

Living apart together in Spain. Different meanings according to life stage: Choice or constraints?

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1. Introduction

In developed societies, the prevailing pattern of transition to adulthood can be portrayed as late, protracted and complex (Billari & Liefbroer 2010), and it is associated with a growing prevalence of 'singlehood'. Nonetheless, 'single' individuals are typically over-estimated as living-apart-together (LAT) relationships are often overlooked. This distinction is important as it may have relevant implications for partnership and fertility dynamics.

Studies on Northwestern European contexts have found that the share of individuals in LAT relationships appears to be around 10% of all adults age 18 and older (*e.g.* Haskey 2005; Ghazanfaraeeon Karlsson & Borell 2005; Regnier-Loilier *et al.* 2009; Liefbroer *et al.* 2015) (Lyssens-Danneboom & Mortelmans 2014; Pasteels *et al.* 2017). This share is between 6 and 9 % for Australia (Reimondos *et al.* 2011) and the US (Strohm *et al.* 2009). In the case of Spain, over half of Spanish women and nearly two-thirds of Spanish men in their prime reproductive ages (25-34) were not co-residing with a partner in 2019, according to the Continuous Household Survey. However, based on the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey (SFS), nearly one in four women and one in five men in the same age group (25-34) had an intimate partner that lived in a separate household, and thus, were in living-apart-together (LAT) relationships.

A debate in the literature concerns the meaning of LAT relationships. Specifically, are LAT relationships a transitory state prior to cohabiting or an alternative type of union (Connidis *et al.* 2017)? And is it dependent on the life stage? A previous study on Spain found LAT relationships among Spanish women in prime reproductive ages to be a transitory stage to cohabitation instead of an alternative union type (Castro-Martin *et al.* 2008). This is a common finding, particularly among young adults. For this sub-population, LAT relationships are typically the consequence of some type of constraint, such as lack of financial resources. This constraint is associated with why we observe most young adults in Spain who are not co-residing with their intimate partners to still reside in their parental home. On the other hand, LAT relationships at later ages are more often long-lasting and based on personal preference.

In this paper, we use the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey (SFS) to revisit the situation of LAT relationships in Spain since the preceding study (Castro-Martin *et al.* 2008) based on the 1999 Fertility Survey. The objectives of the paper are to analyze the current prevalence and socio-demographic profile of non-coresidential partnerships compared to two decades ago, to investigate whether LAT remains a transitory state among young women and men in present-day Spain, and further investigate the meaning of LAT relationships for later life stages.

2. Contribution

This study will be an update of nearly two decades, a period in which cohabitation is no longer a marginal family form (Dominguez-Folgueras & Castro-Martin 2013), non-marital childbearing has been rising, and leaving the parental home continues to be delayed (Esteve *et al.* 2020). During this time, Spain has not only experienced a remarkable increase in cohabitation but also in non-coresident unions. Recent studies have emphasized the postponement or lack of union formation as contributing to the unrealized fertility desires of childless individuals in Spain, particularly of men (Esteve *et al.* 2020, Esteve *et al.* 2021). Spain has already had very low fertility for

three decades; the increase in LAT relationships across the prime reproductive ages may reflect an increasing share of Spanish adults who face difficulties which hinder them to cohabit and start a family with a stable partner. Moreover, Spain is an interesting case study as it experiences one of the longest delays in many important adulthood transition events, such as leaving the parental home, cohabiting, finding stable employment, and childbearing. It also has a relatively high divorce rate, so it is important to explore the meaning of LAT relationships not only at younger ages but also at later life stages, for instance after separation or divorce.

3. Data and Methods

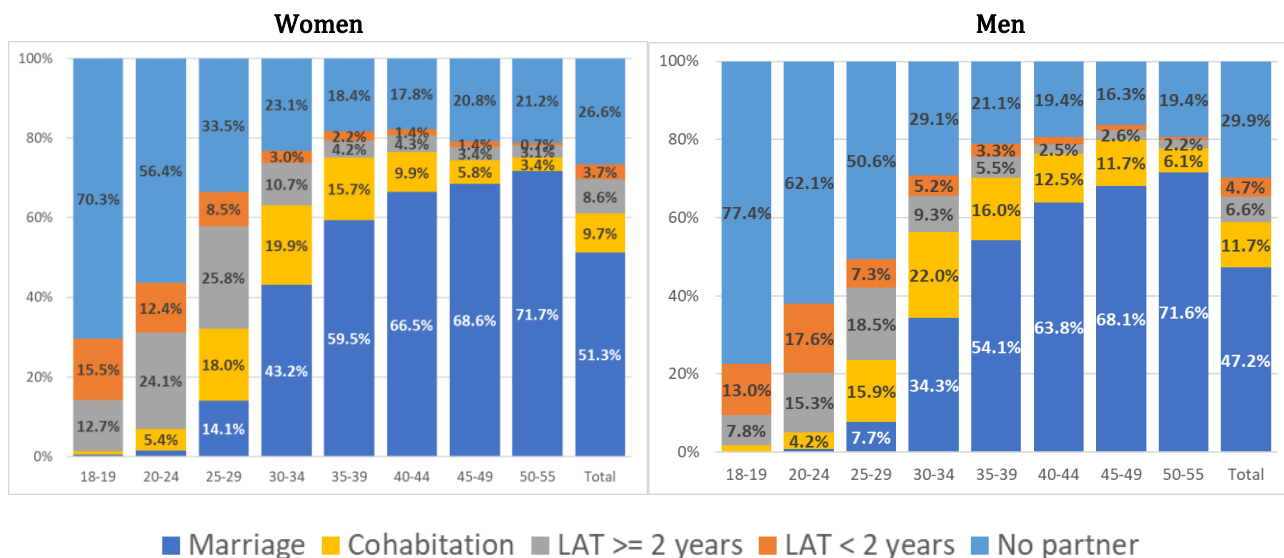
We use the 2018 SFS conducted by the National Statistics Institute (INE). The sample is nationally representative with 14,556 women and 3,686 men, aged 18-55. We exclude a small sample of married couples who are living apart (N=5 for men, N=125 for women). Our final sample is 14,431 women and 2,599 men. The survey provides marital and cohabitation histories, and whether the partners are coresiding or not among current partnerships.

Castro-Martin et al. (2008) differentiated ‘dating’ and stable LAT relationships based its duration (less than or more than two years). Other studies have relied on other measures, *e.g.* short-term intentions to cohabit or get married (Ayuso 2019), reasons for LAT (Duncan & Phillips 2010, Liebroer *et al.* 2015). We use the duration of the relationship (more than two years) to identify stable LAT relationships, but we also explore the short-term intentions to cohabit/marry and the reasons for LAT among non-coresidential couples.

Our main analysis consists in estimating the probability of being in a stable LAT relationship, relative to not having a stable partner, cohabiting, or being married, using multinomial logistic regressions by life stage, *i.e.* 18-34 years old and 35-55 years old, separately. Several covariates are included in the models: age group, urban residence, previous union history, previous childbearing history, and socio-economic characteristics (employment/contract type and educational attainment). Among those partnered, we also include partner’s socio-demographic characteristics.

4. Preliminary results

Fig. 1. Distribution of women and men aged 18-55 by partnership status



Source: 2018 Fertility Survey

Prevalence of LAT by age, comparing 1999 to 2018

The share of women in prime reproductive ages (25-34) with non-coresidential partners increased from nearly 18% to 23% between 1999 to 2018 (see Figure 1). Although the prevalence of LAT relationships at later life

stages (ages 35-55) remains low, there has also been an increase in the share of women with non-resident partners: from 2% in 1999 to 5% in 2018. Though data are unavailable for men in 1999 to estimate the increase, in 2018 the share of men with a non-coresidential partner was 20% among those aged 25-34 and 5% among those aged 35-55.

Main differences in the probability of being in LAT vs. other union types by life stage and gender (results from multinomial logistic analyses)

WOMEN

- At younger ages, being a student increases the likelihood to be partnerless or have a non-coresidential partner.
- Having a university education increases the likelihood of being in a LAT relationship as opposed to cohabitation or marriage, but only at younger ages.
- Having previously cohabited decreases the likelihood of LAT and increases the likelihood of being partnerless or cohabitation among young adults.
- Having previously cohabited at older ages increases the chance of LAT relative to cohabitation or marriage.
- In later life, having children with a former partner is associated with an increased probability of being in a LAT relationship as opposed to being married.
- Older women with partners who are inactive at the time of survey have a higher probability of being in a LAT relationship rather than a cohabiting one.
- Regardless of life stage, being out of the labor force is associated with a higher likelihood of being partnerless, cohabiting or married over stable LAT.
- Practicing religion increases the likelihood of being married or partnerless over LAT for both life stages.

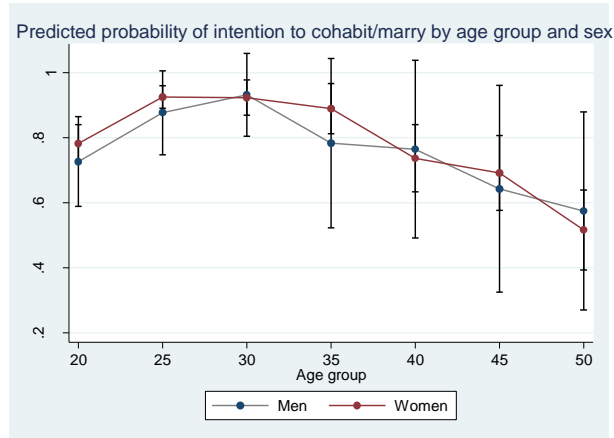
MEN

- At younger ages, being a student increases the likelihood to be partnerless rather than in a stable LAT relationship.
- The lowest level of educational attainment is associated with an increased probability of being married over being in non-coresidential relationships at younger ages.
- In later life, having previously cohabited is associated with a higher likelihood of being in a LAT relationship rather than in a cohabitation or marriage. Having a partner who has previously cohabited is also associated with a higher likelihood of living apart but only relative to marriage, not cohabitation.
- For both life stages, unemployment increases the risk of being in a LAT relationship relative to cohabitation or marriage.
- Having a university education increases the likelihood of being in a LAT relationship as opposed to marriage, for both life stages.
- When both partners in the couple are Spanish-born, there is an increased likelihood of living apart relative to cohabitation or marriage for both life stages.

Intentions to cohabit or marry among individuals in LAT relationships

Intentions among LAT individuals to cohabit or marry are very similar among men and women in every age group (Figure 2). Here, we define 'transitory LAT' as having short-term intentions to either cohabit or marry within the next three years. We observe an inverted-U pattern in the probability of intending to cohabit or marry among individuals in non-coresidential relationships by age group, with the probabilities peaking between the ages 25-34. This pattern appears stronger for women than for men.

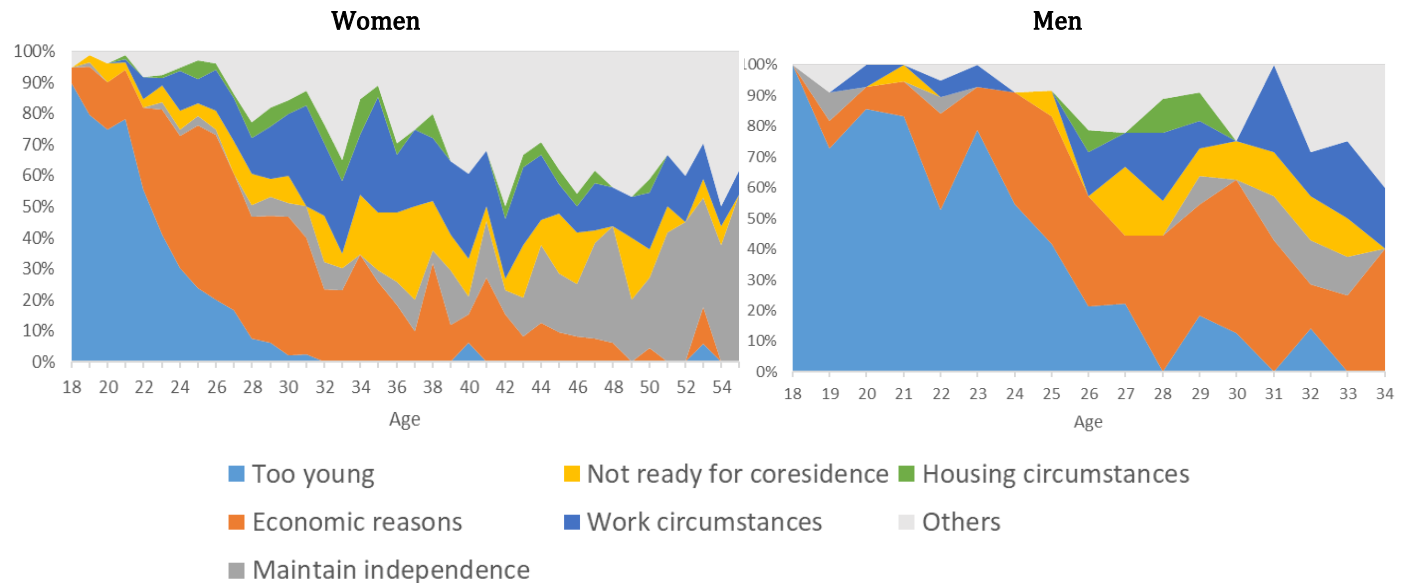
Fig. 2 Predicted probability of intention to cohabit/marry by age group and gender among individuals in non-coresidential unions



Source: 2018 Fertility Survey; Notes: N for women=1784, for men=292

Reported reasons for living apart

Fig. 3 Reported reasons why respondents in non-coresidential couples live apart by age



Source: 2018 Fertility Survey; Notes: Total N (ages 18-55) for women=1784, for men=292. N (ages 18-34) for men=209.

Being ‘too young’ was the primary reason cited by Spanish women in their early 20s as to why they live apart from their intimate partners. From their mid-20s, however, economic reasons were the most cited. Work circumstances also gain prominence among women after age 30. At later ages, the most cited reasons for living apart instead of cohabiting include not being ready for coresidence and desiring to maintain one’s independence. Figure 3 illustrates living apart as a result of constraints for women during early life stages, replaced by a preference to maintain independence later on.

On the other hand, the most common reason for living apart cited by men in their early 20s is also being ‘too young’. From their mid-20s to mid-30s, the most frequently cited reason is economic circumstances. Due to small sample size, we don’t include men over age 35 in Figure 3; however, the top two most cited reasons are to maintain independence and due to work circumstances, in that order. These results are similar to what we see for women.

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