

How is Early Adult Family Formation related to Coparenting in Mid-Life? A Comparison of First-time Families and Stepfamilies.

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Motivation

Well-documented that family formation has become more divers across the past decades → e.g. increase in cohabitation, parenthood out of wedlock, divorce, stepfamilies.

But: we know little about the consequences of more diversity in family formation.

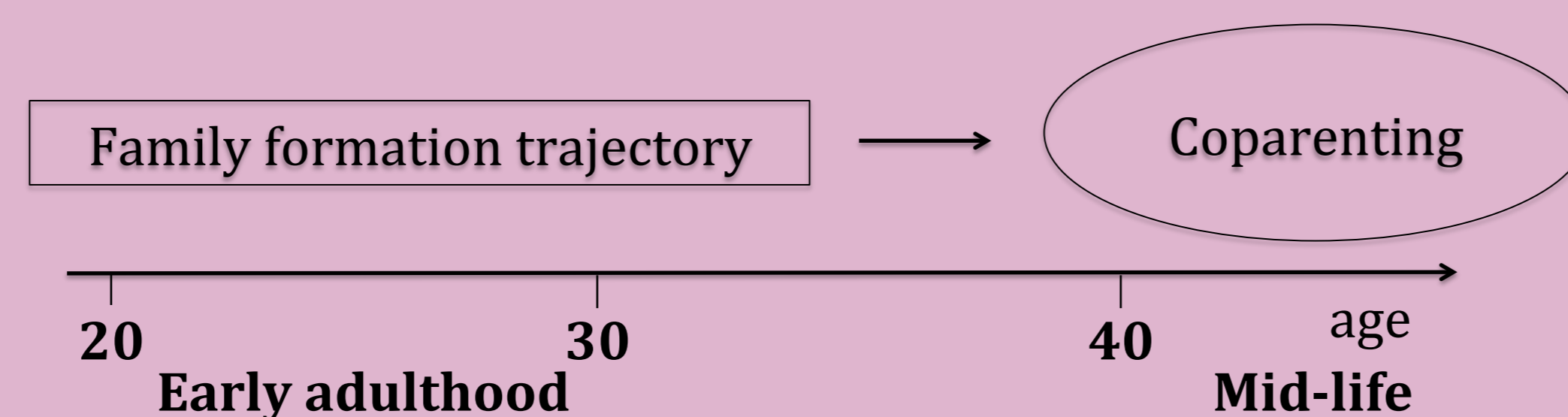
How is more diversity in early adult family formation related to interactions in families later in life?

Research Questions and Study Design

→ Comparison of first-time and stepfamilies in the Geneva area, Switzerland

RQ 1: Which distinct family formation trajectories in early adulthood do we find for the case study of Switzerland?

RQ 2: How are women's family formation trajectories in early adulthood associated with coparenting in mid-life?

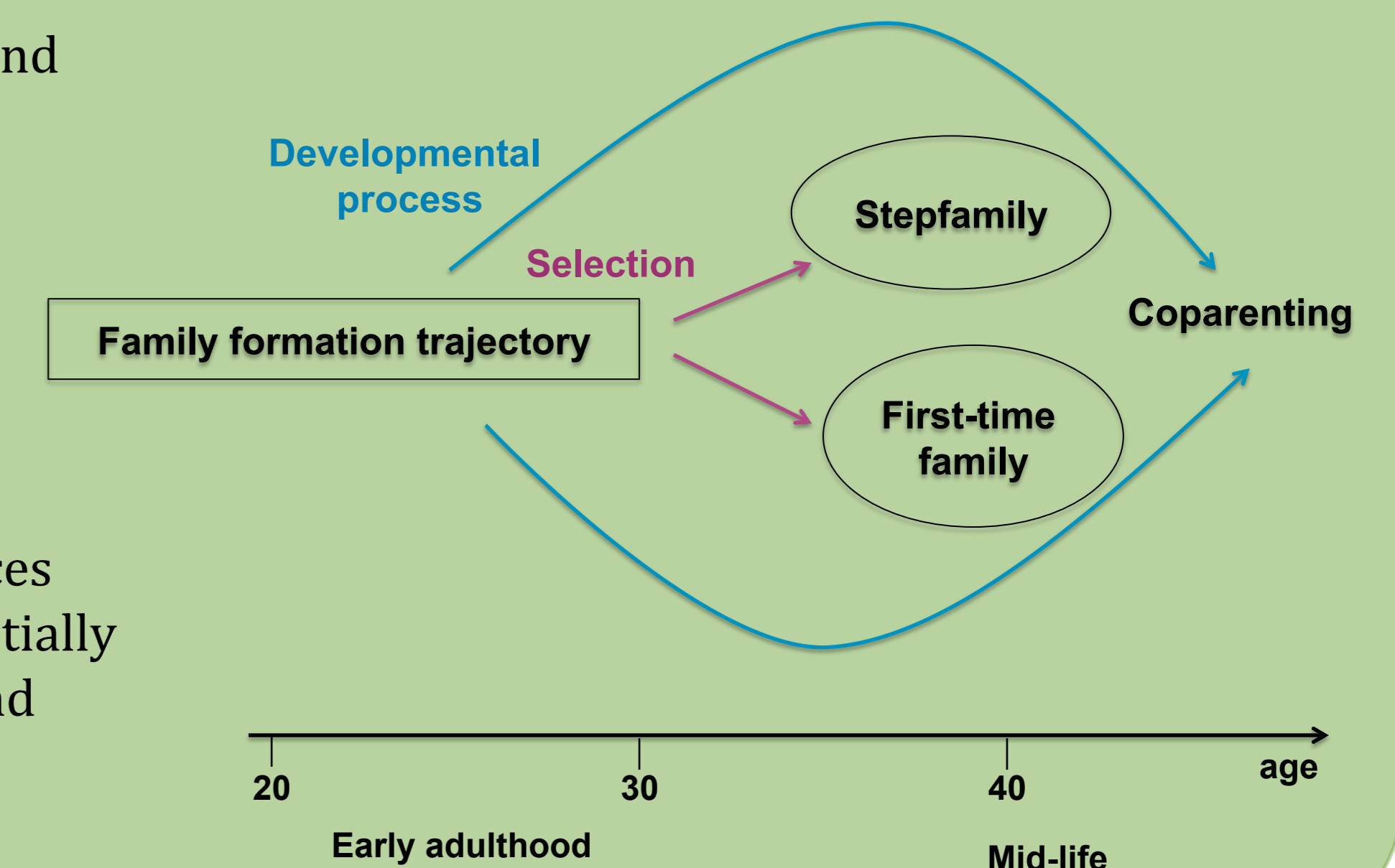


Family Formation Trajectories

Defined as simultaneous relationship, fertility and residential trajectories in early adulthood. We theorize them as:

1. **Channels of selection** into different family structures in mid-life: first-time versus stepfamilies.

2. **Developmental processes** where experiences made and skills learned along the way potentially affect coparenting differently in first-time and step-families.



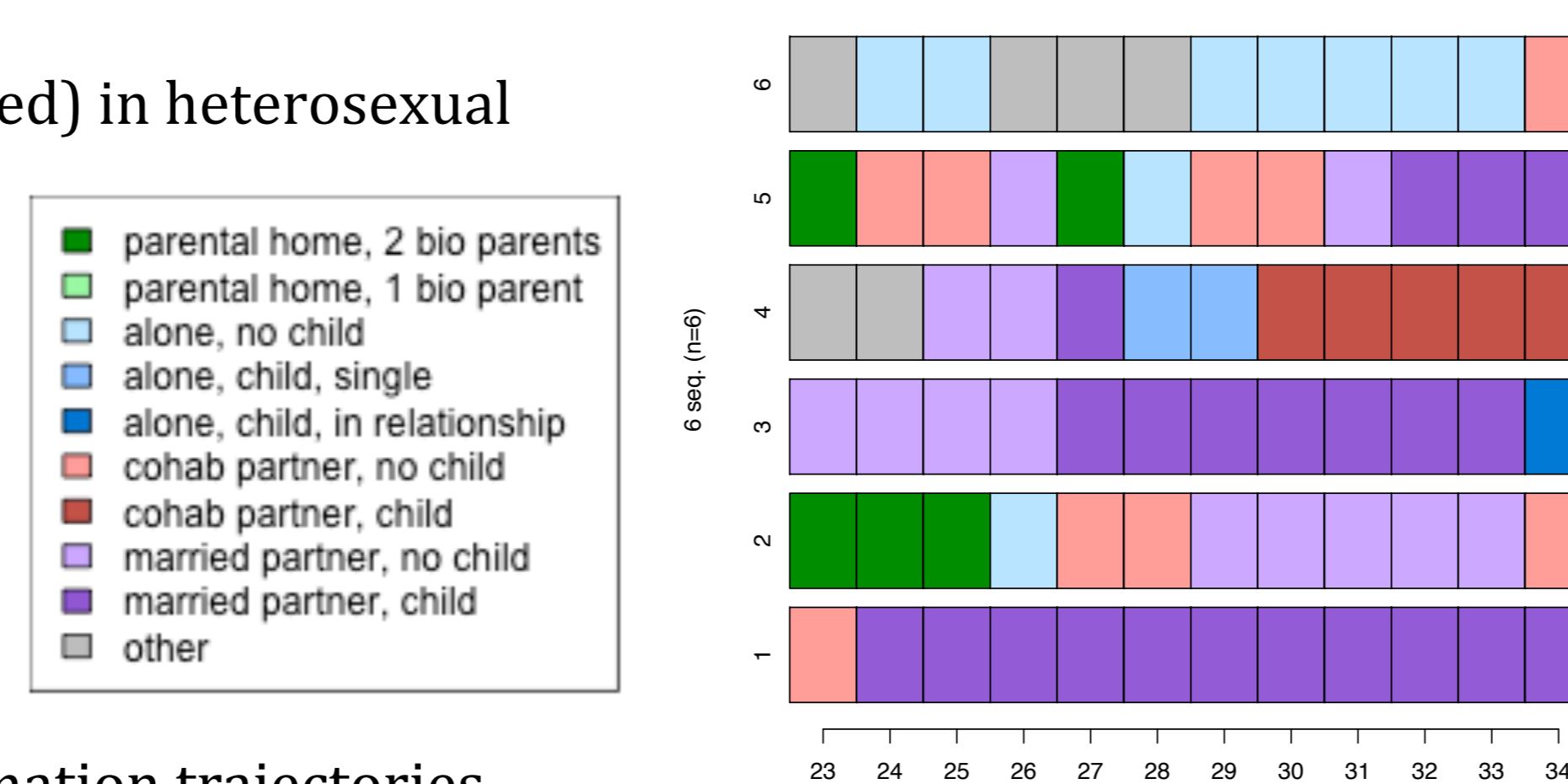
Data and Methods

Stepout Study (Widmer et al, 2012)

- N = 300 women with a biological child aged 5-13 with a partner (cohabiting or married) in heterosexual relationship interviewed (face-to-face) 2009/2010.
- 150 in first-time families → with coresident biological father
- 150 in stepfamilies → with coresident partner who is not the father of the child
- Early adult family formation trajectories from age 23-34
- Women aged 34-55 at survey when coparenting measured
- Matched sample:** Women in step-families matched to women in first-time families in terms of socio-demographic characteristics (age, education)

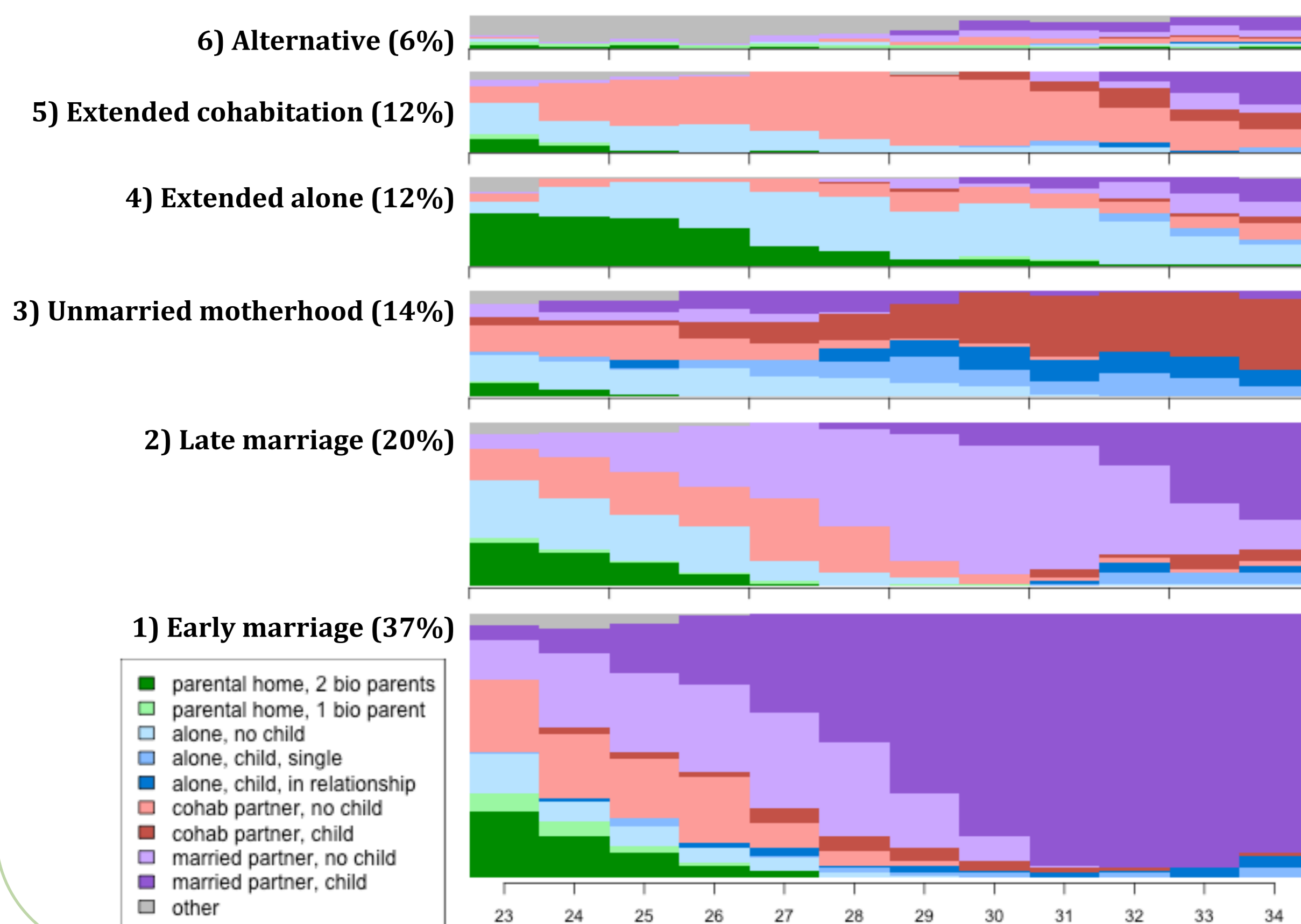
Sequence Analysis & Cluster Analysis to find groups of similar early adult family formation trajectories
OLS Regression with coparenting scales as DV and family formation clusters as IV including stepfamily interactions

Example sequences



Results

Six Family Formation clusters



Variable	Integrity		Conflict		Disparagement	
	B	SE B	B	SE B	B	SE B
<i>Family pathways (a)</i>						
(2) Late marriage	-0.15	0.31	0.29	0.69	0.30#	0.18
(3) Unmarried motherhood	-0.38	0.54	-0.52	1.19	0.54#	0.32
(4) Extended living alone	-0.17	0.37	1.02	1.19	0.51*	0.22
(5) Extended cohabitation	-0.01	0.40	0.76	0.88	-0.02	0.23
(6) Alternative arrangements	0.04	0.48	1.08	1.05	0.42	0.28
<i>Stepfamily interactions (b)</i>						
Step family	-3.69***	0.26	-6.96***	0.58	0.19	0.16
(2) Late marriage × Step	1.07*	0.45	1.46	0.99	-0.73**	0.26
(3) Unmarried motherhood × Step	1.04#	0.62	1.78	1.36	-0.92*	0.36
(4) Extended alone × Step	0.06	0.53	-0.99	1.16	-0.92**	0.31
(5) Extended cohabitation × Step	-0.12	0.53	-0.91	1.18	-0.17	0.32
(6) Alternative × Step	-1.09	0.71	-2.62#	1.58	-0.84*	0.42
Intercept	4.62***	0.21	8.48***		2.323***	
R2 (adj.)	.65(.63)		.59(.57)		.10(.05)	

Notes: Significance levels # p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001. a) reference category= (1) early marriage, b) 1= stepfamily, 0= first-time family, c) centered at the mean, d) 1=mother born abroad, 0=mother born in Switzerland, e) 1=mother higher educational degree, 0=mother lower education.

Controlled for: age of child and mother, mother's education, mother born outside of Switzerland

Coparenting

- Interactions between parents that are centered on the child. Quality of coparenting → beneficial or detrimental effects on child development
- Disruptions in coparenting linked to internalized and externalized symptoms, lower adaptation at school, less competencies in peer relationships
- Low quality coparenting is a marker of early disadvantage

"Support" dimension

Family integrity scale, e.g. "How often in a typical week do you make an affirming or a complimentary remark about your partner to the child?"

"Conflict" dimension

Conflict scale, e.g. "How often in a typical week do you find yourself in a mildly tensed or sarcastic interchange with your partner about the child in the child's presence?"

Disparagement scale, e.g. "How often in a typical week do you find yourself saying something clearly negative or disparaging about your partner to your child?"

Summary and Outlook

- Women's family formation trajectories in early adulthood have enduring effects on coparenting in mid-life. → Research on coparenting should more routinely incorporate a life course perspective.
- Different associations between family formation trajectories and coparenting in first-time and in stepfamilies. → Neglecting previous family formation trajectories will obscure mechanisms by which family structure affects coparenting.
- "Early marriage and motherhood" family formation trajectory associated with low quality coparenting after separation → common among lower educated women → reinforces reproduction of social disadvantage across generations.
- Next steps:** further disentangle the relative importance of family formation trajectories as channels of selection versus developmental experiences