

# Married and Unmarried Cohabitation Impact on Maternal Reproductive Behaviors and Neonatal Health Factors



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## Background

### A Change in Tradition

- Steady decline of marriage in the U.S.
- Increasing number of cohabiting unmarried couples
  - In 2000, 4.9 million opposite-sex unmarried couples
  - In 2010, increased to 6.8 million partnerships
- Unmarried couples behave like married couples
  - Live together
  - Establish social partnership status
  - Start family units

### Effects of a Change in Tradition

- Deinstitutionalization of marriage
  - A change in the traditional views of spousal commitment
  - Spouses focus upon their personal needs rather than the needs of their partner
- Occurs in two stages:
  - Stage 1, a greater emphasis on emotional satisfaction of oneself
  - Stage 2, emphasis on greater expressive individualism

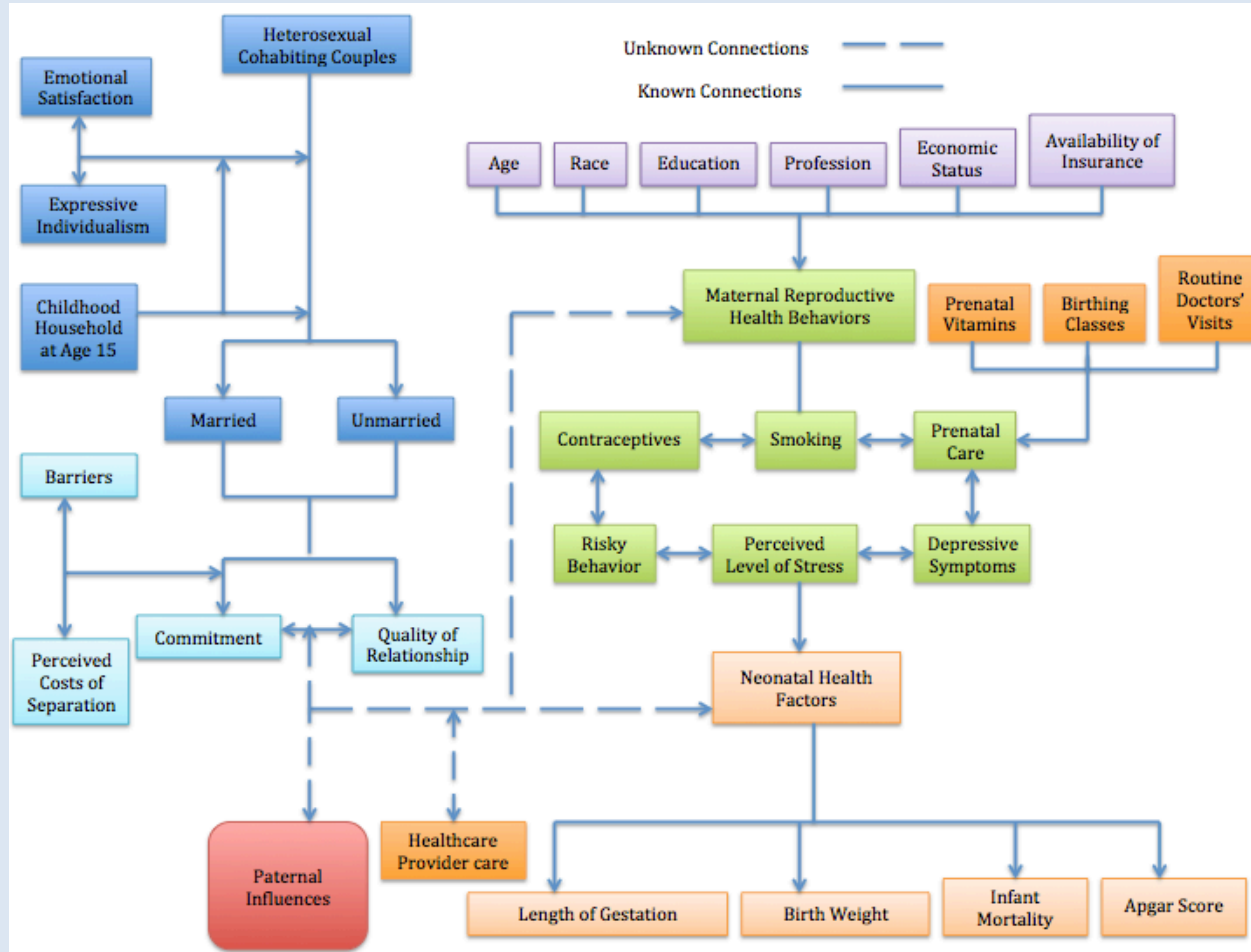
### The Known Science

- Married cohabiting mother
  - Higher birth weights
  - Higher APGAR scores
  - Lower rates of premature births
  - Lower mortality rates
- Unmarried cohabiting mothers
  - Increased risk of smoking
  - Often experience depressive symptoms
  - Possibly more stressful pregnancies

## The Gap

There is little to no information known about how a relationship's commitment and relationship quality affects a mother's perception of maternal reproductive behaviors and how these perceptions affect neonatal health factors.

Abstract and References upon request.



## Discussion

- Such findings suggest that these unmarried cohabiting mothers and their neonates are not receiving the proper support required during pregnancy. Perhaps the effect of being in a legally sanctioned union such as marriage has a health promotional effect on maternal reproductive behaviors and neonatal health factors.

## Research Question

What are the perceptions (feelings, thoughts, impressions, etc.) of married and unmarried cohabiting first time pregnant mothers about maternal reproductive behaviors (prenatal care, smoking, contraceptive use, and emotional levels) during the antenatal process? Also, do these perceptions have an affect on neonatal health factors (APGAR score, birth weight, gestational age, and infant mortality)?

## Purpose

Short term - To explore the perceptions of unmarried and married cohabiting mothers about maternal reproductive behaviors and the effect of these perceptions upon neonatal health factors.  
Long term - To contribute to the promotion of appropriate antenatal care practices for pregnancies and neonatal health factors.

## Methods

### Design

- A phenomenological approach for qualitative study.
- A convenience sample of 8 cohabiting mothers: 4 unmarried and 4 married

### Sample

- Age between 20 – 30
- Pregnancy in the second trimester
- Partner is the biological father of the unborn child
- Cohabiting for duration of pregnancy
- No history of previous pregnancies or planned abortions
- Residence within the Knox County area

### Data Collection

- Phase I: Interview
  - Demographic data
  - Emotional levels
  - Perceptions of:
    - Relationship quality and commitment
    - Maternal reproductive behaviors
    - Partner's role in antenatal process
- Phase II: Neonatal Health Factors
  - Length of Gestation
  - Birth Weight
  - APGAR
  - Mortality

### Data Analysis

- Phase I
  - Thematic analysis of digitally recorded interviews using NVivo
- Phase II
  - Descriptive analysis of demographic data from mother and neonate post-birth