The Social and Demographic Characteristics of Cohabiters in Australia: Towards a Typology of Cohabiting Couples

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Abstract

In a twenty year period, from 1982 to 2006, the proportion of all couples cohabiting in Australia rose from 4.7 percent to 14.9 percent (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2008). This represents a substantial shift in patterns of family formation. Not only are more people living in cohabiting relationships, it is becoming the norm to live in such a relationship either instead of or before committing to marriage. Over 75% of couples now live together prior to marriage compared to only 16 percent in 1976 (Dempsey & De Vaus, 2004). We use data from Wave 1 of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey to investigate how cohabiting couples differ from people of other marital statuses on a number of demographic measures. We also examine whether it is possible to identify distinct groups within the category of cohabiting. We find that cohabiting couples differ from married, single and separated, divorced or widowed people on a number of measures, such as age, religiosity, ethnic background, education, income and fertility intentions. Furthermore, we devise a typology of cohabiting couples which is supported by our results, indicating that there are distinct groups within the category of 'cohabiting', which suggests that it is important not to view cohabiters as a homogenous group. The paper concludes that the recent rise in cohabiting relationships, and diversity amongst these groups, is a reflection of the fundamental changes in patterns of family formation and the changing status of marriage in the life course.

Introduction

In a twenty year period, from 1982 to 2006, the proportion of all couples cohabiting in Australia rose from 4.7 percent to 14.9 percent (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2008; Dempsey & De Vaus, 2004:170). While this is a significant change, even more dramatic is the rise in pre-marital cohabitation. This figure has increased from around 5 percent in the 1960s to approximately 75% percent in 2006 (Headey & Warren, 2006). This trend is demonstrated in Figure 1. This represents a substantial shift in both the demographics of the population and patterns of family formation. Not only are there more people living in de facto or cohabiting relationships, it is becoming the norm to live in such a relationship before committing to marriage. De Vaus (2004:158) goes so far as to argue that we have "reached the point where it is almost a deviant act to marry without first cohabiting". This suggests that there has been a substantial shift in the practice and experience of marriage, choosing an intimate partner, and family formation patterns over the last fifty years. Understanding the characteristics of cohabitors is, therefore, important to gain a fundamental knowledge of partnering patterns in Australia.

The aim of this paper is to determine: What are the characteristics of cohabiters in Australia? This will be investigated in two stages. First, the way that cohabiting people differ from married, single, separated, divorced or widowed people will be evaluated. This will enable a comparison between cohabiters and people of all other marital statuses. Second, this paper will develop a 'typology' of cohabitating people and explore the differences between different types of cohabiters in addition to comparing these types to married people. This will enable a comparison on a number of factors specific to partnered people, such as relationship satisfaction and union duration. Using the first wave of HILDA, which was conducted in 2001, this research will attempt to investigate these aspects and provide a comprehensive picture of cohabiting couples in Australia.

Background

Cohabitation can not be understood without first being put in the context of marriage. Marriage or matrimony in western societies dates back many thousands of years, and is a social institution which has traditionally regulated many aspects of adult life; it organises care giving and breadwinning roles, residential arrangements, sexual interactions and interpersonal redistribution of resources (Coontz, 2004). In recent Western history marriage was the only socially acceptable way of organising family life. According to Coontz, current society is the first to have many alternative ways of organising and regulating that which was once the sole domain and function of marriage (Coontz, 2004). Coontz (2004) argues that we have undergone a 'world historical transformation of marriage' where present day society is the first to experience a co-existence of so many alternative ways of organising adult life. Non-marital cohabitation – along with living alone (one-person households), childless couples, same-sex couples, single-parent families and blended/step families – is only one of a host of new ways of organising adult and family life. Understanding cohabitation, how it fits in with these new forms of family life and how it affects traditional institutions, is integral to our understanding of the society in which we live.

Cohabitation in Australia

The rise in rates of cohabitation has been recent and dramatic as the following data show. At last census (2006), 15% of all couples were in cohabiting as opposed to marital relationships. This compares to 5.7% in 1986 (see Figure 2)(The Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2008). The increased prevalence of cohabitation is believed to be due not only to increasing numbers of cohabiting couples, but also more people being willing to identify themselves as living in de facto marriages[1] (ABS 2008). We also know something about the characteristics of cohabiters. In 2006, the median age for men in de facto relationships was 35.3, while it was 33.3 for women

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[1] The Australian census refers to cohabiting couples as 'married de facto'. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) a de facto marriage exists when the relationship between two people of the opposite sex or same sex, who live together in the same household is reported as: de facto, partner, common law husband/wife/spouse, lover, boyfriend, girlfriend (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996).

(ABS 2008). Seventy percent of people in a de facto relationship in 2006 had never been in a registered marriage and 27% were either separated or divorced. Figure 3 shows the percentage of persons in a de facto relationship by previous marital status and age. This figure shows that older people in cohabiting relationships are more likely to be separated or divorced, while younger people are more likely to be never married. In 2001 the majority of cohabiting couples intended to marry (see Figure 4). Figure 5 shows that it is becoming less likely that couples marry within 5 years of living together, and more likely that they will separate (note: couples who stay cohabiting are not included in these statistics). Rates of cohabitation have been shown to have a strong association with ethnic background. Table 1 shows Australian rates of cohabitation by country of birth, indicating that people born in Australia and New Zealand have among the highest rates of cohabitation, along with those born in North America, while those of Southern European, Middle Eastern and North African decent have the lowest rates of cohabitation. The 1996 Census showed that indigenous Australians are three times more likely than non-indigenous Australians to cohabit. These data suggest that there are distinct patterns in the way in which cohabitation is played out in Australia, however, these are just basic descriptive statistics, which invites the question: what are the more detailed aspects of these patterns?

A number of studies have been conducted in Australia which look at cohabiting relationships in depth. Dempsey and de Vaus (2004) investigate the importance of a number of key demographic and social factors on the practice of cohabitation in Australia. They report that cohabitation is far more common amongst younger people (in their 20s or early 30s), and that the majority of this group has never been married. In older cohorts, cohabiters are more likely to be divorced or separated rather than never married. People with a strong religious affiliation are substantially less likely to cohabit than people who do not have a religious affiliation (for a detailed description see Dempsey & De Vaus, 2004:164-169). Baxter (2001) finds that cohabiting couples have less traditional patterns of domestic labour than married couples and argues that the "incomplete institutionalisation" of cohabitation allows greater freedom to negotiate alternative roles and responsibilities.

Childbearing within cohabiting unions has increased from two percent in 1970 to about 16 percent today (de Vaus & Gray, 2004), despite Carmichael and Whittaker (2007) finding that a prominent reason to transition from cohabitation to marriage for Australian couples is the decision to have children. This shows that the increase in cohabitation has had a substantial impact on the type of family arrangement into which children are born, despite many people still having traditional views.

Carmichael and Whittaker (2007) use data from 115 in-depth interviews to investigate the experience of cohabitation in Australia. They found that a 'decision' to cohabit was rarely made, with cohabitation generally seen as a 'natural progression' in a relationship. Lindsay (2000), also found that unlike marriage, moving into a cohabiting relationship was generally played down, did not involve any sort of public confirmation or show and was not usually celebrated as an anniversary. For the majority of the couples, moving in together was seen as "convenient", and was presented as being the most logical, sensible and practical arrangement (Lindsay, 2000:126). She argued that this downplayed the significance of the relationship and the transition, and highlighted the importance of convenience rather than commitment. In an earlier study Glezer (1991) found that couples choose to cohabit for highly emotional as well as pragmatic reasons. Eighty percent of couples in cohabiting relationships reported love, companionship, mutual involvement, friendship and long-term commitment as reasons for cohabitation (Glezer, 1991:27). This suggests that the reasons for cohabiting are diverse, as are levels of commitment and intentions to formalise the union.

Despite distinct patterns in how cohabitation is played out in Australia, much is still unknown. The aim of the first stage of this research is to provide a comprehensive picture of how cohabiters compare to people of all other marital statuses. They will be compared on measures of age, gender, socio-economic status (SES), religiosity, ethnicity, sex role attitudes and likelihood of having children. While these aspects have been covered by previous studies, no known study has compared cohabiting people to the full host of marital statuses, on all of these measures.

Cohabitation Typology, Marital Status and Well-being

There is a significant amount of research that finds that people who are married have significantly higher levels of well-being and happiness than people of other marital statuses (Brown & Booth, 1996; Nock, 1995; Stack & Eshleman, 1998; Treas & Giesen, 2000). While this is consistently found in studies undertaken in the United States, Hanson, Moum and Shapiro (2007), use Norwegian data to investigate whether cohabitation and marriage are qualitatively different relationships. They examine differences in relationship quality and psychological well-being between middle-aged cohabiters and married persons in Norway, where cohabitation is very widespread and socially accepted[2]. They do not find a strong association and conclude that marriage does not provide a substantial benefit to well-being over cohabitation in Norway, and that the findings originating in the US may be culturally specific.

Recent data shows that Australia is on par with the United States in this regard, as numerous Australian studies also find an association between marital status and well-being. A study by Fleming and Marks (1998) on well-being among young Australians found that in comparison to single people, people in cohabiting or marital relationships were more satisfied with their lives, particularly their home lives, but that married people had the highest level of satisfaction. A number of studies, however, find that this difference in well being (which is generally operationalised using life satisfaction or relationship satisfaction), is often mediated by both intention to marry and previous marital history. Brown and Booth (1996), find that cohabiters' marriage plans largely explain the difference in relationship quality between married and cohabiting couples. Their research suggests that if a cohabiting couple intends to marry, their union outcomes, such as levels of disagreement, perceptions of fairness, happiness, conflict management and levels of interaction, do not differ substantially from those of married couples

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[2] In Norway 24.5% of all couple relationships are cohabitations, with a higher rate of 56% amongst couples aged 30 – 34 (17% aged 34 – 59)(Hansen et al., 2007). The probability of entering into a cohabiting relationship does not differ by socioeconomic status or education in Norway, and about 58% of cohabiting couples have children (Hansen et al., 2007).

(Brown & Booth, 1996). In a more recent study Brown (2004) finds comparable results, and concludes that marriage per se does lead to increases in relationship quality. The study by (Hansen et al., 2007) suggests that when looking at differences between marriage and cohabitation, it is also important to differentiate by prior marital history. For never-married persons marriage may signal increased commitment, stability, security and joint investments, and so add value to a relationship and increase satisfaction. For previously married persons, however, marriage may no longer be important and cohabitation may provide a substitute for marriage without signalling a lack of commitment (Hansen et al., 2007:927). This suggests that the characteristics of cohabiting couples vary by prior marital history and intention to marry, and that it is important to differentiate cohabiters by these factors.

This study

The purpose of this paper is to investigate who cohabits by comparing people who cohabit to people of other marital statuses. A multinominal logistic regression will be used to test for associations in two stages: first, between people of all marital states, and second, between married people and the cohabitation typologies. In the first stage, cohabiters will be compared to the full host of other marital statuses – married, singe, separated, divorced and widowed people – on a number of demographic factors, such as age, gender, socio-economic status (SES), religiosity and ethnicity. Other characteristics, such as sex role attitudes, being a parent and the likelihood of having children will also be included. In the second stage, cohabiters will be divided into groups and then compared to married people, who will be divided into two groups, first or higher order marriages. These groupings are based on intention to marry and experience of a previous marriage and distinguish between different types of cohabiters (see Diagram 1). While previous research has divided cohabiting people into typologies by intention to marry, or previous marital history, no known study has created a typology using both. This will allow a comprehensive typology of cohabiting people to be investigated and emphasises the point that it is important not to view cohabiters as a homogenous group

In addition to the variables used for comparison in Stage 1, further factors specific to couples will be investigated in the second stage. These include satisfaction with partner, parental divorce and union duration. All of the independent variables used in this research have been used in previous research on cohabitation, and consistently show significant differences between cohabitation and other marital statuses (Baxter, 2001; Brown, 2004; Nock, 1995; Rindfuss & Vanden Heuvel, 1990).

Data, Variables and Analyses

This research was undertaken using data collected in Wave 1 of the HILDA Survey. The HILDA sample has been found to bear a close resemblance to the wider population of Australia and has coverage broadly in line with that shown by the ABS Census (HILDA Survey Annual Report, 2002: 10-12). The sample was randomly drawn from all Australian households and the survey was administered in late 2001. The final number of households to complete the survey was 7,682, providing data on 13, 969 individuals. For further information on HILDA see http://melbourneinstitute.com/hilda or the Hilda User Manual (Goode & Watson, 2007). Our sample has been constrained in a number of ways. People under the age of 18 have been excluded from the analysis as they need the consent of a guardian to be eligible to marry (Marriage Act 1961 – add to references). People who did not report their marital status were also excluded from the analysis.

The HILDA survey collected detailed information on all of the variables required to undertake this research. The marital status categories include legally married[3], de facto[4], single and separated, divorced or widowed. The typology of cohabiting people is created using variables that measure

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[3] Marriage is traditionally defined as a legally recognised relationship between a man and woman, which carries certain rights and obligations (Scott & Marshall, 2005).
[4] The Australian census refers to cohabiting couples as 'married de facto'. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) a de facto marriage exists when the relationship between two people of the opposite sex or same sex, who live together in the same household is reported as: de facto, partner, common law husband/wife/spouse, lover, boyfriend, girlfriend (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996).

intention to marry and marital history. Intention to marry is measured by a variable that asks "How likely are you to marry your current partner?" with five response categories ranging from 'very likely' to 'very unlikely'. Those who responded with 'very likely' or 'likely' are considered to be intending to marry. The marital history variable asks "How many times have you been legally married?". This variable is used to create a dichotomous variable which measures 'not previously married' (0) and 'previously married' (1). These two variables are used to create the typology of cohabiting people, which results in the categories: not previously married & intending to marry, not previously married & not intending to marry, previously married & not intending to marry, previously married & intending to marry. Married people are also divided into the categories: 1st marriage and higher order marriage.

The other variables that are used in this study are: sex, age, years of schooling, income, hours of paid work, home ownership, religiosity, ethnicity, Indigenous status, gender attitudes and fertility intentions. The second stage of analysis, which only looks at partnered people, will also take relationship satisfaction, parental divorce and union length into consideration. Appendix 1 contains more detailed information on these variables.

The analytic strategy for this research consisted of two principal stages in addition to a preliminary stage which provided descriptive statistics. Initially, a number of bivariate analyses were carried out to investigate the relationship between the marital status variables and the independent variables. This provides summary statistics for all of the variables used in this research. Multinominal logistic regression is used in the two main analyses. Multinominal logistic regression is a form of regression that involves testing the association between different categories of a dependent variable on a number of independent variables via a comparison of a series of dichotomous outcomes (Scott & Marshall, 2005). This allows a dependent variable with numerous categories to be investigated. The first stage of this research employs marital status as the dependent variable, while the second stage examines the cohabitation typologies and married categories as the dependent variables. This allows a comparison between people of all marital

statuses in the first stage, and a comparison between different categories of partnered people in the second stage. Model comparison was undertaken using pseudo R-squared and the AIC and BIC statistics, which indicated that a number of additional independent variables added to the model. Furthermore, as observations within a household are not typically independent of one another (information was collected on the household and not individual level) a robust estimator of variance, which adjusts for household clustering, was employed in each regression analysis. The results of our analysis are outlined below.

Results

For the purposes of this discussion, the typology categories for cohabiting people will be given the following names: premarital cohabiters (not previously married & intending to marry), long term cohabiters (not previously married & not intending to marry), marriage renouncing cohabiters (previously married & not intending to marry) and marriage idealising cohabiters (previously married & intending to marry).

Preliminary findings

The preliminary findings of our analysis are presented in Table 2 and Table 3. Due to the scope of this paper, the preliminary findings will not be discussed.

Multinominal model for Marital status, Stage One

The results for the Multinominal Regression Model Predicting Marital Status are presented in Table 4. The Pseudo R-squared is 0.3219, the Wald chi2 is 4039.43 (df=51) with an associated p-value <0.001. The model predicts that older people are more likely to be separated, divorced or widowed[5], while younger people are more likely to be cohabiting and single, compared to married[6]. Women are more likely to be separated[7], while men are more likely

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[5] For ease of interpretation, 'separated, divorced or widowed' will from hereon in be referred to as separated.
[6] In this paper we report results based on multinomial logit regressions for marriage and cohabitation status. The regression coefficients indicate how each explanatory variable is

to be single. There is no significant difference in the gender composition of cohabitating and married people. People who are religious are most likely to be married, and the least likely to be cohabiting. While separated people and single people are significantly less religious than married people, their coefficients suggest that in comparison to cohabiting, they are not substantially different from married. People from Europe are more likely to be married and less likely to be single or separated, in comparison to people born in Australasia. People from Asia are more likely to be married and less likely to be any other marital status, compared to Australasian people, while people from America are less likely to be single.   In comparison to non-Indigenous people, Indigenous people are more likely to be cohabiting or single, than married. People with fewer years of schooling are more likely to be cohabiting or single, in comparison to married (there is no significant difference between separated and married). People who have a higher level of income and work more hours are less likely to be single in comparison to married; cohabiting and separated people do not have significantly different incomes or hours of paid work from married people. All categories are less likely to own their own home compared to married, with separated the least likely to own their own home, followed by cohabiting and then single.

People who have children are the most likely to be married, and the least likely to be single, followed by cohabiting and separated. People who expect to have a child in the future are more likely to be married than single or separated.   There is no difference in fertility intentions for married and cohabiting people. There are no significant results for gender attitudes. This suggests that the differences at the preliminary stage disappear when controls are implemented. Gender attitude, however, is somewhat correlated with religiosity (correlation = 0.2301), suggesting that the effect of the gender attitude variable may be washed out by religiosity. When religion is taken out of the model, there is indeed a significant difference between married and

associated with the log odds of being in one marital status rather than a baseline or reference category. We will interpret the coefficients in terms of the log odds, recognising that, in the case of multinomial logit models, an increase or decrease in the log odds does not necessarily mean an increase or decrease in the relevant probabilities.

[7] This is likely due to the proportion of widows and widowers, there being 82% (562) widows and 18% (122) widowers.

cohabiting, with people who display more liberal gender attitudes more likely to be cohabiting (none of the other marital states were significantly different from married). People with a high level of life satisfaction are more likely to be married than of any other marital status. The greatest difference in life satisfaction is between married and single and separated; while the difference between cohabiting and married is significant, it is relatively small.

Multinominal model for the Cohabitation Typology, Stage Two

The results for the Multinominal Regression Model Predicting Cohabitation Typology is presented in Table 5. The Pseudo R-squared is 0.4156, the Wald chi2 is 2447.70 (df=100) with an associated p-value <0.001. The model predicts that older people are more likely to be in higher order marriages, be marriage renouncing cohabiters or marriage idealising cohabiters, while younger people are more likely to be premarital cohabiters, in comparison to being in a first marriage. Women are more likely to be in higher order marriages, be marriage renouncing cohabiters or marriage idealising cohabiters, while men are more likely to be premarital or long term cohabiters, in comparison to being in a first marriage. Religious people are more likely to be in first or higher order marriages, with no difference in religiosity between these two categories, while less religious people are more likely to be cohabiting. The coefficients suggest that the least religious people are most likely to be long term cohabiters, followed by marriage renouncing cohabiters, marriage idealising cohabiters and premarital cohabiters. People born in Europe are more likely to be in higher order marriages, in comparison to people born in Australasia, while people born in Asia are more likely to be married and less likely to be in all the other categories. People born in Africa or the Middle-East are less likely to be premarital cohabiters and more likely to be marriage renouncing cohabiters, in comparison to being in a first marriage. Indigenous people are significantly more likely than non-Indigenous people to be long term or premarital cohabiters. People with more years of schooling are more likely to be married or be long term cohabiters. There are not significant results for income. People who work more hours are more likely to be in higher order marriages or be marriage renouncing cohabiters,

and people who work fewer hours are more likely to be long term cohabiters, in comparison to being in a first marriage. People who own their own home are significantly more likely to be in first marriages than in any other category. The coefficients suggest that the greatest difference in home ownership is between the first marriages and premarital cohabiters, followed by marriage renouncing cohabiters and long term cohabiters, marriage idealising cohabiters and finally people in higher order marriages.

People with children are more likely to be in higher order marriages, be marriage renouncing cohabiters and marriage idealising cohabiters and less likely to be long term cohabiters or premarital cohabiters, in comparison to people in first marriages. People who expect to have a child in the future are more likely to be premarital cohabiters and less likely to be long term cohabiters or marriage renouncing cohabiters, in comparison to people in their first marriage. People who have liberal gender attitudes are more likely to be marriage idealising cohabiters. To check for co linearity between gender attitudes and religiosity, the model was re-run without the religiosity variable (data not shown), this did, however, not change the results. People who have a low level of life satisfaction are more likely to be marriage renouncing cohabiters, and people who have a low level of satisfaction with their partner are more likely to be long term cohabiters or marriage renouncing cohabiters. There are no significant results of parental divorce. People who have been in a union longer are more likely to be married. The coefficients suggest that premarital cohabiters and long term cohabiters have a union length that is the least different from people in their first marriages, followed by higher order marriages, marriage renouncing cohabiters and marriage idealising cohabiters.

Discussion

This research provides interesting information on the characteristics of people in cohabiting relationships and how they compare to people of other marital statuses. In comparison to married people, cohabiting people are significantly younger, less religions, less likely to be from Asia and more likely to be

Indigenous. They, on average, have fewer years of schooling, a lower likelihood of owning their own home, are less likely to have a child and have a lower level of life satisfaction. The models, however, indicate that there are more significant differences between married and single or married and separated people, than there are between married and cohabiting people. In the next stage of research, cohabiting couples are broken up into a typology to further investigate the characteristics of different types of cohabiters.

The results for the cohabitation typology suggest that there are significant differences between different types of cohabiters. For example, the religiosity coefficients suggest that while all groups of cohabiters are on average less religious than people in first marriages, long term cohabiters are far less religious than people in first marriages, more so than any other cohabiting group. Furthermore, long term cohabiters are the least likely to have children, or to expect to have children in the future. This, in addition to their age not being significantly different from people in their first marriage, suggests that people who are less religious and have lower aspirations for parenthood are the most likely to be long term cohabiters. Long term cohabiters are also the only category that does not have fewer years of schooling than people in first marriages.

Interestingly, only long term cohabiters and marriage renouncing cohabiters have, on average, a lower level of partner satisfaction in comparison to people in first marriages (with the coefficients suggesting that the difference is greater for long term cohabiters). These are the two groups of cohabiters that are not intending to marry. It is particularly interesting that this difference remains despite all the controls, in particular, controls for life satisfaction. Does this suggest that cohabiters with less relationship satisfaction are less likely to intend to marry, or is there something about the status of cohabitation, as opposed to marriage, that leads to lower partner satisfaction? The results also indicate that cohabiters who intend to marry, regardless of whether or not they have been previously married, have the same level of partner satisfaction as people in their first marriage. Furthermore, marriage renouncing cohabiters have a significantly lower level of life satisfaction, compared to

people in first marriages. This suggests that there is something specific about previously married cohabiters who do not intend to marry that makes them different from all the other groups in regard to life satisfaction. This raises an issue that is often debated in the literature, is the difference in well-being between the different marital statuses linked to a selection or a causation effect? While this research does not answer this question, it does provide important information on the types of cohabiters in Australia that have lower levels of well-being than married people and which do not.

Despite cohabiters, on average, being less likely than married people to have a child, the typology model indicates that this is only true for cohabitants that are not previously married. Cohabitants who have been married, in addition to people in higher order marriages are more likely than people in their first marriages to have children. This suggests that people who have children are more likely to have been married at some stage in their life. Premarital cohabiters are the only group that are more likely to expect to have a child than people in first marriages. This suggests that there is an association between experience of a previous marriage, cohabitants' intention to marry and aspirations for parenthood. Indicating that cohabitants who have not been married, but who intend to have a child, are the most likely to intend to get married. There is, however, also a vast amount of evidence which suggests that childbearing within cohabiting unions is increasing (de Vaus & Gray, 2004). This raises the question: Does marriage remain the primary arena in which to have and raise children, and to which extent, if at all, is cohabitation taking on the traditional role of marriage – the socialisation of children? This would be an important avenue for further research.

It is also worth noting that there are no significant results for parental divorce. This suggests that the experience of parental divorce does not have a bearing on people's decisions on whether to cohabit or marry, their likely hood of divorcing and re-partnering, nor their intention to marry.

Conclusion

Overall, our analysis suggests that there are many significant differences between people of different marital statuses and between different types of cohabiting people. This study has provided important information on the nature of these differences and emphasises that it is imperative not to treat cohabitants as a homogeneous group. We have presented a typology of cohabiting people and shown the ways in which these groups differ. Premarital cohabiters, overall, are likely to have a high level of life and relationship satisfaction, are unlikely to have children, but aspire to become parents; they are on average the youngest of our partnered groups. Long term cohabiters are likely to be the same age as people in their first marriage, and have similar years of schooling and incomes, but are less likely to have children, and far less likely to expect to have children in the future; they are more likely to have a low level of relationship satisfaction. Marriage renouncing cohabiters are likely to be older than people in their first marriage, are more likely to have children and less likely to expect to have children in the future; they are the most likely to have a low level of life satisfaction and low levels of relationship satisfaction, in comparison to people in their first marriage. Marriage idealising cohabiters are also on average older than people in their first marriage, are likely to have more conservative gender attitudes, and have relatively high levels of life and relationship satisfaction. Having considered these typologies, we suggest that the recent rise in cohabiting relationships, and diversity amongst these groups, is a reflection of the fundamental changes in patterns of family formation and the changing status of marriage in the life course.

Figure, Tables and Diagrams

Figure 1
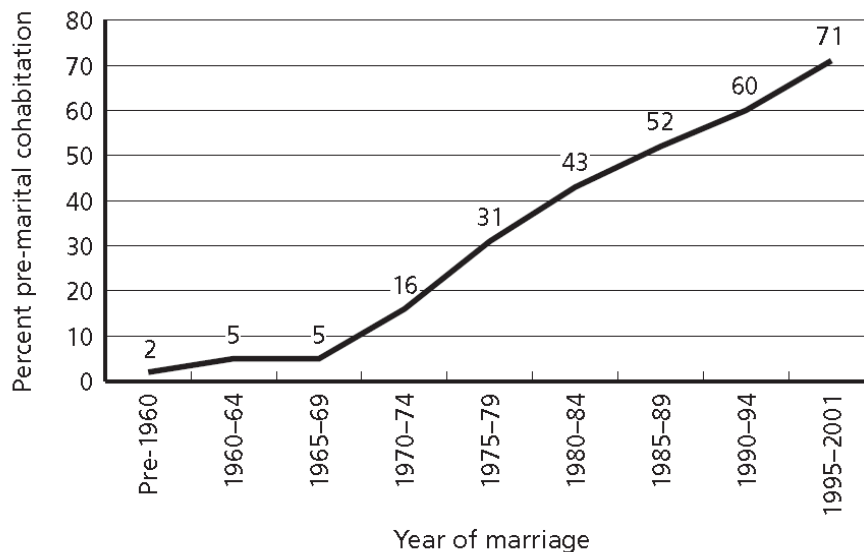
Figure 1: Proportion of marriages preceded by cohabitation by year of marriage, Australia, pre-1960–2001

Source: HILDA (2001).

Note: First marriages only.

(Dempsey & De Vaus, 2004:161)

Figure 2
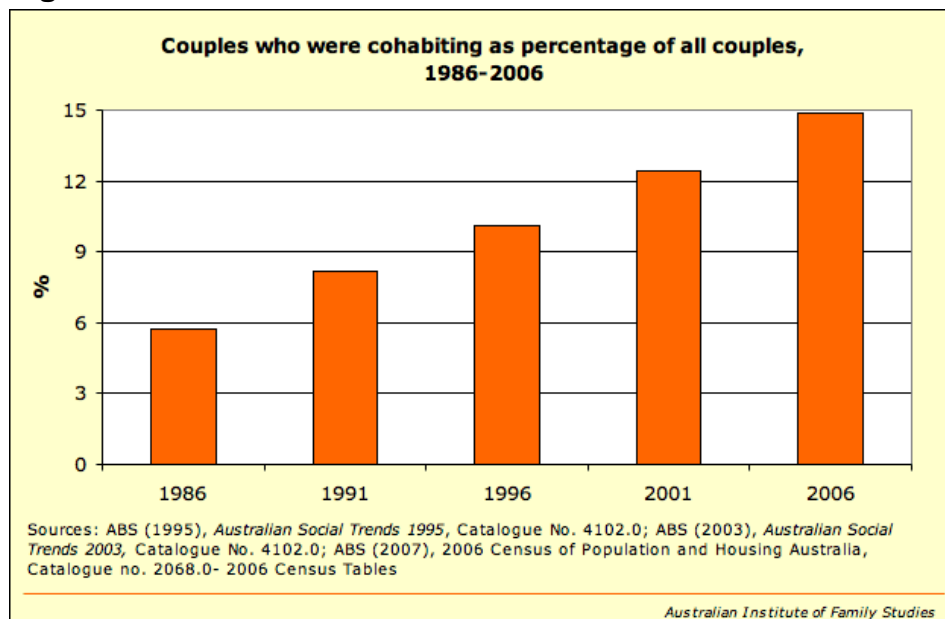
(Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2008)

Figure 3
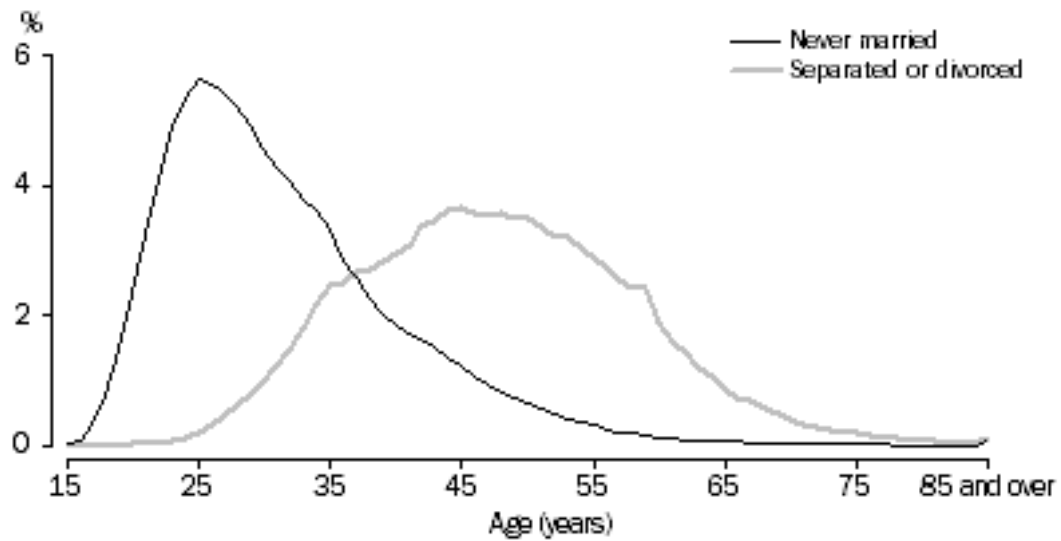
Source: ABS data available on request, 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008 Cat.No.1301.0)

Figure 4
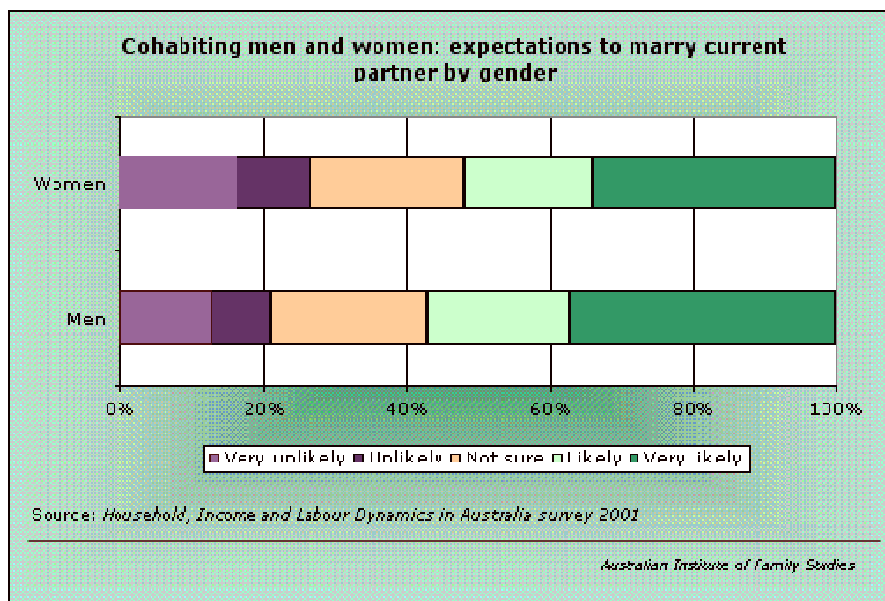
(Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2008)

Figure 5

Percentage of cohabiting couples who married or separated within five years of living together
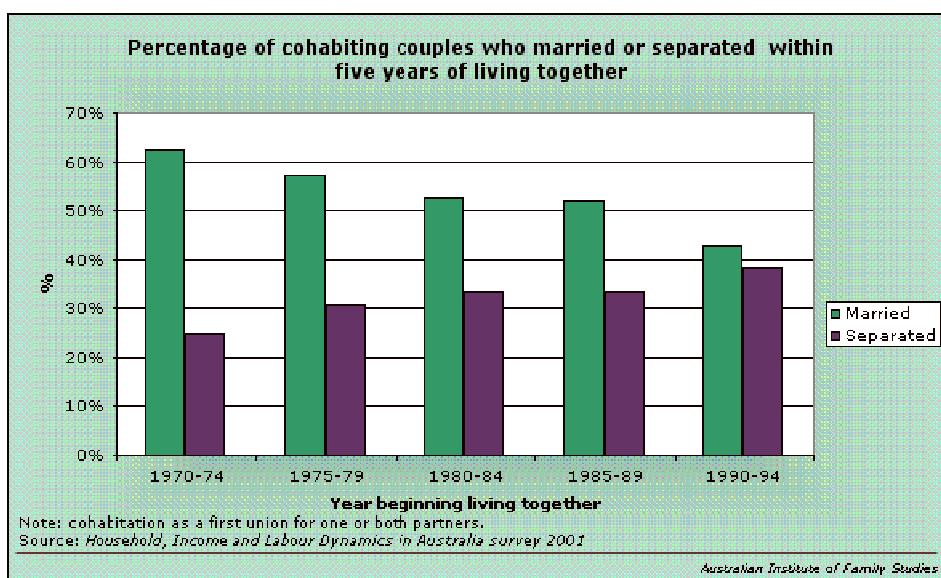
(Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2008)

Table 1

Percent of those in a union who are cohabiting, by selected country of birth, 2001

	Male %	Female %
Australia	13.9	13.8
UK/Ireland	10.2	9.8
New Zealand	22.8	22.7
North and West Europe	8.8	9.8
East Europe and former USSR	5.2	6.4
Southern Europe	2.8	2.2
Other South-east Europe	3.5	3.0
Middle East and North Africa	2.7	1.6
China	3.2	4.2
Other Asia	5.0	6.0
North American	12.5	13.5

Source: 2001 Census of Population and Housing, customized data cube. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003).

(Dempsey & De Vaus, 2004:161)

Table 2: Summary Descriptive Statistics for Marital Status (Independent Variables)

	Married	Cohabiting	Separated, divorced or widowed	Single
Percent of overall Sample				
All (%)	57.12	10.14	14.08	18.66
Country of Birth (brief, %)				
Australia	70.62	77.92	73.71	81.02
Main English speaking	21.21	14.07	12.12	7.07
Other	17.17	8.01	14.17	11.91
Indigenous (%)	0.92	3.59	2.10	2.89
Own home (%)	84.07	52.47	62.23	52.76
Ever had child (%)	90.08	53.44	89.71	13.17
Expect child in future (%)	14.33	47.53	5.93	61.54
Continuous Variables (mean)				
Age	48.54	35.08	57.68	29.75
Years of Schooling	12.23	12.37	11.66	12.34
Income (10,000 $)	4.01	3.56	3.55	2.62
Hours worked	24.63	30.10	15.05	25.11
Religiosity	5.07	2.97	5.39	4.06
Life satisfaction	8.17	7.86	7.58	7.57
Gender attitudes	4.05	3.16	4.51	3.28
N (13, 181)	7 529	1336	1 856	2 460

Note:
Average hours worked includes all people, and not only those who work (there are many people who work zero hours).
The response categories for religiosity and gender attitude ranged from 0-10, with 0 indicating a liberal response, and 10 a conservative response.

HILDA Wave 1, 2001

Table 3: Summary Descriptive Statistics for Cohabitation Typology (Independent Variables)

	1st Marriage	Higher Order Marriage	Premarital Cohabiters[1]	Long Term Cohabiters[2]	Marriage Renouncing Cohabiters[3]	Marriage Idealising Cohabiters[4]
Percent of overall Sample						
All (%)	73.22	11.71	6.09	4.07	2.83	2.08
Country of Birth (brief, %)						
Australia	71.24	66.76	83.33	78.39	68.13	74.46
Main English speaking	11.38	17.34	9.81	14.04	20.72	16.85
Other	17.38	15.90	6.85	7.20	11.16	8.07
Indigenous (%)*	0.91	0.96	3.33	6.09	1.59	2.17
Own home (%)	84.49	81.50	39.07	51.80	71.31	67.39
Ever had child (%)	89.72	92.29	33.52	45.98	85.26	83.15
Expect child in future (%)	15.21	8.86	79.81	37.67	8.76	25.00
Continuous Variables (mean)						
Age	48.00	51.93	27.78	32.91	48.08	43.13
Years of Schooling	12.25	12.07	12.47	12.42	12.19	12.19
Income (10,000 $)	4.01	4.01	3.18	3.28	3.95	4.45
Hours worked	24.85	23.19	32.15	27.32	29.27	30.66
Religiosity	5.16	4.53	3.19	2.34	3.22	3.23
Life satisfaction	8.17	8.17	8.02	7.54	7.74	8.15
Gender attitudes	4.05	4.05	3.04	3.01	3.59	3.20
Partner Variables (mean)						
Union Length	24.38	13.57	4.22	7.27	8.06	4.81
Satisfaction with Partner	8.76	8.78	8.77	7.77	8.08	8.83
Partner Variable (%)						
Parental divorce	7.24	9.54	12.96	17.73	7.17	7.61
N (8,865)	6,491	1,038	540	361	251	184

Note:
Average hours worked includes all people, and not only those who work (there are many people who work zero hours).
The response categories for religiosity and sex role attitude ranged from 0-10, with 0 indicating a liberal response, and 10 a conservative response.
* The observations in each cell are very small

[1] Not previously married & intending to marry; [2] Not previously married & not intending to marry; [3] Previously married & not intending to marry; [4] Previously married & intending to marry

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Table 4 : Multinominal Regression Model Predicting Marital Status

Variable	Cohabiting		Separated, Divorced or Widowed		Single	
	Co-efficient	Robust SE	Co-efficient	Robust SE	Co-efficient	Robust SE
Social and Demographic Variables						
Age	-0.038***	0.004	0.053***	0.003	-0.069***	0.005
Female (0 = Male)	0.046	0.052	0.831***	0.065	-0.365***	0.068
Religiosity	-0.128***	0.012	-0.024**	0.009	-0.025*	0.012
Place of Birth:						
Europe (0 = Australasia)	0.006	0.118	-0.328***	0.089	-0.598***	0.137
Asia	-1.119***	0.243	-0.601***	0.186	-1.058***	0.174
America	-0.182	0.379	-0.484	0.385	-1.277***	0.400
Africa & Middle-East	-0.385	0.364	0.219**	0.222	-0.500	0.314
Indigenous	0.965***	0.244	0.661	0.232	1.207***	0.281
Years of schooling	-0.044*	0.022	-0.017	0.017	-0.051*	0.022
Income	-0.018	0.018	0.018	0.012	-0.142***	0.024
No Income	-0.089	0.110	-0.184*	0.090	-0.246*	0.115
Hours worked	-0.002	0.002	-0.003	0.002	-0.021***	0.002
Own Home	-1.092***	0.102	-1.459***	0.081	-0.865***	0.096
Family Formation and Attitude Variables						
Child	-1.558***	0.107	-0.558***	0.113	-4.036***	0.107
Expect child	0.209	0.118	-0.343**	0.137	-0.416***	0.115
Gender attitudes	-0.032	0.021	0.011	0.017	0.007	0.021
Life Satisfaction	-0.068**	0.025	-0.271***	0.019	-0.245***	0.025
Constant	3.557***	0.417	-0.475	0.343	8.234***	0.413

Number of Observations	11952
Wald chi2 (51):	4039.43
Prob > Chi2:	<0.001
Pseudo R2	0.3219

(Standard error adjusted for 7028 clusters in household identification)

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$ *** $p<0.001$
Married is the reference category

Source: HILDA Wave 1, 2001

Table 5 : Multinominal Regression Model Predicting Cohabitation Typology

Variable	Higher Order Marriage		Premarital Cohabiters[1]		Long Term Cohabiters[2]		Marriage Renouncing Cohabiters[3]		Marriage Idealising Cohabiters[4]	
	Co-efficient	Robust SE	Co-efficient	Robust SE	Co-efficient	Robust SE	Co-efficient	Robust SE	Co-efficient	Robust SE
Social and Demographic Variables										
Age	0.265***	0.009	-0.076***	0.017	-0.017	0.017	0.288***	0.012	0.244***	0.014
Female (0 = Male)	0.904***	0.109	-0.255**	0.104	-0.331**	0.135	1.756***	0.173	0.624***	0.185
Religiosity	-0.027	0.015	-0.101***	0.020	-0.199***	0.025	-0.130***	0.028	-0.103***	0.029
Place of Birth:										
Europe (0 = Australasia)	0.267*	0.127	-0.027	0.233	-0.075	0.233	0.326	0.213	0.208	0.262
Asia	-1.288***	0.314	-0.833**	0.323	-1.229**	0.436	-2.233**	0.788	-1.557*	0.694
America	0.968**	0.383	-0.567	0.554	0.311	0.455	0.245	0.793	-0.017	0.817
Africa & Middle-East	0.394	0.355	-1.519*	0.700	-0.760	0.685	1.167**	0.433	0.284	0.856
Indigenous	-0.778	0.630	0.812*	0.362	1.490***	0.390	-0.693	1.105	-0.016	0.771
Years of schooling	-0.131***	0.025	-0.077*	0.036	-0.036	0.043	-0.138***	0.042	-0.157***	0.045
Income	0.001	0.016	-0.063	0.036	-0.076	0.048	-0.005	0.027	0.031	0.019
No Income	-0.026	0.133	0.179	0.181	0.217	0.203	-0.422	0.238	0.063	0.277
Hours worked	0.007**	0.003	0.001	0.004	-0.010*	0.005	0.017***	0.005	0.005	0.006
Own Home	-0.367**	0.139	-1.024***	0.155	-0.810***	0.178	-0.894***	0.203	-0.720***	0.230
Family Formation and Attitude Variables										
Child	1.404***	0.206	-1.279***	0.168	-1.939***	0.205	0.904***	0.262	1.002***	0.245
Expect child	-0.249	0.159	0.514**	0.184	-1.005***	0.206	-0.664*	0.283	-0.159	0.233
Gender attitudes	-0.022	0.027	0.003	0.035	-0.016	0.038	-0.016	0.045	-0.096*	0.049
Life Satisfaction	-0.028	0.034	0.003	0.048	-0.014	0.049	-0.132*	0.056	-0.009	0.068
Partnership Variables										
Satisfaction with partner	0.041	0.032	-0.073	0.042	-0.278***	0.038	-0.098*	0.046	0.044	0.061
Parental divorce	0.254	0.156	0.105	0.175	0.323	0.191	-0.315	0.309	-0.222	0.311
Union length	-0.281***	0.008	-0.109***	0.022	-0.107***	0.019	-0.361***	0.016	-0.437***	0.024
Constant	-9.102***	0.611	4.733***	0.734	5.493***	0.848	-8.064***	0.978	-7.221***	0.952

Number of Observations	8075
Wald chi2 (100):	2447.70
Prob > Chi2:	<0.001
Pseudo R2	0.4156

(Standard error adjusted for 4375 clusters in household identification)

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001
First marriage is the reference category
[1] Not previously married & intending to marry; [2] Not previously married & not intending to marry; [3] Previously married & not intending to marry; [4] Previously married & intending to marry
Source: HILDA Wave 1, 2001

Diagram 1

Cohabitation Typology

14% (184)

27% (360)

86% (6491)

1st Marriage

Previously
Married
&
Intending to
Marry

Not
Previously
Married
&
Not Intending
to Marry

Higher order Marriage

Previously
Married
&
Not Intending
to Marry

Not
Previously
Married
&
Intending to
Marry

14% (1038)

19% (251)

40% (542)
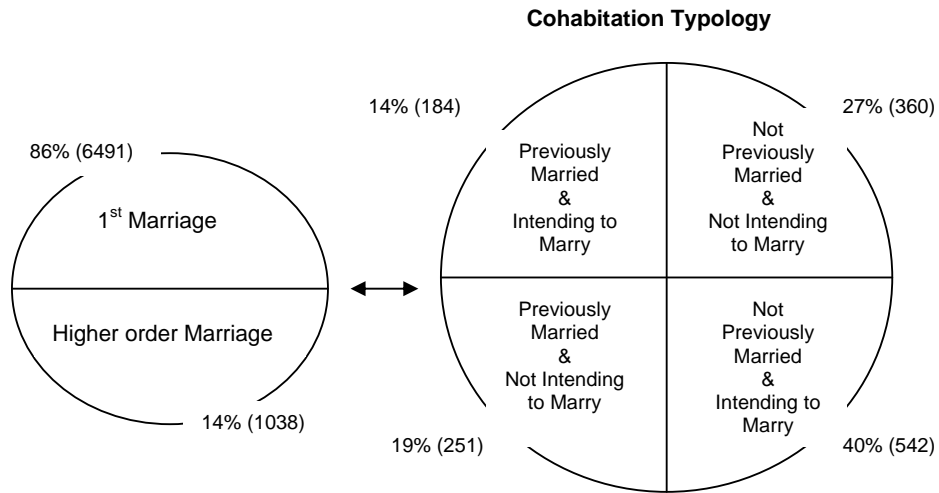
Data based on Wave 1 HILDA

Appendix 1

Variables used in Analyses:

Variable	Question	Categories
Marital status	Derived Variable	Legally married; De facto; Single; Separated, divorced or widowed
Intending to marry	"How likely are you to marry your current partner?"	1 = Very likely; 2 = Likely; Other categories: 3 Not sure; 4 = Unlikely; 5 Very unlikely;
Marital history	How many times have you been legally married?	Continuous

Social and Demographic Variables

Age	Age last birthday at June 30 2001	Continuous - years
Sex	Female = 1, Male = 0	
Religiosity	Importance of religion	11 response categories 0 = 'the least important thing' to 10 = 'the most important thing'
Ethnicity	Country of birth	Australasia, Europe, Asia, America, Africa and the Middle East
Indigenous status	1= Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or both, 0= not of Indigenous origin	
Years of schooling	Continuous – Years of education	
Income	Financial year gross wages and salary.	Per $10,000
Hours of paid work	Hours per week usually worked in all jobs. Includes all people, and not only those who work (there are many people who work zero hours).	Continuous
Home ownership	Own, Rent or live rent free.	1 = Own own home, 0 = rent or live rent free

Family Formation and Attitude Variables

Child	Ever had children.	0= does not have child, 1 = has child
Fertility intentions	How likely to have (a child of your own/more children) in the future?	11 response categories 0 = 'very unlikely' to 10 = 'very likely'
Gender attitudes	"It is better for everyone involved if the man earns the money and the woman takes care of the home and children. "	7 response categories 1 = 'strongly disagree" – liberal attitude; 7 = 'Strongly agree' – conservative attitude
Life satisfaction	"How satisfied are you with your life?"	11 response categories 0 = 'totally dissatisfied' to 10 = 'totally satisfied'

Partnership Variables

Relationship satisfaction	Please rate your: Satisfaction with your partner.	11 response categories 0 = 'totally dissatisfied' to 10 = 'totally satisfied'
Parental divorce	"Did you mother and father ever get divorced or separated?"	0= 'parents did not divorce', 1 = 'parents divorced
Union length	Cohabiting: "Year began living with current partner" Married: "year of present or most recent marriage"	Continuous

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