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Fertility after repartnering in the Netherlands: Parenthood or commitment?



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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we focus on childbearing after the dissolution of the first marital union. The discussion of what drives fertility decisions after dissolution has been largely dominated by the arguments that: (a) people want to have a child as a way to achieve the adult status of parenthood (the “parenthood hypothesis”), and that (b) a shared child can signal the partners’ commitment to each other (the “commitment hypothesis”). Earlier studies have reported mixed findings for these hypotheses. We used couple data from several Dutch surveys ($N = 8094$ couples of which 10.2% included a repartnering partner) and utilized a new analytical approach to test the commitment proposition in particular. Our main findings lend support to the parenthood hypothesis when it comes to men’s transition to a union-specific birth and to the commitment hypothesis when considering women’s transition. Whereas for men, children from a prior union decrease the likelihood of transitioning to a union-specific birth, for women children from a prior union do not matter. That is, women would find it important to confirm the union as a family despite the presence of children. Additional support for the commitment hypothesis for women is that being in a second union rather than first union increases chances of parity progression.

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Western European countries have clearly witnessed an increase in divorce rates over the last half a century and not surprisingly, researchers have examined what that might mean for other domains of family life such as fertility (Kneip & Bauer, 2009). The raise in divorce rates has been considered to be one of the main factors undermining fertility in Europe as the instability in people’s marital histories can be an obstacle to realizing their fertility intentions (for an overview, see Thomson, Winkler-Dworak, Spielauer, & Prskawetz, 2012; Bavel, Jansen, & Wijckmans, 2012). However, the climbing divorce trends have not necessarily signaled a retreat from partnerships

in general. Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that the majority of divorcees repartner (for an overview, see Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000; Sweeney, 2002) with a probably stronger preference for cohabitation over remarriage (Wu & Schimmele, 2005). The fact that an increasing number of people divorce and repartner at childbearing ages means that fertility decisions are now frequently also made in higher order unions. Indeed, some researchers have even reported a positive correlation between divorce and fertility rates starting in the 1990s (e.g., Billari & Kohler, 2004) though others have suggested that this positive correlation at the macro level does not necessarily mean that the negative correlation at the individual level has been reversed (Van Bavel, Jansen, & Wijckmans, 2012).

Higher order unions differ from first unions in a number of important ways, which can affect subsequent fertility. Of particular interest for us in this work are the marital and parental statuses of the two partners at the start of the current union. A number of works have examined fertility

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in higher order unions, predominantly by comparing how likely the transition to having a common child in the new union is for individuals with and without prior children (e.g., Buber & Prskawetz, 2000; Griffith, Koo, & Suchindran, 1985; Kalmijn & Gelissen, 2007; Prskawetz, Vikat, Philipov, & Engelhardt, 2003; Stewart, 2002; Vikat, Thomson, & Hoem, 1999). In our work, we continue in this line of research and focus on the birth of a shared child within a higher-order union. Notably, we do so by utilizing detailed, couple data from several Dutch multi-actor studies - the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS), the Family Survey Dutch Population (FSDP 1998, 2003, and 2009), and the survey Households in the Netherlands 1995 (HiN95). These studies include comparable information for both partners in the current union concerning their pre-union parental and marital statuses. We add to the literature in two ways. First, a number of previous studies have been unable to take into consideration the characteristics of both partners though the argument has clearly been made that, “women who are partners of men for whom it is the second union are different from women who are themselves already in their second union. Similarly, the reverse argument holds for men, i.e., men in second unions may be different from male partners in unions that are the second unions for women” (Buber & Prskawetz, 2000). Our complete couple data allow us to avoid this caveat of earlier research. Second, in our consideration of how one’s prior marital status might influence the transition to having a first shared child in a higher order union, we account for the fact that if a repartnering parent wants to have another child with the new partner, they will then in fact be making a higher parity progression. This transition to having a higher order child will be associated with a larger care load, a point already made in the literature (Henz & Thomson, 2005). Even if repartnering individuals might be more willing to have a child with their current partner than non-repartnering individuals, that transition might be more burdensome in the presence of children from a prior union. In our contribution to the existing literature we explicitly compare the transition to a higher order birth for the never-previously-married and the previously-married with the same number of children. We also account for the fact that in a higher-order union with a pre-union child the transition might be faster not so much because of a commitment effect but because there is a desire for close age spacing between the half-siblings. In other words, our data and analytical approach allow us to explicitly test the proposition put forward by the commitment hypothesis. We elaborate on these points in the subsequent sections.

1. Fertility decisions in first and higher order unions

The discussion of what drives fertility decisions has been largely dominated by the argument that people want to have a child as a way to achieve the adult status of parenthood (the so-called “parenthood hypothesis”) and the argument that a shared child can confirm the couple’s status as a family and signal the partners’ commitment to each other (the so-called “commitment hypothesis”;

Griffith et al., 1985; Vikat et al., 1999). In first unions, these individual and couple considerations coincide – the birth of the first child can solidify the relationship and it also confers parenthood status to the two partners. However, differences between higher order unions and first unions can result in these considerations being disconnected from each other. This is what makes fertility decisions after repartnering particularly interesting (Kalmijn & Gelissen, 2007). If the higher order union resembles a first union quite closely (for example, when there are no prior children present), then the two previously outlined mechanisms are still at play. If, however, the new union includes children from a prior relationship, the couple consideration (i.e., the desire to solidify the union) might still be there whereas the individual need to be a parent has already been met for at least one of the partners. This potential “mismatch” between the individual and couple considerations in higher order unions has drawn the attention of an increasing number of researchers to the role which prior children might play in fertility after repartnering.

Earlier studies have reported mixed findings, which do not clearly favor one hypothesis over the other. Some studies have found that when people enter a new union with children from an earlier relationship, they are less likely to have a union-specific first child. These findings lend support to the parenthood hypothesis though the effects at times differ depending on whose pre-union children one considers, their numbers, and residence. For example, Wineberg (1990) showed that remarried women with two or more children were less likely to have another child in the new union. Similarly, Buber and Prskawetz (2000) found that in Austria, the progression to a birth of a common child was less likely if either of the two partners entered the union with two or more children from a previous relationship. The difference between having just one vs. having two or more pre-union children has been attributed to the fact that parents might want to provide a (half-)sibling to their children. Yet, Vikat, Thomson, and Prskawetz (2004) reported that the presence of children from prior unions reduced the odds of a shared birth for couples in Finland and Austria, irrespective of the number of prior children. Comparable conclusions were reached by Kalmijn and Gelissen (2007) based on Dutch data (the Divorce in The Netherlands survey; Kalmijn, De Graaf, & Uunk, 2000) which however, did not provide information about the parental status of the new partner.

In contrast to these findings, the U.S. based study of Griffith et al. (1985) reported that a woman’s number of prior children did not have a significant effect on her fertility after repartnering. In other words, having a shared child as a way to formalize the union was important even for women who were already mothers. This lends support to the commitment hypothesis. More recent support for this hypothesis has come from studies based on Swedish (Vikat et al., 1999), British (Jefferies, Berrington, & Diamond, 2000), and Italian data (Meggiolaro & Ongaro, 2010), to mention just a few. In all of these studies, the authors found that having children from a prior union did not affect the transition to having shared children in the current union.

2. The current study

The main goal in the current study is to test the parenthood and commitment hypotheses in a new way with detailed, couple data from several Dutch multi-actor studies. The studies include comparable information for both partners in the current union concerning their pre-union parental and marital statuses, as well as, information on the ages of their children. With these data we examine the transition to first common birth in higher order unions (i.e., unions which follow the dissolution of the first marital union) in the Netherlands.

First, we test the parenthood hypothesis by examining the progression to a shared birth for couples in which at least one of the partners is repartnering. Using the standard approach outlined above, we focus on how the transition to having a common child is affected by the prior parental statuses of the two partners. If repartnered parents are less likely to have a common child than repartnered non-parents, we can conclude that the desire to fulfill one's parenthood role is an important mechanism in making fertility decisions in higher order unions (*parenthood question 1*).

To test the parenthood hypothesis, we do not simply make the comparison between parents and non-parents but also account for the ages of the youngest pre-union children of the partners. As others have noted, people have a preference for birth spacing between siblings at two-three years (Holland & Thomson, 2011). Additionally, qualitative research has shown that the relationship between half-siblings with small age difference more closely resembles the bonds between full siblings (Bernstein, 1997). In other words, parenthood will likely have a negative effect on the birth of a new child, but less so if the pre-union child is young. For parents with younger pre-union children, the addition of a new child to the family might still be likely as “the child who is five or under when a half-sibling is born comes closest to the situation of any child whose parents have another baby” (Bernstein, 1997, p.157).

In our test of the parenthood hypothesis we also explore whether an interaction exists between the partners' pre-union parenthood statuses. The parenthood hypothesis suggests that when two parents form a union, they will be less likely to have a common child compared to two non-parents. Yet, a higher order union can also be formed between a parent and a non-parent and here several alternatives arise. First, a stepchild might serve as a substitute for a biological child, especially if that stepchild is still young. If that is the case, we should find that the couples where only one of the partners is a parent have a similar risk of a common birth in the current union as the couples where both partners are parents. Second, the argument can also be made that the addition of a child is easier when a pre-union child is already present. Besides the fact that this will confer the status of a “father/mother” to the non-parent, previous research has also found that the birth of a biological child in a step-family can in fact improve the functioning of the family and the involvement in child care of the previous non-parent (e.g., Hofferth & Anderson, 2003). If that is the case, we should find that the

transition to a union-specific birth is more likely when a non-parent enters into a union with a parent rather than with a non-parent (*parenthood question 2*).

In the second step of our work, we adopt a novel approach to testing the commitment hypothesis. The most frequently used previous test has been to compare the transition to a shared birth for couples with and without prior children. The cases when the prior children decreased the likelihood of a shared birth have been treated as confirmation of the parenthood hypothesis, with some exceptions made for the cases when the partners had only one child from a previous union. Null effects have been seen as confirmation of the commitment hypothesis. The shortcoming of this approach is that it assumes that people would want that “extra” child (in order to solidify the new union), irrespective of the fact that it will increase the care burden when there are already prior children present. In other words, it is important to account for the “costs” of a prospective birth in order to identify if it has an added value for the couple (Henz & Thomson, 2005). Our alternative is to compare repartnered persons with a given number of children to never-before married people with that same number of children. In first unions, the first child both solidifies the relationship as well as, confers parenthood status to the two partners. Therefore, we can think of a commitment effect when the birth of a first common (but second to the individual) child is more likely after repartnering than the birth of a second child in the first union. Put another way, the commitment hypothesis implies a positive effect of a second vs. first union on parity progression after controlling for the previous number of children. A similar, parity-sensitive approach was taken by Henz and Thomson (2005) and Thomson et al. (2002). Unfortunately, these works were not able to account for the age of the repartnering parents' youngest child and as Thomson et al. (2002) themselves note, “couples with stepchildren may accelerate the pace of childbearing in order to minimize the age difference between half siblings” (p. 94). Our data allow us to overcome this shortcoming.

In our work, we control for a number of characteristics of the two partners which have been shown to be associated with fertility behaviors such as the partners' ages, whether they are currently in a marital or cohabiting union, and the educational level of the female partner. Though we do not have detailed, time-varying information about the place of residence of all pre-union children following the dissolution of the first marriage, evidence from the Netherlands has shown that in 85% of the cases, the children stay with their mothers (De Graaf, 2008). Therefore, we also run the models separately for hers and his pre-union children.

3. Method

3.1. Participants and procedure

For this study we combined several Dutch surveys: the Households in the Netherlands 1995 survey (Huishoudens in Nederland 1995, HiN95; Weesie, Kalmijn, Bernasco, & Giesen, 1995), the first wave of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS; Dykstra et al., 2005), and three of the

repeated cross-sectional waves of the Family Survey of the Dutch Population (1998, 2003, and 2009; *Familie-enquête Nederlandse Bevolking, FNB*; de Graaf, de Graaf, Kraaykamp, & Ultee, 1998, 2003; Kraaykamp, Wolbers, & Ruiters, 2009). The harmonization and pooling of diverse datasets meant that we had a large enough number of cases in the different couple arrangements to perform the analyses which we saw necessary to properly test the assumptions put forward in the introduction. The response rates for the three surveys are comparable: 39% for HiN95, 45% for NKPS, and 47.3%, 52.6%, and 44.2% respectively for the 1998, 2003, and 2009 years of the FNB. Dutch response rates tend to be lower than elsewhere and have been declining over time (De Leeuw & De Heer, 2001; Stoop, 2005) which is likely a reflection of the fact that the Dutch appear to be particularly sensitive about privacy issues (Mandemakers & Dykstra, 2008). Survey dummies were included in all models to control for possible survey differences.

The Households in the Netherlands (HiN95) survey is based on a probability sample from the non-institutionalized population in the Netherlands in 1995 (Weesie, Kalmijn, Bernasco, & Giesen, 1995). Respondents in HiN95 are (1) couples of whom at least one partner is between the ages of 18 and 65, and (2) dependent and independent singles of age 18–65. Information was obtained through a combination of face-to-face interviews and self-administered questionnaires. In married and cohabiting couples, both partners were interviewed (e.g., about the current relationship and the fertility histories of the partners) and both filled out a questionnaire (including questions about any previous relationships). If only one of the partners was willing to be interviewed, the household was excluded from the data collection, leading to a lower cooperation rate at the household level than is normal in face-to-face interview surveys (Weesie, Kalmijn, Bernasco, & Giesen, 1995). More information about the design of the study can be found in Weesie et al. (1995).

The Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) is a nationally representative, multi-actor, multi-method panel study among respondents, aged 18–79 at the time of the first data collection (between 2002 and 2004). The primary respondents (also referred to as “anchors”) were selected from a random sample of private addresses in the Netherlands. The anchor data were collected via computer-assisted face-to-face interviews and self-completion questionnaires (for which the return rate was 92%). Among other topics, the survey also contains data on the partnership and fertility histories of the participants. During the interviews, the anchors were asked for permission to contact a number of family members (also referred to as “alters”), including the current intimate partner of the anchor. These alter data were collected via self-completion questionnaires. A detailed description of the survey’s design, data collection, and measures can be found in Dykstra et al. (2005).

The Family Survey of the Dutch Population (FNB) is a large-scale repeated cross-sectional survey administered in the Netherlands. The surveys are based on a representative sample of the non-institutionalized Dutch population between the ages of 18 and 70. For each survey, a

Table 1

Final number of couples used (per survey) included in the analyses.

Survey	<i>N</i> couples for our data (percentage of data for this study)	Percentage of couples which included a repartnering partner
HiN95	1405 (17.4%)	8.5%
1998 FNB survey	853 (10.5%)	8.2%
2003 FNB survey	897 (11.1%)	9.2%
2009 FNB survey	1269 (15.7%)	10.6%
NKPS	3670 (45.3%)	11.4%
Total	8094	10.2%

sample of primary respondents was drawn randomly from population registers of a stratified (with respect to region and urbanization) sample of Dutch municipalities. The data were collected via structured face-to-face interviews and self-completion questionnaires which were identical for the primary respondents and their partners. The FNB registers the complete life-courses of primary respondents and their partners with respect to a number of factors including partnership formation and fertility. More detailed information about the surveys can be found in de Graaf et al. (1998, 2003) and Kraaykamp et al. (2009).

For the purposes of this paper, we restricted our analyses to heterosexual couples which were living together (married or not) at the time of the interview. We excluded couples for which we did not have information about the previous marital and parental statuses of both partners. It is important to note here, that we focus specifically on the partners’ earlier marital statuses – we did not account for their earlier experiences with cohabitations (for more information, see p. 13). As we focus on fertility in this paper, we omitted the couples in which the female partner was over the age of 45 at the start of the relationship. Though a potentially interesting case, we also excluded the couples in which at least one of the partners was never married before but had children due to the lower number of cases (e.g., only 59 couples included a female partner which fit in this category). After additional cleaning for data consistency with respect to the reported dates for the various life events, we were left with 8094 couples (of which 10.2% included a repartnering partner). Table 1 displays the number of couples per survey which were included in our study.

4. Measures

The dependent variable in this study (i.e., union-specific birth) was a binary indicator taking the value of 1 in the month when a birth occurred in the current union and 0 otherwise. In the cases when both partners had reported the birthdates of the children from the current union, we used the dates reported by the female partner (all FNB surveys). In the NKPS the birthdates were only reported by the primary respondent for the study (which was the female partner in 55.9% of the unions which fit our selection criteria). In the HiN95 survey, the birthdates of all children were reported by the female partner.

In order to obtain information about the pre-union marital and parental statuses of both partners, we had to

reconstruct and synchronize the fertility and partner histories on both sides, based on the diverse self-reported questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. We made the decision to focus on pre-union marital status rather than on having experience with cohabitations as the different surveys imposed different minimum length limitations on cohabitations in order for them to be recorded. For example, the respondents in the FNB surveys were asked to report cohabitations which were at least a year long whereas the respondents in the HiN95 survey reported all cohabitations of at least three months. Furthermore, we did not have information about previous cohabitations of the partner (i.e., the alter) for the NKPS respondents.

The way the pre-union parental statuses of the partners were established differed across the surveys. In the HiN95 survey, the female partner reported the birthdates of all children – her pre-union children, her partners' pre-union children, as well as, the birthdates of all children she had with that current partner. These data were used to establish the parental statuses as well as, the birthdates of the youngest pre-union children for both partners. In the 1998 FNB, both partners reported the birthdates of all children including who the other parent was (e.g., “current partner”, “previous partner”). Once again, we used the female reported birthdates for the children born to the current partner. For the children born to an ex-partner, we used the individually-reported by each partner information. Though both partners reported all birthdates in the 2003 and 2009 FNB surveys, they did not explicitly state who the other parent of that child was. Therefore, we “assigned” children to the current or a previous union based on the reported by both partners date when the current relationship started. All unique birthdates preceding the start of the current union, were “assigned” to the partner who reported them. If both partners reported the same birth which preceded the start of the current relationship (which meant that we could not distinguish which current partner was the biological parent), we dropped the union from our sample. Finally, in the NKPS study, both partners reported whether they had any children prior to the start of the current relationship. Their birthdates, however, were only reported by the primary respondent in the study. This meant that at times, we knew that the alter had children prior to the current union (as that information was self-reported) but we did not have information about the birthdates of these pre-union children.

The highest completed educational levels of both partners were self-reported in all studies and for this work were coded in the following manner: 1 = (*incomplete*) *elementary*, 2 = *secondary education*, 3 = *vocational education*, and 4 = *university and post-graduate*.

5. Analytical approach

We performed two main sets of analyses, one addressing our two questions with respect to the parenthood hypothesis and one addressing the commitment hypothesis. For the parenthood hypothesis, we used discrete-time event-history analysis (Allison, 1982; Yamaguchi, 1991) to examine if the partners' parental statuses prior to

the current union affected the transition to the first union-specific birth in the new union. The data were organized in a couple-period format where each row of the dataset corresponded to a time period of one year of the relationship¹ and contained information about both partners. The dependent variable was the probability that the first common child was born in a given year, provided that it was not born the year before. We observed the unions from the year in which the relationship started (or from the year the female partner turned 16 if the current relationship started before her 16th birthday). The observations were right-censored either at the interview year (for the couples which did not have a common child) or after the year the female partner turned 45.

We performed two analyses to examine our parenthood questions. In the first analysis (addressing the previously described *parenthood question 1*), the main independent variables were the parental statuses of the two partners at the start of the current union, also accounting for the age of their youngest pre-union child. In other words, three (partly time-varying) dummies were included for each partner – “does not have a child from a previous union” (not time-varying), “has a pre-union child who is currently under the age of three”, and “has a pre-union child who is currently between the ages of three and seven” (“has a pre-union child who is currently over the age of seven” served as the reference category). This way, we were able to assess not only the effect of the repartnering individual's parental status on the transition to a union-specific first birth but also to examine if the effect varied depending on the age of the youngest pre-union child. We ran separate models for the couples which included a previously married woman (controlling for the marital and parental statuses of her partner), a previously married man (controlling for the marital and parental statuses of his partner), and finally, a model for all couples which included at least one repartnering individual (controlling for both partners' previous marital statuses). For each of these models, we excluded the couples for which we knew that the partner in question was a parent but we did not have information about the birth year of his/hers youngest pre-union child. Subsequently, we addressed the issue of possible interactions between the partners' earlier parental statuses, controlling for their previous marital statuses (*parenthood question 2*).

In all of these analyses, duration dependency was accounted for by including a linear term for the number of years which had passed since the start of the union. The quadratic term of the duration variable was not significant and was thus, excluded. Other specifications of the duration variable (e.g., interval dummies) did not produce changes in the results. We corrected for the fact that the observations (i.e., couple-years) were not independent within unions by using the *vce(cluster)* option within Stata.

In order to test the commitment hypothesis, we estimated two recurrent event discrete-time models

¹ The results did not differ when the analyses were performed with a monthly specification.

(Steele, 2011) for the transition to higher order births (i.e., from second to fifth) in the current union. The data were organized in a couple-period format where each row of the dataset corresponded to a time period of one month of the relationship and contained information about both partners. The couples which included a repartnering partner contributed a single episode to our data. For them, the risk period began at the start of the current union and ended with the birth of the first union-specific child (with right-censoring at interview date/after the female partner turned 45). The rest of the couples (i.e., the ones where both partners were never married before) contributed a maximum of four episodes to our data which had the following durations: from the month after the birth of the first child to the birth of the second, from the month after the birth of the second child to the birth of the third, and so on. Right-censoring was the same as for the couples with a repartnering partner. We excluded the transition to first birth as a way to ensure that the partners already had met their need for parenthood.

As mentioned previously, we did not have detailed information about the residence arrangements of the pre-union children. Therefore, we chose to run two separate models – one focusing on the parity progression of the female partner and one – on the parity progression of the male partner. We excluded the couples where the female or male partner respectively, was married before but was not a parent. In other words, we examined how parents' higher parity progression was affected by their pre-union marital statuses. We controlled for the number of children "accumulated" at the start of each episode, as well as, the earlier marital and parental status of the other partner. In this setup, we can think of a commitment effect if we find a positive effect of a second vs. first union on parity progression, after controlling for the previous number of children of the partner in question. Additionally, in the analyses modeling the higher parity progression of the female partner, we included a time-varying covariate for the current age of her youngest child (either pre-union or from the current union) as well as, for the number of months that had passed since the start of the relationship (and the quadratic term of this duration variable). Controlling for the age of the youngest child meant that we were able to account for the fact that the repartnering parent had "lost" a number of years due to their separation from the ex-partner. In the analyses addressing the higher parity progression of men, we made the decision to control for the current age of his partner's youngest child (if she had any). As we already mentioned, in 85% of the Dutch cases, children stay with their mothers after divorce (De Graaf, 2008). This means that by controlling for the age of his partner's youngest child, we most likely controlled for the age of the youngest resident child. Furthermore, an additional check demonstrated that there was a strong correlation between the ages of the partners' youngest pre-union children ($r = 0.54$). Once again, we corrected for the non-independence of the observations within unions by using the `vce(cluster)` option within Stata. We also estimated the models with union-level random effects and found our results to be virtually identical (results available upon request).

In all of our analyses we included: a time-varying variable indicating if the union was currently a marriage or not, the current age of the female partner (as well as its quadratic term in order to account for the possible curvilinear effect on fertility), a time-varying dummy denoting if the male partner was 45 or older, the highest education level of the female partner, and dummies for the five surveys which we used.

6. Results

Of the 8094 unions which we observed, 6894 (or 85.2%) were marriages at the time of the interview and 1197 were cohabitations/registered partnerships. In the majority of cases, both partners were never married before ($n = 7270$ or 89.8%) whereas 824 unions (or 10.2%) included at least one repartnering individual. The correlation between the partners' ages at the start of the relationship was $r = 0.75$ for the unions with two never-before-married individuals and $r = 0.53$ for the couples with one repartnering partner. Of the 7270 couples with two never-married before partners, 5848 (or 80.4%) had a child within the current union. The mean number of years from the start of the relationship to the birth of that first child was 6.12 years ($SD = 3.82$). As can be seen in Fig. 1, the probability of having a first child for these unions, increased somewhat steadily over time, plateaued around the eighth/ninth year of the relationship, and then declined. Of the 824 couples which included at least one repartnering partner, the slight majority had a child from a previous union ($n = 475$ or 57.6%) and nearly half ($n = 386$ or 46.8%) had a common child within the observation period. The mean number of years from the formation of the union to the birth of the first common child was 3.73 ($SD = 2.74$). As can be seen in Fig. 2, the probability of having a common child for these couples increased until about the third/fourth year of the current relationship and then rapidly decreased. Note that the probability of childbirth for the remarried couples in the first years of the union are somewhat higher than in the same period for the first-time married couples. More information about our sample is displayed in Tables 2 and 3.

In the first step of our analyses, we addressed the two questions with respect to the parenthood hypothesis. As

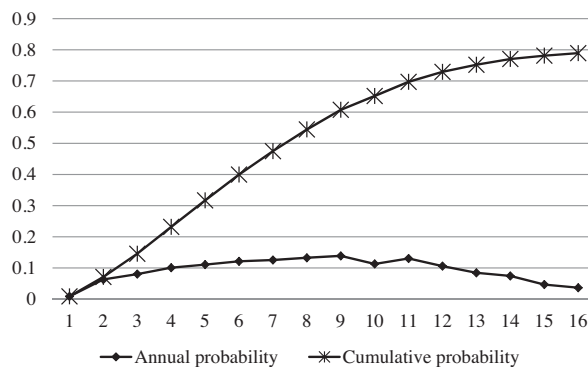


Fig. 1. Probability of having first child in a union with two never married before partners within the first years of the relationship, $n = 7270$.

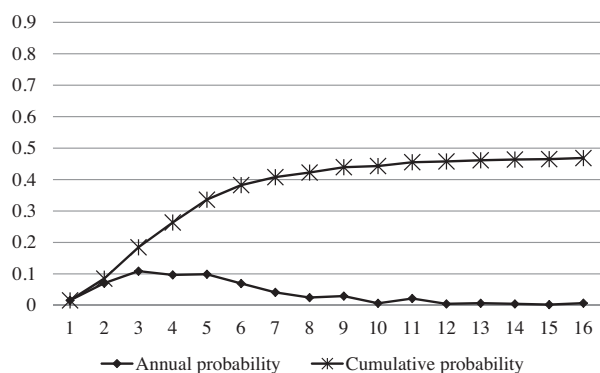


Fig. 2. Probability of having a shared child in a union with at least one repartnering partner within the first years of the relationship, $n = 824$.

can be seen in Table 4 (addressing *parenthood question 1*), our results were robust irrespective of whether we ran the analyses only for the repartnering women, only for the repartnering men or for all unions which included at least one repartnering partner. According to Model 3 of Table 4, we did not find “clear cut” evidence for the parenthood hypothesis when it comes to women and their pre-union

children. The transition to the first union-specific birth was more likely for non-mothers than for mothers of older children (i.e., currently above the age of seven): the odds of a non-mother making that transition were 2.2 times higher. However, we also found that mothers with young children (under the age of seven) were more likely to make the transition than the reference group and about as fast as non-mothers. In other words, our results indicated that the presence of her pre-union children was not linked to the transition to a first union-specific birth, except when the children were older. For men, however, the age of their youngest pre-union child did not matter. As our results (Model 3 of Table 4) indicate, as far as men’s pre-union children were concerned, the one thing that mattered for the transition to the first union-specific birth was whether the man had any children or not. Here, we saw clear evidence that the transition to that birth was more likely in the unions where the man was not a father at the start of the relationship (Hazard Ratio = 1.93). Yet, the strongest effect remained the one of being in a union with a mother of a child under the age of three ($HR = 2.55$).

In the subsequent analysis, results displayed in Table 5, we examined the possible interplay between the two partners’ pre-union parental statuses (*parenthood question*

Table 2

Marital and parental statuses of the partners at the start of the union, $N = 8094$ couples.

Male partner					
		Not married before, no kids	Married before, no kids	Married before, parent	
Female partner	Not married before, no kids	7270	161	160	7591
	Married before, no kids	150	38	45	233
	Married before, parent	102	51	117	270
		7522	250	322	

Table 3

Descriptives of working sample, $N = 8094$ couples ($n = 7270$ couples with two never-married-before partners and $n = 824$ couples with at least one repartnering partner).

	Female partner	Male partner
Marital status prior to this union, $N = 8094$	7591 not married before 503 married before, 6.2%	7522 not married before 572 married before, 7.1%
Parental status prior to this union, $N = 8094$	7824 not a parent 270 mothers, 3.3%	7772 not a parent 322 fathers, 4.0%
Parental status prior to this union for couples with a repartnering partner, $n = 824$	554 not a parent 270 parent, 32.8%	502 not a parent 322 parent, 39.1%
Number of children prior to current union		
Has one child	97	84
Has two children	119	178
Has more than two children	54	60
<i>M</i> age of youngest child at start of this union (<i>SD</i>)	8.53 (5.42)	10.47 (6.72)
<i>M</i> age at start of current union for the never married before couples (<i>SD</i>), $n = 7270$	21.20 (4.19)	23.40 (4.53)
<i>M</i> age at start of current union for couples with a repartnering partner (<i>SD</i>), $n = 824$	30.84 (6.66)	35.17 (8.17)
<i>M</i> age at birth of 1st child for the never married before couples (<i>SD</i>), $n = 5848$	26.99 (4.16)	29.18 (4.42)
<i>M</i> age at birth of 1st common child for couples with a repartnering partner (<i>SD</i>), $n = 386$	31.12 (4.89)	35.69 (6.32)
Highest educational level of the partners		
(incomplete) Elementary education	2051 (25.5%)	1943 (24.3%)
Secondary education	1838 (22.8%)	1239 (15.5%)
Vocational education	2253 (28.0%)	2352 (29.4%)
University, post-graduate	1911 (23.7%)	2464 (30.8%)
<i>M</i> number of years from start of relationship to birth of first common child (<i>SD</i>)		
Unions with no repartnering partners	6.12 (3.82)	
Unions with at least one repartnering partner	3.73 (2.74)	

Table 4

Parameter estimates for discrete-time event history models of the transition to a union-specific first birth in a higher-order union depending on the parental status and the age of the youngest child from a previous union of the repartnering partner.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Previously married women		Previously married men		At least one repartnering	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Current age of the youngest child from previous union (ref. = child is currently >7 years)						
She has no child from a previous union	0.73**	(0.26)			0.81**	(0.26)
Her child is currently ≤3 years	0.90*	(0.39)			0.93*	(0.40)
Her child is currently >3 and ≤7 years	0.70*	(0.29)			0.82**	(0.29)
He has no child from a previous union			0.64**	(0.20)	0.65**	(0.19)
His child is currently ≤3 years			0.02	(0.47)	0.06	(0.46)
His child is currently >3 and ≤7 years			0.40	(0.30)	0.37	(0.29)
The male partner is a father	-0.91**	(0.26)				
The male partner was married before	0.29	(0.23)			0.12	(0.20)
The female partner is a mother			-0.54*	(0.31)		
The female partner was married before			0.25	(0.24)	0.14	(0.20)
Time varying: the union is a marriage	0.90**	(0.19)	1.09**	(0.18)	1.03**	(0.14)
Number of years since start of union	-0.12**	(0.04)	-0.11**	(0.03)	-0.12**	(0.02)
Current age of female partner (in years)	0.56**	(0.17)	0.76**	(0.14)	0.64**	(0.11)
Square term of current age of fem partner	-0.01**	(0.00)	-0.01**	(0.00)	-0.01**	(0.00)
Male partner is currently ≥45 years	-0.63*	(0.34)	-0.78**	(0.26)	-0.75**	(0.25)
Female education (ref. = university, post-graduate)						
(incomplete) Elementary	-0.12	(0.24)	0.35	(0.25)	0.14	(0.19)
Secondary	-0.02	(0.23)	-0.29	(0.21)	-0.15	(0.16)
Vocational	0.14	(0.25)	0.02	(0.20)	0.03	(0.16)
Survey (ref. = FNB 09)						
FNB 1998	-0.37	(0.34)	-0.53*	(0.30)	-0.39	(0.25)
FNB 2003	-0.88*	(0.36)	-0.41	(0.30)	-0.46*	(0.25)
NKPS	-0.48*	(0.26)	-0.44*	(0.22)	-0.36*	(0.18)
HiN95	-0.59*	(0.33)	-0.91**	(0.29)	-0.68**	(0.24)
Constant	-9.10**	(2.63)	-12.24**	(2.16)	-11.70**	(1.79)
N person years	2446		2662		3863	
n unions	477		486		726	

+ $p < 0.10$.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$

Table 5

Parameter estimates for discrete-time event history models of the transition to a union-specific first birth in a union which is higher-order for at least one partner: Interaction between the partners' previous parental statuses (N person years = 4337, n unions = 804).

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
The female partner was not a mother prior to this union	0.40*	(0.18)			0.92**	(0.33)
The male partner was not a father prior to this union			0.56**	(0.15)	1.12**	(0.34)
Interaction between the parental statuses of the partners					-0.70*	(0.35)
The male partner was married before	-0.18	(0.17)	0.04	(0.19)	0.21	(0.20)
The female partner was married before	0.16	(0.19)	0.04	(0.18)	0.31	(0.19)
Time varying: the union is a marriage	1.07**	(0.14)	1.08**	(0.13)	1.08**	(0.14)
Number of years since start of union	-0.12**	(0.02)	-0.12**	(0.02)	-0.12**	(0.02)
Current age of the female partner (in years)	0.65**	(0.11)	0.68**	(0.11)	0.68**	(0.11)
Square term of current age of fem partner	-0.01**	(0.00)	-0.01**	(0.00)	-0.01**	(0.00)
Male partner is currently ≥45 years	-0.92**	(0.22)	-0.74**	(0.22)	-0.82**	(0.22)
Female education (ref. = university, post-graduate)						
(incomplete) Elementary	0.05	(0.19)	-0.01	(0.18)	0.05	(0.19)
Secondary	-0.17	(0.16)	-0.20	(0.16)	-0.16	(0.16)
Vocational	0.01	(0.16)	-0.01	(0.16)	0.01	(0.16)
Survey (ref. = FNB 09)						
FNB 1998	-0.42*	(0.24)	-0.40	(0.24)	-0.38	(0.24)
FNB 2003	-0.54*	(0.24)	-0.47*	(0.24)	-0.47*	(0.25)
NKPS	-0.44**	(0.17)	-0.38*	(0.18)	-0.38*	(0.17)
HiN95	-0.68**	(0.24)	-0.69**	(0.24)	-0.68**	(0.24)
Constant	-10.33**	(1.70)	-10.99**	(1.74)	-12.08**	(1.79)

+ $p < 0.10$.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$

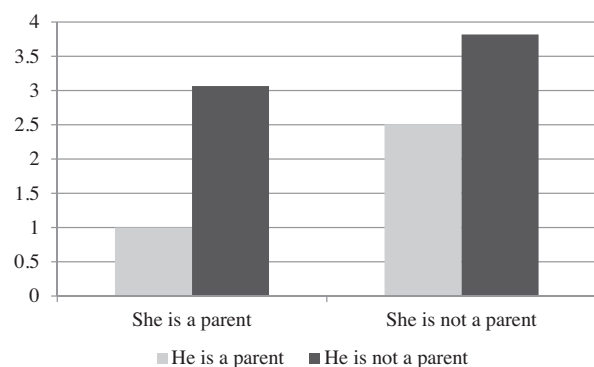


Fig. 3. Hazard ratios of first union-specific childbirth in unions where at least one of the partners is repartnering, $n = 804$.

2). As can be seen in Model 3 of Table 5, the transition to the first union-specific birth was most likely in the unions between two non-parents and least likely when the union involved two parents. We plotted the odds in Fig. 3 to help

visualize how the transition to the first union-specific birth differed for couples where a non-father/father joined a household with and without a pre-union child. As can be seen in Fig. 3, the difference between a non-father and a father joining the household was much larger for households where the woman was already a mother than when she was not a mother at the start of the union. In other words, a non-father joining the household was associated with higher odds of a union-specific birth when he partnered a mother than when he partnered a non-mother.

Our final analysis addressed the commitment hypothesis. Our findings are displayed in Table 6, separately for the couples which were “matched” based on her parity (Model 1) and the one “matched” on his parity (Model 2). As previously mentioned, in both models we controlled for the current age of the youngest child of the female partner. Our decision was driven by the consideration of how the custodial arrangement of parents might affect the transition to a higher order birth. However, our earlier results with respect to the unimportance of the ages of

Table 6

Parameter estimates for a discrete-time recurrent event history model for the transition to a higher order birth for parents in first and higher order unions.

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Couples matched on her parity		Couples matched on his parity	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
The woman was married before	0.75**	(0.17)		
Her partner was married before	0.25	(0.30)		
Her partner is a father at the start of the union	-0.77*	(0.36)		
Number of kids the woman has at the start of the episode (ref. = one)				
She has two	-1.31**	(0.03)		
She has three	-1.49**	(0.05)		
Current age of her youngest child: last before start of union or most recent in this union (ref. = under 3 years)				
The child is >3 and <7 years	-0.07*	(0.03)		
The child is over 7 years	-1.66**	(0.08)		
The man was married before			-0.25	(0.38)
His partner was married before			0.19	(0.25)
Number of kids he has at the start of the episode (ref. = one)				
He has two			-1.30**	(0.03)
He has three			-1.49**	(0.05)
Current age of the youngest child of his partner: last before start of union or most recent in this union (ref. = under 3 years)				
She is not a mother			0.13	(0.36)
The child is >3 and <7 years			-0.06*	(0.03)
The child is over 7 years			-1.73**	(0.09)
The union is currently a marriage	0.39**	(0.05)	0.43**	(0.05)
Number of months since start of union	0.01**	(0.00)	0.01**	(0.00)
Square term of number of months since start of union	-0.00**	(0.00)	-0.00**	(0.00)
Current age of female partner is years	0.49**	(0.03)	0.50**	(0.03)
Square term of current age of female partner	-0.01**	(0.00)	-0.01**	(0.00)
Male partner is currently ≥45 years	-0.39*	(0.16)	-0.45**	(0.14)
Female education (ref. = university, post-graduate)				
(incomplete) Elementary	-0.16**	(0.03)	-0.16**	(0.03)
Secondary	-0.13**	(0.03)	-0.14**	(0.03)
Vocational	-0.13**	(0.03)	-0.13**	(0.03)
Survey (ref. = FNB 09)				
FNB 1998	-0.12**	(0.04)	-0.12**	(0.04)
FNB 2003	-0.16**	(0.04)	-0.16**	(0.04)
NKPS	-0.12**	(0.03)	-0.11**	(0.03)
HiN95	-0.09*	(0.04)	-0.10**	(0.04)
Constant	-11.39**	(0.45)	-11.47**	(0.44)
N	915,098		922,103	
Unions	5893		5950	
(n including a repartnering woman/man)	254		311	

* $p < 0.10$.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$

men's pre-union children (see Model 3 in Table 4) also supported this decision.

As can be seen in Model 1 of Table 6, we found a positive effect of second vs. first union of the female partner on parity progression, even after controlling for the number of children the female partner already had, the current age of her youngest child, and the duration of the present relationship. The odds of making a higher parity progression were 2.1 times higher ($\exp(0.75)$) in unions where the female partner was married before. Interestingly enough, the results were somewhat different in the analysis where the couples were matched on the male partner's parity progression. There, we did not find evidence that his earlier marital status affected the transition to a common birth in the current union. For both models, we found a negative association between the number of children the partner already had and the transition to having another child. Additionally, the transition to a subsequent birth was most likely while the previous child (of the woman) was still young (i.e., mostly under the age of three).

In all of the previously described analyses, we found rather consistent effects for the control variables. We saw that the transition from a cohabiting to a marital union was associated with a higher transition rate to a (higher-order) birth in the current relationship. We also found the well documented in the literature curvilinear effect of the female partner's age whereas for the male partner, we saw a significant drop in the odds of a common birth once he passed the age of 45. Interestingly, we only found an effect of the female partner's educational level when we considered the higher parity progressions in the current union. Consistent with other studies (for an overview, see Van Bavel, 2010), a higher parity progression was more likely for the more highly educated women. Finally, though we found that the duration of the union had an effect on the transition to a common birth, our results support the claim made by others that, "the most salient clock is the youngest child's age" (Holland & Thomson, 2011, p. 116)

7. Discussion

In this work, we examined how the transition to having a common child in a union was affected by the earlier marital and parental statuses of the partners. As has been previously elaborated, fertility decisions are likely to be driven by the desire to have a child as a way to achieve the adult status of parenthood (the "parenthood hypothesis") but also by the wish to signal the partners' commitment to each other (the "commitment hypothesis"; Griffith et al., 1985; Vikat et al., 1999). We analyzed couple data from multiple harmonized Dutch surveys to investigate how the male and female partners' parental statuses, the ages of their youngest pre-union children, and the partners' experience with marital dissolution might affect the transition to having a common child in the current union. Taken together, our findings suggest that what matters for the transition to a common birth in a higher order union is: (a) whether the male partner is a parent at the start of the union, and (b) whether this is a higher order union for the female partner.

We found that as far as the man's pre-union children were concerned, the presence of pre-union children was associated with lower odds of making the transition to the first union-specific birth. This is in line with the previously defined parenthood hypothesis as men's fatherhood preferences are already met when entering a second union. For men, we did not find variation in the timing of childbirth as to the age of his youngest pre-union child. For women, the pattern is different: being a mother at the start of the second union did not reduce the odds of having the first common childbirth as compared to non-mothers, a finding which refutes the parenthood hypothesis for women. Yet, the age of her youngest pre-union child did matter. We saw that the transition to first common birth was more likely for the mothers of a young child than for mothers who have an older child. That is, in a union where the female partner is a mother, the transition to the birth of the first common child is still likely as long as her pre-union child is relatively young. As the woman's pre-union children are more likely to stay with her and thus, "come" into the new union, it is not surprising that their ages affect the transition to the first union-specific birth. As others have already noted, there is a clear preference for birth spacing between siblings of about two-three years (Holland & Thomson, 2011). In a situation, where a young pre-union child is present in the household, the addition of a half-sibling will in fact, closely resemble the birth of another sibling in an intact family (Bernstein, 1997). Stated differently, though the parenthood mechanism holds true for men, there might also be the consideration of how closely this new common child will resemble a full-sibling for the pre-union (most likely resident) child. Interestingly, we also found a stronger parenthood effect for men in unions where the other partner was a mother. In other words, the transition to a common birth was even more likely when a non-father entered an already existing family (a mother and her pre-union child), than when a non-father partnered with a non-mother. Our interpretation of this result focuses on the fact that the second case essentially implies the creation of a "family" – it is a situation where both partners have to make the rather important step of becoming parents. In the former situation, however, the non-father is entering a setting where his partner already has experience with being a mother which can, in fact, encourage his desire to be a parent too.

The above finding that prior children have no effect on childbirth in the new union suggests support for the commitment hypothesis for women. That is, women would find it important to confirm the union as a family despite the presence of children. As we contended, however, a better design was needed to test the commitment hypothesis because additional children impose a higher caring burden. Our new way of testing the commitment hypothesis was to compare parents in first and higher-order unions, who have the same number of children. Our analyses of the parity progression showed a positive effect of being in a second union for mothers. When the union included a repartnering mother, the odds of making the transition to the birth of that subsequent (but first common) child were higher than for a non-repartnering mother with the same number of children.

Again, this progression was most likely while the youngest child was under the age of three. We did not however, find this union-order effect in couples where the man was a repartnering father. Thus, we find a commitment effect for repartnering women but not for repartnering men. So how can we interpret this gender difference in the commitment effect? Earlier works have demonstrated that stepchildren receive more time and attention from their step-fathers in blended (i.e., a family which contains both biological and stepchildren) than in non-blended families to the point where the paternal investment in these children does not differ within a family (Hofferth & Anderson, 2003). In other words, for a mother entering a new union, whose child is most likely staying primarily with her (which is by and large the case in the Dutch context, De Graaf, 2008), it is beneficial to have a child with her new partner as that might draw him into the care for her child as well.

Though we highlight these interesting differences between the effects which the pre-union characteristics of the male and female partners might have on fertility in the current union, there are several caveats which should be kept in mind. Foremost, we did not have detailed information about the residential arrangements of the partners' pre-union children. Though other works have clearly stated that in the Dutch context, the vast majority of children stay with the mother after the marital dissolution (e.g., De Graaf, 2008), our interpretation of the findings is not based on concrete information about the residency of the partners' pre-union children at the time when the current relationship started.

Of course, our interpretation of the "function" of children in higher order unions (i.e., to satisfy the partners' desire to be parents or to solidify the relationship) is based on the actual observed fertility behaviors. Though we outline several well established in the literature theoretical mechanisms, a more detailed test of the parenthood and commitment hypotheses might in fact require the use of prospective, couple-level data which also include information about preferences, intentions, and the perceived value of children. In the absence of such data, we can only deduce the significance of having common children based on the actions of the repartnering parents/partners. Related to this is the fact that higher order unions might be more homogamous in terms of fertility intentions than first unions. In other words, an individual who left the first marriage because of the ex-partner's lack of desire for children, might in fact select the subsequent partner partially based on his or her positive fertility intentions. These higher order unions will then be more likely to make the transition to childbearing than couples which are still negotiating their fertility intentions.

Another important point to mention is the fact that we focused on higher order unions which followed the dissolution of a marital union (rather than higher order unions following the dissolution of a marriage and/or cohabitation). As we elaborated in the measures section, this choice was made due to the differences between the surveys in the way earlier cohabitations were recorded (i.e., in some studies they had to be at least a year-long to

be noted, whereas in others, three-month long cohabitations were also documented). This means, that we have omitted from our analyses all mothers/fathers who had their pre-union children in the context of a cohabitation. Therefore, when examining our findings, it should be kept in mind that our primary interest here was to inspect the mechanisms which underlie fertility decisions after the dissolution of a marital union in particular. We cannot say how or whether these processes might differ after the breakup of a cohabiting union. What we can state based on our work, is that we find evidence of the importance of both the parenthood and commitment mechanisms for fertility transitions in higher order unions.

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