

# The Diffusion of Cohabitation and Children's Risks of Family Dissolution

David Pelletier, Université de Montréal

## Background

### COHABITATION'S INSTABILITY

- As a general rule, cohabiting couples are less stable than married ones, but the gap between both union types varies with time and place.
- Liefbroer and Dourleijn\* found that the stability of cohabiting unions depends on the level of diffusion of cohabitation within the 16 European countries analysed.
- They estimated that the ratio of dissolution risk between cohabiting and married couples have a U-shaped pattern: It was larger in countries and generations with very high or very low proportions of cohabiters, and smaller when about half of couples started their union by cohabiting.

\* Liefbroer and Dourleijn, 2006. "Unmarried Cohabitation and Union Stability: Testing the Role of Diffusion Using Data from 16 European Countries", *Demography*, 43(2):203-221.

### COHABITATION IN CANADA

- The proportion of births to cohabiting couples has been increasing in each of the ten Canadian provinces, but remains much higher in Québec.
- Cohabiting unions are less stable than marriages in all provinces, but the stability gap is narrower in Québec.

## What we asked

- Is the diffusion of cohabitation as a family form associated with changes in children's risks of parental separation?
- Are these changes similar for children born to married or cohabiting parents?
- How does the cohabitation/marriage hazard ratio of family dissolution evolve with the diffusion of cohabitation?

## What we learned

- Globally, children's risks of family dissolution are not much influenced by the diffusion of cohabitation.
- For children born to married parents, the association is weak, but it is strong and negative for children born to cohabiting parents.
- The ratio of cohabitation to marriage dissolution hazards decreases non-linearly with the diffusion of cohabitation.

## Data

### INDIVIDUAL DATA

- Representative sample of children 4-5 years old from Statistics Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY).
- A total of 24,267 children born between 1989 and 2004, with almost a quarter born to cohabiting parents.

### CONTEXTUAL DATA

- The proportion of births to cohabiting couples in each province and annual birth cohort.
- Derived from the proportion of 0-year-old children living with cohabiting parents in four national censuses (1991, 1996, 2001, and 2006).

## Method

### DISCRETE-TIME SURVIVAL MODEL

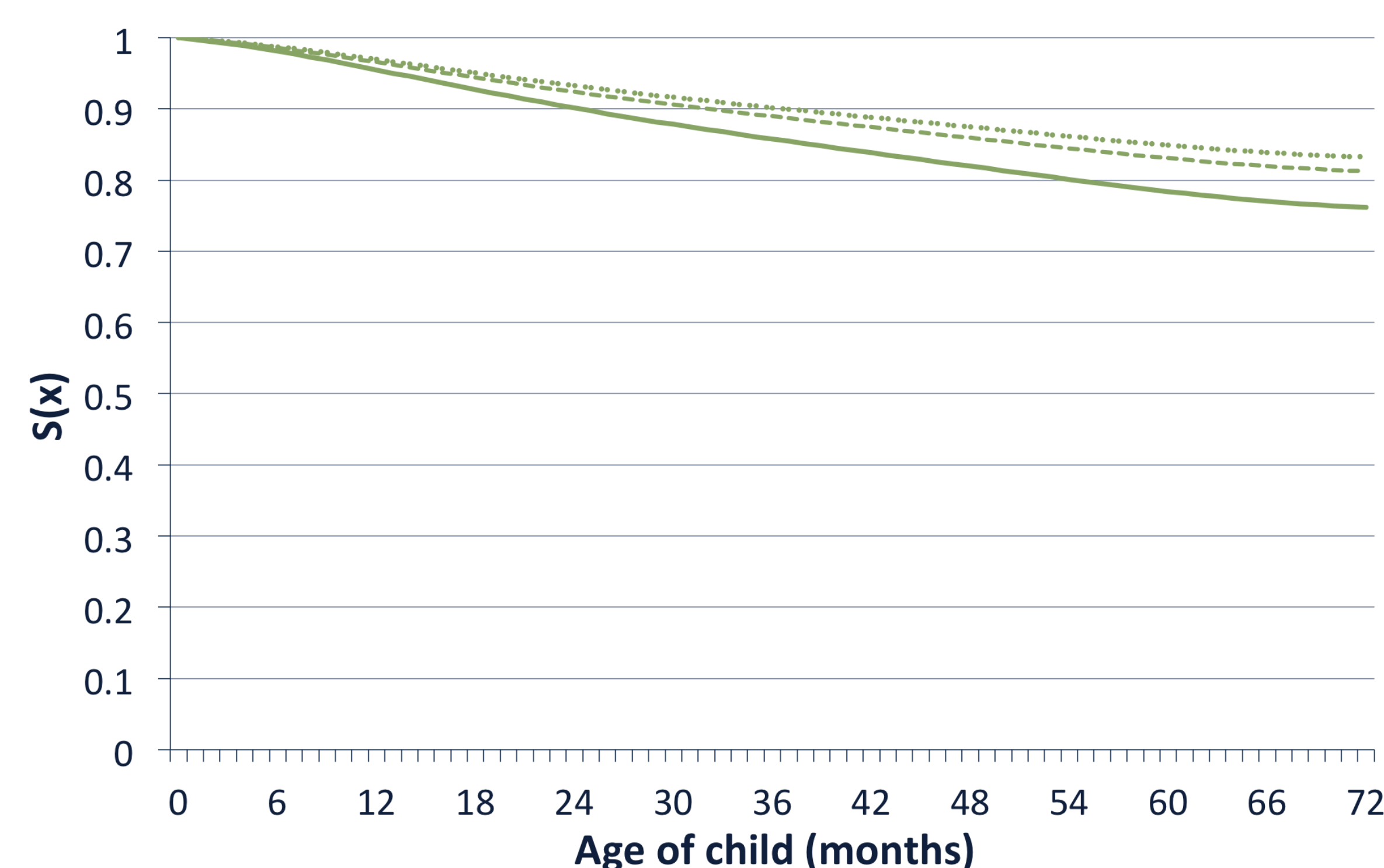
- Logistic models estimating the monthly risk of parental separation.
- Separate models for children born to married and cohabiting parents.
- Quadratic function of the proportion of births to cohabiting couples in the province-cohort of birth.

## Results

### PARENTAL UNION SURVIVAL FOR ALL CHILDREN

Figure 1:

Predicted parental union survival functions according to the proportion of births to cohabiting couples in the province-cohort of birth, all children combined



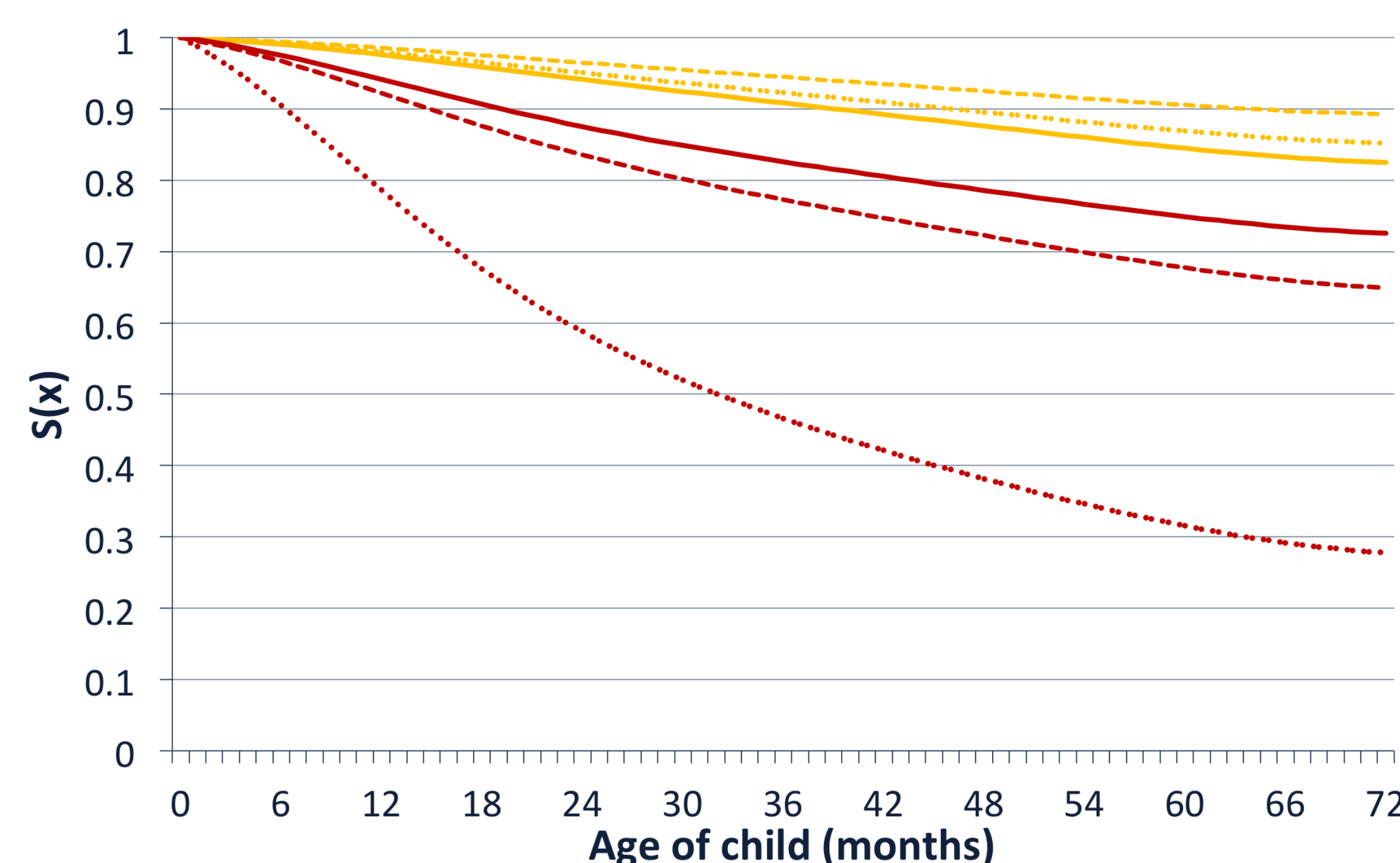
Proportion of births to cohabiting couples in the province-cohort of birth

0%	30%	60%
.....	-----	—————

### PARENTAL UNION SURVIVAL BY UNION TYPE AT BIRTH

Figure 2:

Predicted parental union survival functions according to the proportion of births to cohabiting couples in the province-cohort of birth, by parent's union type at child's birth



Proportion of births to cohabiting couples in the province-cohort of birth

0%	30%	60%
.....	-----	—————

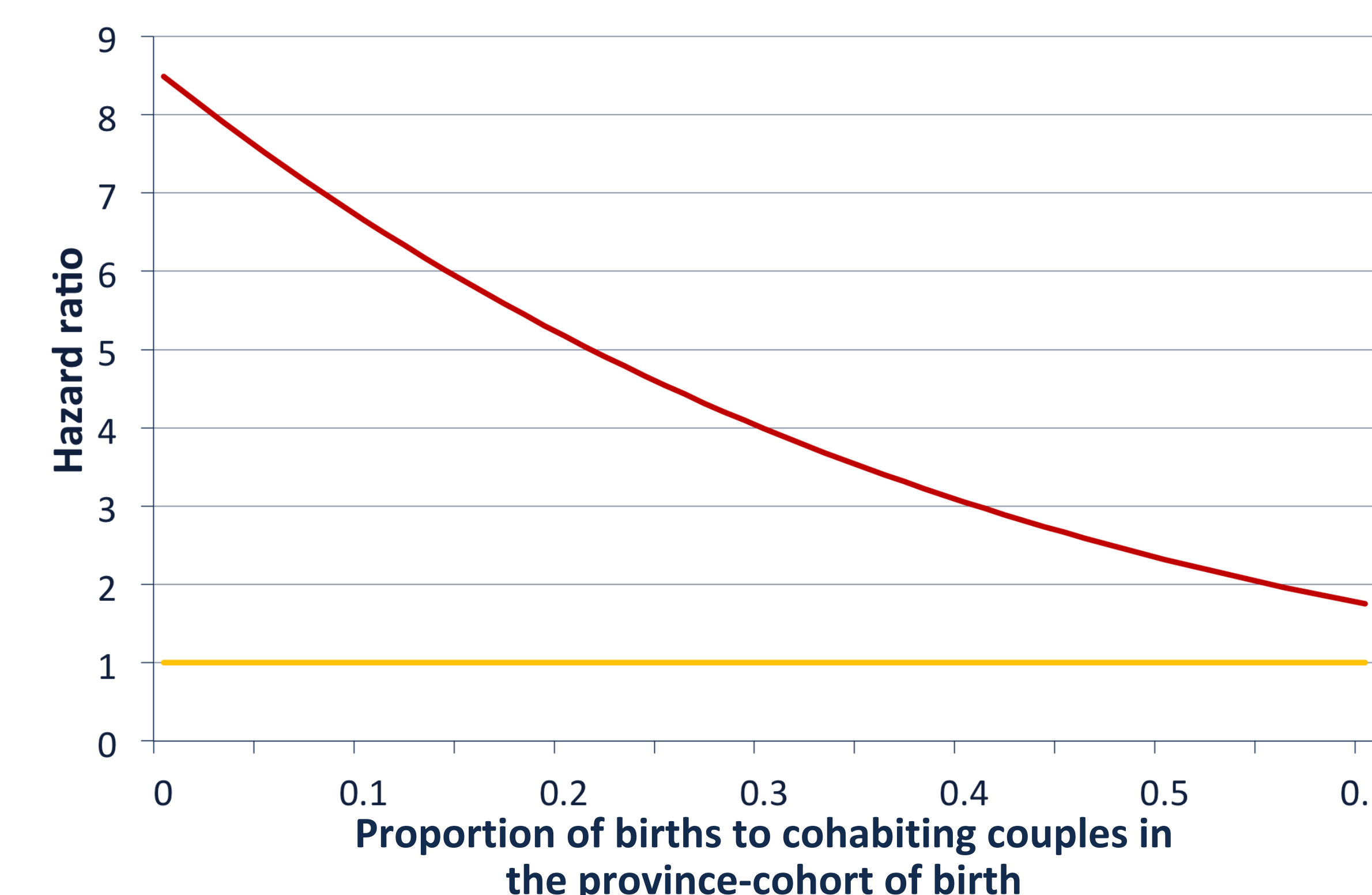
Parent's union type at child's birth

Marriage	.....	-----	—————
Cohabitation	.....	-----	—————

### UNION TYPE HAZARD RATIO

Figure 3:

Hazard ratio of parental separation for children born to cohabiting (vs. married) parents according to the proportion of births to cohabiting couples in the province-cohort of birth



Parent's union type at child's birth

Marriage	—————
Cohabitation	—————

## Acknowledgments

This analysis was conducted at the Quebec Interuniversity Centre for Social Statistics (QICSS) which is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI), Statistics Canada, the Fonds de recherche du Québec - Société et culture (FRQSC) and Quebec's universities.

## Contact

david.pelletier@umontreal.ca