

# The influence of parental education on cohabiting and single parenthood across Europe and Canada

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This research looked at the influence of parental education on the chance of having a first child within a cohabiting union or while being single as compared to having a first child within marriage.

**Theory.** The Pattern of Disadvantage perspective claims that the increase in nonmarital births is caused by an increase in economic hardship and technological changes which hit people with a lower socio-economic status disproportionately. This perspective therefore suggests that young adults are more likely to have a nonmarital birth if they grew up with lower educated parents. In contrast, the Second Demographic Transition theory postulates that the increase in nonmarital parenthood is mostly due to attitudinal changes which led to a decrease in marriage and an increase in cohabitation. Since the higher educated are often the forerunners of new demographic behaviour, this theory suggest that young adults are more likely to have their first birth within cohabitation if they grew up with higher educated parents.

**Data and Method.** Data from the Generations and Gender Survey (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Norway, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Russia), was combined with Dutch (Onderzoek Gezinsvorming, 2008), and Canadian data (General Social Survey, 2006). The dependent variable *partnership context at first birth* differentiates between marriage, cohabitation, single, and no biological children. *Parental education* combines information on the educational levels of the respondent's father and mother coded in the International Standard Level of Education (ISLED). Furthermore, information on respondent's *own educational level* (time-varying), *school enrollment* (time-varying), *gender*, *cohort*, *age* (time-varying) and *age-square* were included. A discrete time competing risk model is used by analysing multinomial logistic regressions on a person-period file (in months).

**Preliminary results (not including Dutch data).** In most Eastern European countries we find a negative influence of parental education on the chance of having a first birth within cohabitation. In Norway and Canada we find this too. In Germany, parental education had a positive influence on the chance of having a first birth within cohabitation for men. However, in all other Western European countries we did not find a significant influence. In most countries we find a negative influence of parental education on the chance of having a first birth while being single. We did not find a significant influence in Germany, Poland, Georgia, and Lithuania. After including respondent's own educational level and school enrollment most, but not all, effects of parental education disappear.