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Education and the Transition to Parenthood among Partnered and Single Women in Britain

Conference on Education and reproduction in low-fertility settings (EDUREP)

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Introduction

- The negative relationship between women's education and the transition to first birth has long been established.
- The educational gradient of first birth among women may vary by union status and by the societal context (Ermisch, 2008; Perelli-Harris et al. 2010).
- However, very little is known about the implications of the male partner's education.
- In this study we use British longitudinal data to examine the likelihood of first birth by women's education and union status and the influence of men's education on this relationship.

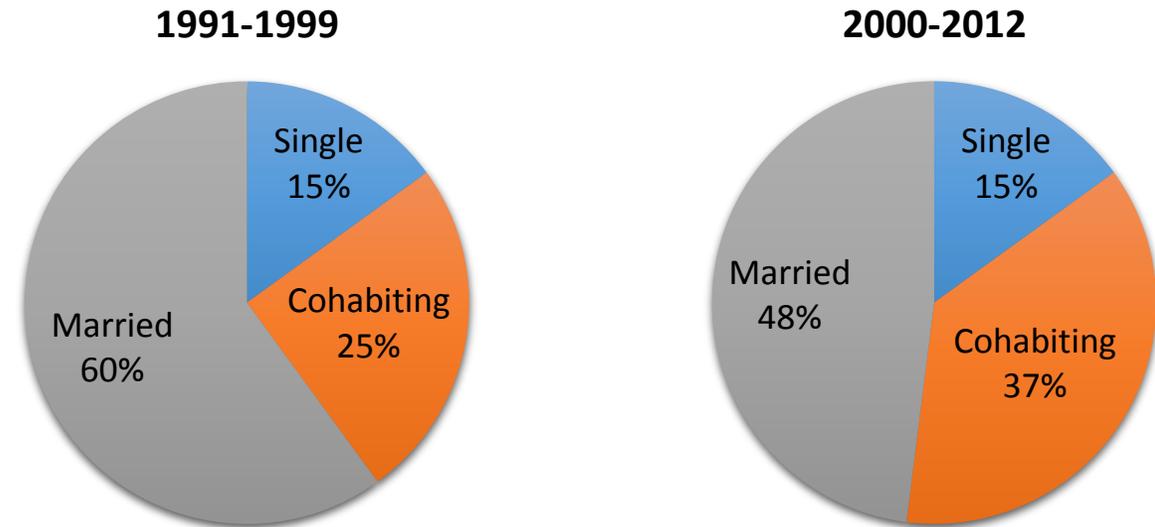
Theoretical Background

- Over the past decades there has been an increase in cohabitation and in the proportion of non-marital births in Europe.
- Theoretical explanations include:
 - SDT
 - Economic uncertainty, pattern of disadvantage
 - Oppenheimer et al (1997): emphasis on men's economic insecurity as a determinant to delay/forgo marriage.
 - Theory of marriage market search (Ermisch 2008)

Britain as a Case Study

- Timing of first birth is polarized by education and occupational status (Rendall et al. 2005, 2009).
- The share of births to single (unpartnered) women is amongst the highest in Europe: 15% compared to 3%-5% in countries like France and Norway (Perelli-Harris et al. 2010).

Distribution of first births by partnership status and time period among British women



Source: BHPS 1991-2008, UKHLS 2009-2014

Research Hypotheses

- H1: The educational gradient of first birth would be more strongly negative among cohabiting and single women.
- H2: The educational gap in the transition to first birth among single and cohabiting women is expected to increase over time.
- H3: A woman would be more likely to enter first birth within cohabitation if her partner is low educated.

Data and methods

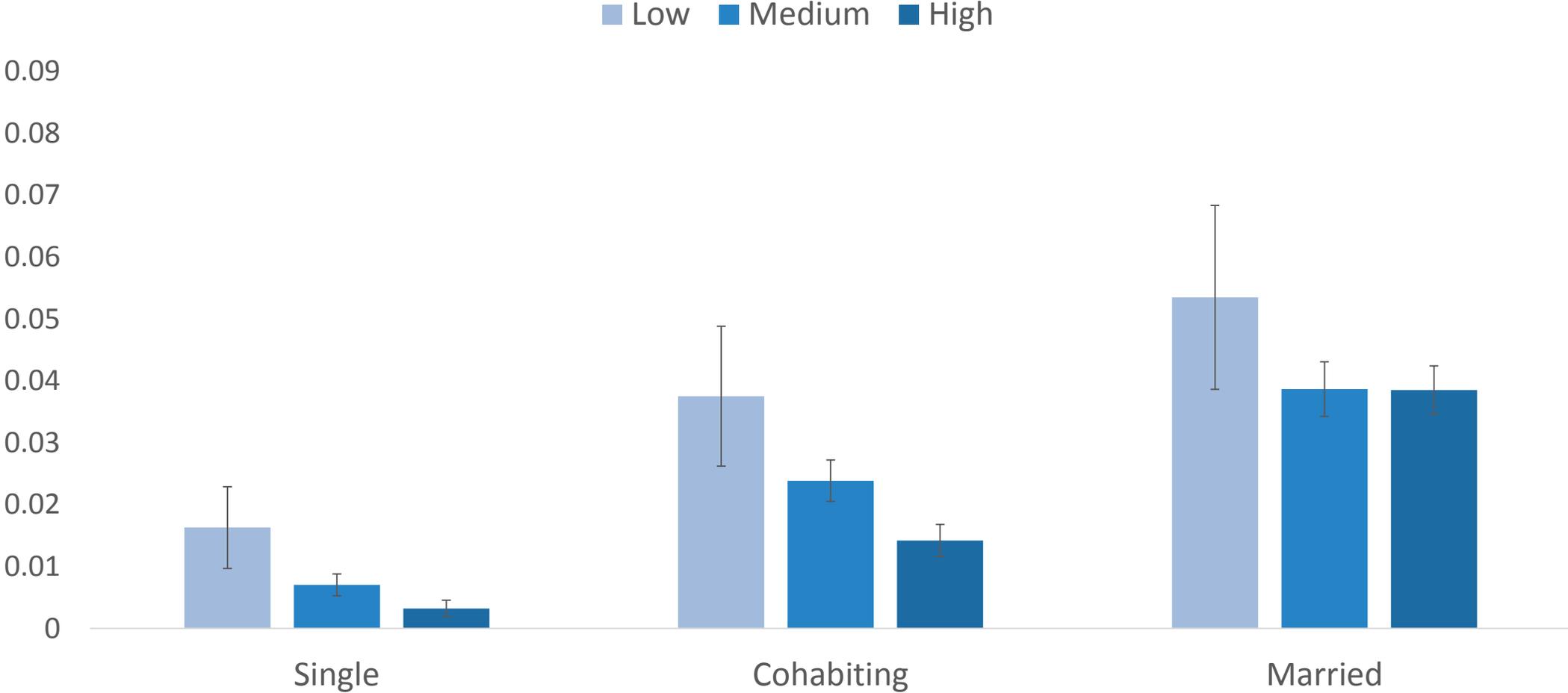
- Data sources:
 - The British Household Panel Survey (BHPS, 1991-2008): over 10,000 respondents aged 16 and above from around 5,500 households interviewed annually.
 - The UK Longitudinal Household Survey (UKHLS, 2009-2014).
- The subsample includes women aged 20-45 observed throughout the period from 1991 to 2012.
- We use a competing risks model in order to estimate the likelihood of first birth while being single, in cohabitation or marriage as opposed to no birth in each given year. This model is estimated using a multinomial regression.
- We run a separate model for partnered women for the likelihood of first birth within cohabitation, marriage or no birth.

Measures

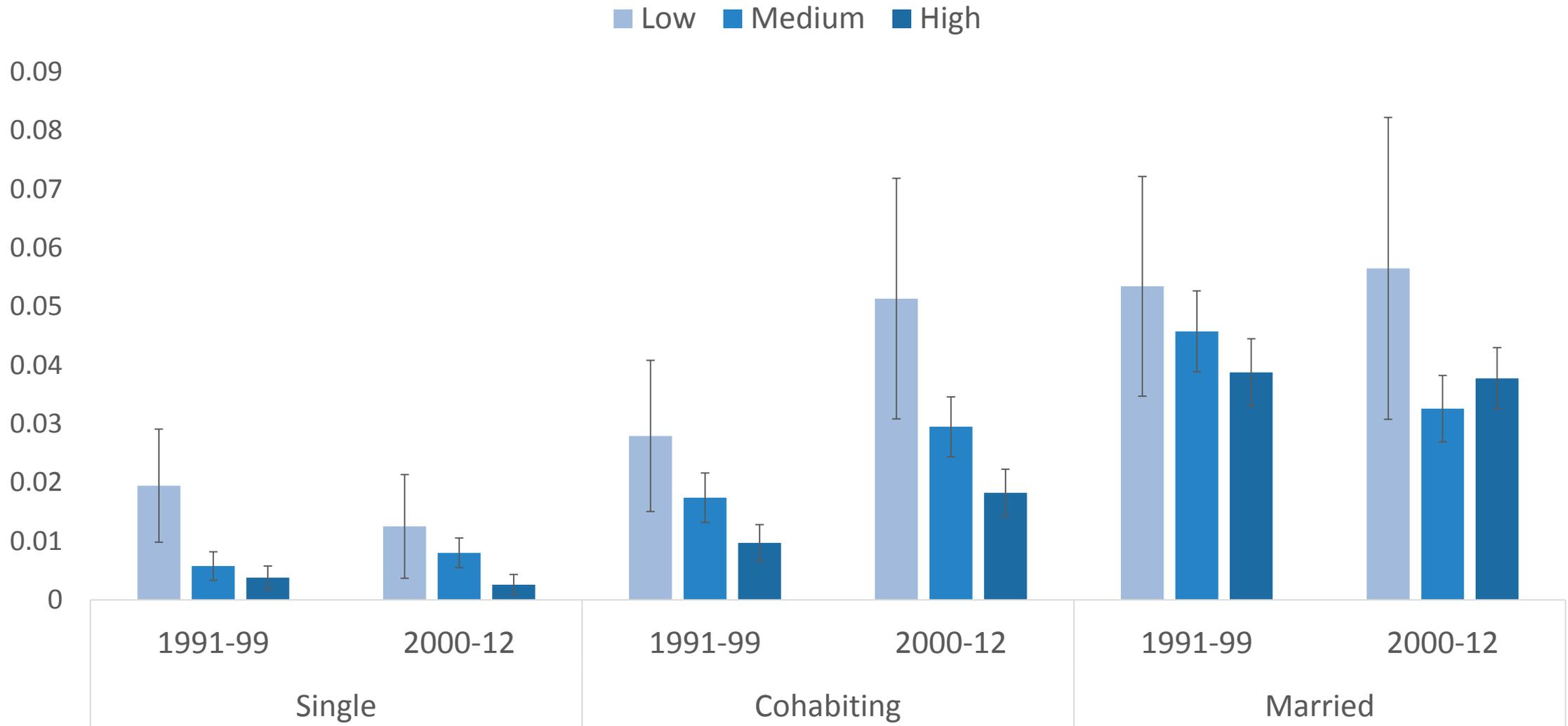
- For all women:
 - Education: Low (lower secondary), medium (upper secondary) and high (tertiary)
 - Enrolment status (enrolled/ not enrolled)
 - Lagged employment status (employed/ not employed)
 - Foreign born (yes/no)
 - Age and age squared
- For partnered women:
 - Partner's education and employment, union duration.

Findings

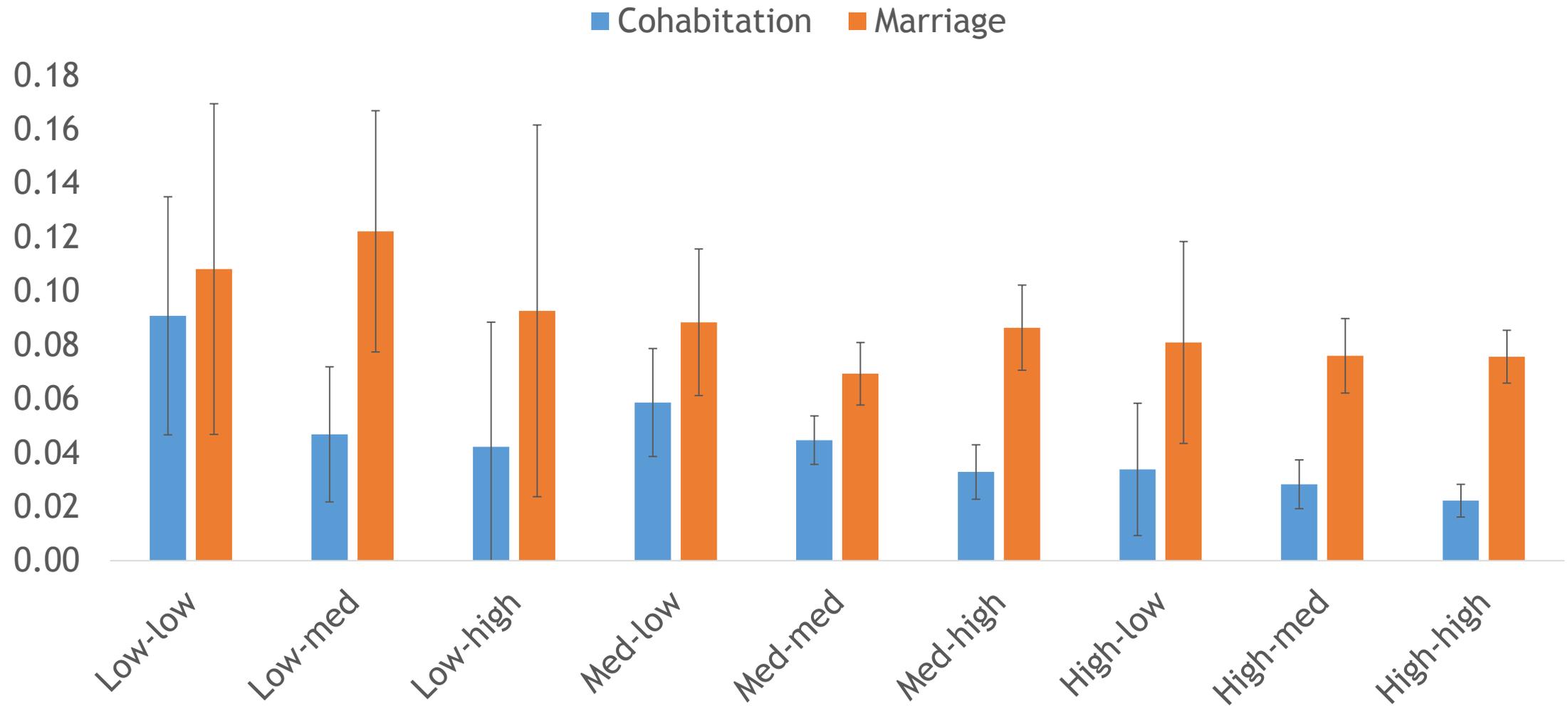
Predicted margins for the transition to first birth by education and union status, women aged 20-45



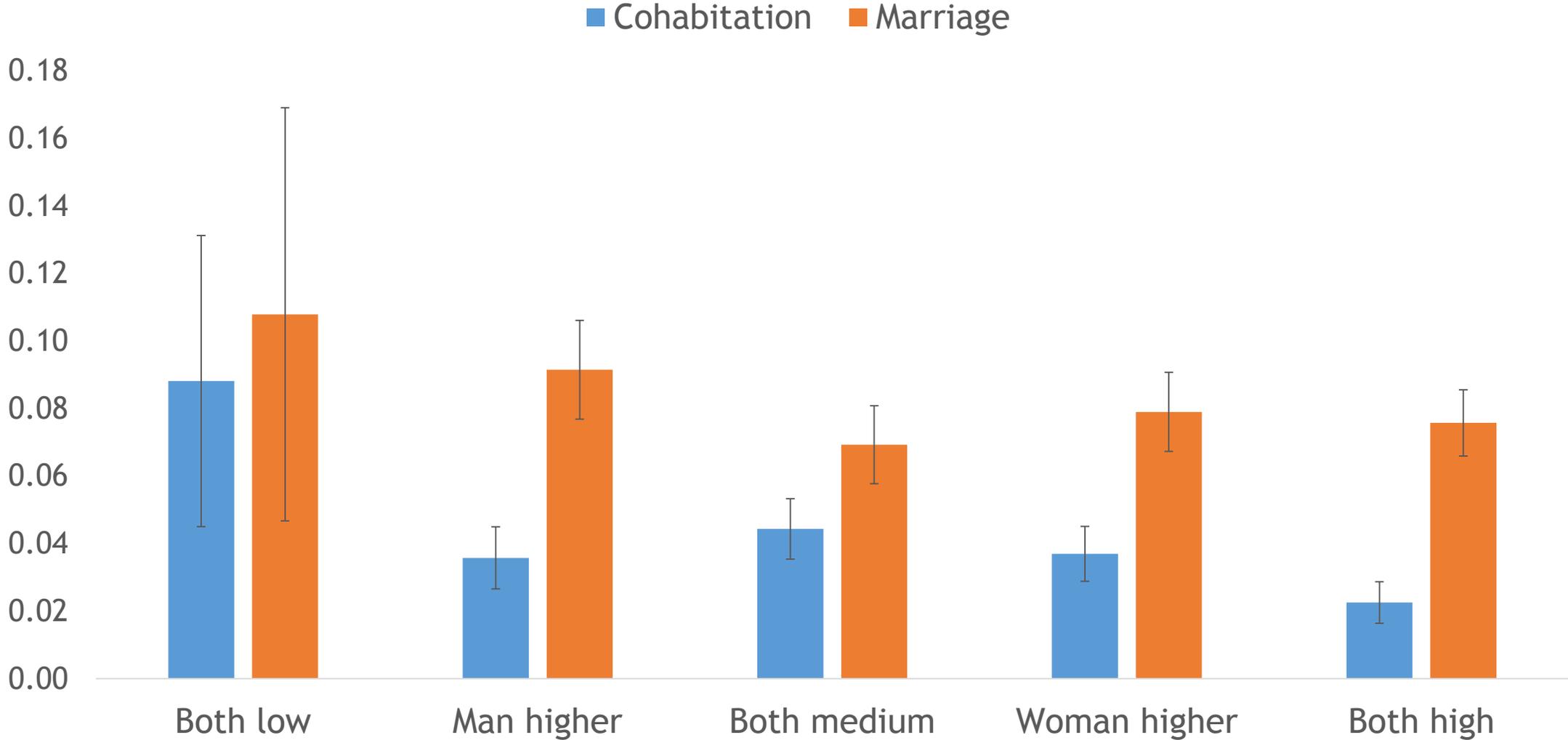
Predicted margins for the transition to first birth by education and union status, women aged 20-45 pre and post 2000



Predicted margins for the transition to first birth by union status and couples' education (woman-man)



Predicted margins for the transition to first birth by union status and partners' relative education



Discussion

- Less educated women are more likely to have their first birth within cohabitation.
- This propensity has increased the most for medium educated women.
- A low educated partner increases the likelihood of first birth within cohabitation, mostly for less educated women.
- This may have consequences on social inequality as cohabitation is less stable than a marriage union.
- Future directions: how the changing educational gender gap has influenced partnership preferences and childbearing within cohabitation.

Thank you!

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