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Andrew Golub, Megan Reid

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Cohabitation and Repartnering among Low-Income Black Mothers

ANDREW GOLUB, *National Development and
Research Institutes*

MEGAN REID, *National Development and
Research Institutes*

ABSTRACT—Serial cohabitation has increased dramatically in the U.S., especially in the low-income Black population. The purpose of the study is to understand cohabiting and co-parenting relationships among unmarried cohabiting low-income urban Black families on their own terms, identifying the strengths, challenges, and unique needs of these families. Though cohabitation patterns varied widely, most participants had extensive periods living without a partner. This finding provides more support for the unbalanced marriage markets explanation than the serial cohabitation explanation. Indeed, most participants' children (83%) had none or only one resident father prior to the current cohabitation. Implications for having a new resident father and child development are discussed.

KEY WORDS—Black families, cohabitation, low-income families. resident fathers, repartnering

CONTACT—Correspondence for this article should be addressed to Andrew Golub, National Development and Research Institutes, 71 West 23rd St., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10010, golub@ndri.org.

Introduction

SEVERAL OF THE MOST PRONOUNCED TRENDS IN FAMILY FORMATION in the U.S. over the last several decades include the decline of marriage, the rise of cohabitation, the increase of divorce, and the increase of stepfamilies through remarriage or cohabitation (Cherlin, 2009; Sassler, 2010; Seltzer et al., 2005). These shifts have been particularly pronounced among low-income Black populations (Golub, Reid, Strickler, & Dunlap, 2013; Lincoln, Taylor, & Jackson, 2008; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). These variations in family structure and ongoing changes in family membership can have important implications for the healthy development of children. In a review of the literature on remarriage, Sweeney (2010) called for further analysis of the institutionalization of repartnering. She noted that much research demonstrates that family instability is often associated with various problem behaviors and negative outcomes for children. She also noted that few studies of the impact of repartnering have explored unmarried cohabiting stepfamilies. Some cohabiting stepfamily systems consist of adolescents who must transition and adjust to change. Adolescence is a particularly important developmental stage where youths are expected to acquire many life competencies and various negative behaviors can debut (Manning & Lamb, 2003). This paper is part of a larger study of child development in unmarried cohabiting low-income Black families raising an adolescent from a prior relationship.

In our study, cohabiting low-income Black mothers of adolescents were asked about their fertility, marriage and cohabitation histories. We examined these histories to identify the type of paths or *careers* that typically occur, framed by two primary research questions: (1) What types of partnering careers did mothers commonly experience? (2) What types of resident fathering histories did their adolescent children commonly experience? Previous studies of serial cohabitation reviewed below have primarily focused on the number of partners. This analysis expands on that literature by exploring the characteristics of these relationship careers, including the length of partnership periods and the time between partnerships. We sought to learn whether there was substantial variation in partnering and coparenting experiences among low-income Black families and whether these could be catalogued into distinct career types. Such a typology could support further directed research that would ultimately inform policy makers and practitioners to understand the range of cohabiting stepfamily experiences that

adolescents face. The remainder of this introduction examines the literature on two major aspects of partnering careers affecting low-income black families: serial cohabitation and unbalanced marriage markets.

Serial Cohabitation

An ethnographic study by Dunlap, Golub and Johnson (2003) described a family formation process among low-income Black urban families they referred to as *transient domesticity*. In this process, relationships tended not to involve marriage, partnerships tended to be short lived, mothers tended to retain custody of any children, and new partnerships tended to follow soon after one ended. The impact of this partnering pattern on the presence of a resident father in children's lives is exemplified by a quote from Olivia, a young research participant.

[Growing up] it was me and my sisters and brothers and my grandmother was always there. And my mother, her new boyfriend, . . . [often] one of the kid's father. . . . She had like from what I seen like . . . well . . . all I know she said . . . [counting to herself] four, five, six, seven . . . about seven [different boyfriends].

In the broader literature, successive partnering is generally referred to as *serial cohabitation*. Prior studies of serial cohabitation have primarily focused on the likelihood of relationship dissolution or on the number of such relationships. The National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) is widely used for this purpose because it provides complete marriage and cohabitation histories for a nationally representative sample (Goodwin, Mosher, & Chandra, 2010; Groves et al., 2005). Using the NSFG, Kennedy & Bumpass (2008) found that cohabitation was well established in the U.S. by the early 1990s and has increased rapidly since. They estimated that the proportion of children expected to spend time in a cohabiting family by age 16 increased from 37% to 46% (nearly half) over the course of the 1990s. Rates were higher for Black children, mothers with less formal education, and mothers who were single at the time of their child's birth.

Ethnographic research provides some insight into the basis for serial cohabitation, especially among low-income families. Edin and Kefalas (2005) found that the desire to be a good mother motivated low-income women to have children regardless of whether they could establish a suitable marriage or even cohabitation beforehand (also see Dunlap, Stürzenhofecker, &

Johnson, 2006). Edin and Nelson (2013) found that low-income men were similarly motivated by their excitement about fatherhood and the possibilities that it holds, despite their difficult circumstances and an awareness of their limited prospects for future economic success (also see Roy, 2006). Many of the men Edin and Nelson talked to first started cohabiting with their partner only after she became pregnant or delivered a child, indicating their enthusiasm for the fathering relationship over the romantic relationship.

Lichter, Turner, and Sassler (2010, p. 754) contended that cohabitation has become a lifestyle alternative to marriage and remarriage (also see, Daniel T. Lichter & Qian, 2008). Lichter and colleagues (2010, p. 755) noted that cohabitation is “commonly viewed as an adaptation to economic hardship,” and that, “dissolution rates among low-income cohabiting couples are exceptionally high, which presumably sets the stage for forming new intimate relationships, including new cohabiting unions.” For their analysis of the NSFG, they operationalized serial cohabitation as two or more cohabitations prior to marrying, if ever. This measure limited their ability to identify repartnering experiences that include both marriages and cohabitations. Using their measure, they found that in 2002, 12.1% of all women had serial cohabited, up from 8.7% in 1995. Lichter and colleagues found higher rates of serial cohabitation among Black mothers, those whose family of origin did not remain intact, and those with less formal education. This research provides a lower-bound estimate for the prevalence of serial cohabitation for several reasons: first because their operational measure did not include marriages that could be part of a repartnering sequence; and second because their data was right censored. Their analysis included all women aged 15–44; some women would have eventually gone to additional cohabitations. In sum, their work indicated that more than 1 in every 8 women will experience serial cohabitation over the course of her life.

Cohen and Manning (2010) used the NSFG to estimate that serial cohabitation increased rapidly across recent birth cohorts; women born 1968–72 were nearly three times as likely (13.9%) to have serial cohabited by age 30 than women born just a decade earlier, 1958–62 (5.4%). They estimated that cohabitations tended to last a few years (average 31.7 months) and that serial cohabitators tended to have slightly shorter cohabitations (28.2 months). Similarly, Goodwin, Mosher, & Chandra (2010) used the NSFG to estimate that most cohabitations end (either in marriage or dissolution) within three years, and that the rate is higher among Blacks than Whites. Using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), Lichter, Qian, & Mellott (2006)

estimated that cohabiting unions tend to last only a few years, dissolution is a more common result than marriage, and that transition to marriage was even less common among low-income and Black cohabitators. These findings are consistent with the expectations of transient domesticity.

Cherlin's syntheses of the literature on family formation patterns extended the concept of serial cohabitation to include all live-in romantic partnerships, both marriages and cohabitations. In his article on the deinstitutionalization of American marriage, Cherlin (2004) described major changes to the twentieth century norms of lifelong and near universal marriage, including the growth in cohabitation and relationship dissolution and repartnering both through remarriage and cohabitation. Other researchers have provided a historically longer and geographically broader discussion of these trends as affecting Western society in general including Coontz (2005) and Lesthaeghe (1995). Cherlin contended this American trend is rooted in individualism, the pursuit of personal interests, and a de-emphasis on the importance of marriage as a central cultural institution. In his more extended treatise, he referred to the combined impact of these changes as the *marriage-go-round* characterized by successive repartnering through both marriages and cohabitations (Cherlin, 2009). He noted that Black and lower income adults are more likely to cohabit without marrying and that they are also more likely to separate. Based on this prior research on serial cohabitation and repartnering, we would expect that cohabiting careers among our sample of low-income Black mothers would be characterized by a succession of short cohabitations that follow closely after each other.

However, using the NSFG, Cherlin (2009, p. 173) identified a counterintuitive phenomenon: the percentage of women in their late thirties or early forties who had lived with three or more partners was substantially lower for Blacks (9%) than for whites (16%). This leads to our discussion of a second major influence on partnering among low-income Black women.

Unbalanced Marriage Markets

Cherlin (2009, p. 173) suggested the lower number of mean lifetime partners among Black women reflects the lower number of "marriageable" men in their communities. The number of men, and especially those positioned to serve as traditional economic providers, in low-income predominately Black communities has been greatly reduced by chronic unemployment, drug abuse, imprisonment, and mortality (Edin, 2000; Daniel T. Lichter,

Graefe, & Brown, 2003; Western, 2006; Wilson, 1996). Moreover, changes in men's circumstances surrounding employment, substance use, crime, and imprisonment are major factors that can also lead to the dissolution of a partnership (Edin & Nelson, 2013; Lopoo & Western, 2005). Prior research suggests that structural circumstances and women's limited options are behind the low rates of long-term marriage among low-income Blacks.

The *unbalanced sex ratios* argument contends that in general, men tend to be less interested in long-term exclusive relationships than women (Becker & Becker, 2009; Guttentag & Secord, 1981). Consequently, when men are in short supply, as they are in many low-income Black communities due to high rates of imprisonment and mortality, marriage will be less common and greater rates of cohabitation, non-exclusivity, and relationship dissolution will occur. There is partial support for this argument in low-income Black urban communities from both quantitative (Guzzo, 2006; Daniel T. Lichter, McLaughlin, Kephart, & Landry, 1992) and ethnographic (Anderson, 1999; Bowleg, Lucas, & Tschann, 2004) studies. Accordingly, we would expect that many partnering careers among low-income Black women would include substantial gaps between successive partners. The existence of unbalanced marriage markets would also predict a greater prevalence of women that never have a live-in romantic partner. However, our selection criteria excluded inclusion of any such women in this study.

Materials and Methods

SAMPLE

This analysis used data from the Impact of Transient Domesticity on African American Families Study, funded by the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). All survey procedures were approved by the researchers' IRB. The overall purpose of the study is to understand cohabiting and coparenting relationships among unmarried cohabiting low-income urban Black families on their own terms, identifying the strengths, challenges, and unique needs of these families.

The project recruited 136 unmarried cohabiting Black families from low-income sections of New York City such as the South Bronx, Harlem, East New York, and Brownsville using known field contacts, posters, and contacts at various agencies. Many of the respondents were recruited in government subsidized housing projects. All families included a heterosexual cohabiting (unmarried) couple in which at least one of the partners was parenting an adolescent child (age 10–16) and at least one partner was

Black. The sampling procedure was stratified to include new cohabiting relationships of less than 12 months (40%) and more established relationships between 1 and 5 years in length (60%). Families involving marriages or longer cohabitations were excluded from the study. The mothers were interviewed in a mutually convenient, private location, usually a room in the family's home. Each mother provided informed consent and a pseudonym that is not her real name. Mothers were asked to provide informed consent to interview one adolescent child. Children were interviewed separately from their mothers. Children provided their own informed assent and a pseudonym for the study. All names reported in this paper are pseudonyms chosen by the participants. Mothers were paid \$40 and children \$20 for completing the interview.

Various families participating in this study were excluded from this analysis. Twelve families in which the father was the custodial parent were excluded from the analysis. Others were excluded because of incomplete information. This analysis specifically examined the detailed partnering careers requested in the survey. Thirty-four mothers (27% of the eligible sample) did not provide complete partnering history information. Excluding these participants left a total of ninety families included in the analysis. Possible reasons for not providing complete relationship information include inability to remember, an unwillingness to think about painful experiences (participants were told and reminded that they could skip any questions they wanted to for any reason without penalty), participant fatigue during a lengthy section of the questionnaire, or a combination of the three. Conceivably, respondents with more extensive relationship histories could have been more likely to not provide complete data. Consequently, estimates of the number of prior relationships and amount of time spent in prior relationships could be biased downward.

This analysis has two other major limitations that affect the generalizability of results. The selection criteria for this study are highly specific. Moreover, there is no guarantee that this study sample is representative of all low-income Black urban cohabiting families. Thus, caution should be taken with regard to generalizing findings, especially statistical estimates, to any larger population. The purpose of this analysis was to identify the types of partnering careers common among low-income Black cohabiting mothers. This information provides context for future work examining the experiences of mothers, children, and cohabiting fathers in these families.

MEASURES

The collection of partnering career data included extensive and systematic questioning. A life-event calendar (LEC) was used to retrospectively obtain information about each woman's marriages, cohabitations, births, and adoption of responsibility for non-biological children. Belli, Smith, Andreski, & Agrawal (2007) provided a description of the LEC procedure, which has become a standard for collecting life history data retrospectively and is currently used by the NSFG (Groves et al., 2005). In the present study, participants were first asked their birth date and if and when they graduated from high school. These two dates were then placed on their personal timeline or LEC. Participants were then asked to identify the date and nature of any other major events in their life such as moving, parents breaking up, starting a new job, medical event, death of someone close, or incarceration. The dates of these events were also entered onto the LEC. This calendar was then made available to the participant to help identify when partnering and parenting events occurred relative to other highly salient life experiences shown on their personalized LEC.

Participants were next asked, "Have you ever been legally married?" and if so, "How many times?" Participants were asked for the following information concerning each marriage: "When did you get married the xx time?" "When did the two of you move in together?" "When did you separate, that is, one of you moved out?" "When did you get divorced?" and, "Did you have children together?" Participants were then asked the birth date for each child.

Participants were asked the following question to identify nonmarital cohabitation experiences, "Not counting the times that you lived with someone you were married to or eventually got married to, how many times in your life have you moved in together with a girlfriend/boyfriend or allowed a girlfriend/boyfriend to move in with you?" Some of the participants (8%) reported having had a same-sex romantic relationship where they lived together. Data on these relationships were collected and are included in this analysis. For each cohabitating relationship, participants were asked when they moved in together, when they broke up (one of them moved out), whether they had children together, and if so the children's birth dates. Lastly, participants were asked about any children they had with partners other than those already listed and any non-biological children they accepted to raise as their own.

ANALYSES

The analysis entailed visual inspection of the mother's life event calendars up to the time of the baseline interview. It was presumed that if transient domesticity was commonplace that the pattern involving a rapid succession of short partnerships would be obvious. If transient domesticity was not that common, the range of alternative patterns would be broad. However, the unbalanced marriage markets among low-income Blacks suggested that there might be substantial gaps between cohabitations. In preparation for this analysis, each mother's partnering and fertility data were converted into a vector identifying the partnering status and any births occurring during each month from the time of the mother's birth up through the time of the baseline interview. With regard to marriages, the date when the participant first moved in with her spouse and the date that they moved out were used, as opposed to the dates of marriage and divorce because couples may move in together before marriage and may separate long before they obtain an official divorce.

The following features were calculated to characterize each partnering career: age at baseline, age at birth of first child, number of prior children, age at first relationship, time from first birth to first relationship (which can be negative, indicating having lived with someone prior to having any children), length of first relationship, number of prior relationships, longest relationship gap, and the percentage of months since age eighteen (up to the current cohabitation) that the mother was in a residential romantic relationship. The career data was then exported to Excel where each row represented a mother and the columns represented the successive months in her partnering career. The summary characteristics were also exported to Excel to facilitate visual analysis. The career data were shaded to highlight periods of a residential romantic relationship and distinguish them from periods spent without a partner.

The careers were successively sorted according to various characteristics and combinations of characteristics in an effort to identify a typology of the most common partnering careers, following the same inductive procedures and principles typically used to rigorously evaluate text via grounded theory (Charmaz, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Our investigation was also informed by several *a priori* themes based on the literature. The theory of transient domesticity predicted that participants would have had numerous short relationships with only small gaps of single parenting between them. The theory of unbalanced sex ratios predicted that cohabitations would be

more common than marriage, relationships would be short, and that many women would have substantial gaps between relationships.

The mothers' relationship histories were also used to explore focal children's experiences. In this paper, we refer to the mothers' cohabiting partners as resident fathers, regardless of whether the partners were married or legal adoption occurred. Other analyses from this project support this nomenclature. Several analyses found that cohabiting partners were highly involved in domestic labor and that they were viewed by their partners and focal adolescents as coparents (Forehand, Parent, Golub, & Reid, *In Review*; Reid, Golub, & Vazan, *In Review*). The analysis of children's experiences was limited to the eighty biological children of the mother participating in the study. The other ten children were adopted.

For this analysis we also assumed that each adolescent had lived with their mother continuously. Kennedy and Bumpass (2008, p. 4) also made this simplifying assumption in their analysis of the NSFG data. This assumption excludes the documentation of childhood disruptions other than fathers moving in or out of the household such as the child living with a relative, in foster care, or in a juvenile corrections facility. The child's resident father history was constructed by truncating each mother's partnering career from the left at the time of birth of the focal child. The following summary statistics were then calculated for each child's history: whether a father was present when the child was born, number of resident fathers (prior to the current one), and the percentage of months with a resident father prior to the current cohabitation. The same inductive procedures described earlier were used to analyze the children's resident father histories.

Results

Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of ten mothers' partnering careers. The ten careers included were chosen to illustrate a range of experiences. These charts show the timing of marriages, cohabitations, and births over each woman's career, starting at age fifteen. The last cohabitation on each woman's chart is the current cohabitation that was ongoing at the time of the baseline interview. The end of that cohabitation spell indicates the participant's age at baseline. We originally intended to find a typology of careers. We expected to observe a few distinct types, especially those illustrating transient domesticity and maybe others illustrating primary longer relationships and others that had not cohabited much or for long. However, our analysis revealed that was not the case. There was much

Figure 1. A Sample of Partnering Careers.

variation across careers to support identification of a simple typology with a few categories. We concluded that there is neither a single common trajectory nor even a few common paths.

Failing to find a few common partnering career types, we turned to exploring the most distinctive characteristics of the partnering careers. Relatively few of the careers fit the model of transient domesticity involving a series of short relationships with even shorter gaps between them. Some of the closest examples of this pattern were Coco Kiss, Monique, and Carol. In contrast, some of the careers had features consistent with the predicted effects of unbalanced marriage markets. Several partnering careers included sustained gaps between relationships, including Renee, Butterfly, and Ms. Jones. There were also women who did not cohabit until their late 20s or early 30s despite having had a child in their teens, including Paula, Renee, and Amazing. Then, there were some women who had particularly long first relationships such as Nicole and Michele.

To make these observations more systematic, we calculated summary statistics for the sample. The mean age of the mothers was 38.7 years old. This older age reflects the selection criterion of parenting an adolescent child. The mean number of children was 2.5. Cohabitations were about three times as common as marriages. Most mothers did not have many prior relationships: 18% had none, and 44% had only one. High count serial cohabitation was uncommon: only 12% of the mothers had three or more prior relationships. The average relationship length of 4.1 years was rela-

Table 1. Characteristics of Mother’s Partnering Careers

Age	38.7
Mean Number of	
Prior Marriages	0.3
Prior Cohabitations	1.0
Prior Relationships	1.4
Children	2.5
No. of Prior Relationships	
0	18%
1	44%
2	26%
3+	12%
% of Relationships that	
Lasted up to 1 year	25%
Lasted 1–2 years	14%
Lasted > 2 years	61%
Average Relationship Length	4.1
Relationship Coverage (excluding current rel.)	
Age 18–19	29%
Age 20–29	32%
Age 30–39	18%
Age 40+	6%
Age 18+	28%

tively long compared to the expectation of short cohabitations. The collective majority of these mothers’ adult lives (72%) were spent single. During their thirties and forties, mothers were less likely (6%–18%) to be in a relationship than in their teens and twenties (29%–32%).

Figure 2 turns to the children’s resident father histories. The eight cases presented illustrate a variety of common experiences. Some children experienced a succession of resident fathers like Shay and, to a lesser extent, Bambam. However, these cases consistent with the expectations of transient domesticity were not the norm. Many children had a resident father as a newborn, including Tamika, Scooby, Bambam, and Shay. Some children lived with one of their resident fathers for many years, including Joey,

Figure 2. A Sample of Adolescent Children's Resident Father Histories.

Scooby and Shay. Some children did not have a resident father in their lives until the current cohabitation, including K Star and Stephanie consistent with the expectations of unbalanced marriage markets.

Table 2 provides a summary of the children's resident father histories. The average age of the children was 12.9 years and slightly more of them were female (56%) than male. About a third of the children (34%) had never lived with a resident father prior to their mother's current cohabitation, and about half (49%) had only one prior resident father. Only 17% had two or more prior resident fathers. On average, these periods of a prior resident father covered one-quarter of their young lives. This coverage declined with age from 35% while zero to five years old to 26% up to age 10 and then dropped to only 8% at age ten and above.

Discussion

This paper adds to the growing literature on serial cohabitation. Prior studies have examined basic characteristics of serial cohabitation, on average. This is the first study we are aware of that examines the full course of partnering careers by visualizing these careers graphically. This approach has provided insights into the extensive variation in partnering careers. Some research had suggested that serial cohabitation, especially among low-income Black families, involved a succession of short cohabitations following shortly after each other. Other work on unbalanced marriage markets suggested that there would be substantial gaps between relationships. This latter expectation was more supported by our analysis than the former explanation. The majority of mothers of an adolescent entering a new cohabi-

Table 2. Characteristics of Adolescent Children’s Resident Father Histories

Age	12.9
Female	56%
# of Prior Relationships	
0	34%
1	49%
2+	17%
Relationship Coverage (excluding current rel.)	
Age 0 up to 5	35%
Age 5 up to 10	26%
Age 10 to Current Rel.	8%
Age 0 up to Current Rel.	25%

tation had either none or one prior cohabitation. Only a handful (12%) had three or more prior relationships.

The figures revealed various characteristics that distinguished among partnering careers. Some women had long first relationships. Conceivably, these relationships were intended to last but were impacted by unforeseen circumstances possibly including unemployment, substance abuse, or trouble with the law. Other women had children in their teens but did not have a residential romantic partner until their twenties or thirties. This finding is consistent with prior literature explaining that low-income women often place motherhood ahead of establishing a long-term relationship (Anderson, 1999; Edin & Kefalas, 2005). It is also consistent with the various explanations for a lack of marriages among low-income Blacks, including a lack of eligible men and the potential further impact of unbalanced marriage markets. These theories are also consistent with the finding that some women had extended gaps between residential partners. Exceedingly few of the partnerships met the short repeated cohabitations predicted by transient domesticity. Indeed, collectively the mothers in the study had spent most of their adult lives single—neither married nor cohabiting.

This important finding indicates that serial cohabitation is not a revolving door or marriage-go-round for these low-income Black mothers. This finding is consistent with the possibility that for these women serial cohabitation is the result of the structural challenges of poverty and life circumstances in the context of sociocultural expectations of partnering rath-

er than a manifestation of an individualistic preference for such a pattern. In this manner, serial cohabitation among low-income Black populations may be quite different from the larger phenomenon of the marriage-go-round described by Cherlin (Cherlin, 2009) that also affects persons with higher incomes. To the extent that this is the case, programs that seek to encourage low-income Black women to maintain their partnerships and to marry may be inappropriate for their circumstances. Instead, programs that help them to overcome the various challenges associated with poverty they and their partners face may leave such women more prepared to sustain relationships that might eventually result in marriage.

Serial cohabitation clearly affects the resident father histories of low-income Black adolescents like those included in this study. Again, because of the variety in mothers' partnering careers, there was great variation in youths' resident father histories. Prior literature has examined the potential problems when mothers' romantic partners enter and exit the family. However, this was not the experience of most of the children in this study. Relatively few had two or more prior resident fathers as would have been predicted by transient domesticity. Some had a father present when they were born. Some experienced an extended period with a resident father. However, most (83%) of the children had experienced none or only one resident father prior to adolescence. Collectively they had spent most of their early childhood without a resident father (75%). Moreover, the likelihood of living with a resident father declined with age. Thus, many of the children's memories of their resident fathers from early childhood are likely to be distant, faint, and even lost to time.

This has important implications for the larger NICHD funded study of which this is a part. The study was intended to document the impact of an alternative type of two-parent household involving repeated changes in the resident father. Instead, the findings of the larger study need to be understood as the result of a relatively unique but increasingly common experience in the life of the low-income Black children studied: the incorporation of a resident father into a family. The presence of resident fathers in the lives of low-income Black children raises questions about whether they contribute to or hamper healthy child development, whether policies and programs could enhance potential positive influences and ameliorate potential negative influences, and whether cohabiting relationships should be supported regardless of whether legal marriage ensues.

The findings of this analysis are limited by the sample studied. The participants included a highly select population—low-income urban Black mothers of adolescents who started a cohabitation within the last five years. The findings are not generalizable to any larger population, nor does the study include a comparison group. The detailed analysis of resident father careers revealed many of the types of characteristics that could be relevant to understanding children’s experiences of changes in family structure over time. It would be valuable to repeat the visual and summary analyses with a nationally representative dataset such as the NSFG which would allow prevalence estimation and a comparison of variation in children’s experiences with family income, race/ethnicity, urbanicity, and region.

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Andrew Golub, PhD, is a Senior Principal Investigator at National Development and Research Institutes, Inc. (NDRI). He has studied the challenges in low-income Black communities and policy implications for more than two decades. His work has examined family, child development, drug use in context, crime, policing and veterans reintegration.

Megan Reid, PhD, is a Project Director at National Development and Research Institutes, Inc. (NDRI). Her research focuses on family formation, domestic labor, relationship quality, child development, and the impact of natural disasters, especially among low-income Black families.

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