Leaving Lone Parenthood: Analysis of Repartnering Patterns in the U.K.

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Introduction

The study of lone parenthood is of increasing importance due to the growing numbers of lone parents. About a quarter of all families with dependent children in Britain are now lone parent families (Lyon *et al.*, 2006). Little research has been conducted on the duration of lone parenthood and how this differs between socio-economic and demographic groups. This is in spite of the fact that differences between groups in the rates of in-flow and out-flow from lone parenthood are important in determining the stock of lone parents (Böheim and Ermisch, 1998). The rise in lone parenthood can be hypothesised to be due to an increase in the length of time women remain lone parents as well as an increase in the number of women becoming lone parents. Hence it is vital to investigate the *duration* of lone parenthood as this is key to understanding the growth in lone parenthood (McKay, 2003).

Despite a wealth of research in the U.K. on the stock of lone parents, in recent years there is a lack of research on the flows into and out of lone parenthood. The few studies that have investigated the flows do not account fully for the differential ways in which women can enter or leave lone parenthood. Furthermore, the number and types of variables used in the analyses are limited. There is therefore ample scope to update and enhance these previous studies through the use of the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS).

The key aim of this study is to extend the knowledge of the determinants of leaving lone motherhood through repartnering in the U.K. Both an identification of important

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variables that are related to repartnering and an investigation of the duration of lone parenthood will be conducted, including how these vary for different types of lone mother.

Data and Methods

The data for this analysis is taken from the BHPS between the years 1991-2004. The BHPS is an annual nationally representative survey which interviews every adult member of a sample of around 5000 households. This amounts to around 10,000 individual interviews. The survey re-interviews the same respondents in each subsequent year after the survey began in 1991. Particular advantages of this data for this analysis are its longitudinal nature combined with a large number of available waves of data. These provide scope for capturing lone mothers at the point at which they enter lone motherhood and allow enough follow up years to observe and analyse their repartnering patterns.

Lone mothers are identified and selected for the sample at the point of entering lone motherhood by merging successive waves and determining transitions between states of de-facto marital status that occur between the two waves. The ability to select lone mothers at this point of entering lone motherhood allows time-varying covariates to be included in the model as well as standard fixed time variables. Variables selected for analysis include a number of demographic and socio-economic factors including age, type of lone mother (either single never-married or separated from a partnership), employment status, education and religion, amongst others.

A life-table approach is used to determine the median duration of lone motherhood for the different types of lone mothers. This approach also highlights the shape of the underlying hazard of repartnering, which is later used to inform the modelling process. A series of simple discrete time event history models are used to investigate the bivariate associations of each of the variables with repartnering. A multivariate model is then constructed in order to simultaneously test the variables and determine those which are significantly related to repartnering. Finally a competing risk model is implemented to

simultaneously estimate the risk of entering into a cohabiting union relative to the risk of remaining a lone mother and the risk of entering into a marriage relative to remaining a lone mother.

Preliminary Results

An initial analysis of the data has been undertaken. Results from these investigations indicate that:

- The median duration of lone motherhood for single never married women is between 5 and 6 years, in contrast to a median duration of between 4 and 5 years for those becoming a lone mother through the separation of a previous partnership.

- Duration of lone motherhood has only a negligible impact on the probability of repartnering after controlling for other factors.

- Consistent with previous studies, age is found to be the most important determinant.

- A mixture of demographic and socio-economic factors are related to the chances of repartnering.

- In contrast to previous studies, being separated from a cohabiting union has a negative effect on the odds of repartnering compared to being separated from a marital union.

- There is no effect of duration on the relationship between the explanatory covariates and the chances of repartnering.

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References

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