BOUND BY CHILDREN: INTERMITTENT COHABITATION AND LIVING TOGETHER APART

Abstract

In this article, we examine variations in low-income mothers’ patterns of intermittent cohabitation and the voluntary and involuntary nature of these unions. Intermittent cohabitation involves couples living together and separating in repeating cycles. Using Three-City Study ethnographic data, we identified 45 low-income mothers involved in these arrangements, 18 of whom resided with their children's fathers occasionally while saying that they were not in a cohabiting relationship. We term such relationships living together apart (LTA). Data analysis revealed that distinct patterns of voluntary and involuntary separations and reunifications characterized intermittent cohabitation and LTA and that these relationships were shaped by the bonds that shared parenting created and the economic needs of both parents. We argue that these dimensions may explain some disparate accounts of cohabitation status in low-income populations. They also demonstrate previously unexplored diversity in cohabiting relationships and suggest further questioning contemporary definitions of families.

The full article will be available at onlinelibrary.wiley.com, Family Relations. Vol. 60 (5): 633-647.