

April 2020 Webinar

**Family environment instability:
How early childhood shapes social
maladjustments over time**

Presenter:

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Child Trends



Webinar Information

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Resources for Teaching Relationship Skills

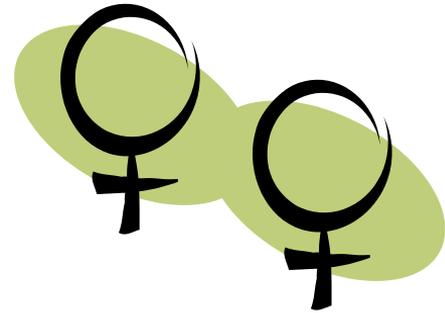
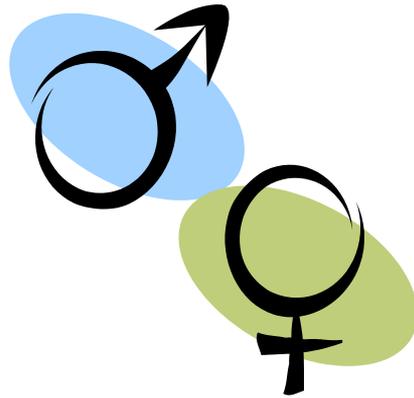
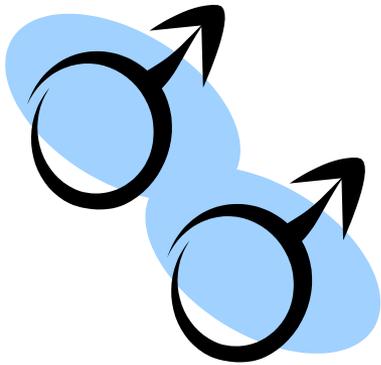
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The Dibble Institute
believes in stable, healthy families.



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all people deserve respect.



Family stability and children's social outcomes

Elizabeth Karberg, Ph.D.
April 8, 2020



Webinar objectives

You will learn...

1. How families in America are changing
2. The link to children's social outcomes
3. *Why* we see this link
4. What this means for those working with children and families

1. Background



Family stability project

- NIH grant R03HD090277
- Why child aggression and social competence?
- Why family contexts?
- What are the mechanisms and for whom?

Children's social development

- Social competence (positive social skills) is an essential life skill.
- As children develop, some degree of social incompetence is expected
- It shouldn't persist into the school years

Family instability

- Increasingly common
(Ruggles, 2016)



Fig. 7 Divorces per 1000 married women standardized by age: USA, 1867–2012. (Source: Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014; These estimates use direct standardization for the period 1970–2012 and indirect standardization for the period 1867–1969; both periods use 2010 as the standard. The 1970–2012 estimates follow the analysis of Kennedy and Ruggles (2014), but they are adjusted to account for the differences between the death registration area and the country as a whole. Missing years were interpolated based on the fluctuations in crude rates)

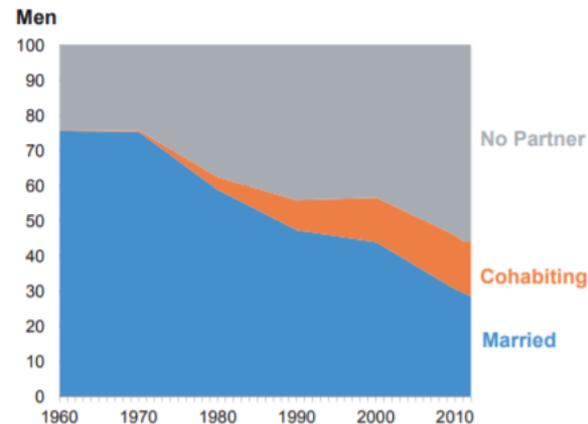
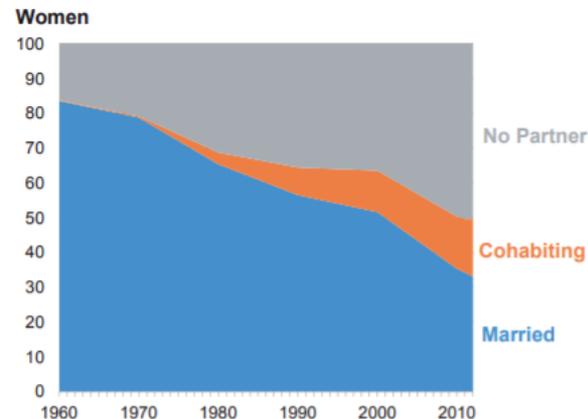


Fig. 6 Percentage of women and men aged 25–29 who were married or cohabiting. (Source: Calculated from Fitch et al., 2005; King et al., 2010; Ruggles et al., 2010)

Children's family contexts

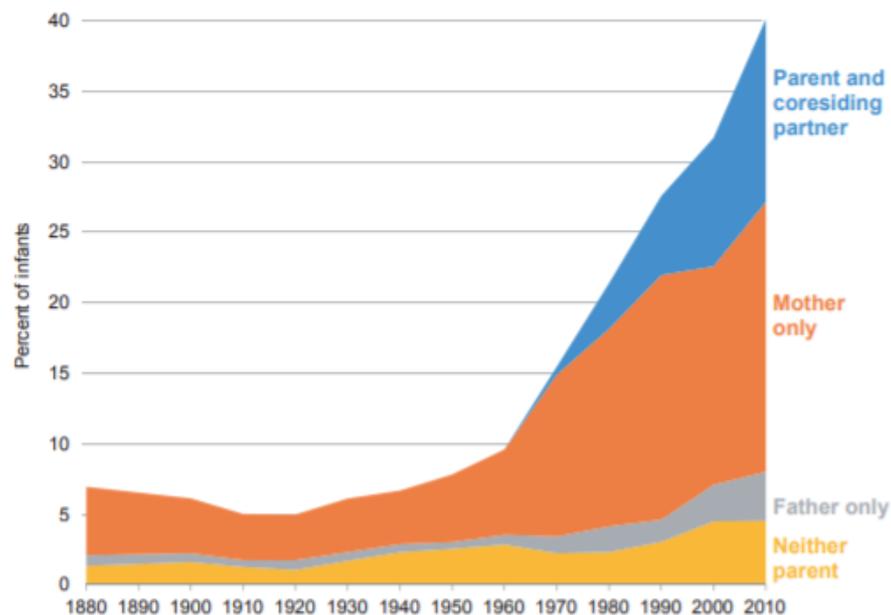


Fig. 9 Living arrangements of infants residing without married parents: USA, 1880–2010. (Source: Fitch et al., 2005; King et al., 2010; Ruggles et al., 2010; The category “parent and coresiding partner” was estimated using cohabitation variables in the 2010 Current Population Survey to adjust results from the census in 2000 and 1990 based on the “unmarried partner” category. Pre-1990 cohabitation was estimated from Fitch et al., 2005)

Family instability and social development

- Linked with social maladjustment
- Children do not experience family instability equally
 - In particular, marriage shapes likelihood
- Family (in)stability shapes children's household income, time with each parent, and possibly the quality of interaction with each parent changes

2. Methodology



Data

- Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study
- 1,498 mothers/children

Measures

- Family instability: no vs. 1
- Social competence
- Aggression
- Household income
- Mothers' relationship status at birth

Approach

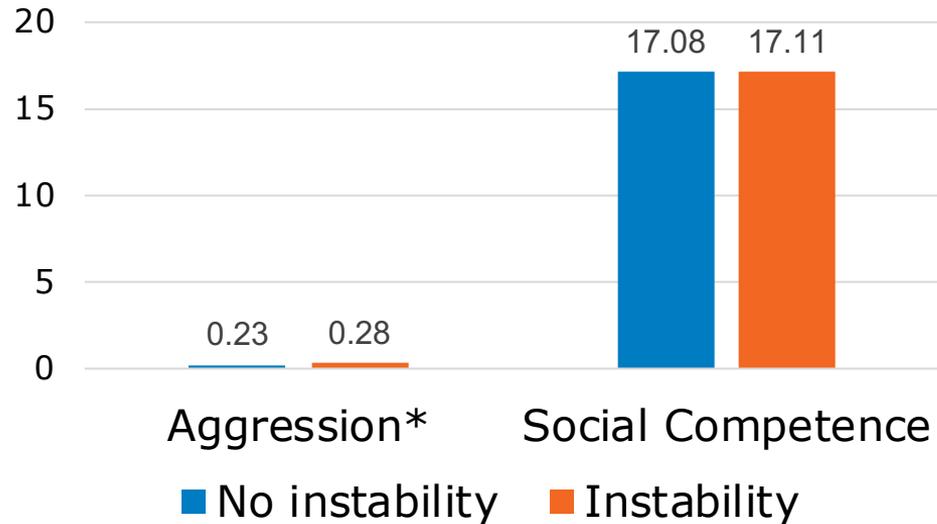
- Family instability between birth and age 9
- Social competence and Aggression at age 15
- NOT changes over time in social outcomes
 - Rather, differences by group

3. Results



Family instability and social development

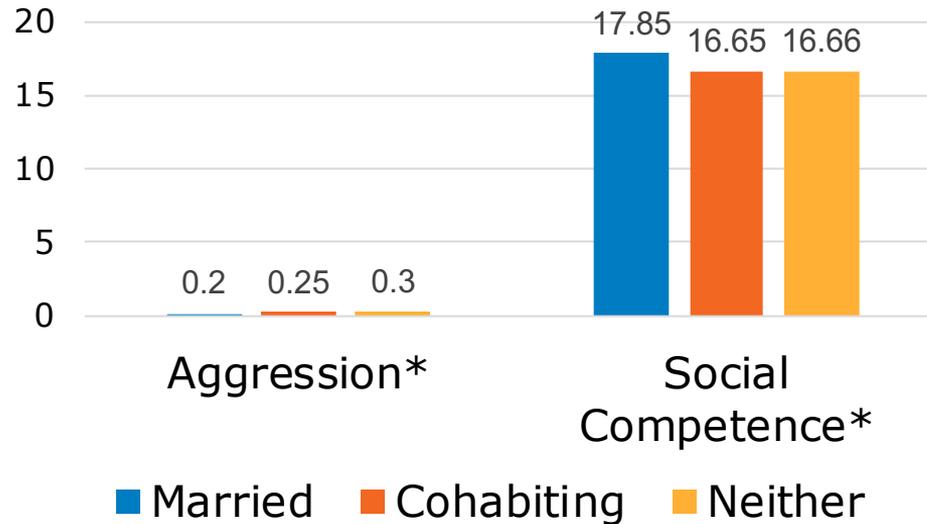
Family instability is linked with aggression, not social competence



*Significant at $p < .01$ level

Relationship status at birth and social development

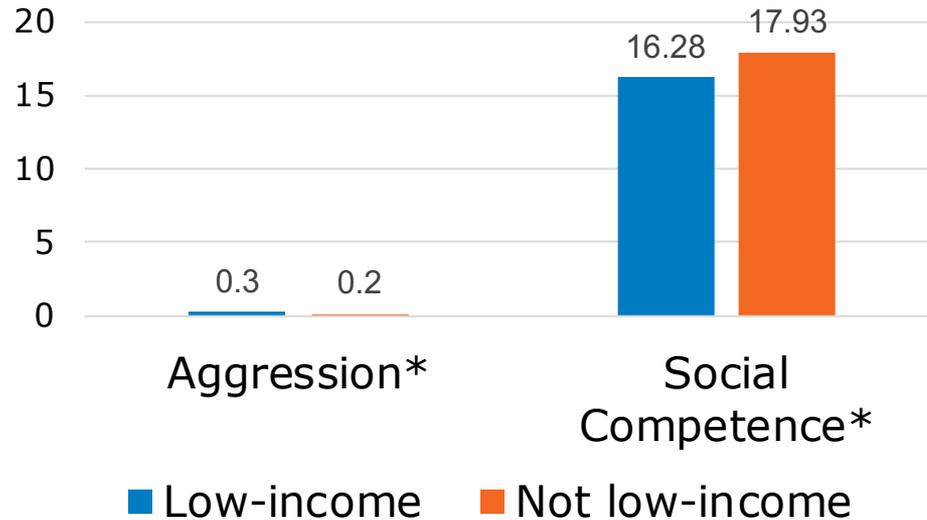
Marriage at birth is linked with less aggression and greater social competence



*Married significantly different from other groups at $p < .01$ level

Household income at age 15 and social development

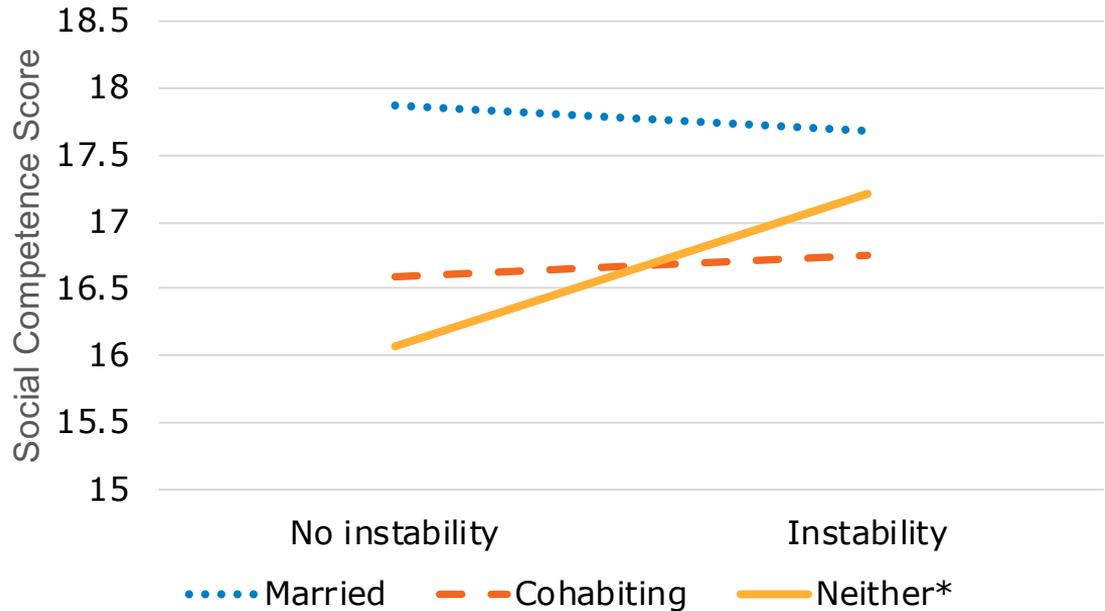
Adolescents living in low-income households are rated as more aggressive and less socially competent



*Significant at $p < .001$ level

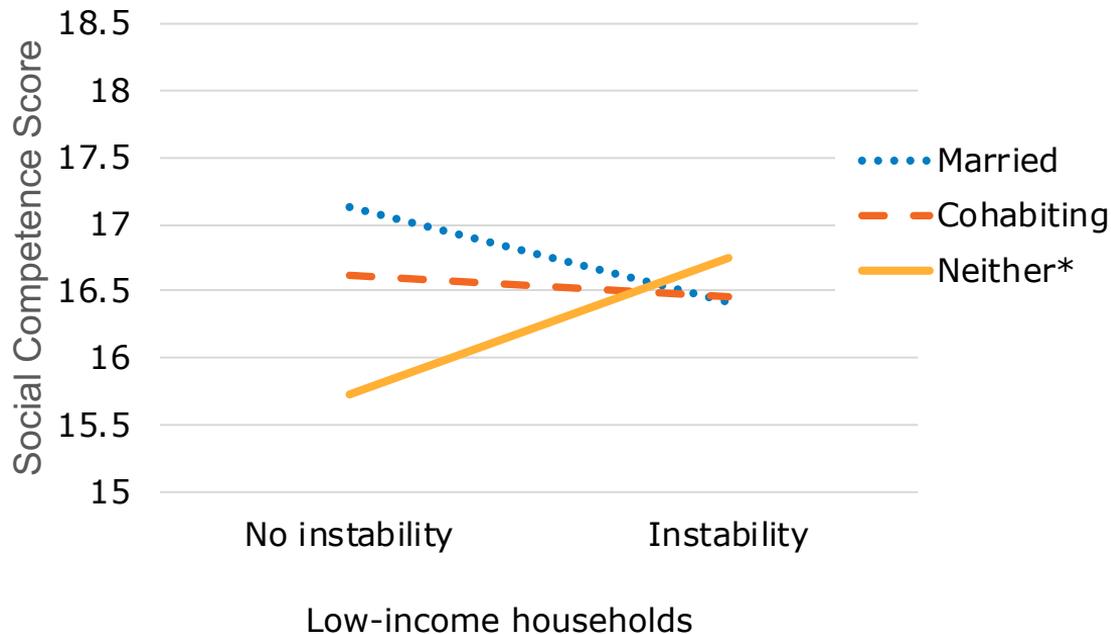
Moderation effects – relationship status at birth and social competence

Instability is associated with *greater* social competence when mothers gain a partner



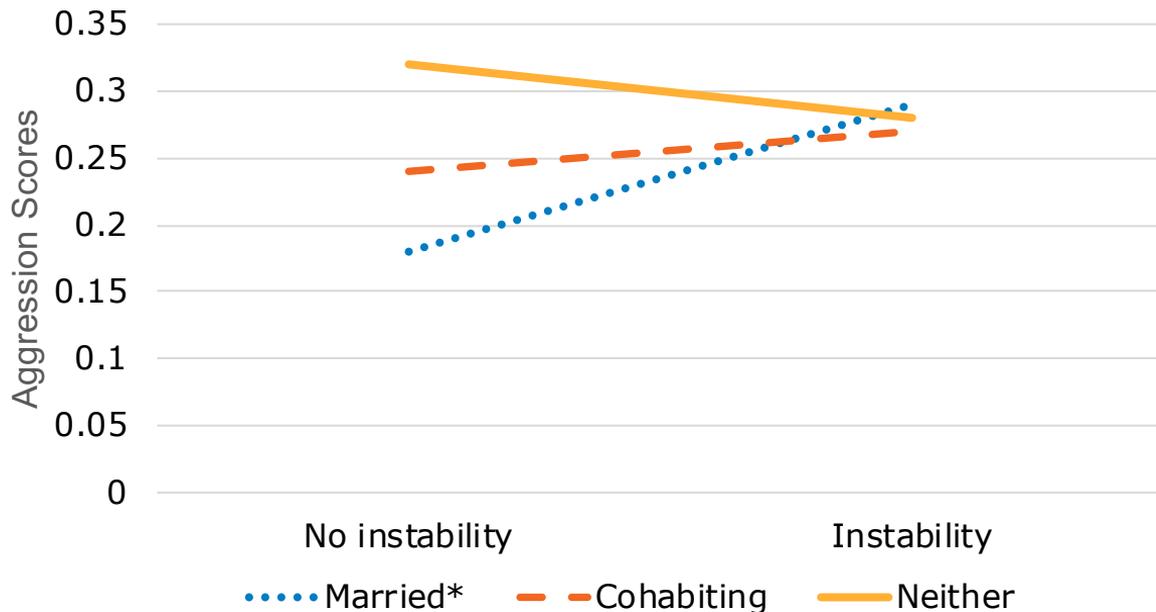
This effect is driven by households with low income

Moderation effects – relationship status at birth and income and social competence



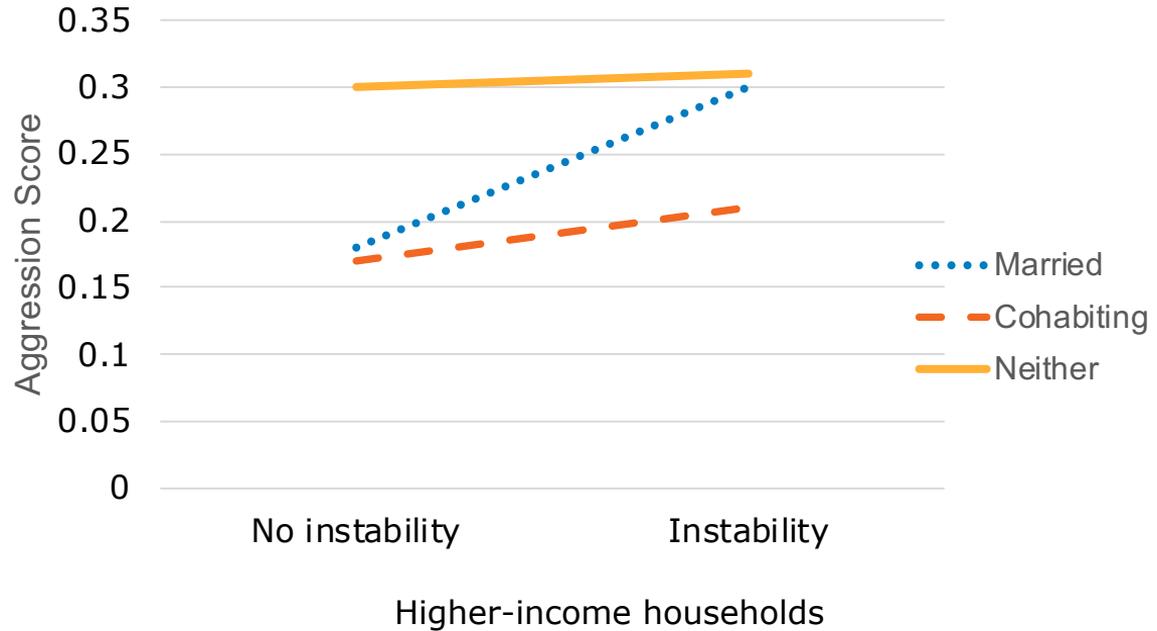
Instability is associated with more aggression when mothers divorce

Moderation effects – relationship status at birth and aggression



Moderation effects – relationship status at birth and income and aggression

This effect is driven by households with higher income



4. Summary and Implications



Summary



Early family instability is linked with adolescent aggression



This is driven by families experiencing a **divorce**



And with **higher income**



Early family instability is not linked with social competence



It is *positively* linked with social competence when **a partner moves into the house**



And *only when* the family has **low income**

Implications

- Support for heterogeneity effect
- Children in low-income households and households where mothers stably live without a partner generally have lower levels of social competence and higher levels of aggression
 - Cumulatively speaks to the need for policies and programs that alleviate parenting stress and financial insecurity
 - This may be improved when a partner moved into the house, but more research is needed on this to understand when and why this is the case

Implications

- COVID-19:
 - Inability to leave a bad relationship – may be as or more stressful than instability
 - Policies and programs to alleviate parenting stress and financial insecurity important now more than ever

Questions?



Thank you!

- www.childtrends.org
- ekarberg@childtrends.org





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Second Wednesday Webinar

May 13, 2020

Scaling Up a Large Program in Rural Areas

Presenter:

Jill Gwilt, Director of the Mission West Virginia THINK Program