

Family Instability and Pathways to Adulthood in Cape Town, South Africa

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Short Abstract:

This project employs longitudinal data from metropolitan Cape Town, South Africa to examine the influence of family instability during childhood and early adolescence on individuals' pathways to adulthood. A growing body of research in the US indicates that family instability, measured in terms of parental partnership changes, influences adolescent outcomes at least as much as family structure. This project extends the family instability perspective to a setting with high levels of family instability due to factors other than parental partnership change and with nontrivial levels of non-parental caregiving. Rather than focusing on individual life domains or single life course transitions, in line with a life course perspective the analysis utilizes latent class cluster analysis and multinomial regression to examine the influence of family instability on pathways to adulthood that span multiple life transitions across multiple domains.

Introduction

A growing body of research in the United States indicates that family *instability*, measured in terms of parental partnership changes, influences young people's behavior at least as much as family structure (Cavanagh and Huston 2006; Fomby and Cherlin 2007; Wu 1996; Wu and Thomson 2001). The motivation for this research is the high level of union disruption among adults with children in the US, which has made it increasingly likely that young people will experience family change during their childhood. Scholars investigating the influence of family instability have provided evidence of links with adolescent relationship-forming, sexual, and childbearing behavior (Cavanagh et al. 2008; Fomby et al. 2010; Hofferth and Goldscheider 2010; Ryan et al. 2009; Wu 1996; Wu and Thomson 2001) as well as adolescent school engagement (Brown 2006; Heard 2007; Sun and Li 2002).

The current analysis extends the work on the relationship between family instability and adolescent outcomes in two important ways. First, it applies the family instability perspective to a sub-Saharan African setting with high levels of family disruption due to factors other than parental partnership change and substantial levels of non-parental caregiving. The work on family instability in the US focuses on parental partnership changes to the exclusion of other sources of family turbulence. The focus on *parental* changes also makes it difficult to know the extent to which results apply to instability in non-parental caregiving arrangements. In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the AIDS epidemic has rendered parental death a key source of family disruption. Widespread internal and international labor migration and traditions of fostering also engender transitions in parental and non-parental caregiving arrangements.

The second extension of the family instability perspective relates to outcomes. Rather than examining the influence of family instability on individual adolescent outcomes, this project asks how family instability during childhood and early adolescence influences individuals' *pathways to adulthood*. This is in line with life course theory, which underscores the importance of simultaneously attending to multiple life domains (such as family, school, and work) and emphasizes pathways rather than single life course transitions as the subject of research (Amato et al. 2008; MacMillan and Copher 2005). The current analysis uses latent class cluster analysis to identify life pathways, as has been done successfully in several recent studies of the transition to adulthood in the United States (Amato et al. 2008; MacMillan and Copher 2005; Osgood et al. 2005; Minca 2010).

Data

The analysis employs data from the Cape Area Panel Study (CAPS), a longitudinal study of youth in metropolitan Cape Town, South Africa. Interviews were conducted over four survey waves between 2002 and 2006. At the first wave, when respondents were ages 14 to 22, a life history calendar was administered that collected retrospective yearly information from birth to 2002 on a range of topics. This project uses both retrospective reports from the calendar and prospective reports from the later study waves.

Two research methods are employed: latent class cluster analysis to identify predominant pathways to adulthood, and multinomial logistic regression to examine the influence of family instability on the pathway followed. Latent Gold is used for the former and Stata for the latter. The pathways to adulthood span ages 15 to 22, with a possibility of extending to age 25 with the availability of Wave 5 data. The statuses considered are schooling (enrollment and level), work, marriage, and parenthood. Family instability is measured as changes in co-residence of six months or more with mothers, fathers,

grandparents, and other caregivers before the age of 15. Various dimensions of family instability are considered, including ever change, cumulative number of changes, and timing of change (early childhood, middle childhood, early adolescence). The CAPS dataset offers a rich set of control variables, including population group, family structure from birth through Wave 1, SES in childhood and at Wave 1, parental education, age at puberty and first sex, and literacy/numeracy at Wave 1.

Preliminary Results

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics for selected measures of family instability and family structure. Almost 40% of the youth experienced at least one change in co-residence with a mother, father, grandparent, or other caregiver before the age of 15 and approximately one in seven experienced two or more changes. Similar proportions ever experienced changes in mother and father co-residence (20% and 22%, respectively). In addition, about 18% ever experienced a change in grandparent co-residence and 10% a change involving another caregiver type. Relatively equal proportions experienced family instability in early childhood (before age 6), middle childhood (ages 6-10), and early adolescence (ages 11-14).

Table 2 shows the proportion of male and female respondents occupying each status at each age. The proportion out of school increases from approximately 5% at age 15 to 80% at age 22. The proportion working also increases with age, with more males than females employed throughout the transition to adulthood. The proportion married is low at all ages for both males and females, with only 10% of females and 3% of males ever married by age 22. Levels of parenthood are, however, higher, with 38% of females and 16% of males ever parents by the age of 22.

Figures 1 and 2 display preliminary results from the latent class cluster analysis. Use of the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) suggested that the optimal solution for females was 9 role configurations and 10 pathways, while for males it was 8 role configurations and 9 pathways. The first 8 pathways to adulthood for females are shown in Figure 1. The results for Pathway 1, the most common for females (followed by 21%), indicate that the probability of being in secondary school was close to 1 at ages 15-16 and began to decline at ages 17-18. Correspondingly, the probability of working began to rise after age 18. The probabilities of being unemployed or of being a parent were low at all ages. This pathway is referred to as *secondary student to worker*. The other pathways are analyzed and assigned names using similar criteria. Overall, unemployment (not in school, not a parent, and not working) figures heavily in the pathways of 26% of the female respondents (Pathways 2 and 6). One-fifth of the females followed pathways of incomplete secondary school to single parenthood (Pathways 3 and 5), and an additional 7% became single parents early in secondary school but remained in school through their early 20s. The pathways for approximately 16% of the females included tertiary school (Pathways 4 and 7).

Figure 2 displays the preliminary pathways to adulthood for males. Pathway 1, followed by 26% of male respondents, indicates a high probability of being in secondary school through age 17, with a decline in the probability of secondary school through age 20 and a corresponding increase in unemployment through age 22. Overall, pathways involving unemployment are common among the males, with Pathways 5 (9%) and 6 (9%) also involving unemployment without and combined with parenthood. In contrast, Pathways 2, 3, and 9 (followed by 33% of respondents) all involve high probabilities of secondary school (with school-leaving at various stages of adolescence) followed by work. Tertiary school is included in the pathways of 17% of the male respondents.

Preliminary analyses suggest significant bivariate associations for males and females between ever change in co-residence with a mother, father, or other caregiver and the pathway to adulthood followed (not shown). Cumulative effects of family instability on pathways to adulthood are suggested only for changes in co-residence with fathers for males and other caregivers for females. With regard to timing, bivariate results suggest significant associations between family instability in early adolescence and the pathways to adulthood, and not family instability earlier in childhood. Next steps include finalization of the latent pathways, further descriptive analysis, and multinomial logistic regression examining the influence of the various family instability measures adjusting for a range of controls.

Table 1. Preliminary Descriptive Statistics, Family Instability and Structure

Characteristic	Female	Male
<i>Family instability before age 15</i>		
Experienced change in mother co-residence	0.21	0.18
Experienced change in father co-residence	0.22	0.23
Experienced change in grandparent co-residence	0.18	0.18
Experienced change in other co-residence	0.09	0.10
Experienced any change by age 15	0.39	0.39
Experienced any change before age 6	0.20	0.17
Experienced any change age 6-10	0.19	0.19
Experienced any change age 11-14	0.18	0.17
Experienced two or more changes by age 15	0.15	0.13
<i>Family structure at age 14</i>		
Lived w/ mother, father	0.49	0.50
Lived w/ mother, father, gp	0.03	0.05
Lived w/ mother, gp	0.06	0.06
Lived w/ mother only	0.23	0.23
Lived w/ gp only	0.07	0.07
Lived w/ father only or father, gp	0.04	0.03
Lived w/ neither mother, nor father, nor gp	0.09	0.06
<i>Orphan status</i>		
Maternal orphan before age 15	0.02	0.03
Paternal orphan before age 15	0.09	0.10
N individuals	944	765

Note: Proportions are based on data weighted to adjust for sample design and for individual non-response in waves 2, 3, and 4.

Table 2. Proportion of Young People Occupying Various Statuses by Age

Age	Out of school		In primary		In secondary		In tertiary		Working		Ever Married		Ever Parent	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
15	0.06	0.04	0.09	0.14	0.85	0.81	0.00	0.01	0.07	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.00
16	0.11	0.10	0.05	0.07	0.85	0.82	0.00	0.01	0.14	0.20	0.01	0.00	0.07	0.00
17	0.22	0.21	0.02	0.03	0.72	0.70	0.05	0.05	0.20	0.28	0.01	0.00	0.11	0.02
18	0.40	0.38	0.01	0.02	0.42	0.43	0.17	0.17	0.29	0.39	0.02	0.00	0.16	0.04
19	0.52	0.50	0.00	0.01	0.27	0.28	0.20	0.21	0.40	0.46	0.05	0.01	0.22	0.07
20	0.65	0.62	0.00	0.00	0.15	0.16	0.20	0.21	0.46	0.54	0.07	0.01	0.27	0.10
21	0.73	0.71	0.00	0.00	0.09	0.10	0.18	0.19	0.55	0.63	0.08	0.02	0.33	0.13
22	0.80	0.79	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.06	0.15	0.15	0.58	0.69	0.10	0.03	0.38	0.16

Notes :

Proportions are based on data weighted to adjust for sample design and for individual non-response in waves 2, 3, and 4.
N for females=944; N for males=765.

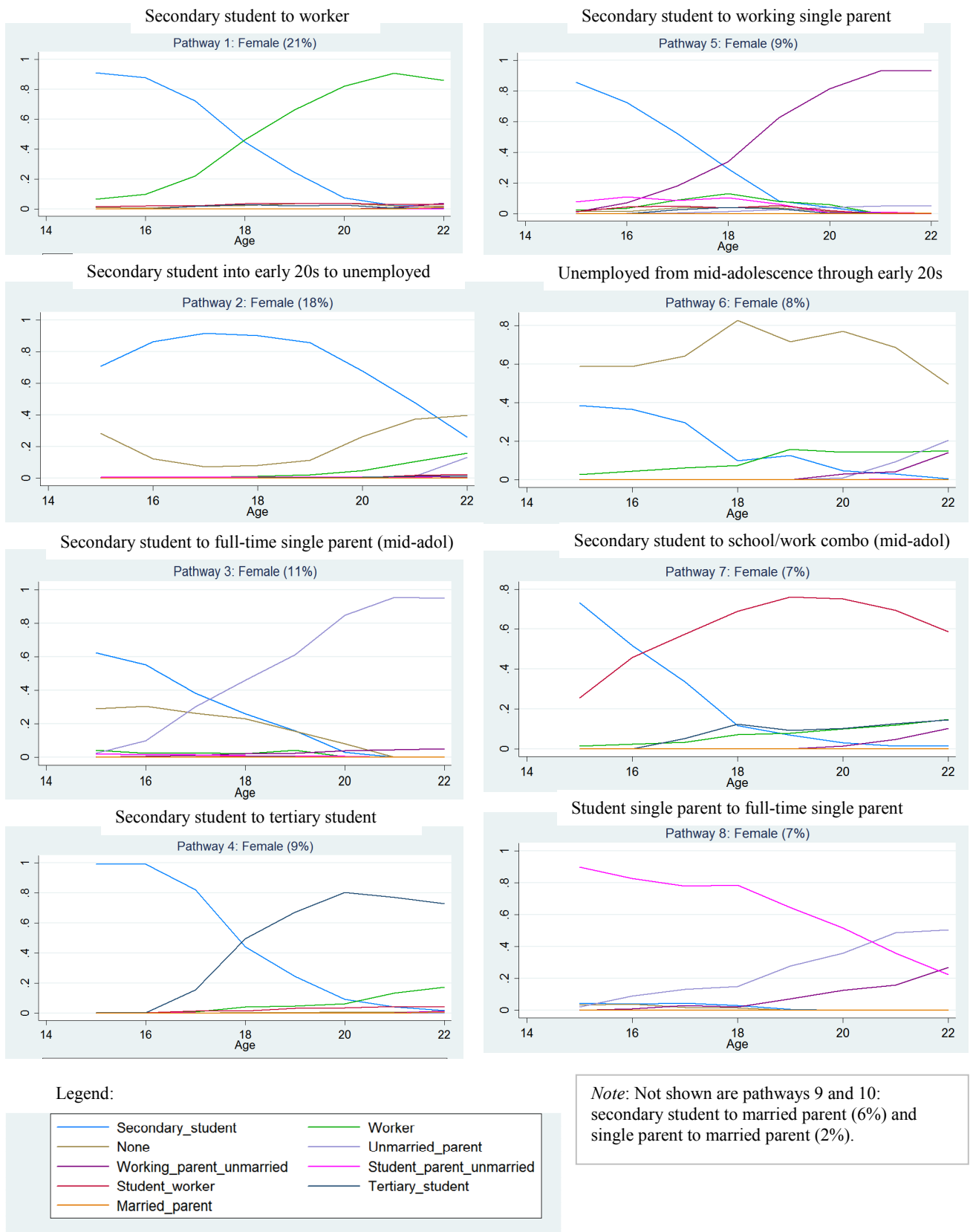


Figure 1. Preliminary Latent Pathways to Adulthood, Female, Age 15 to 22

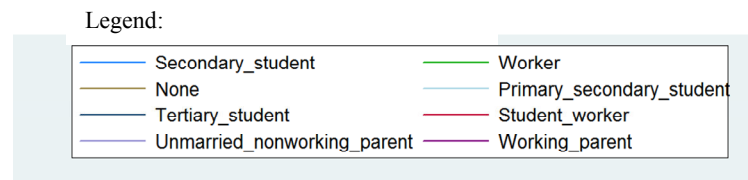
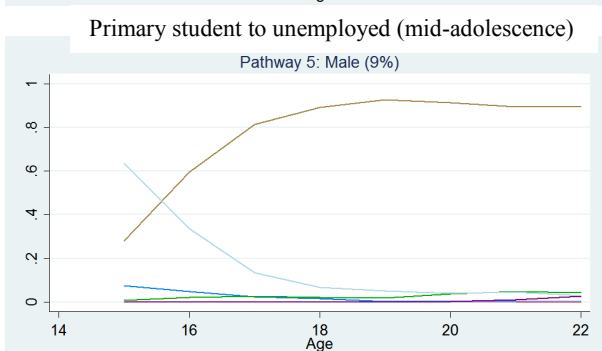
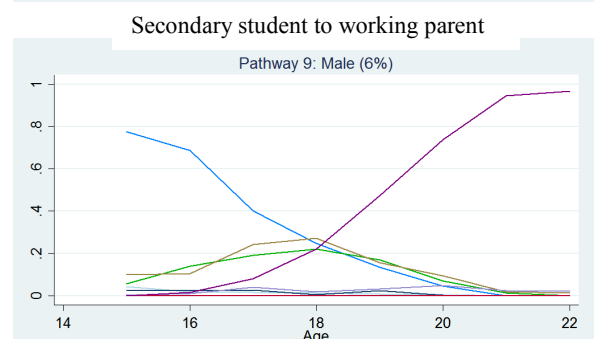
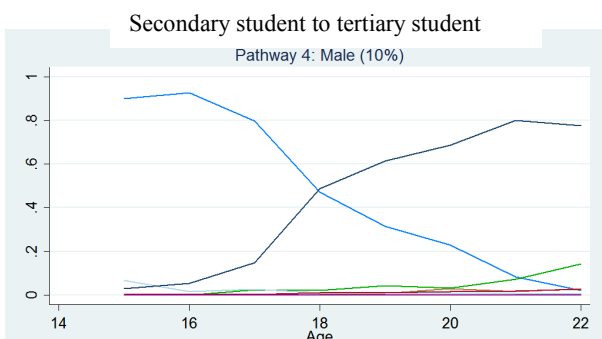
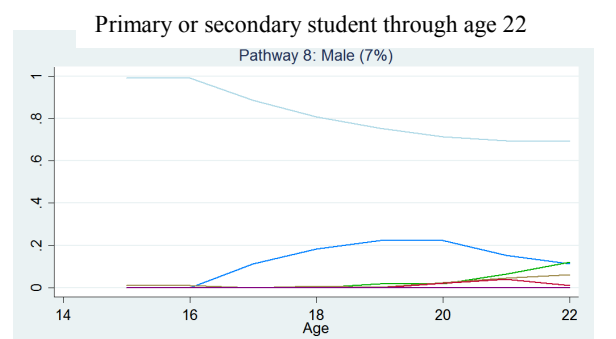
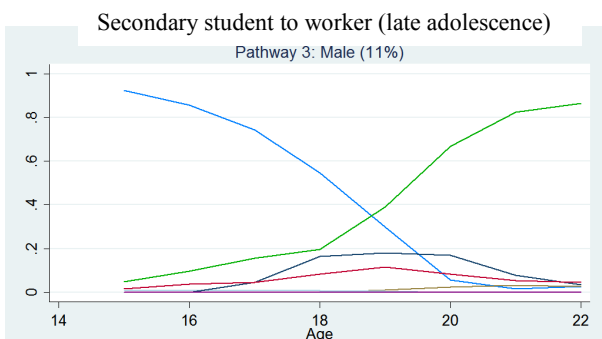
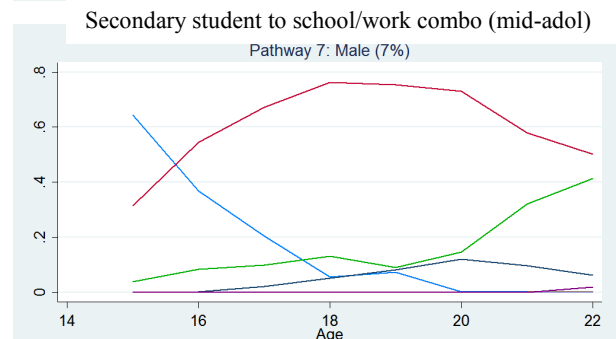
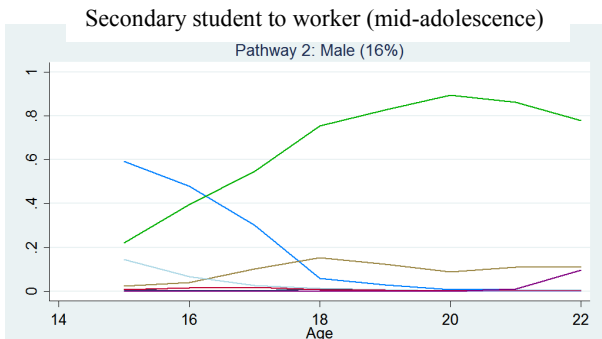
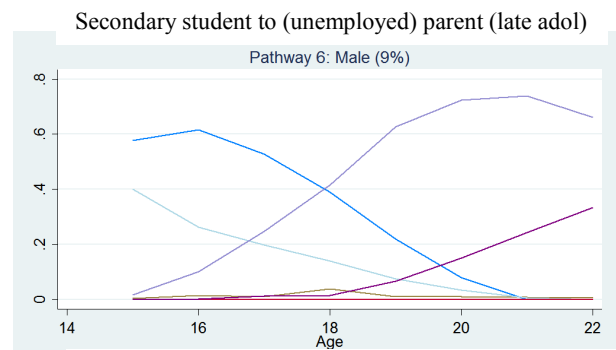
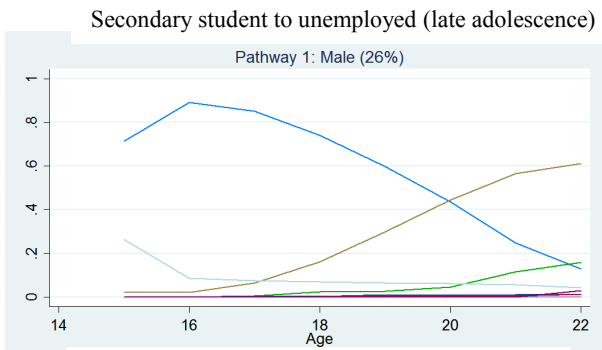


Figure 2. Preliminary Latent Pathways, Male