough power to determine a significant result or whether it is because these women entirely account for this higher probability remains to be seen. There is no clear indication from this study that those who were previously cohabiting are more likely to form a cohabitation than other types of lone mothers. The predicted probability is slightly higher for this group of lone mothers compared to the previously married and single never-married, but not statistically significant.

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