

## **Partnership status at first birth. Explaining cross-national differences in the influence of parental educational attainment on parenthood decisions.**

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Sixty years ago, the life course trajectory into parenthood was fairly straight forward in most industrial countries. Since then, life courses de-standardized and have increasingly been replaced by alternative pathways into family formation and parenthood. A prominent observation is the increasing decoupling of marriage and childbearing resulting especially in an increase in first births to cohabiting couples. Yet, more diversity in choices by no means guarantees more socio-economic equality. Studies show that in many societies women growing up with parents with a lower socio-economic status have a higher chance of having a birth within cohabitation. However, there are also countries where young adults raised in higher and lower SES families are equally likely to have a birth within a cohabiting union. The current study focuses on the question why cross-national differences are found in the influence of parental SES and the chance of having a first birth within cohabitation. Drawing on research on cohabitation as a result of economic constraints to marry and cohabitation as a result of changing norms regarding family life, we introduce three macro-level indicators which have the potential of explaining cross-national differences: economic inequality, norms towards marriage, and women's empowerment. The moderating effects of these macro-level variables on the link between parental SES and the chance to have a first birth within cohabitation will be examined using information on women from 19 industrialized countries, thereby covering East-, Central, and West-Europe, and North-America. Our results show that norms towards marriage is the most powerful explanatory variable.