

**ARE COHABITING RELATIONSHIPS
MORE VIOLENT THAN MARRIAGE?**

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Catherine T. Kenney

Sara S. McLanahan

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Catherine T. Kenney
Office of Population Research
Princeton University
ctkenney@princeton.edu

Sara S. McLanahan
Department of Sociology and Office of Population Research
Princeton University
mclanaha@princeton.edu

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Abstract

In response to increases in cohabitation in the United States, researchers have recently focused on differences between cohabiting and marital unions. One of the more consistent findings in this emerging literature has been a higher rate of domestic violence among cohabiting couples. A prominent explanation for this finding is that cohabitators are not subject to the institutionalized social control mechanisms that may limit violent behavior within marriage. This article uses data from the National Survey of Families and Households (1987-88 and 1992-93) to explore an alternative explanation: differences in selection out of cohabitation and marriage, including the selection of cohabitators with the “best” relationships into marriage, lead cross-sectional samples to over-represent long-term cohabitators, who tend to have more troubled relationships. We find support for this explanation in evidence that there is no difference in the level of domestic violence found in married and cohabiting couples in the first year of the relationship but that violence increases at higher relationship durations in cohabitation.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, rates of cohabitation have increased dramatically in the United States. In 1970, only 11 percent of newly married couples had cohabited prior to getting married, whereas by 1988, about half had done so (Bumpass, Sweet & Cherlin 1991). Indeed cohabitation has now replaced marriage as the modal form of first co-residential union (Bumpass & Lu 2000). In response to this trend, researchers have become increasingly interested in understanding the differences between cohabitating and marital unions and have begun to compare these two types of unions along a number of dimensions. One of the more consistent (and potentially alarming) findings in the emerging literature is the higher rate of domestic violence among cohabiting couples (Yllo and Straus 1981; Stets and Straus 1989; Stets 1991). For example, Stets found that 14 percent of cohabiting respondents in the NSFH-87 reported being physically violent during the previous year as compared with only 5 percent of married respondents. Researchers also have found that people who cohabit are more depressed and more likely to have problems with drugs and alcohol than people who are married (Horwitz and White 1998; Yamaguchi and Kandel 1985; Nock 1995).

Unfortunately, these findings are not easy to interpret. On the one hand, they may be due to differences in the social control mechanisms inherent in the institutions of marriage and cohabitation. Nock (1995), for example, proposes that cohabitation is an “incomplete institution” (Cherlin 1978) inasmuch as the social norms that constrain negative behavior in marriage are much weaker among cohabiting couples. On the other hand, differences between cohabiting and married couples may be due to differences in the selection processes that sort people into these two states. Given the high rates of

cohabitation, and given the relatively short duration of most cohabiting unions, the population of cohabiting couples at a point in time is likely to differ significantly from the population of couples who ever enter a cohabiting relationship. In other words, cross-sectional samples disproportionately represent couples that have cohabited for a long time (Lundberg and Pollak 1998; Bumpass et al. 1991) and therefore may not provide an accurate picture of the characteristics of all cohabiting relationships. (A similar point was made by Bane and Ellwood (1986) with respect to the population of mothers receiving welfare at a point in time).

While many researchers have attempted to take account of differential selection into cohabitation and marriage, only a few have attempted to adjust for differences in exit rates (Nock 1995; Schoen and Weinick 1993; Horwitz and White 1998). And virtually no study has taken account of the fact that about 40 percent of cohabiting unions end in marriage (Bumpass and Sweet 1989).

This paper uses data from two waves of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH 1987-88 and 1992-93) to compare the prevalence of domestic violence among cohabiting and married couples and to determine how much of the difference in domestic violence may be due to differential selection. We find evidence that domestic violence is as high (or higher) in the first year of marriage as it is in the first year of cohabitation. However, differences in the selection processes operating over time result in a cross-sectional picture in which domestic violence is much higher among cohabiting couples. While our results do not rule out the possibility that institutional forces contribute to difference in violence, we conclude that such an effect has not yet been demonstrated. Furthermore, we argue that to properly study the effects of

cohabitation on violence and other aspects of couple relationships, researchers must take account of the selection processes discussed in this paper.

The next section of the paper discusses the arguments for why cohabiting unions might be expected tolerate more domestic violence than marriages and reviews the empirical evidence. The third section describes the data and methods and the fourth section reports the results. The final section discusses the implications of our findings for studies that compare cohabitation with marriage using cross-sectional data.

Theory and Prior Empirical Research

Numerous researchers have found that cohabiting couples have poorer quality relationships than married couples (See Nock 1995 for a review). Brown and Booth (1996) found that cohabiters report more disagreements and conflict and less fairness, happiness, conflict management, and interaction than married people, although most of the difference can be accounted for by future marriage plans. These researchers also report that cohabiting individuals who plan to marry look very similar to married individuals in terms of relationship quality.

Research on family violence also finds higher rates of dysfunction among cohabiting couples as compared to married couples (Yllo and Straus 1991; Stets and Straus 1989; Stets 1991; Waite and Gallagher 2000). Stets and Straus (1989) found that 35 percent of cohabiting couples in the National Family Violence Resurvey of 1985 experienced violence in the previous year as compared to 15 percent of married couples. Using a more restrictive measure of violence – whether the respondent had hit, shoved, or thrown things at his or her spouse or partner in the previous year – Stets (1991) found

that about 14 percent of cohabiting respondents in the NSFH-87 had been physically violent during the previous year compared with about 5 percent of married respondents. Significant differences in the level of violence by marital status remained after controlling for age, education, occupational status, and race (Stets and Straus 1989; Stets 1991; Waite and Gallagher 2000). At least one study reports contradictory findings. After controlling for religious affiliation and attendance, Ellison, Bartkowski and Anderson (1999) found no difference in the risk of domestic violence between cohabiting and married couples.

Cohabitation as an Incomplete Institution

A prominent explanation for the differences in levels of violence among cohabiting and married couples is that these couples occupy institutions that are governed by different laws and different social norms. Nock (1995: 57-58) argues that the “stronger social sanctions associated with deviations from tradition in marriage” mean that married couples are “...more likely to resolve their problems, or at least arrive at acceptable compromises than cohabiting individuals whose relationships are less *enforced* by social and legal constraints.” Similarly, Yllo and Straus (1981) and Stets and Straus (1989) suggest that cohabiting couples experience more conflict and violence than married couples because they are more isolated from kin networks and other social relationships that might control their behavior. According to this view, the lack of exposure to strong norms reduces restraints on aggression. Waite and Gallagher (2000:56) also argue that “something about a marriage license seems to protect married women... from domestic violence,” with the *something* being social integration into the

community and men's having a stake in the community. Institutional differences in attitudes and beliefs, as well as norms for behavior, have also been proposed as part of the explanation for why individuals who cohabit prior to marriage are more likely to divorce than individuals who marry directly (Thompson and Colella 1992; Axinn and Thornton 1992).

Selection Processes

An alternative explanation for the difference in domestic violence between cohabiting and married couples focuses on the differences between people who choose to cohabit (and stay cohabiting) and people who choose to marry. Selection into and out of marriage and cohabitation affects the characteristics of the populations in both states, and thus cross-sectional comparisons of cohabiting and married couples are likely to be biased if researchers do not take account of the underlying selection processes. Three processes are potentially important: (1) individuals who marry are likely to be different from individuals who cohabit, (2) married individuals who divorce are likely to be different from cohabiting individuals who end their relationships, (3) and finally, cohabiting individuals who marry their partners are likely to differ from couples who continue to cohabit. If any of these differences are related to the propensity for domestic violence, then the failure to take account of these selection processes will result in biased estimates of the effects of cohabitation on domestic violence.

Not taking account of differences in *selection into* marriage and cohabitation is likely to lead to an overestimate of the positive effects of cohabitation on violence. Studies show that individuals who cohabit are younger, on average, and have lower levels

of completed education than individuals who marry (Bumpass & Sweet 1989).

Cohabitors also are more likely to be unemployed, or to have had unstable job histories (Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel 1990; Clarkberg 1999). Finally, the use of illegal drugs is also associated with higher rates of entry into cohabitation (Yamaguchi and Kandel 1985).

To take account of differential selection into marriage and cohabitation, researchers have attempted to control for such individual characteristics where they could be identified and measured. But there are doubtless other characteristics associated with violence and entry into cohabitation (and marriage) that are not measured and not controlled for in these studies.

The consequence of not taking account of *selection out of* cohabitation and marriage is more ambiguous. It seems reasonable to expect that married couples who divorce are those with the highest-conflict, lowest-quality relationships. Thus for any particular marriage cohort, couples who stay married are likely to be those with fewer relationship problems (Heaton 1991). The effect of union dissolution on the composition of cohabiting couples is less clear, however. On the one hand, given the relative absence of legal and social restraints, we might expect high-conflict cohabiting relationships to end more quickly than high-conflict marriages: the costs of exiting are lower. In this case, differential selection would lead to an underestimate of the positive effects of cohabitation on violence since the worst relationships would not be observed. On the other hand, cohabiting couples may be more tolerant of “bad relationships” (Edin 2000) than married couples since they are less binding, in which case cohabiting couples would be less likely than married couples to dissolve a bad union. Similarly, cohabitators who

exit quickly may be selective of individuals who have found themselves a better “match,” while those who continue to cohabit for long periods of time may be those who have the fewest alternative options, either for marriage to the current partner or to someone else. Both of the latter two alternatives would lead us to over-estimate the positive effects of cohabitation on violence.

Finally, not taking account of *selection from cohabitation into marriage* is likely to lead to an overestimate of the positive effects of cohabitation on violence in couple relationships. Using data from the NSFH88, Manning and Smock (1997) report that cohabitating couples are more likely to marry if the man has higher earnings, higher education, and more full-time employment. In short, if the ‘best’ cohabitating relationships are being ‘creamed off’ into marriage, this process will lower the average quality of cohabiting relationships relative to marital unions.

Data and Variables

Data

Data for this study come from the National Survey of Families and Households, a national sample of 13,017 respondents initially interviewed between March 1987 and May 1988. In addition to a nationally representative main sample of 9,643 respondents, the survey includes an over sample of certain minority groups and household compositions, including cohabiting couples (Sweet et al. 1988). In married-couple and cohabiting households, the spouse or partner completed a self-enumerated questionnaire. Because the dependent variables used in this study are created from both partners’ responses, only cases for which the spouse/partner questionnaire was completed, and for

which complete information was available on the variables included in the analysis, are included, resulting in a final sample of about 3,900 married couples and 330 cohabiting couples. In our regression analyses, the sample is further restricted to couples in relationships of under five years duration and includes 1,200 married couples and 270 cohabiting couples. Finally, we made use of data from the second wave of the NSFH (1992-93) to look at “entering” cohabitators’ (those who had been in cohabiting relationships of less than one years’ duration in the first wave of the NSFH) relationship transitions between the two waves. Information on relationship outcomes for 111 such couples was available in the wave 2 data.

Variables

Dependent Variables

The NSFH asked respondents and their partners several questions regarding physical violence in the relationship. Because previous research has found that it is more likely for one spouse to report the use of violence than for both to agree that it has occurred (Szinovacz, 1983), and because it seems reasonable to assume that individuals are more likely to report no violence where it has occurred than to report violence where none has occurred, we make use of the couple data to construct indicators of violence that take a positive value if *either* member of a couple indicated there was violence. The first measure is a dummy variable created from a general question that asks whether, in the past year, arguments with the spouse or partner have “become physical,” (equal to one if there was violence and zero otherwise). The second measure considers the “direction” of the violence. Based on questions asking how often, in the past year, the respondent

(spouse/partner) hit or was hit by the spouse/partner (respondent), this measure allows us consider differences that may exist because of respondent's sex.¹ Again, we use a dummy variable to indicate whether either partner reports that the respondent had been hit, shoved, or had things thrown at him or her in an argument one or more times in the past year (equal to 1 if there was violence and zero otherwise).

Independent Variables

Relationship status is coded as a dummy variable equal to 1 if the couple is cohabiting and equal to 0 if they are married. Age is the age of the respondent in years. Race is coded 1 for Blacks and 0 for non-Blacks. Because of the small sample size of Hispanics, and because Hispanics were similar to whites in rates of cohabitation and physical violence, Hispanics and whites are combined for this analysis. Income is measured as the couple's total earned income, including wages and self-employment income of both partners. Education is measured with dummy variables for those with less than a high school education, those with high school and those with some college, and those with a college education or more. Separate dummy variables indicate whether the male or the female in a couple has a drug or alcohol problem. Male unemployment is measured as the weeks the male in a couple was unemployed in the previous year. In the regression analyses, the duration of the relationship is measured with dummy variables for each year of the relationship up to 5 years.

¹ While previous survey research has found that women and men are about equally likely to report having been hit by their partner, the consequences of relationship violence appear to differ by sex. Women are significantly more likely to be hurt when there is hitting in the relationship (Brush 1993), and experiencing violence is more likely to undermine their sense of personal control (Umberson et al. 1998). The causes of violence

Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the variables used in the analysis both for the full sample and for the sample of couples in relationships of up to five years' duration. Consistent with past research, the means of the independent variables show that, as compared with married respondents, cohabitators are younger (30 years old vs. 41 years old), have lower mean income (\$34,000 vs. \$42,000), are less likely to be college-educated (16% vs. 22%), and are more to have drug or alcohol problems (7% vs. 4% for men). Men in cohabiting couples report more weeks of unemployment in the previous year than do men in married couples (3.15 weeks vs. 1.91 weeks). In the sample of couples who have been together for 5 years or less, the magnitude of these differences is smaller, although the direction remains the same. Even comparing couples who have been together for less than five years, the average duration of the relationship is 2.49 years for married couples and 1.63 years for cohabiting couples. Previous research has shown that age, education, and income are negatively associated with physical violence, while drug and alcohol problems and male unemployment are positively associated with violence (Stets, 1991).

The data in Table 1 also confirm the results of prior research which is based on cross-sectional samples and which shows much higher rates of violence in cohabiting couples as compared to married couples. Depending on which measure of violence we use, cohabitators are two to three times more likely than married couples to be in a relationship involving physical violence. Married couples in the under-five-years subsample are more likely to be in relationships involving physical violence than couples in

may differ by sex as well: their own unemployment has a positive effect on the use of violence by men, but no effect for women.

the full sample, which is consistent with previous research indicating that violence decreases with duration in marriage (Yllo and Straus 1981).

In Table 2, which presents the physical violence variables by the duration of couples' relationship, we explore the extent to which the differences in physical violence between married and cohabiting couples result from differential selection out of marriage and cohabitation. Those in relationships of 0 to 1 years are considered to be similar to the population entering marriage or cohabitation (although even this assumption may lead to an underestimate of the effects of selection out of cohabitation), and those in relationships of longer duration are considered to be survivors in the relationship state (marriage or cohabitation) of entering populations from previous years. Note that in the entering populations (relationship duration 0 to 1 year), there are no significant differences in physical violence between married and cohabiting couples. In the second and subsequent years of relationship duration, presumably as a significant proportion of cohabitators in the 'best' relationships have exited into marriage, violence is significantly higher among cohabitators and (generally) lower among married couples. The decrease in violence among married couples is likely to be a combination of selection out of marriage by those in the highest-conflict relationships and diminishing violence among couples who stay together as they age. These results are consistent with an institutional explanation for higher violence in cohabitation only if we assume that something about either cohabitation itself or the social supports to cohabitators changes dramatically after the first year of cohabitation, or if we believe that it takes over a year for the experience of cohabiting to affect the behavior of cohabitators.

Table 3, which presents means of selected independent variables by relationship duration for married and cohabiting couples, provides further evidence of how selection out of cohabitation affects the characteristics of those who remain cohabiting for longer durations. In relationships of less than one year's duration, cohabiting men actually have a slightly lower number of weeks unemployed than married men, and fewer cohabiting men have a drug or alcohol problem. Total couple income is fairly similar for married and cohabiting couples in the "entering" populations. Approximately the same proportion of married and cohabiting respondents have less than a high school education, and, while fewer cohabitators have a college education or more, the education gap is far smaller among couples in new relationships than among those in long term relationships. These results provide powerful evidence that selection *out of* cohabitation is affecting the stock of cohabitators, since institutional differences between cohabitation and marriage could not cause educational attainment to decline with relationship duration. In addition, the proportion of cohabiting men (and women) with drug or alcohol problems tends to increase with relationship duration, suggesting that substance abuse may be a significant factor in couples' decisions about whether or not to marry cohabiting partners. Beyond the first year, cohabiting men report more weeks of unemployment than married men, which is consistent with prior evidence showing that male employment is a factor in couples' transitions from cohabitation to marriage.

Table 4 shows the results of logit regressions for each of the three physical violence variables on marital status and other independent variables for couples in relationships of less than five years' duration. Model 1 includes only the marital status indicator and shows that, without controlling for individual characteristics, the odds of

physical violence are significantly higher for cohabiting couples (as compared to married couples). Model 2 introduces controls for age and socioeconomic status, drug and alcohol problems, and male unemployment. Consistent with prior research, the odds of physical violence are lower for cohabiting couples once these controls are introduced, but they are still significantly higher than for married couples. Model 2 also controls for relationship duration (dummy variables). In this model, where there is no interaction between relationship duration and marital status, none of the duration variables are significant. Nor does their inclusion significantly change the odds ratios for any of the other independent variables.

Model 3 includes an interaction of marital status with relationship duration. For all three violence measures, the inclusion of the interaction term reduces the odds of violence for cohabiting couples. These results suggest that in the first year of the relationship, the odds of violence are the same for cohabiting and married couples. For married couples, the odds of violence become smaller at higher relationship durations, significantly so for women getting hit at 4-5 years duration. In contrast, for cohabiting couples, the odds of violence become larger at higher relationship durations, significantly at 1-2 and 4-5 years in the regression of *arguments getting physical*, at 4-5 years in the regression of *women being hit*, and at 1-2 years for the regression of *men being hit*.

Figure 1 presents graphs of the predicted probability of violence in marriage vs. cohabitation based on the results from Model 3. The predicted probabilities are for cohabitators at the median age (27) and income level (\$25,000) who are white and who have a high school education. Compared with the dramatic differences in violence by relationship duration shown in Table 2, there appear to be no significant patterns of

higher violence in cohabitation using the predicted probabilities from the controlled regressions. This suggests that the increase in violence by relationship duration among cohabitators seen in Table 2 is primarily the result of changes in the composition of the cohabiting population at higher relationship durations. Cohabitators at higher relationship durations tend to have less education, more weeks unemployed, and more drug and alcohol problems than people who have been married for the same length of time. In the first four relationship durations, cohabiting respondents are also younger than married respondents.

The results in Table 4 show the effects of a number of independent variables on the odds of violence while also revealing a few interesting differences in variables' effects on violence. Age has a significant negative effect on violence across all three dependent variables. Consistent with prior research, the odds of violence are higher for Blacks, as compared to Whites and others, with stronger and more significant effects on males getting hit than on females. This result is strongest and most significant when the dependent variable is based on the general question about arguments 'getting physical.' Higher education significantly reduces the odds of violence against male respondents but has no significant effect on violence against female respondents. Conversely, the number of weeks that the male partner is unemployed in the previous year has a significant positive effect on violence against women but no effect on either of the other dependent variables. The strongest effect across all three dependent variables is the increase in violence associated with males' problems with alcohol or drug use. The odds of a woman being hit are four times higher if she is in a relationship with a man who has an alcohol or drug problem. Men also are significantly more likely to be hit if they

themselves have an alcohol or drug problem, but not if their partner has an alcohol or drug problem.

Finally, Panel A of Table 5 shows the means on selected variables for respondents in the “entering cohort” of cohabitators at NSFH1 by whether they had married each other, separated, or were still cohabiting with their time one partner five years later (taken from wave 2 of the NSFH). Among those who married their partner, 14 percent reported that arguments had gotten physical, compared with 27 percent among those who were still cohabiting. For men, the difference is even more striking: 6 percent of those who married had been hit in wave 1 of the NSFH compared with 27 percent of those who continued to cohabit. For physical fights and for women in general, the incidence of violence is higher among those who eventually separated, whereas for men violence is highest among those who continued to cohabit. In addition, among the NSFH1 entering cohort of cohabitators, respondents who married their partners had higher average incomes, fewer weeks unemployed, and more education than those who continued to cohabit. Of those who married their partners, only 1 percent were Black, while among those who were still cohabiting five years later, 32 percent were Black. Despite the small sample size, this example demonstrates how selection out of cohabitation affects the characteristics of the remaining stock of cohabitators.

Panel B of Table 5 shows the percentage of the same “entering” cohort of cohabitators who end up (1) separated, (2) still cohabiting, or (3) married to their partner five years later (NSFH2). Overall, 39 percent of this cohort of cohabiting couples had separated, 7 percent were still cohabiting, and 54 percent had married their partner. Couples who reported no physical violence at time 1 were somewhat more likely to have

married than were couples who reported violence. Couples who reported physical arguments at time 1, and couples who reported that the man was hit at time 1, were more likely to be cohabiting at time 2 than couples who did not report violence. Respondents with less than a high school education were the most likely still to be cohabiting five years later (13 percent) and least likely to have married their time 1 partners (33 percent). In contrast, none of the time 1 cohabitators with a college degree or more were still cohabiting with their partners, and 65 percent had married their time 1 partners.

Summary and Conclusions

The results presented in this paper suggest that a cohort of couples who enter cohabitation at a given point is not, on average, more likely to experience violence than a cohort of newlyweds, at least not during the first year. Moreover, we know from earlier studies that half of cohabiting unions will end in marriage or separation within the first year. Many of the remaining relationships will end in marriage or separation in the next year or two. Individuals who remain in cohabiting relationships for longer periods of time and are most prone to violence represent only a small proportion of the entering cohabiting cohort. Stets (1991) and Stets and Straus (1989) suggest that their findings of higher levels of violence in cohabiting relationships are a cause for alarm in part because as cohabitation continues to become more prevalent, more individuals will be at risk of physical violence in their relationships. Yet this prediction of increased risk is based on comparisons of the stock of married and cohabiting couples in the population at a point in time rather than on the idea of exposure more commonly used for assessing risk.

As emphasized in recent research (Manning and Smock 2000; Casper and Sayer 2000), an entering cohort of cohabitators is a heterogeneous group. Some of them have marriage plans and tend to be better educated, better employed, less likely to have drug and alcohol problems, and less likely to be physically aggressive in arguments. As this subgroup moves out of cohabitation and into marriage, which happens fairly rapidly, those who remain in cohabiting unions are, *on average*, less educated, poorer, more prone to drug and alcohol problems, and more likely to use violence against their partners.² The result of this selection, as Lundberg and Pollak (1998) predict, is that the characteristics and behavior of those who ever cohabit differ substantially from the characteristics of the population of cohabiting couples at a point in time.

Selection into and out of this heterogeneous group seems to be the most likely explanation for such dramatic changes as the increase in physical violence between the first and second year of cohabitation. In cases involving immutable variables (e.g., level of education), selection would seem to be the only viable explanation for the significant changes that occur over the duration of the relationship, although it remains possible that duration in a relationship has an independent effect on violence and that this effect is different in marriage than it is in cohabitation.

The results presented here suggest that previous family violence researchers may have been premature in attributing higher levels of violence among cohabiting couples to the failure of institutional controls. Our results may also have implications for other comparisons between married and cohabiting couples in which the dependent variable of interest—including other aspects of relationship quality, job stability, or household

² Even this select group of longer-term cohabitators is still heterogeneous: some older, previously married cohabitators who are in long-term relationships have relatively low

division of labor—is likely to be related to selection out of the relationship either to divorce or separation, or, for cohabitators, into marriage. Neither the population of married couples nor especially the population of cohabiting couples is closed. Accordingly, accounting for the effects of selection into *and* out of these populations on the characteristics of their members is a critical first step before attributing differences between the groups to institutional influences on behavior.

levels of violence.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on Variables Used in the Analysis

(Standard deviations in parentheses)

| Variable | Full Sample | | Relationships <= 5 years | |
|---|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| | Married | Cohabiting | Married | Cohabiting |
| <i>Dependent Variables</i> | | | | |
| Percent of couples: arguments get physical | 12% | 29% | 18% | 29% |
| Percent of couples: female respondent hit | 7% | 22% | 11% | 22% |
| Percent of couples: male respondent hit | 8% | 24% | 16% | 25% |
| <i>Independent Variables</i> | | | | |
| Mean age of respondent | 41.01 (14.69) | 30.16 (9.27) | 30.57 (9.53) | 28.76 (8.30) |
| Mean total couple earned income | \$42,349 (50,029) | \$34,059 (41,934) | \$39,296 (42,434) | \$33,310 (43,758) |
| Mean weeks male unemployed in previous year | 1.91 (7.76) | 3.15 (8.47) | 2.4 (8.34) | 3.08 (7.99) |
| Percent Black | 9% | 14% | 8% | 13% |
| Percent with less than high school education | 17% | 19% | 11% | 19% |
| Percent with high school or some college | 61% | 65% | 65% | 65% |
| Percent with college education or more | 22% | 16% | 24% | 17% |
| Percent couples: male has alcohol or drug problem | 4% | 7% | 4% | 5% |
| Percent couples: female has alcohol or drug problem | 1% | 3% | 1% | 2% |
| Mean duration of relationship in years | 15.64 (10.83) | 2.7 (1.67) | 2.49 (2.5) | 1.63 (1.25) |
| N | 3,973 | 327 | 1,191 | 271 |

Table 2: Percent Married vs. Cohabiting Couples Experiencing Domestic Violence at Different Relationship Durations

| Duration | Married | Cohabiting |
|--|----------------|-------------------|
| 0 to 1 Years | | |
| <i>% in which arguments 'get physical'</i> | 21% | 21% |
| <i>% women respondents hit</i> | 15% | 17% |
| <i>% men respondents hit</i> | 18% | 18% |
| <i>N</i> | 265 | 121 |
| 1 to 2 years | | |
| <i>% in which arguments 'get physical'</i> | 19% | 43% |
| <i>% women respondents hit</i> | 11% | 21% |
| <i>% men respondents hit</i> | 16% | 46% |
| <i>N</i> | 235 | 65 |
| 2 to 3 years | | |
| <i>% in which arguments 'get physical'</i> | 20% | 22% |
| <i>% women respondents hit</i> | 14% | 27% |
| <i>% men respondents hit</i> | 14% | 6% |
| <i>N</i> | 238 | 41 |
| 3 to 4 years | | |
| <i>% in which arguments 'get physical'</i> | 15% | 29% |
| <i>% women respondents hit</i> | 10% | 25% |
| <i>% men respondents hit</i> | 12% | 27% |
| <i>N</i> | 227 | 28 |
| 4 to 5 years | | |
| <i>% in which arguments 'get physical'</i> | 16% | 46% |
| <i>% women respondents hit</i> | 5% | 44% |
| <i>% men respondents hit</i> | 21% | 21% |
| <i>N</i> | 230 | 24 |
| 5 to 10 years | | |
| <i>% in which arguments 'get physical'</i> | 16% | 30% |
| <i>% women respondents hit</i> | 8% | 25% |
| <i>% men respondents hit</i> | 11% | 26% |
| <i>N</i> | 688 | 43 |
| Over 10 years | | |
| <i>% in which arguments 'get physical'</i> | 8% | 15% |
| <i>% women respondents hit</i> | 4% | 0 |
| <i>% men respondents hit</i> | 3% | 0 |
| <i>N</i> | 2,070 | 13 |

Table 3: Means of Selected Independent Variables at Different Relationship Durations for Married and Cohabiting Couples

| Duration | Married | (SD) | Cohabiting | (SD) |
|---|----------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 0 to 1 Years | | | | |
| <i>Total Couple Earned Income</i> | \$33,852 | (24,450) | \$31,255 | (29,794) |
| <i>Weeks male unemployed</i> | 3.26 | (9.52) | 3.13 | (8.15) |
| <i>Male has drug/alcohol problem</i> | 5% | | 2% | |
| <i>Female has drug/alcohol problem</i> | 0 | | 0 | |
| <i>Percent with less than high school</i> | 13% | | 14% | |
| <i>Percent with college or more</i> | 24% | | 18% | |
| <i>Age</i> | 29.34 | | 27.57 | |
| <i>N</i> | 265 | | 121 | |
| 1 to 2 years | | | | |
| <i>Total Couple Earned Income</i> | \$39,287 | (42,249) | \$38,188 | (75,508) |
| <i>Weeks male unemployed</i> | 2.64 | (8.65) | 3.95 | (9.62) |
| <i>Male has drug/alcohol problem</i> | 3% | | 5% | |
| <i>Female has drug/alcohol problem</i> | 1% | | 2% | |
| <i>Percent with less than high school</i> | 10% | | 23% | |
| <i>Percent with college or more</i> | 27% | | 12% | |
| <i>Age</i> | 29.27 | | 27.80 | |
| <i>N</i> | 235 | | 65 | |
| 2 to 3 years | | | | |
| <i>Total Couple Earned Income</i> | \$37,535 | (26,940) | \$30,748 | (21,712) |
| <i>Weeks male unemployed</i> | 1.81 | (7.16) | 2.46 | (6.02) |
| <i>Male has drug/alcohol problem</i> | 5% | | 7% | |
| <i>Female has drug/alcohol problem</i> | 1% | | 5% | |
| <i>Percent with less than high school</i> | 12% | | 12% | |
| <i>Percent with college or more</i> | 23% | | 27% | |
| <i>Age</i> | 30.78 | | 29.61 | |
| <i>N</i> | 238 | | 41 | |
| 3 to 4 years | | | | |
| <i>Total Couple Earned Income</i> | \$43,550 | (68,581) | \$33,151 | (23,837) |
| <i>Weeks male unemployed</i> | 2.37 | (8.35) | 3.11 | (7.95) |
| <i>Male has drug/alcohol problem</i> | 5% | | 11% | |
| <i>Female has drug/alcohol problem</i> | 1% | | 7% | |
| <i>Percent with less than high school</i> | 11% | | 29% | |
| <i>Percent with college or more</i> | 24% | | 11% | |
| <i>Age</i> | 31.57 | | 29.68 | |
| <i>N</i> | 227 | | 28 | |

4 to 5 years

| | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <i>Total Couple Earned Income</i> | \$43,204 | (37,575) | \$35,029 | (32,501) |
| <i>Weeks male unemployed</i> | 1.8 | (7.66) | 1.42 | (5.02) |
| <i>Male has drug/alcohol problem</i> | 5% | | 12% | |
| <i>Female has drug/alcohol problem</i> | 0 | | 0 | |
| <i>Percent with less than high school</i> | 10% | | 29% | |
| <i>Percent with college or more</i> | 22% | | 12% | |
| <i>Age</i> | 32.14 | | 34.79 | |
| <i>N</i> | 230 | | 24 | |

5 to 10 years

| | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <i>Total Couple Earned Income</i> | \$42,017 | (42,339) | \$41,011 | (32,969) |
| <i>Weeks male unemployed</i> | 1.91 | (7.24) | 2.84 | (9.26) |
| <i>Male has drug/alcohol problem</i> | 5% | | 19% | |
| <i>Female has drug/alcohol problem</i> | 1% | | 9% | |
| <i>Percent with less than high school</i> | 11% | | 16% | |
| <i>Percent with college or more</i> | 26% | | 14% | |
| <i>Age</i> | 33.69 | | 36.05 | |
| <i>N</i> | 688 | | 43 | |

Over 10 years

| | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <i>Total Couple Earned Income</i> | \$44,221 | (56,013) | \$27,126 | (23,299) |
| <i>Weeks male unemployed</i> | 1.62 | (7.56) | 5.85 | (14.48) |
| <i>Male has drug/alcohol problem</i> | 3% | | 15% | |
| <i>Female has drug/alcohol problem</i> | 0 | | 0 | |
| <i>Percent with less than high school</i> | 23% | | 38% | |
| <i>Percent with college or more</i> | 20% | | 0 | |
| <i>Age</i> | 49.46 | | 40.77 | |
| <i>N</i> | 2,070 | | 13 | |

Table 4: Logit Estimates for Physical Violence Dependent Variables for Couples in Relationships of under Five Years' Duration. Odds Ratios (Standard Errors)

| <i>Independent Variables</i> | Arguments Get Physical (N=1,502) | | | Female Respondent Hit (N=753) | | | Male Respondent Hit | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| Cohabiting | 1.85*** (0.28) | 1.55*** (0.25) | 0.86 (0.24) | 2.31*** (0.58) | 1.77** (0.48) | 1.05 (0.46) | 1.78*** (0.39) | 1.42 (0.34) | 0.79 (0.33) |
| Age of respondent | | 0.97*** (0.01) | 0.97*** (0.01) | | 0.95*** (0.02) | 0.95*** (0.02) | | 0.95*** (0.01) | 0.95*** (0.01) |
| Black (White and other is omitted) | | 2.36*** (0.48) | 2.43*** (0.50) | | 1.9* (0.67) | 1.9* (0.68) | | 1.98** (0.60) | 2.04** (0.63) |
| High School/Some College (less than h.s. = omitted) | | 0.68** (0.13) | 0.72* (0.14) | | 0.89 (0.30) | 0.93 (0.32) | | 0.56** (0.16) | 0.59* (0.17) |
| College or more | | 0.42*** (0.10) | 0.45*** (0.11) | | 0.91 (0.39) | 0.97 (0.42) | | 0.24*** (0.09) | 0.26*** (0.10) |
| Total couple income | | 0.99 (0.00) | 0.99 (0.00) | | 0.99 (0.00) | 0.99 (0.00) | | 1 (0.00) | 1 (0.00) |
| Weeks male unemployed | | 1.004 (0.01) | 1.003 (0.01) | | 1.03** (0.01) | 1.03** (0.01) | | 0.98 (0.01) | 0.98 (0.01) |
| Male alcohol/drug prob | | 2.73*** (0.76) | 2.62*** (0.73) | | 4.30*** (1.90) | 4.34*** (1.97) | | 2.93*** (1.21) | 3.24*** (1.36) |
| Female alcohol/drug prob | | 1.51 (0.93) | 1.51 (0.94) | | 4.01 (4.89) | 3.69 (4.56) | | 1.99 (1.46) | 2.04 (1.55) |
| 1-2 years duration (0-1 years is omitted) | | 1.27 (0.24) | 0.87 (0.20) | | 0.87 (0.29) | 0.76 (0.30) | | 1.45 (0.40) | 0.84 (0.29) |
| 2-3 years duration | | 0.99 (0.20) | 0.89 (0.20) | | 1.04 (0.34) | 0.83 (0.31) | | 0.70 (0.24) | 0.69 (0.25) |
| 3-4 years duration | | 0.83 (0.18) | 0.66* (0.16) | | 0.82 (0.30) | 0.69 (0.28) | | 0.80 (0.27) | 0.61 (0.23) |
| 4-5 years duration | | 1.06 (0.23) | 0.76 (0.18) | | 0.66 (0.26) | 0.39** (0.18) | | 1.41 (0.45) | 1.21 (0.43) |
| Cohabiting X 1-2 years (cohab X 0-1 years omitted) | | | 3.29*** (1.35) | | | 1.43 (1.06) | | | 5.05*** (2.99) |
| Cohabiting X 2-3 years | | | 1.04 (.53) | | | 2.08 (1.50) | | | 0.37 (0.44) |
| Cohabiting X 3-4 years | | | 2.11 (1.17) | | | 1.67 (1.60) | | | 2.74 (2.20) |
| Cohabiting X 4-5 years | | | 4.64*** (2.48) | | | 13.58*** (12.58) | | | 1.3 (1.06) |

*** Significant at .01 level

** Significant at .05 level

* Significant at .10 level

Table 5 Panel A. Means on Time 1 Variables by Relationship Outcome at NSFH2 for "Entering" Population of Cohabitors

| | Relationship Status at NSFH2 | | |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | Separated | Still Cohabiting | Married t1 Partner |
| <i>Percent in which arguments 'get physical'</i> | 32% | 27% | 14% |
| <i>Percent of women respondents hit</i> | 26% | 25% | 14% |
| <i>Percent of men respondents hit</i> | 19% | 27% | 6% |
| <i>Total Couple Earned Income (sd)</i> | \$26,905 (18,936) | \$28,904 (23,532) | \$38,012 (39,487) |
| <i>Weeks male unemployed (sd)</i> | 2.82 (7.75) | 2.93 (6.23) | 2.60 (7.65) |
| <i>Percent Black</i> | 14% | 32% | 1% |
| <i>Percent with less than high school</i> | 18% | 26% | 13% |
| <i>Percent with college or more</i> | 14% | 5% | 23% |
| N | 43 | 8 | 60 |

Table 5 Panel B. Percentage in Each Relationship Category at NSFH2 Among Those in "Entering" Population of Cohabitors

| | Percent In Each Relationship Status at Time 2 | | | | N |
|---|---|------------------|--------------------|-------------|------------|
| | Separated | Still Cohabiting | Married t1 Partner | Total | |
| All "entering" cohabitators from time 1 | 39% | 7% | 54% | 100% | 111 |
| <i>Couples who reported physical arguments at time 1</i> | 53% | 11% | 37% | 100% | 19 |
| <i>Couples who reported no physical arguments at time 1</i> | 33% | 8% | 59% | 100% | 75 |
| <i>Woman respondent was hit at time 1</i> | 44% | 0% | 56% | 100% | 9 |
| <i>Woman respondent was not hit at time 1</i> | 32% | 5% | 63% | 100% | 38 |
| <i>Man respondent was hit at time 1</i> | 50% | 33% | 17% | 100% | 6 |
| <i>Man respondent was not hit at time 1</i> | 38% | 10% | 53% | 100% | 40 |
| <i>Respondant's race is black</i> | 67% | 22% | 11% | 100% | 9 |
| <i>Respondent's race is white</i> | 36% | 6% | 59% | 100% | 101 |
| <i>Respondent with less than high school</i> | 53% | 13% | 33% | 100% | 15 |
| <i>Respondent with high school or some college</i> | 37% | 8% | 55% | 100% | 73 |
| <i>Respondent with college or more</i> | 35% | 0% | 65% | 100% | 23 |

Figure 1. Predicted Probability of Physical Fights by Relationship Duration

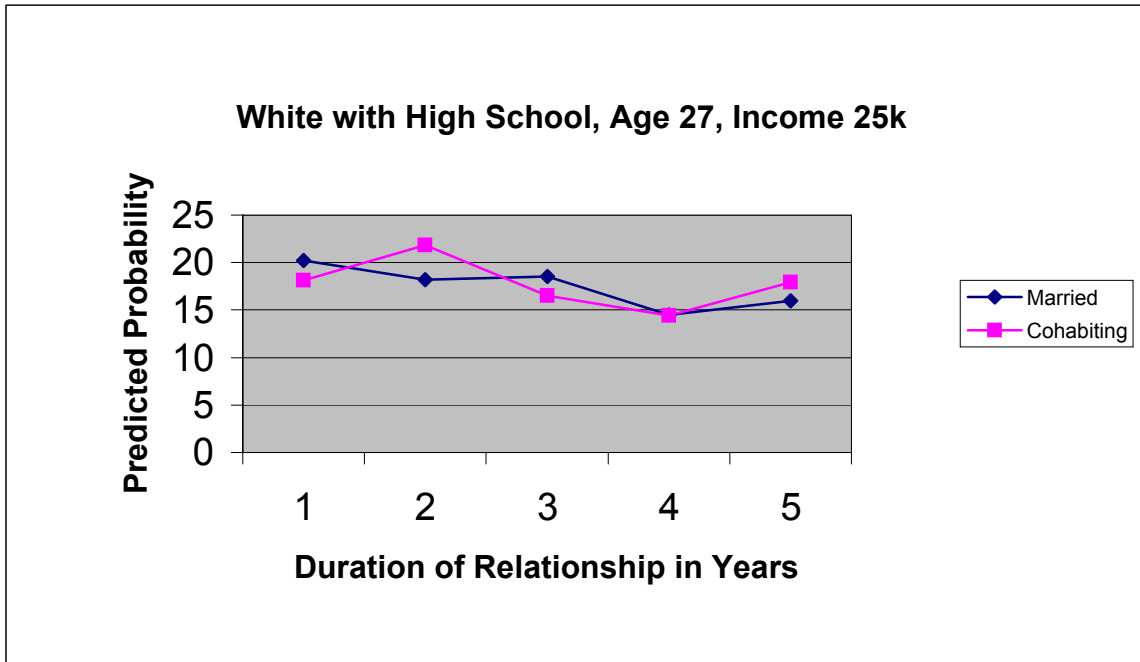


Figure 2. Predicted Probability Woman Is Hit by Duration of Relationship

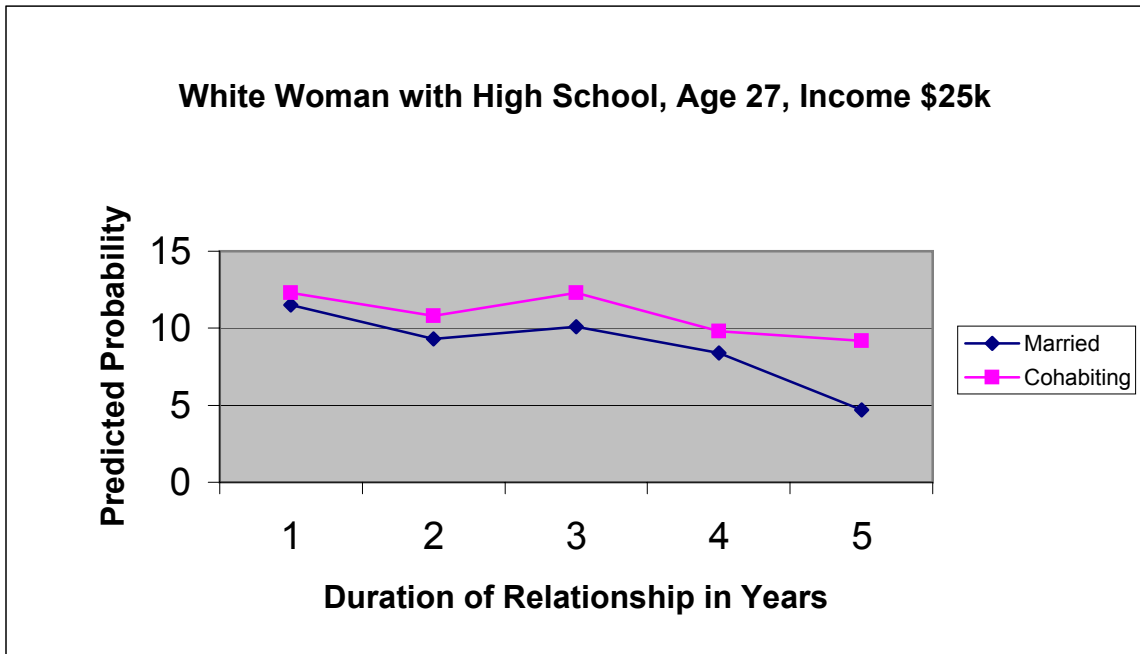


Figure 3: Predicted Probability Male Is Hit by Duration of Relationship

