

Investigating living-apart-together (LAT) relationships using a life course approach

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ABSTRACT

Using a life course approach we investigate living-apart-together relationships; that is, intimate relationships where the partners involved do not coreside. Research on the nature and pattern of contemporary relationship formation and dissolution has almost exclusively focused on unions such as cohabitation and marriage in which the two partners share a common household. However, there is evidence that a substantial proportion of the population does not in fact live with a romantic partner. In this paper we describe the characteristics of individuals in non-residential unions and investigate whether these unions are a stepping stone towards cohabitation, or whether they are more permanent arrangements. Using data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (2005) survey, we estimate that 24 per cent of the population aged 18 and over that is not cohabiting or married identify themselves as being in an intimate ongoing relationship. While non-residential unions are most prevalent among young people, they are experienced by individuals at all stages of the life course including by single parents and previously married people aged 45 and over. We find that the meaning of these relationships varies greatly by life course factors such as age, and previous relationship history. While the younger generations frequently anticipate moving into a common residence with their partner in the future, among the older generations living apart from a partner appears to be a more permanent arrangement allowing a combination of both intimacy and autonomy.

Key words: relationships, union formation, living-apart-together, LAT

INTRODUCTION

The past few decades have seen substantial changes in relationship formation and dissolution patterns in Australia, as in other Western countries, including the postponement and decline of marriage and the increasing popularity of cohabitation. These trends have also led to a change in what demographers and social researchers define as being in a union or relationship. In the past the distinction was primarily between those who were married versus those who were single (never married, separated, divorced or widowed). Today a tripartite model is typically used instead, differentiating between those who are single, cohabiting or married (Rindfuss & VandenHeuvel 1990; Hakim 2004; Roseneil 2006). In this model, those who are not living in the same residence as a partner are classified as single or unpartnered. This perspective is reinforced by social surveys orientated towards collecting data about households and the relationship of individuals within those households (Asendorpf 2008; Strohm *et al*, 2008).

However, a growing body of research is now accumulating on another form of partnership that is not easily accommodated within this tripartite relationship model: that of people who are in 'living-apart-together' (LAT) relationships, or where people identify themselves in a relationship with someone with whom they do not live with (Trost 1998). Individuals in these unions are essentially 'hidden populations', not registered in any official statistics (Borell & Ghazanfareon Karlsson 2003). This makes it difficult to estimate how common they are, but survey evidence from a range of countries suggests that a substantial percentage of the population that would typically be classified as single is in fact in a non-cohabiting relationship.

Interest in LAT relationships has only recently emerged and there remain questions as to how these relationships should be defined and accommodated at both a conceptual and theoretical level. As Haskey & Lewis (2006:38) note, LAT raises similar questions as cohabitation did when it first came to be widely recognized as a distinct form of partnership. These questions relate to both the characteristics of the individuals involved as well as the meaning of the relationships themselves; whether they are a transitional stage before cohabitation or marriage, or a completely new form of partnership. Evidence suggests that individuals enter into non-residential relationships for a range of reasons throughout the life-course.

This paper uses data from the 2005 wave of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) data survey to examine living-apart-together relationships in Australia. To date very little is known about non-residential relationships in Australia, because of the previous lack of nationally representative survey data on this relationship type. The aim is to provide an estimate of the prevalence of these relationships, to investigate the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of individuals in these unions, and to examine how the meaning attached to these unions relates to life course factors.

BACKGROUND

A new phenomenon?

According to Levin (2004) the LAT relationship is a ‘new family form’, which existed in the past, but which in recent years has become much more prevalent and visible in society. Due to the lack of historical data on the prevalence of LAT relationships, it is difficult to know with certainty if there has been a real rise in the prevalence of non-residential unions, or if this form of relationship is simply attracting more popular attention than before (Ermisch & Siedler 2008). Evidence from a Swedish poll conducted in 1993, 1998 and 2001 appears to show an increase in the prevalence of non-residential relationships (Levin 2004), and increases between 1982-1997 have also been reported for Japan (Iwasawa 2004). However no increasing trend was found between 1991 and 2005 in a study using the German Socio-Economic Panel (Ermisch & Siedler 2008). There are good reasons to believe that non-cohabiting unions have become increasingly common in recent years, since there has been an increase in the proportion of the population that is neither cohabiting or married. At the same time the recent academic and media interest in these relationships has certainly made them more visible.

One reason why LATs may be more prevalent today is the simple fact that a growing proportion of the population is now unpartnered at any point in time (Weston & Qu 2006). For example between 1986 and 2001 the percentage of women aged 30-34 who were unpartnered (not cohabiting, not married) increased from 23 to 34 per cent (de Vaus 2004). For men in their early 30s, the equivalent rise was from 29 to 41 per cent. As a larger proportion of the population is not in a cohabiting or marital union, the proportion of the population that is ‘at risk’ of forming a non-residential relationship has also increased. Factors contributing to the increased prevalence of individuals who are unpartnered, include socio-economic changes such as the prolonging of the time in education, demographic trends such as increased life expectancy and increased rates of relationship dissolution through divorce or the breakdown of cohabitations (Milan & Peters 2003:6; Weston & Qu 2006; Castro-Martin, *et al.* 2008). At the same time ideational changes have made alternative forms of partnerships more acceptable in society, and couples who find themselves in a relationship with a new partner who lives elsewhere may not feel as great a social pressure to settle down together in a common residence as they would have in the past (Levin 2004).

The greater availability of quantitative data from social surveys as well as qualitative studies has also made these relationships more visible (Trost 1998; Haskey & Lewis 2006). Until recently the majority of research on LAT relationships originated from Scandinavian countries, such as Sweden and Norway (Levin & Trost 1999) where this type of union is socially recognized and accepted as a distinct type of relationship and even given a specific name ‘*särbo*¹’ (Borrel and Ghazanfaraeeon Karlsson 2003:50). However with the dramatic increase in interest in LATs during the past few years, research is now also accumulating from a growing list of countries including France (Beajouan, *et al.* 2008), Germany (Asendorpf 2008); Spain (Castro-Martin, *et*

¹ *sär* stands for apart and *bo* for live. *Särbo* relationships are generally considered to be a relatively permanent arrangement rather than a transitional relationship before forming a cohabitation.

al 2008), United Kingdom (Haskey 2005; Haskey and Lewis 2006; Ermisch & Siedler 2008), Canada (Milan & Peters 2003), the United States (Strohm, *et al.* 2008) and Japan (Iwasawa 2004).

In terms of the prevalence of LAT relationships, evidence suggests that a substantial minority of the total adult population is involved in a LAT relationship. For example, in the US, data from the General Social Survey of 1996 and 1998 indicates that 6 per cent of women and 7 per cent of men are in a LAT relationship, representing 35 per cent of all individuals not in a live in relationship (Strohm 2008:16). The 2001 Canadian Social Survey, produces similar estimates of 8 per cent of the population aged 20 and over in a LAT relationship (Milan & Peters 2003). Direct international comparisons of the prevalence of LAT relationships are difficult to make however, because of the difference in the age range of the analytical samples, the dates of the surveys, as well as the definition of LAT used in the different studies. Due to the relatively recent emergence of scholarly interest in non-coresidential unions, there is still a lack of consensus regarding their precise definition.

Definition

With regard to definitions one of the most important questions in the recent literature is where, if anywhere, the boundary between casual dating relationships and more committed LAT relationships should be drawn. In general there is some agreement that more casual and fleeting relationships should be differentiated from more committed non-coresidential unions, and often different terms are used to make a theoretical distinction between the two. For example, Haskey (2005) terms the former 'those who have a partner who usually lives elsewhere' and the latter Living Apart Together (LATs). Similarly Trost (1998) uses the terms 'steady going couples' versus the more committed living-apart-together couples. Actually trying to categorize respondents into one or the other group in practice however is difficult. Various factors, for example the length of the relationship or the age of the individuals involved have been taken as proxy indicators of the level of seriousness of the relationship. For example in their study of LATs among young people in Spain, Castro-Martin *et al.*, (2008) only focus on LAT relationships that have lasted more than two years. Haskey's (2005) analysis of the prevalence of non-residential partnerships in the Omnibus Survey in Britain, uses a number of alternative ways to try and estimate the 'true' number of living apart relationships, for example by excluding relationships of young adults who were still living at home.

Since quantitative data on non-residential unions come from surveys, question wording plays a very important role in determining who is enumerated as being in a non-residential union. As Haskey (2005) notes, using the term 'living-apart-together' in a survey would not be possible as respondents would not understand the meaning without some explanation and elaboration. Instead surveys have used particular terminology to try and distinguish between more casual dating relationships and more committed unions (Strohm, *et al.* 2008:27-28). Examples include:

- *Do you have a main romantic involvement – a (man/woman) you think of as a steady, lover, a partner, or whatever?* If yes respondents are asked if they live with their partner. (U.S. General Social Survey)
- *Are you in an intimate relationship with someone who lives in a separate household?* (2001 Canadian Survey)

- *Do you have a steady relationship with a male or female friend whom you think of as your “partner”, even though you are not living together? (BHPS)*
- *Are you currently in an intimate ongoing relationship with someone you are not living with? (Gender & Generations Survey / HILDA)*

The degree to which these questions are able to exclude less committed relationship varies. The last question, which was included in HILDA, is probably one of the strongest as it includes the terms *intimate* and *on-going*. Nevertheless, unlike questions on more objective concepts such as legal marital status, it is inevitable that even the clearest question asking about non-residential unions will involve an element of subjectivity (Haskey 2005).

Transitory or permanent arrangements?

An important theoretical question regarding LATs relates to the meaning of these partnerships and whether they are a transitory step taken before entering a live-in relationship, or whether they are a more permanent arrangement. A closely related distinction is whether partners are living apart voluntarily, through an active choice, or involuntarily due to various circumstances (Levin 2004). Previous research suggests that the meaning of LAT relationships and the reasons why individuals enter them, depends very much what stage of the life course an individual is at (Beaujouan, *et al.* 2006; Strohm, *et al.*, 2008).

LAT relationships appear to be more provisional and involuntary among younger cohorts. The geographic location of places of work or study, as well as financial and housing factors may constrain or prevent young people from moving into a joint residence with their partner. Also young people living at home are unlikely to have acquired the financial ability to set up a joint residence with their partner (Castro-Martin, *et al.* 2008). Involuntary non-residential relationships may also be the result of caring responsibilities for children or elderly parents (Levin 2004). While these circumstances prevent individuals from moving in together, the possibility to cohabit is there if and when circumstances change.

Alternatively, LAT relationships can be more permanent arrangements that allow for intimacy but also autonomy and independence, and this appears to be particularly the case for older individuals (Levin 2004). Other reasons for actively wanting to live apart include the feeling of not being ready to live with someone, and concern about children (Beaujouan, *et al.* 2008). Qualitative evidence also suggests that those who are voluntarily living apart include individuals who have gone through a divorce or a relationship breakdown, experiences which have left them particularly ‘risk averse’ (de Jong Gierveld 2004; Levin 2004; Roseneil 2006).

While in general a distinction is made between LAT relationships which are involuntary and which are due to circumstances which prevent the couple from moving in together, and LAT relationships which are voluntary and which are seen as a more permanent arrangement it is likely that the distinction is not always so clear cut. Based on the results of her qualitative study of LATs in the United Kingdom, Roseneil (2006) suggests that apart from these two main groups of LATs, the ‘regretfully apart’ and the ‘gladly apart’, there is also a large group of individuals who are ‘undecidedly apart’. This group has not made a definite choice to cohabit or not. Some speak of not being ready or of feeling that starting to cohabit may in fact ruin the relationship with the current partner; reasons that have also been mentioned in other qualitative studies

(Haskey & Lewis 2006). As Haskey & Lewis (2006:4) note, in many ways the ‘leap of faith’ needed for a LAT relationship to become a cohabiting one is greater than the one needed to transition from cohabitation to marriage.

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the nature and pattern of living-apart-together relationships in Australia. The first objective is to determine the prevalence of non-residential relationships in Australia. We then describe several key features of these relationships, including their duration, the frequency of contact, and the geographic distance between partners. Finally based on several key life course factors, including age, relationship and fertility history, we seek to identify different profiles of individuals involved in LAT relationships with similar demographic characteristics. The profiles are used to investigate how the meaning and purpose of non-residential relationships varies over the life course. If the nature and pattern of LAT relationships in Australia, is similar to that found in other Western countries, based on findings from previous research we expect that for younger individuals a LAT relationships is likely to be a transitional relationship, or a step towards cohabitation, while for older individuals not living with a partner will be more of a matter of choice and more of a permanent arrangement.

DATA

To investigate the prevalence and characteristics of non-residential unions in Australia we use data from the 5th Wave of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey. HILDA is a large-scale nationally representative longitudinal survey that is conducted on an annual basis. The survey interviews all members of a household aged 15 and over, and in the fifth wave conducted in 2005/2006 the total number of respondents was 12,759.

In the fifth wave several key questions were included for the first time as part of Australia’s participation in the international Gender and Generations Survey (GGS). The GGS is a cross-national longitudinal survey coordinated by the Population Activities Unit of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, that as of 2008 had been run in 16 countries the majority of which were European. Respondents who were not married, and not in cohabitation were asked if they were in an intimate ongoing relationship with someone they were not living with.

Respondents who were in non-resident union were then asked a series of questions regarding their relationship including: the month and year the relationship started, whether a definite decision to live apart had been made and if yes by whom, the geographic distance to the partner, and the frequency of contact. Respondents were also asked if they intend to start living with their current partner during the next three years, and if they plan to marry in the future.

It is important to note that the questions on non-residential partnerships are restricted to those who are not married, unlike in the standard GGS questionnaire where the possibility that a respondent is married and in a relationship with their spouse but not living with them is included². The questions are asked of both heterosexual and same-sex couples and we include

² In the literature there is no standard treatment of married couples in living-apart-together relationships. Sometimes married couples are included in the definition of LAT unions (Levin & Trost 1999), and other times excluded (Haskey 2005). There is general consensus though that LAT relationships do not include so called commuter marriages/cohabitations, where the couple maintains one household but one partner live elsewhere for periods of time due to work reasons (Levin & Trost 1999).

both types of couples in this study³. Also, we make no specific distinction is made at the outset between more and less casual relationship; all living-apart-together relationships are considered even if they have only been on-going for a short time. Since relationship questions are only asked of respondents aged 18 or over, or less than 18 but not living with parents, we exclude those aged less than 18 leaving a total analytical sample of 12,066 respondents, of which 974 were in a LAT relationship.

METHOD

The analysis is undertaken in three main parts. The first part describes the prevalence and characteristics of LAT respondents compared to those who are single, cohabiting or married, using weighted percentages and summary statistics. The second part looks at three key characteristics of LAT relationships, their duration, the frequency of contact and the geographical distance between partners. For this part bivariate tables are used to examine the relationship between these characteristics and age. Age is grouped into four broad categories representing those who are 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, and 45+. Finally, the third part uses Multiple Correspondence and cluster analysis to identify different profiles of respondents with similar demographic characteristics.

Multiple Correspondence Analysis

To create a typology of individuals involved in LAT relationships, we follow the strategy used by Beaujouan, *et al.* (2009) who analyzed the French GGS data and used Multiple Correspondence Analysis. Multiple Correspondence Analysis is a method for identifying patterns among three or more categorical variables (Greenacre 2007). The aim of MCA is to convert large contingency tables where the rows are observations and the columns categorical variables into a low-dimensional (typically two-dimensional) space or map⁴. The interpretation of the results is then based on the proximities as described graphically on the map. In this case we are interested in the interrelationship between four key demographic variables of individuals in living-apart together relationships: their sex, age, presence of children, and previous relationship history. As for the bivariate analysis, age is grouped into four categories. The presence of children is described by a 3 category variable indicating whether the respondent has no children, at least one resident child, or only non-resident children. Finally, previous relationship history is divided into 3 categories, consisting of those previously married, previously de-facto but never married, and never de-facto or married.

³ There were 18 same-sex couples in the HILDA sample.

⁴We use the XLSTAT software to perform the Multiple Correspondence and cluster analysis <<http://www.xlstat.com/en/home/>>

Ward's method cluster analysis

Based on the results of the MCA, cluster analysis of the coordinates of the observations is used to identify homogeneous groups of respondents. We use Ward's method of cluster analysis, an agglomerative hierarchical method where each observations starts off as its own cluster and then an analysis of variance approach is used to group the individual clusters into larger groupings. Using this method we identify four groups of individuals with similar demographic characteristics. Using these four groups of people from different stages of the life course we then investigate how the groups differ in their answers to three key questions: whether or not they have made a definite decision to live apart, whether they intend to live together within the next 3 years and whether or not they intend to marry. This allows us to see whether their relationship is voluntary or involuntary and the degree to which it is seen as a transitional or permanent arrangement.

An alternative analysis strategy to that outlined above, would be to have each of the 3 key topics of interests (whether relationship is due to a definite decision to live apart; intention to live together in next 3 years, intention to marry) as the dependent variable and to see how key demographic and socio-economic characteristics such as age, number of children, and employment influenced the dependent variable. The reason this strategy was not used was because of the high degree of multi-collinearity between age and the other independent variables. For example younger respondents are much more likely to have never had a previous live-in relationship, and to not have children while the opposite is true for older respondents. This makes it difficult to separate out the effects of age from the other variables of interest.

RESULTS

Prevalence of LAT relationships & characteristics of individuals in LAT unions versus other relationship statuses

Diagram 1 shows the distribution of the HILDA sample according to their relationship status (single, married, cohabiting or LAT) by age. There is a clear pattern between age and relationships status, with the proportion that are in a living-apart-together relationship or in a cohabitation declining with age, and the proportion in a marriage increasing. It should be noted that since these are cross-sectional results, the pattern is influenced by both cohort and age effects. In total of those aged 18 and over, 36 per cent were not in a couple relationship, a figure that is similar to the 39 per cent estimated by the 2006 Census (ABS 2009). Around 9 per cent of the total sample were in a non-cohabiting union, but restricting attention only to those who were not cohabiting or married, the equivalent figure was 24 per cent.

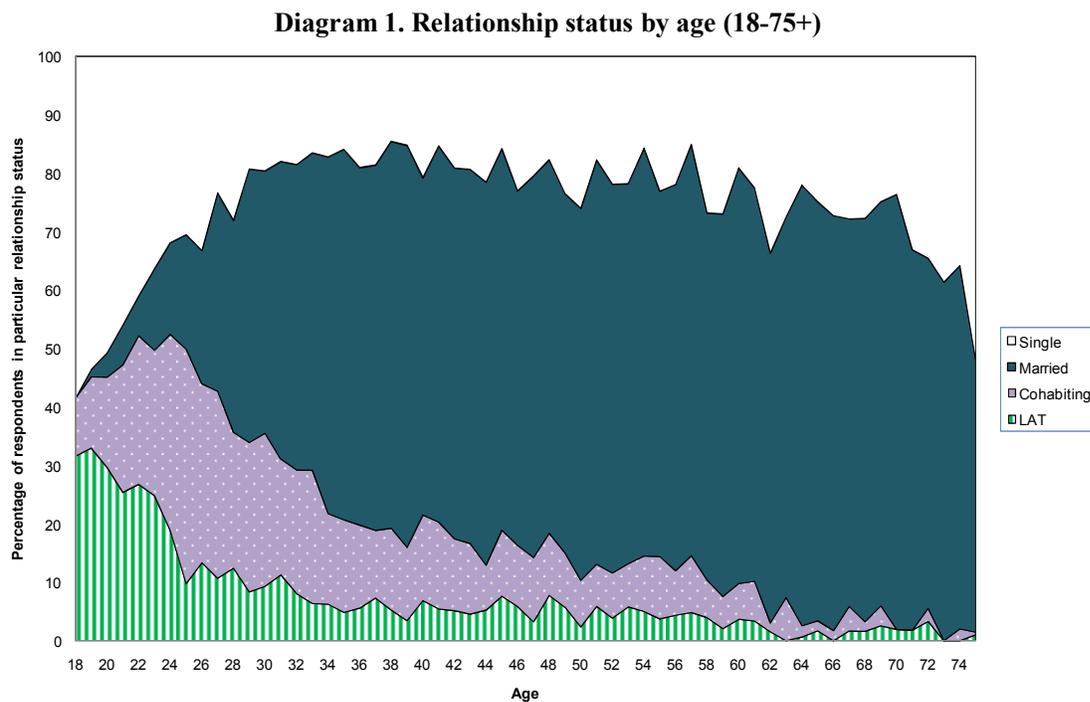


Table 1, presents the weighted percentages of several key demographic and socio-economic relationship variables by relationship status. The table indicates that compared to those who are single, cohabiting or married, those in a LAT relationship differ on several key characteristics. Overall individuals with a non-residential partner had the youngest age profile. For example 44 per cent of LATs were aged between 18 and 24 compared to 16 per cent of those in a cohabitation and 1 per cent of those who were married. Those in a LAT relationship were also the most likely to not have any children, and to have never been married. Their marital and fertility history is of course closely related to their young age profile.

People with a non-cohabiting partner had a similar employment situation to those who were cohabiting, and in terms of education the profile of the LATs was similar to both cohabiting and married individuals although a lower proportion of the LATs had a highest education level that was at year 11 or below. This could also be partly explained by a cohort effect, since younger people have higher education levels than older cohorts. However, other studies from several countries including the United Kingdom, Spain and Germany have also found that LAT relationships are more prevalent among those with higher educational levels (Haskey & Lewis 2004, Castro-Martin et al 2008; Ermisch & Siedler 2008). Possible reasons that have been suggested for this is that individuals with higher education and occupational statuses are more likely to have jobs that require a degree of travel and mobility, and at the same time they are more able to afford to have two separate residences (Haskey & Lewis 2006). Castro Martin, *et al.* (2008) also suggest that among younger individuals in Spain LAT arrangements may suit those who prioritize the professional career (Castro Martin, *et al.* 2008). An interesting question is if the educational or socio-economic differences in the prevalence of LAT will in the future become less pronounced if the behaviour becomes more widespread, in a similar way as happened for cohabitation (references). Strohm, *et al.* (2008) tentatively speculate that this may be a reason why education is positively associated with being in a LAT relationship in the United States as a whole, but not in California where the behaviour is more prevalent and accepted.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics by relationship status
(weighted column percentages)**

	Single	LAT	Cohabiting	Married	Total
Age group					
18-24	24.6	44.1	16.1	1.3	12.6
25-29	10.0	14.2	18.9	5.2	8.6
30-34	7.7	14.0	18.6	9.5	10.3
35-39	6.9	5.8	11.4	10.9	9.5
40-44	7.2	6.0	10.6	11.9	10.0
45+	43.7	15.9	24.5	61.2	49.0
Number of children					
0	54.6	72.7	50.4	11.2	32.1
1+	45.4	27.3	49.6	88.8	67.9
Ever married					
Yes	43.1	20.9	28.3	100.0	70.6
No	56.9	79.1	71.7	0.0	29.4
Employment					
Employed	55.4	81.9	78.8	62.2	63.7
Unemployed	5.2	4.0	2.9	1.4	2.8
Not in the labour force	39.4	14.0	18.3	36.4	33.5
Highest education					
University	15.6	21.8	23.3	22.4	20.6
Certificate/Diploma	26.0	30.1	33.6	31.6	30.1
Year 12	21.2	30.0	17.1	11.7	16.4
Year 11 or below	37.2	18.1	26.0	34.3	32.9
Total percentage	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total N (unweighted)	3,290	974	1,509	6,293	12,066

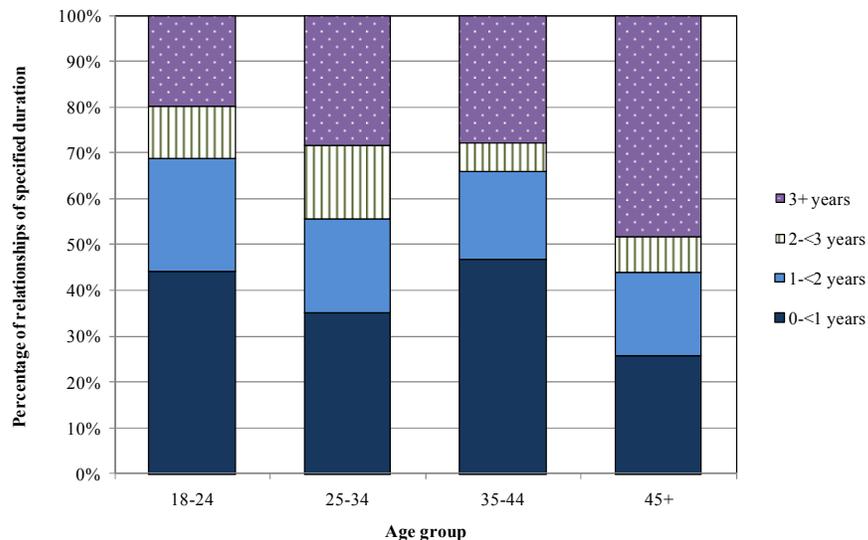
Characteristics of LAT relationships: duration, distance between partners and frequency of contact

Duration of relationships⁵

The majority of LAT relationships were of a relatively short duration. The median duration was 1.5 years, and the mean was 2.4 years. Around 39 per cent of relationships had started less than 12 months before the survey; a further 21 per cent had started 1 to 2 years ago, 11 per cent 2-3 years ago and around 28 per cent of people were in a relationship that had lasted for 3 years or more. The cross-sectional nature of the data makes it difficult to draw any conclusions about the tempo of transitions out of non-cohabiting relationships but the results seem to indicate that after one or two years, individuals in non-resident relationships commonly experience some transition, either by ending the relationship or by starting to live together. There is still a substantial proportion, however, whose LAT relationship had lasted more than three years.

Turning to how the duration of relationships varied by the age of the respondent, the duration was relatively similar for respondents aged 44 and under. There was a substantial distinction however among individuals aged 45 and over. In this age group, nearly half the respondents were in a relationship that had lasted 3 years or more, compared to less than a third of respondents in the younger age groups.

Diagram 2. Duration of non-cohabiting relationship, by age group



⁵ 59 respondents did not know the month the relationship started, but knew the year. In these cases the month was imputed to June. In addition 2 had missing information on the duration of the relationship as they did not know the year the relationship started.

Frequency of contact

Another aspect of LAT relationships that can provide an indication of their importance is how frequently individuals meet with their non-resident partners. Despite not sharing the same residence, the frequency of contact between partners was very high and around 75 per cent met at least three times a week, and many of these met on a daily basis.

Diagram 3, shows how frequency of contact was related to age. The frequency of contact between partners appears to be negatively associated with age. In the youngest age groups, respondents and their partners may be attending the same school or university and therefore have a high frequency of contact. This could also be related to the fact that older respondents are also the ones who are more likely to have resident children, and therefore have greater constraints on their time. Nevertheless amongst those aged 45 and over, around 80 per cent still see their partner on a weekly basis.

Geographic distance between partners

A key factor regulating the frequency of contact between partners is how closely they live to each other. The data indicates that the majority of people with a non-coresidential partner lived very close to their partners. Around 77 per cent lived in the same city as their partner, and a further 15 per cent in different cities but the same state. Only a minority were in a long distance relationship with a partner that lived in another state, 2 per cent, or overseas, 5 per cent.

The close physical proximity between partners' residences is also indicated by the travel time between residences. For 25 per cent of people it takes them 10 minutes or less to reach their partner, while the median time was 20 minutes.

Diagram 4 indicates how geographic distance to the partner is related to their age. The lower frequency of contact between individuals aged 45 and over can at least partly be explained by their greater propensity to not live in the same city/town as their partner compared to the younger LATs. It is also interesting to note that among the 25-34 age group around 9 per cent of respondents had a relationship with someone living abroad. It could be speculated that this is related to the relatively high degree of travel among this age group (ABS 2008). They may have met a partner while travelling or working overseas, or their partner may have moved overseas for travel or work reasons.

Diagram 3. Frequency of contact with partner, by age group

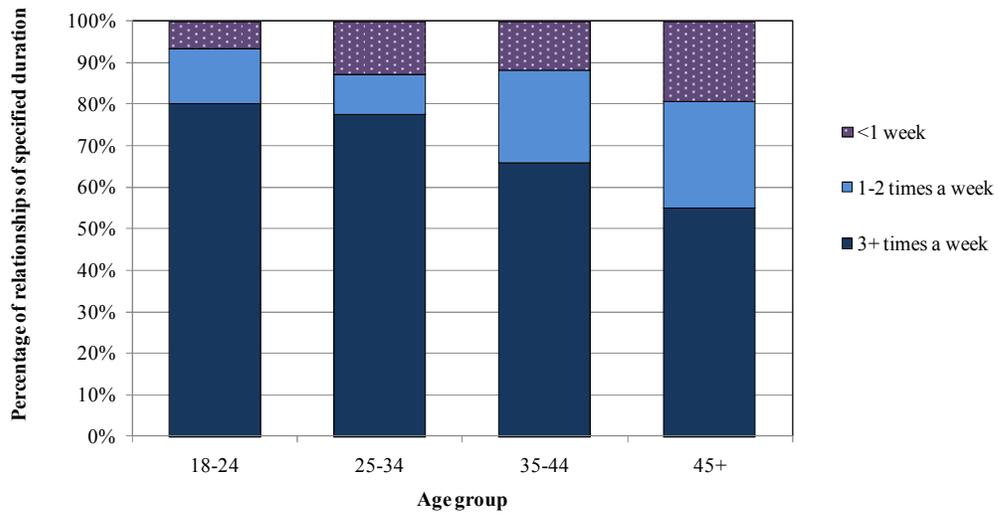
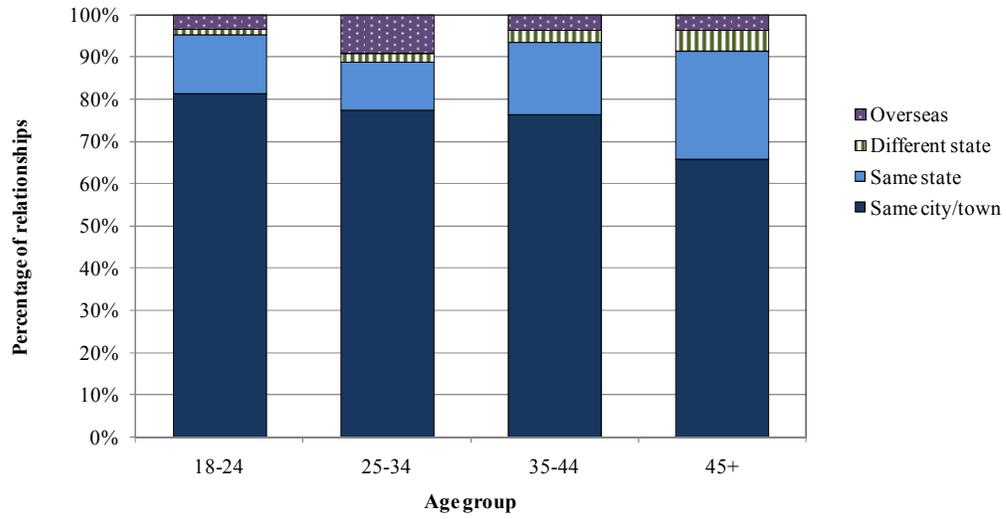


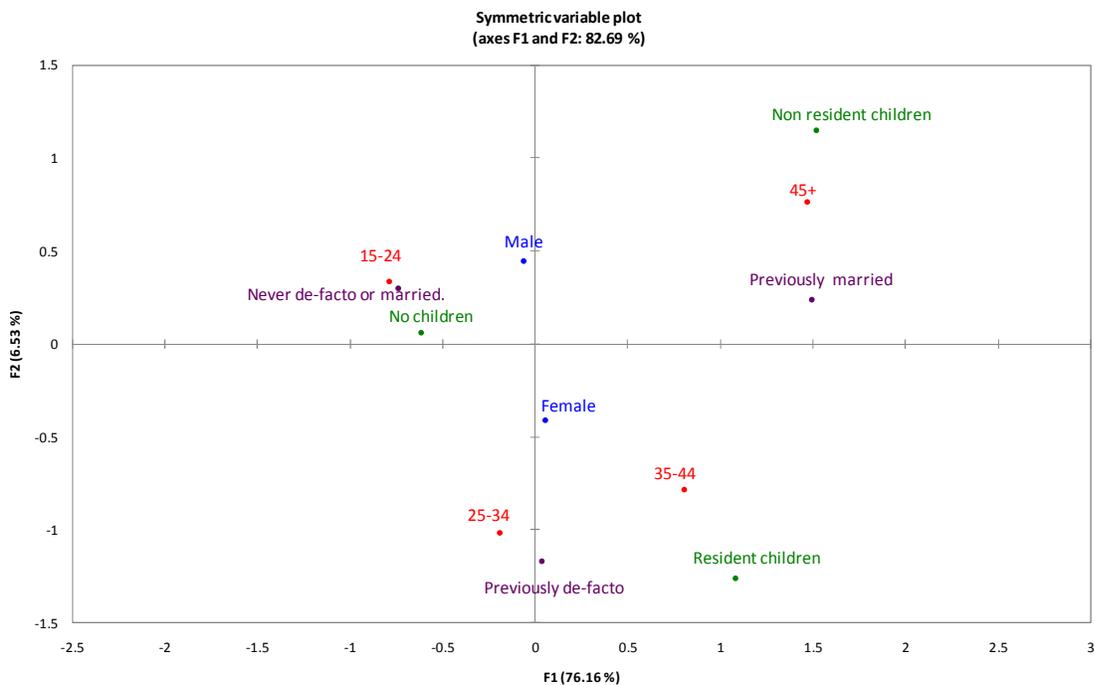
Diagram 4. Geographic distance to partner, by age group



Results of Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) & Cluster analysis

Diagram 5, presents the 2-dimensional symmetric variable plot resulting from the MCA with the two axes, representing the first and second factor respectively. The total percentage of variance or inertia accounted for is 83 per cent. Based on the proximity between different levels of the variables, some distinct profiles of LATs can be identified visually. In the top right hand quadrant are those who tend to have non-resident children, are aged 45 and over and have been previously married. In the lower right and spreading into the left quadrant, there is a less distinct group that is aged between 25-44, predominantly female, previously de-facto and with resident children. Finally in the top left quadrant, those who were 18-24 years, with no marital or cohabitation experience and with no children are found. The results of the MCA using HILDA data are strikingly similar to the results of the MCA used by Beaujouan, *et al.* (2009) on the French version of the Gender and Generations Survey.

Diagram 5. Symmetric Variable plot from MCA



Cluster analysis was conducted on the coordinates of the observations on the two-dimensional plot of the MCA. This resulted in the four clusters shown in Table 2. The table shows the distribution by sex, age, fertility, relationship history, employment and education level, of each of the four clusters using the same variable as in the Table 1. The first cluster is very homogenous and is primarily made up those aged 18-24, with no children, and with no previous history of marriage or cohabitation. The second cluster is made up of primarily female respondents, aged between 25-34, the majority of which are childless and have no marriage history but they have experienced at least one cohabitation in the past. The third cluster consists of older individuals aged 30 or older, most of which have been married. Over 80 percent in this group have had at least one child, and the majority of these one or more children still resident in the household. Finally the fourth cluster is also relatively homogeneous, consisting of those aged 45 and over, with

children who are primarily non-resident children and again previously married. Again these clusters are very similar to the ones from the French GGS (Beaujouan, *et al.* 2009).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics by cluster (percentages)

	Cluster 1	Cluster 3	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Total
	Under 25s	Young adults, prev defacto	Single-parents	Older , prev married	
Sex					
Male	62.6	27.7	48.3	64.7	53.3
Female	37.4	72.3	51.7	35.3	46.7
Age group					
18-24	75.2	15.0	2.0	0.0	44.1
25-29	12.6	32.4	5.4	0.0	14.2
30-34	9.4	34.6	11.5	0.0	14.0
35-39	1.9	9.6	15.2	0.0	5.8
40-44	0.9	8.5	20.2	0.0	6.0
45+	0.0	0.0	45.7	100.0	15.9
Number of children					
0	100.0	74.1	19.1	0.0	72.7
1+	0.0	25.9	80.9	100.0	27.3
Ever married					
Yes	0.0	0.0	73.2	100.0	79.1
No	100.0	100.0	26.9	0.0	20.9
Employment					
Employed	84.8	78.4	82.1	68.9	81.9
Unemployed	5.1	4.4	1.5	1.7	4.0
Not in the labour force	10.1	17.2	16.5	29.4	14.0
Highest education					
University degree	19.7	27.9	22.6	18.8	21.8
Certificate/Diploma	25.2	38.7	33.0	37.6	30.1
Year 12	40.0	21.3	16.5	12.4	30.0
Year 11 or below	15.1	12.2	27.9	31.3	18.1
Total percentage	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total N (unweighted)	474	184	219	97	974
Within-class variance	0.06	0.25	0.42	0.16	

Cluster differences in decision to live apart, and intentions to cohabit and marry

Definite decision to live apart

Some insight into the meaning of LAT relationships can be gained from seeing whether or not individuals had made a definite decision to live apart from their partner. If there was a definite decision to live apart, this could be taken to imply that the arrangement is one of choice rather than constraint. Table 3 shows a clear differentiation amongst the different clusters in whether or not they had made a definite decision to live apart. Over 70 percent of the older respondents, who had been previously married, had made a positive decision to live apart, compared to fewer than half of the under 25s.

However, it is difficult to know with certainty if a definite decision to live apart was related to choice or circumstances. For example, young adults still living at home, may have stated a definite decision to live apart because lack of financial resources prevent them from moving in with their partner at that particular point in time.

Further insight is available by examining whose decision it was to live apart, where there had been a definite decision to do so. Most people indicated that it was a joint decision between them and their partner. The single parents were most likely to state that the decision to live apart was solely theirs, followed by the older group. While the responses of the single parents are not surprising, it is interesting that in the other groups where the decision was not joint, individuals usually stated that it was *their* decision alone even though we would expect the decision to be roughly equally divided between the two partners.

Intention to live together in next 3 years

A clearer picture of whether the LAT arrangement was permanent or transitory is available by looking at whether or not respondents had any intention to start living together with their partner within the next 3 years. Overall around 64 percent of respondents planned to live together within the next 3 years and 36 per cent did not, although there was large degree of inter-cluster variation in responses. The young adults were the group with the highest stated intentions of living with their partner at 79 per cent, while the lowest intentions were found among the older group, at 32 per cent. In general it is difficult to tell whether a negative answer reflects an uncertainty that the relationship would continue, or instead a preference to maintain the relationship in the long term but to continue to live in separate residences. Given the earlier results regarding the age pattern of duration, it may be speculated that amongst the young adults a negative intention may reflect an uncertainty about the future of the relationship while for older adults, who had relationships of the longest duration, it could indicate a preference to keep the current living arrangements.

It is also interesting to note that the results also indicate that there was not always a close link between having made a definite decision to live apart and intentions to not live together at all. For example, while 61 per cent of young adults (previously defacto) had made a decision to live apart, around 79 per cent did intend to move in together within the next 3 years.

Table 3. Cluster differences in whether there has been a definite decision to live apart, and intentions for the future of the relationship (percentages)

	Under 25s	Young adults, previously defacto	Single parents	Older and previously married	Total
Definite decision to live apart?					
Yes	48.3	60.9	67.1	72.9	57.4
No	51.7	39.1	32.9	27.1	42.7
<i>Total (N)</i>	<i>474</i>	<i>184</i>	<i>219</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>973</i>
Whose decision to live apart					
Respondent	11.4	15.3	23.1	17.1	16.0
Respondent's partner	2.2	3.6	4.8	7.1	3.8
Both respondent and partner	86.5	81.1	72.1	75.7	80.3
<i>Total (N)</i>	<i>229</i>	<i>111</i>	<i>147</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>557</i>
Intend to live together within next 3 years					
Yes	68.8	78.7	53.3	32.2	63.7
No	31.2	21.4	46.7	67.8	36.3
<i>Total (N)</i>	<i>468</i>	<i>178</i>	<i>210</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>946</i>
Likelihood of marrying/ re-marrying					
Unlikely/very unlikely	5.7	12.1	44.0	68.1	21.7
Not sure	23.3	30.8	24.1	16.5	24.2
Likely/very likely	71.0	57.1	31.9	15.5	54.1
<i>Total (N)</i>	<i>473</i>	<i>182</i>	<i>216</i>	<i>97</i>	<i>968</i>

Intentions for marriage

Respondents were also asked about their plans for marriage in the future. There was no explicit mention in the question on marriage whether the future marriage was to the current LAT partner or to a hypothetical future partner. We assume that the majority would answer with respect to their current partner. As with the intention to cohabit, responses to the marriage question also varied greatly among the groups. Among the under 25s group, 71 per cent thought that they were *likely or very likely* to marry in the future, and attitudes towards marriage were also positive among young adults who had previously been de-facto. On the other hand, single parents and older respondents, both usually previously married, had much lower intentions. Around 68 per cent of the older respondents said they were unlikely or very unlikely to remarry in the future. These results are very similar to those found by Ermisch & Siedler (2008) where the older people and the single mothers were the ones most inclined to not marry in the future.

DISCUSSION

The results from HILDA, closely resemble the ones from other international studies. In particular, we find that older respondents, most of which were widowed or divorced, were the most likely to be 'voluntarily' living-apart-together and to have little intention to transition to into a cohabitation. While we do not know the reasons behind the choice, the wish to maintain a degree of independence and autonomy is likely to be an important consideration (Beaujouan, *et al.* 2009). Qualitative research of LAT relationships in later life in other countries, highlights that for the elderly important concerns appear to center around the practicalities of sharing living quarters with someone else and having to adjust to another person's habits, the wish to remain autonomous and to maintain or continue relationships with children and grandchildren (de Jong Gierveld 2002).

The single parents most closely resembled the older respondents in their decision to live apart and their future plans for coresiding. Again we do not know the reasons behind the decision, though it is possible that that they did not want to disrupt the home environment of their resident child(ren) by bringing a new partner into the home or by moving into another residence. Around half of the single parents did however envisage living with their partner in the next 3 years. At this time the resident children may have grown accustomed to the partner, or they may have grown up and left the household.

Young adults who had previously been defacto, were much more likely to intend to cohabit within the next 3 years, and to marry in the future. This group may also have felt the greatest normative pressure to consolidate their relationship by living in a common residence. For those under 25, the single parents, and the older previously married couples the pressure to move in with their partner is unlikely to have been felt as strongly. Indeed, these groups may even have felt a social pressure to *not live* with their partner.

The under 25s groups was more evenly divided in terms of whether a definite decision had been made to live apart. In this group the arrangement may be more a matter of circumstances and practical or financial constraints rather than choice. At this age, and with no previous experience of living with a partner, they may also not feel ready to take the step to move in with their partner.

CONCLUSION

Changing demographic trends mean that a substantial proportion of the population is now not living with a partner. For example, according to the 2006 Census, in Australia 4.6 million people aged 20 and over, or nearly a third of the adult population, were not living with a partner or spouse and can therefore be classified as unpartnered (ABS 2007). If a substantial percentage of this population is in fact in a relationship, then it becomes important to understand more about these partnerships as the experience of those who are truly single and those who have a non-resident partner are likely to be different in many respects. Several authors also predict that LAT relationships are going to become more common in the future (Levin 2004; Castro-Martin et al 2008). Reasons for this include the ones discussed earlier such as the continuation of demographic trends of increased life expectancy, increased rates of marital dissolution and the rise of cohabitations. Also important may be increased gender equality and the rise of dual-career couples, and cases where working women are less able to relocate for their partner's job (Levin 2004; Castro-Martin et al 2008).

It is important to not only understand more about these relationships in their own right, but at a broader level note, a greater understanding of why new relationship types such as LATs are formed can also provide some insight into reasons for changing relationship trends such as the postponement and avoidance of marriage (Casper, *et al.* 2008; Strohm, *et al.* 2008). However, more quantitative and qualitative research is needed to understand the nature of live-apart-together relationships all sections of the life-course. At the moment, our understanding of these relationships is limited by the cross-sectional nature of most quantitative studies. Longitudinal data on LAT relationships would allow us to study their duration and their eventual outcomes as separations or cohabitations.

For younger individuals who are known to be moving out of the parental home at increasingly later ages (de Vaus 2004) it is important to understand in more detail about the constraints they face in setting up a common residence with their partner, in particular relation to financial and housing factors. More qualitative research would also be of interest in order to understand young people's attitudes towards establishing a common residence with a partner, and the degree to which non-residential relationships among young people are related to individualistic values, risk aversion or fear of commitment as has been suggested (Heath & Cleaver 2003). Among older individuals, it is also important to understand more about their intimate relationships, because non-residential partners may be an important source of instrumental and emotional support, especially for the elderly who are living alone.

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