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Research Article

Partnership trajectories of people in stable non-cohabiting relationships in France

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Partnership trajectories of people in stable non-cohabiting relationships in France

Arnaud Régnier-Loilier¹

Abstract

BACKGROUND

In France, nearly one in ten people are in a stable non-cohabiting partnership. Many studies have pointed out the diversity of the phenomenon.

OBJECTIVE

However, cross-sectional data does not distinguish between temporary, transitory, or more lasting situations. In order to contribute to a better understanding of living apart relationships, we follow changes in the partnership situation of people in stable non-coresidential intimate relationships and identify which characteristics correspond to which partnership trajectories: still living apart, moved in together, or relationship ended.

METHODS

The three waves of the French Generations and Gender Survey are used. After describing the state of the non-coresidential relationships after three and six years, we apply multinomial logistic regression modelling to characterize the various trajectories.

RESULTS

After three years, 22% of people in a stable non-coresidential relationship are still with the same partner, and after six years, 12%. The longitudinal data reveals two main situations among the youngest respondents: non-cohabitation as a stage leading ultimately to moving in together and as an experiment in intimate relationships that were considered to be stable but did not last. At the other end of the age range, non-cohabitation is more a form of coupledness in its own right, expected to last.

CONCLUSIONS

Our results highlight the wide diversity of the meaning of ‘non-coresidential partnership,’ depending to a large extent on the moment in the life course at which it takes place and on the relationship history. Overall, in France, non-cohabiting

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relationships appear to be more often a prelude and not an alternative to marriage or cohabitation, especially during the first stages of the life course.

CONTRIBUTION

For the first time, longitudinal data is used to study non-coresidential relationships and the partnership trajectories of people in this situation. This paper contributes to the debate on the signification of non-coresidential relationships as captured in a demographic survey.

1. Introduction

Although ‘living apart together’ (LAT) is not completely new (a famous French example was Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre), in the past it was probably not widespread, and its extent has only recently begun to be measured quantitatively. Previously, demographic surveys only distinguished between married couples, unmarried couples, and single people, and the fact that not all single people are alone slipped through the statistical net. Available data now shows that a significant number of single people are in a relationship. In many countries, nearly one adult in ten is in a stable intimate relationship with someone living elsewhere. This is true for France, Germany, Russia (Liefbroer, Poortman, and Seltzer 2015), Italy (Régnier-Loilier and Vignoli 2014), Canada (Turcotte 2013), Britain (Haskey 2005), and the United States (Strohm et al. 2009). Thus, in these countries, among persons living without a partner, one in four is not emotionally alone. But most quantitative and qualitative studies show that living apart covers a range of situations, from younger people for whom it is more a stage on the way to moving in together to older people who have already lived in a couple and see it as a more sustainable form of relationship.

At present, research on this subject provides a cross-sectional description of the phenomenon. We can describe non-coresidential relationships and identify the characteristics of people in such relationships. However, we do not know whether this is a new sustainable form of union, a new stage in the process of forming a cohabiting couple, or an experiment in intimate relationships. The large proportion of recent non-coresidential relationships in France could mean that the phenomenon is increasingly common. However, no change in the overall prevalence of the phenomenon has been observed since the mid-1990s (Régnier-Loilier, Beaujouan, and Villeneuve-Gokalp 2009). This high concentration of recent non-coresidential relationships thus indicates that non-coresidential partnership is a temporary situation for many people, which leads to moving in together or to separation.

However, for some couples, the partners' residing in separate homes is a long-term arrangement.

The main goal of this article is to contribute to a better understanding of the non-coresidential situations that are recorded in demographic surveys, based on the French case. For the first time, a survey – the Generations and Gender Survey – provides longitudinal data on the topic. It is now possible to monitor the partnership progress of people in a stable intimate relationship and to identify which situations or characteristics correspond to which partnership trajectories. First, we examine the proportion of non-coresidential relationships that end, lead to a move into a shared dwelling, or remain non-cohabiting three and six years later. Second, we seek to identify the characteristics of individuals and their life courses that lead to a particular relationship outcome.

Examining the significance of this phenomenon by following individuals in stable intimate relationship allows us trace the development of 'living apart together' and the issues it raises. If non-cohabitation were to become established as a sustainable form of coupledom, this might have effects on fertility (for younger people), insofar as the birth of a child is very rare outside of a cohabiting couple, and on housing needs and might require some form of legal recognition.

2. Context: Changes in conjugal behaviour in France and emergence of non-coresidential partnerships

The transformation of couples and families is one of the greatest social upheavals of recent decades. In France until the mid-1970s, marriage was the only legitimate way of institutionalising the family. But this “social taboo on intimate and sexual relations with no assumption of marriage and the prospect of a family” was soon widely challenged (Théry 1998: 40). The number of weddings fell from 400,000 in 1970 to 250,000 in the mid-1990s, as consensual unions increased. At first this was called “young cohabitation” (Roussel 1978) because it seemed mainly to involve young couples trying out living together before getting married, but the phenomenon actually lasted longer (Toulemon 1997). The creation of civil unions (PACS, *Pacte Civil de Solidarité*) in 1999 offered a new legal form of union for couples who did not wish to marry and for same-sex couples who previously had not been allowed to (same-sex couples were allowed to marry in 2013). From the early 1980s a further type of coupledom caught the attention of sociologists and demographers: 'living apart together' (LAT), or non-coresidential couples.

Various societal developments have been put forward to explain the emergence of this phenomenon. First, longer time spent in education and increasing difficulty

in finding a first job have tended to delay young people's residential independence from their parents (Milan and Peters 2003), particularly in countries like Spain and Italy where finding an independent dwelling is difficult (Castro-Martín, Domínguez-Folgueras, and Martín-García 2008; Régnier-Loilier and Vignoli 2014). In this context, relationships where each partner lives separately look more like the courting patterns of the past than some new form of coupledness, especially for young people living with their parents. This residential separation would appear to be a prelude rather than an alternative to marriage and cohabitation and therefore not a direct competitor (Villeneuve-Gokalp 1997; Castro-Martín Domínguez-Folgueras, and Martín-García 2008).

Second, the adoption of new values has opened up a range of partnership options, as institutions (church, marriage) lose their grip on private lives, autonomy and self-fulfilment outside the couple are more highly valued, and relations between men and women become more egalitarian. In more traditional European countries, such as Italy, where the division of gender roles remains strong, forming a couple while living apart would appear to be to young women's advantage. By freeing them from the household tasks that cohabitation involves, this form of relationship enables young women to continue to devote themselves to their education and career (Di Giulio 2007), so women see many advantages in non-cohabitation (Levin 2004). Yet research by Simon Duncan et al. (2013) in Britain shows that few women mention non-cohabitation as a way of escaping the traditional role division. More generally, Gilda Charrier and Marie-Laure Déroff consider that living apart together is based on a greater respect for each person's lifestyle, assumed to be different (Charrier and Déroff 2005), and enables a shared matrimonial life to be kept at a distance so as to be able to define oneself personally (Charrier 2008). From this point of view, living apart together is an illustration of the theory of the Second Demographic Transition (Lesthaeghe 1995). Liefbroer, Poortman, and Seltzer (2015) identify an east-west division that supports the idea that LAT couples are more common in the countries that have progressed furthest in the second demographic transition, where there are alternatives to marriage.

Third, specialisation in the labour market has boosted demand for highly qualified staff. Lower interchangeability of skills means greater employee mobility and this may lead to residential separation for existing couples. Also, with the feminisation of the labour market, women are now less willing to move with their spouses because they do not want to sacrifice their careers (Levin 2004).

Fourth, the development of faster and more affordable means of transport has made it easier to meet up with someone who lives elsewhere (Levin 2004). These distant relationships can be maintained thanks to modern communication technologies (mobile telephony, Skype, etc.). In addition, new types of contact via

online dating sites and social media (Bergström 2016) make it easier to geographically enlarge relationship networks.

Fifth, in demographic terms, partnership trajectories increasingly include separation and divorce. As a result there may be various reasons for not living together in a new intimate relationship. Parents may want to avoid imposing a stepparent on their children from a previous relationship (Levin and Trost 1999; Bawin-Legros and Gauthier 2001; Levin 2004; Duncan et al. 2013). Widows and widowers who want to maintain good relations with their children or grandchildren may have similar reasons for not living with a new partner (Caradec 1997). Alternatively, living apart may be adopted as a precaution, either at the start of a relationship in order to have time to test its solidity or, more deliberately, in order to avoid repeating past errors and running the risk of another divorce or separation after painful memories of the first (Levin 2004; Duncan et al. 2013).

These background points imply that situations vary widely and their significance varies substantially across the life course. Non-coresidential relationships may be seen as a stage in the process of forming a couple or as a new alternative to other forms of union (marriage, civil union, cohabitation) according to when they occur in the romantic and partnership trajectory.

3. Approach, hypotheses, and research questions

3.1 A longitudinal life course perspective

The heterogeneity of non-coresidential partnerships has been highlighted across different studies in which various typologies have been proposed, based either on quantitative data (Villeneuve-Gokalp 1997; Régnier-Loilier, Beaujouan, and Villeneuve-Gokalp 2009; Reimondos, Evans, and Gray 2011) or on a qualitative approach (Levin 2004; Roseneil 2006; Duncan and Philips 2010; Duncan et al. 2013; Stoilova et al. 2014).

Without presenting each of them in detail, most of these categorizations are based on the idea of a continuum between ‘dating LATs’ and ‘partner LATs.’ Duncan et al. (2013) have proposed a typology based on two axes, from ‘stage’ to ‘state’ and from ‘preference’ to ‘constraint.’ These various studies all highlight the plurality of situations that come under the LAT heading. They also suggest that LATs should be explored from a life course perspective. A recent comparative study in Europe using quantitative data concluded that the life course perspective sheds light on the dynamics that shape a LAT relationship, interpretable as either a stage

or a state during the life course (Pasteels, Lyssens-Danneboom, and Mortelmans 2015).

Based on cross-sectional data, responses about the length of LAT relationships imply that in many cases the situation is temporary. In 2005 in France, nearly half of the stable non-coresidential intimate relationships had begun less than two years previously (Régnier-Loilier, Beaujouan, and Villeneuve-Gokalp 2009). Similar results were found for Britain in 2011, when 43% of LATs were found to be less than two years old (Duncan et al. 2014), and for Australia (Reimondos, Evans, and Gray 2011). This high concentration of recently formed relationships indicates that they quickly either turn into cohabitation or end. And yet this cross-sectional snapshot cannot say which and thus understand its significance, i.e., as a new stage in forming a couple or as an initial partnership experiment. At the same time, more than one-third of non-coresidential relationships in the same countries had begun at least three years earlier, revealing the existence of lasting relationships.

At the end of a study of LAT in the United States, Charles Strohm et al. (2009) conclude that longitudinal data is needed to determine when LAT is a transitional arrangement and when it is a sustainable life style. Pasteels, Lyssens-Danneboom, and Mortelmans (2015) suggest that “longitudinal data providing information on the outcomes of LAT partnerships in terms of continuing the LAT relationship, making the transition to a cohabiting union or separating, would give more insight into the mechanisms of the partnership continuum.” Our research deals with precisely these issues. Since longitudinal data for France is now available, our objective is to see if dual residence is a long-term form of union or a transitional stage, and to identify the characteristics of the partners or relationships associated with the particular patterns. The results of earlier cross-sectional research have been used to formulate the research hypotheses.

3.2 Research issues and hypotheses

Age appears to be one of the most important determinants of a living apart together relationship, as it relates closely to the various life-cycle phases. Many younger people are studying or face economic difficulties as they enter the labour market (Milan and Peters 2003). In France, many students have no independent housing (many live with their parents or in student hostels) and, if they do, the rent is often paid by their parents (Régnier-Loilier 2011). People in non-coresidential relationships are thus strikingly younger than those in cohabiting couples. In Britain roughly half are aged 16–24, while that age group accounts for less than one-tenth of people in cohabiting couples (Haskey 2005). Findings are similar for France

(Régnier-Loilier, Beaujouan, and Villeneuve-Gokalp 2009) and Canada (Turcotte 2013).

At the start of their partnership careers, young people tend to have numerous short relationships (Rault and Régnier-Loilier 2015) and consider their first love experiences as a “contract ‘without any fuss’ about the nature of feelings experienced and the future of the relationship” (Giraud 2014), suggesting that some of these non-coresidential relationships are likely to end in separation. At the same time, the average age at entry into a cohabiting union (22.5 years for women and 24.5 for men born in the mid-1980s: Rault and Régnier-Loilier *ibid.*) suggests that for others, non-cohabitation when they were younger was a transitional period before moving in together.

H1: The over-representation of young people in non-coresidential relationships means that for them it is a transitional situation.

And yet it is not only the young that are in non-coresidential relationships but also older people, who may have already experienced marriage and parenthood. Increasingly, when a cohabiting union ends in separation, divorce, or widowhood, a new relationship is formed. But a painful separation, an unsatisfying cohabitation experience, obligations to children (Milan and Peters 2003; Levin 2004; Duncan et al. 2013), or children who do not accept the new partner (Bawin-Legros and Gauthier 2001) are all circumstances that may lead to partners choosing to live apart. Jenny de Jong Gierveld (2004) notes in her study of 55–89 year-olds that separated women and people who are widowed appear, for various reasons, to prefer a non-coresidential relationship to remarriage. Vincent Caradec (1997) mentions in particular attachment to one’s own home, furniture, and local area. Keeping one’s home is also a way of maintaining a close bond with children and grandchildren because it is a place where the family is used to gathering.

Unlike younger people, whose reasons for not living together are circumstantial and part of growing up, the reasons given by the widowed or separated are more firmly anchored and less fluid.

H2: Living apart is a more definitive partnership arrangement for the widowed and separated than for the young and is more likely to be still in place some years later. The presence of children from a previous union will make the arrangement even stronger.

The duty of care for others concerns not only children but also, in some cases, a dependent parent. Although this situation is mentioned in a number of studies (Milan and Peters 2003; Levin 2004; Duncan et al. 2013, for example) it seems to be fairly rare (Duncan et al. 2013). Intergenerational cohabitation is unusual these days, as both elderly parents and their children place greater value on autonomy and independence (Caradec 1997).

H3: Because of the 'distant closeness' that exists between generations, the partnership trajectory of people in a stable intimate relationship is independent of the existence of a disabled or dependent parent.

If one of the partners has a disability or health problem, moving in together might enable the partners to support each other. But moving in with someone who has health problems may be less attractive for both parties: the person with a disability may not wish to burden their partner with their difficulties, and the healthy partner may prefer not to be involved in the other person's daily health issues.

H4: When one of the partners has a disability, it is an obstacle to moving in together and tends to encourage living apart.

Material considerations may also intervene. Keeping two homes is costly and moving in together may result in substantial savings (Haskey and Lewis 2006).

H5: People with a higher economic capital have fewer budget constraints, and hence homeowners, who have neither mortgage repayments nor rent to pay, are less likely to move in together. Similarly, level of education, as a proxy for socioeconomic position, is an influence on the propensity to move in together.

Many studies report that non-cohabiting partners are more individualistic and place a higher value on autonomy and independence (Strohm et al. 2009). Seen in this way, a non-coresidential relationship might come close to the "pure relationship" envisaged by Anthony Giddens (1992). This is a relationship of sexual and emotional equality entered into for the satisfaction that each partner expects to gain from being closer to the other. This is similar to Liefbroer, Poortman, and Seltzer's (2015) comparative approach examining the link between European countries' progress in the second demographic transition and their forms of coupledness. More generally, Anne Milan and Alice Peters (2003) show that in Canada people in non-coresidential partnership have less traditional views,

believing less often than others that it is important for a relationship to last or that it is extremely important to have children.

Some of the reasons given for not living together may have an impact on the partnership trajectory. In particular, the desire to remain independent is likely to mean a lower likelihood of moving in together. The expressed intention of cohabiting in the coming years and the partner's views on the matter may also play an important role. No intention of cohabiting may reflect the desire to pursue the relationship as it is, living apart, or may reveal greater hesitation about wishing it to continue.

H6: A 'positive' intention to move in together indicates an increased likelihood of moving in together, whereas a 'negative' response indicates increased likelihood of either separating or remaining in a non-coresidential partnership.

Finally, it is important to consider the partners' level of education, not only as a proxy for socioeconomic position (H4) but also with regard to couple attitudes and preferences. While, in France, married and unmarried couples are nowadays indistinguishable in terms of educational level, unlike older generations (Prioux 2009), individuals who choose a civil union (PACS) are more educated than those who marry (Bailly and Rault 2013). They also differ in their values, being more distant from religion and less attached to gender roles in work and private life (Rault and Letrait 2010). They have also a more liberal attitude towards sexuality (Rault 2011). Thus, assuming that some non-coresidential relationships do represent a new form of union, we propose Hypothesis 7.

H7. Educational level has a net effect on partnership trajectory, with graduates having a higher propensity to engage in lasting non-cohabiting relationships.

4. Data, method, and terminology

4.1 Panel data from the Generations and Gender Survey

Our study is based on data from the *Étude des relations familiales et intergénérationnelles* (Érfi, Régnier-Loilier 2016), the French version of the international longitudinal Generations and Gender Survey (GGs, Vikat et al. 2007). In the first wave of Érfi-GGS in 2005, 10,079 persons aged 18–79 living in ordinary

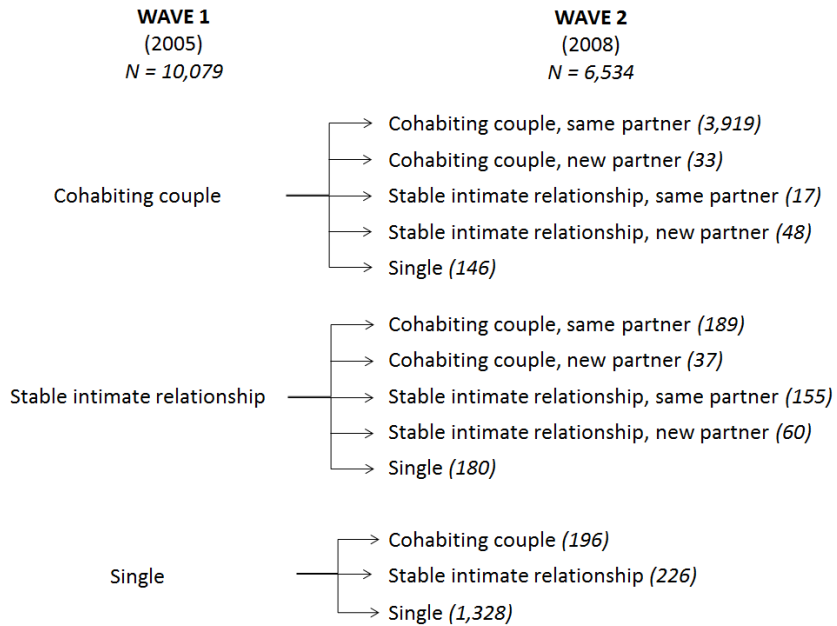
households were interviewed. The same people were questioned again three and six years later: 6,534 took part in the second wave (2008) and 5,781 in the third (2011).

Each wave's questionnaire started with a description of the residents in the dwelling. If no spouse was reported, the respondent was asked, "Do you currently have an intimate stable relationship with someone you're not living with? This may also be your spouse if he/she does not live together with you." If the answer was "Yes," questions were asked about the reasons for not living together, the respondent's intention to cohabit within the next three years, and the views of the partner. Certain characteristics of the partner were also recorded: date of birth, gender, nationality, whether employed, qualifications, functional limitations or disability. Details were also taken of the relationship itself: frequency of meeting, time taken to travel to the partner's home, length of relationship (for the exact wording of the questions, see UNECE 2005).

Note that the GGS questionnaire provides no information on how the non-coresidential relationship ended, whether by separation or death of the partner. This raises problems with older respondents, whose relationships more frequently end with the death of a partner.

Of the 10,079 respondents in 2005, 3,991 were not living as a couple, and of these, 1,033 had a stable intimate relationship with someone living in another dwelling. The same questions were asked in the following waves. For those still in a relationship (cohabiting or not) it was possible to identify whether they were still with the same partner. There are 13 possible partnership trajectories between waves 1 and 2, ignoring any changes in marital status (Figure 1). Between wave 1 and wave 3, including the situation recorded in wave 2, the number of possible trajectories becomes exponential, and therefore they are not detailed here.

Figure 1: Possible partnership trajectories between 2005 and 2008



Source: INED-INSEE, Érfi-GGS1-2 2005, 2008. Coverage: all respondents who took part in waves 1 and 2.
 Interpretation: 189 were in a stable intimate relationship in 2005 and still were, with the same partner, in 2008.

4.2 Method

The purpose of this study is to analyse the partnership trajectories of the people who were in a stable intimate relationship in wave 1 by observing their situations in 2008 and 2011. We do not provide a detailed description of the characteristics of those in a stable intimate relationship in wave 1 because this has already been widely published (Régnier-Loilier, Beaujouan, and Villeneuve-Gokalp 2009; Sánchez and Goldani 2012;² Régnier-Loilier and Vignoli 2014; Liefbroer, Poortman, and Seltzer 2015). Table A-1 (Appendix A) summarises the main characteristics used in this article and describes the respondents.

² Note that the authors of this paper did not use the weighting variable.

First, we describe the partnership trajectory of the people in a non-coresidential relationship three and six years later according to the five possible outcomes (Figure 1). Since age turned out to be a structural characteristic of non-cohabitation, the description is presented by age group. Five age groups were constructed to obtain a similar and sufficiently large number in each.

Second, we seek to characterise the people in each trajectory considering only the period 2005–2008, because the descriptive analysis revealed that only 68 people living apart in 2005 still had the same partner in 2011 – a sample too small for studying the period 2005–2011. Only three trajectories of non-coresidential relationships are examined between 2005 and 2008, to ensure a sufficient number of observations:

- respondent still living apart with the same partner ($n = 155$);
- respondent has moved in with their partner ($n = 189$);
- the non-coresidential relationship has ended ($n = 277$), and in 2008 the respondent is alone or with a new partner.

Our analysis uses multinomial logistic regressions.³ We model the probability of having moved in together and of ending the relationship, compared with still living apart (reference). To test our hypotheses, and in a life course perspective, various characteristics describing the respondent in wave 1 (2005) are included in the model: the respondent's age (to test H1), their legal marital status and past conjugal history and the presence in the household of any children from a previous union (H2), having or not having a father or mother with a disability or functional limitation⁴ (H3), one partner has a disability or functional limitation (H4), owning their home outright, paying a mortgage, or renting (H5), and the respondent's reason for not living together,⁵ their intention of moving in together in the next three years, and their partner's views on the matter (H6). The highest level of education of both partners is also taken into account, since it affects partnership behaviours, values, and expectations (H7).

³ It would have been instructive to run models of duration, but the data does not allow it. In the case of moving in together, the date is known but not the date of the end of the relationship.

⁴ The question was worded: "Is your mother/father limited in her/his ability to carry out normal everyday activities because of a physical or mental health problem or a disability?"

⁵ Only two reasons were singled out, one directly referring to the desire to remain independent ("I want to live apart to remain independent"), and the other to specific constraints ("we are constrained by circumstances, work etc.). Other reasons were not used, either because of sample size, or because they correlated with other variables (for example, "because of children" and "my partner has another family" are directly connected). Note that a quarter of the respondents chose none of the suggested reasons ("other"), revealing a failure in questionnaire design (incomplete list of possible answers).

Other control variables are included in the models. First, gender, since some research suggests that women and men may not have the same understanding of what constitutes a stable intimate relationship (see Haskey 2005 or Strohm et al. 2009, for example). Selection bias may therefore lead to variation in women's and men's partnership trajectories. Second, two characteristics of the relationship are included: length of relationship and frequency of meeting. Other variables were not included in the models because the survey sample was too small. This is particularly the case for the same-sex partners,⁶ even if it was established that same-sex couples had a higher propensity to not share the same dwelling (Rault 2017) because sexual orientation is less socially exposed when the partners do not live together (Steven and Murphy 1998).

Third, we descriptively tested the effect on the partnership trajectory of three changes in the respondent's situation between waves: emergence of a parent's health problem or disability, change in employment status, and leaving the parental home. These were not included in the models because in the case of attrition (taken into account in the model as a specific outcome of the relationship) the outcome of the situation remains unknown. Moreover, their collinearity with other variables, particularly age, was too strong.

4.3 Methodological challenge

The Érfi-GGS survey data raises two difficulties, one linked to the problem of identifying people in stable intimate non-cohabiting relationships in the first wave, and the second linked to sample attrition across waves.

4.3.1 Stock sampling and left truncation effect

Using data from the Érfi-GGS, we do not follow a cohort of persons in stable intimate relationships (that all began on a given date), but persons who reported being in one at the time of the first wave. Some of these relationships were already longstanding at that time, while others were more recent. Two effects can result in imprecision. First, with a cross-sectional approach the likelihood of identifying people in a stable relationship increases with the length of the relationship (stock sampling). The description of relationship outcomes by their characteristics may

⁶ There are only 18 cases in the database. Moreover, the variable is incorrectly entered in the French GGS due to coding errors during data collection (it is estimated that around half of same-sex couples are in fact heterosexual couples).

also be a source of bias.⁷ Moreover, the start of a non-cohabiting relationship is not as easy to define as the start of cohabitation (date of moving in together) or marriage (wedding day). For partners to consider their relationship as ‘stable and intimate’ it needs to have lasted for some time, and once it is considered as such the start date of the relationship that is given will not necessarily correspond to the exact moment when it became ‘stable and intimate’; it is not an easily identifiable event, but a process. Persons tend to give the date of a memorable event such as the first date, the first kiss, or the first sexual relations, i.e., of an event that may precede the moment when the relationship became ‘intimate and stable.’ For example, 16% of the people in stable relationships in 2011 (Érifi-GGS wave 3) who had reported being ‘alone’ in 2008 (wave 2) gave a relationship start date in 2011 that was before 2008.⁸ If cross-sectional data are used, this leads to an overestimation of the survival of stable intimate relationships (Appendix B), especially those that are recent, because some of the very recent relationships are invisible.

In the light of this double limitation, inherent to all studies on this topic, we need to define the purpose of our study. The aim is not to give an exact measure of the survival of non-cohabiting relationships, but to see, among persons who report being in such a relationship at a given time, what characteristics are associated with the various outcomes of their relationship, while controlling for the effects of the relationship length.

4.3.2 Attrition between the waves

The initial sample declined significantly from wave to wave (but similarly to other comparable surveys in France). The attrition rate was 35% between wave 1 and wave 2 and 43% between wave 1 and wave 3. The attrition was selective, since those who lost contact or refused to participate in subsequent waves had specific profiles (Régnier-Loilier and Guisse 2016). In particular, people living apart together displayed higher attrition than those living together as a couple (40% between 2005 and 2008). For the descriptive part of the study a specific longitudinal weight variable was applied to each wave that adjusted the structure of the 2008 and 2011 respondent populations to that of the 2005 French population as a whole.

⁷ Take the example of a sample of unemployed people in 2005. At the time of the survey, more long-term unemployed are identified than recent unemployed, who quickly find a new job and who have a specific profile (the young highly educated in particular). The description of the unemployed by their characteristics could be biased as a result.

⁸ The situation is similar to that of pregnant women. At a date T, some women say they are not pregnant when in fact they are but don’t know it yet. When they find out they are expecting a baby, the pregnancy start date they give will be the actual start date, and not the date when they discovered their condition.

Table A-1 (Appendix A) presents the characteristics of persons in a stable intimate relationship on the basis of the whole 2005 respondent sample (left-hand column), and then only those resurveyed in 2008, applying the longitudinal weight variable (right-hand column). The close similarity of the distributions obtained from the two samples shows that the longitudinal weight variable does indeed correct the distortion due to attrition, without affecting the characteristics related to our study.

However, in order to take account of possible attrition effects in the models, we included non-response to wave 2 in the multinomial regression as a possible outcome for a relationship. In this way attrition is included in the calculation of the propensity to follow one trajectory or another.

4.4 Terminology

Many studies addressing the issue of non-coresidential partnerships refer to the LAT acronym (living apart together) coined by a Dutch journalist, Michel Berkiel, in 1978 to describe the case of a stable couple in which each partner lives in their own home. Most sociological studies of LAT have been conducted from qualitative interviews and based on a specific and relatively precise definition. Irene Levin's study (2004) deals with couples where 1) the partners do not share the same dwelling; 2) each partner lives in their own home, and may share it with other people; 3) the partners define themselves as a couple and 4) believe that their family and friends perceive them as such. She adds that these may be heterosexual or homosexual couples.

Although this definition is referred to in most qualitative and quantitative research on the topic, the researchers seldom confine themselves to this restrictive perimeter. John Haskey and Jane Lewis (2006) observed that the 'regard themselves as a couple' condition was not met for many LAT people. Specifically in quantitative surveys, the concept is much less precise in its boundaries. Usually the LAT population is estimated by using a fairly, perhaps excessively, general question put to people not living with a spouse, such as, in the French Generations and Gender Survey, "Do you currently have a stable intimate relationship with someone you are not living with?"

The general nature of this type of question means that people of widely differing profiles are grouped in a single category. Catherine Villeneuve-Gokalp (1997) used quantitative data to show that in France people who had a regular partner but did not regularly live with them saw their relationship "much more as a 'stable intimate relationship' (84%) than as a 'conjugal relationship' (16%)" (p. 1067). Including or not including the 'feeling like a couple' criterion in Irene

Levin's proposed definition thus considerably affects the apparent prevalence of the phenomenon. Overwhelmed by the wide diversity of situations involved in the idea of a 'stable intimate relationship,' researchers have attempted to homogenise the LAT population by applying a number of restrictive criteria.

John Haskey (2005), for example, decided to remove from his count of LATs in the UK people who were living with their parents. This halves the prevalence of the phenomenon. Charles Strohm and his colleagues (2009) in the United States chose rather to restrict their research population to those aged 23 and over, because before that age too many people were still in education. Other researchers use restrictions based on the duration of the relationship. In research into the situation of young people in Spain, Teresa Castro-Martín Domínguez-Folgueras, and Martín-García (2008) restricted LAT to relationships that had lasted at least two years.

However, these restrictions do appear to be conceptually problematic. To illustrate the arbitrary nature of these criteria, imagine a study of marriage where anyone married for less than two years or aged under 23 is considered to be not married! A recent relationship may very well last over time in non-cohabiting mode, or lead to moving in together, or come to an end.

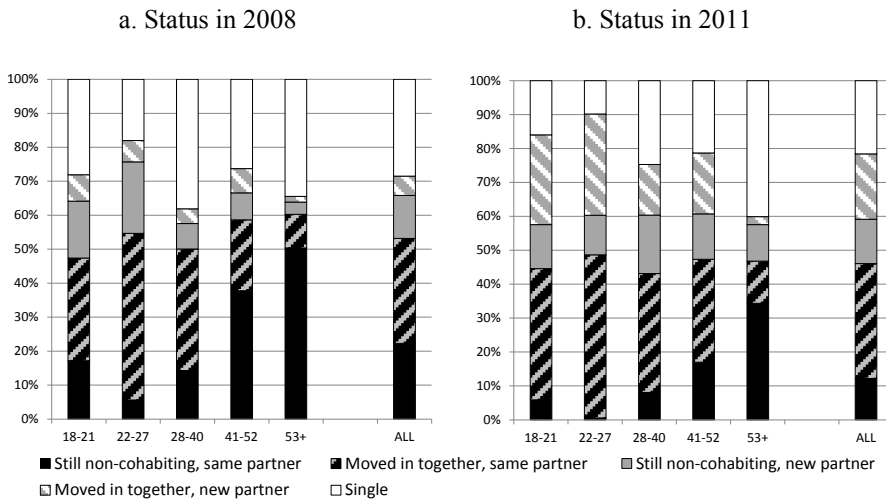
Accordingly, we propose to avoid using the acronym LAT in this article and prefer to speak of non-coresidential, non-cohabiting relationships, or living apart.

5. Results

5.1 Partnership trajectory of people in a stable intimate relationship after three and six years

Between waves 1 and 2 of the survey (2005–2008), 46% of non-cohabiting relationships had ended, and 53% had ended after six years (Figure 2). Where the relationship was still intact, four out of ten couples were still living apart after three years, and only one in four after six years. Ultimately, 22% of non-cohabiting respondents in wave 1 (2005) were still in a non-coresidential relationship with the same partner after three years, and only 12% after six years. By comparison, 94% of those in a cohabiting couple were still living together after three years and 88% after six. Living apart, therefore, does not last well, either in form (many people move in together) or in substance (even more people break up).

Figure 2: Partnership trajectory of persons in intimate couple relationship by age in 2005



Source: INED-INSEE, Éri-GGS1-2-3 2005, 2008, 2011. Coverage: persons in a stable, non-cohabiting intimate relationship in the first wave (2005), resurveyed in 2008 (2011). Interpretation (e.g., Status in 2008): 17% of those aged 18–21 in 2005 were still in a stable non-cohabiting intimate relationship with the same partner in 2008.

However, the partnership trajectory of non-cohabiting partners is closely related to age. Although, very broadly, the proportion of people still in a relationship with the same partner does not greatly vary by age, the form of the relationship does, and markedly. The proportion of relationships where the partners continue to live apart is higher for older respondents (6% for the 22–27 age group, up to 50% for ages 53–79), with the exception of the 18–21 age group, among whom a larger proportion are still living apart (17%) than in the 22–40 age group (Figure 2a). The same is true after six years, but in lower proportions (Figure 2b).

Altogether, after three and six years, moving in together was most frequent among 22–27-year-olds (roughly one non-cohabiting respondent in two), an age group that includes average age at first cohabitation. This age group also contains the highest proportion of new non-cohabiting relationships (21% after three years: Figure 2a) and of moving in with a new partner (30% after six years: Figure 2b). Conversely, moving in together is particularly rare among the 53–79 age group: fewer than 10% after three years and 12% after six.

These few descriptive points clearly reveal two distinct patterns of living apart at either end of the age range. Among the youngest, a non-cohabiting relationship

is both a transition to cohabitation or a conjugal experiment often leading to separation and a new relationship, whereas among the oldest it is a much more sustainable form of coupledom.

5.2 Partnership trajectories from 2005 to 2008 and partner characteristics

5.2.1 Descriptive analysis

Our study focuses here on the 2005–2008 period. Table 1 presents in descriptive form the partnership trajectories of people living apart according to various characteristics. Those who started a new relationship with a new partner between 2005 and 2008, living together or apart, but whose relationship had ended, and those who were single in 2008 are combined (“Relationship ended”) to simplify the results.

The following characteristics had little significant effect on partnership trajectory: gender, living with children from a previous union, having a parent with a disability, and frequency of partners meeting (non-significant chi-square, $p > 0.05$).

However, partnership background has a major impact on the development of a non-coresidential relationship. The widowed are the group with the largest proportion still living apart with the same partner (58%) and with the smallest proportion that has moved in together (4%). The divorced are also often still in a non-cohabiting relationship (40%) and only 20% had moved in together with their partner after three years. Conversely, only one-sixth of never-married respondents were still living apart. The number of non-cohabiting married people is very small ($n=19$), so we cannot draw any specific conclusions from it.

The length of the relationship, related to partnership background (Figure A-1, Appendix A) also produces distinct partnership trajectories. The propensity to still be living apart with the same partner is greater the longer the relationship has existed. Over half the shorter relationships (less than 2 years) have ended after three years, and the relationships already 2 or 3 years old in 2005 most often lead to moving in together (40%).

The intention to live together within the next three years is a fairly strong predictor of behaviour, particularly where it is ‘negative’: only 4% of those who did not intend to cohabit (response “No”) moved in together. A ‘positive’ intention to cohabit, on the other hand, was realised in fewer than half of all cases (47% moved in together). The views of the respondent’s partner on living together have similar effects. The likelihood of separation is greater for those who do not plan to cohabit:

the relationship ended within three years for 60% of those who did not want to move in together (response “No”), compared with 37% of those who did intend to (response “Yes”).

Since the prospect of cohabitation is linked to the reasons for not living together (Duncan et al. 2014), it is hardly surprising that the development of the non-coresidential relationships is linked to them too. Those who described their situation as a choice made in order to keep their independence are proportionally more often still not coresident (41%), while living apart as a result of job constraints more often led to moving in together (41%). These may be people who were waiting for a transfer or looking for a new job near their partner’s home.

Table 1: Partnership trajectory between 2005 and 2008 by personal characteristics (%)

		Still non-cohabiting	Moved in together	Relationship ended
Gender ns	Male	18.5	29.0	52.6
	Female	25.7	32.6	41.8
Age ***	18–21	17.2	30.2	52.6
	22–27	5.6	49.1	45.3
	28–40	14.3	35.8	49.9
	41–52	37.8	20.9	41.4
	53 and over	50.4	9.9	39.8
Marital history ***	Unmarried, never in couple	16.7	34.2	49.1
	Unmarried, has been in couple	16.4	33.5	50.1
	Divorced	39.9	20.5	39.6
	<i>Married (1)</i>	30.9	43.7	25.4
Children previous union in household ns	Widowed	57.8	3.8	38.4
	None	21.7	30.9	47.5
Health problems for one or both partners ***	1 or more	28.7	30.7	40.6
	None	19.7	33.0	47.4
Parent limitations ns	Disability or limitations	41.4	15.5	43.1
	None	22.5	31.7	45.8
Housing tenure ***	Disability or limitations	20.8	26.0	53.2
	Owner	28.4	26.6	45.0
	Buying	16.9	34.1	49.0
	Tenant	22.0	31.3	46.8

Table 1: (Continued)

		Still non-cohabiting	Moved in together	Relationship ended
Length of relationship ***	Less than 2 years	14.9	30.6	54.5
	2 or 3 years	17.1	39.4	43.5
	4 or 5 years	30.0	31.3	38.7
	6 years or more	40.6	21.0	38.5
Frequency of meeting ns	Nearly every day	23.1	39.7	37.2
	At least once / week	30.8	23.3	45.9
	Several times / week	21.0	26.6	52.4
	Several times / month	18.8	30.0	51.2
	Several times / year, never	12.4	45.5	42.2
Intention to cohabit within 3 years ***	Yes	15.9	47.0	37.1
	Probably	18.9	29.8	51.3
	Probably not	39.0	8.5	52.6
	No	35.7	4.3	60.0
Partner's opinion about cohabiting ***	Yes	18.2	41.0	40.9
	Hesitant	21.2	22.6	56.2
	No	36.7	7.4	55.9
Reasons for not cohabiting ***	Choice, to keep independence	41.0	12.4	46.7
	Occupational constraints	18.0	41.4	40.6
	Other	19.7	31.8	48.5
Man's educational level *	Lower secondary	23.0	23.9	53.1
	Upper secondary	18.9	35.1	46.0
	2 years' higher education	25.3	36.7	38.0
	3+ years higher education	23.0	36.5	40.6
	Don't know	24.9	19.8	55.3
Woman's educational level **	Lower secondary	22.5	29.1	48.5
	Upper secondary	24.4	28.1	47.5
	2 years' higher education	20.9	31.4	47.7
	3+ years higher education	19.0	41.7	39.3
	Don't know (1)	29.2	3.7	67.0
All		22.3	30.9	46.8

Source: INED-INSEE, Érfi-GGS1-2-3 2005, 2008. Coverage: persons in a stable, non-cohabiting intimate relationship in the first wave (2005), resurveyed in 2008. Key: ns nonsignificant chi-square $p > 0.05$; *** significant $p > 0.01$; ** $p > 0.05$. Interpretation (e.g., "Three years later"): 6% of those aged 22-27 were still in a non-coresidential relationship in 2008. N.B. (1) $n < 20$; absolute figures are given in the Appendix, Table A-1.

Outright homeowners are proportionally more likely still to be in a non-cohabiting relationship (28% compared with 17% of buyers) but the difference is small.

If at least one of the partners has a disability or functional limitation, they are much more likely to still live apart (41% compared with 20% without such problems) than to move in together (15% compared with 33%).

Finally, the relationship ended more often among the less highly educated (especially men), while graduates had most often moved in together (especially women). But overall, the propensity to remain in a non-cohabiting relationship appears relatively independent of the level of education.

5.2.2 Multivariate analysis

These initial findings tend to confirm most of our hypotheses. However, the various characteristics are not independent. Each age corresponds to particular stages in a life cycle. For example, the age-related differences are not necessarily due to age as such but rather to current or past situations. In order to tease out the net effect of the various characteristics on partnership trajectories, we modelled the probability of having moved in together, of the relationship having ended, and of the person not taking part in wave 2, rather than of still living apart with the same partner (the reference). Model 1 includes the intention to cohabit in the next three years and the partner's views on the matter. However, since intentions to move in together and reasons for living apart are linked, Model 2 does not include this variable. The objective of this second model is to highlight the link between the reasons most frequently cited by people to explain why they do not live together and their relationship trajectory. Table 2 provides logit coefficients. The estimated probability (%) determined from Table 2's 'reference case' is reported in Table A-3 (Appendix C).

Ceteris paribus, a net age effect remains. Compared with the 28–40 age group, the 22–27-year-olds are more likely to have moved in together, confirming the descriptive findings (Figure 2a). Conversely, older people are less likely to have moved in or to have ended their relationship than to have remained in a non-coresidential relationship. The age effect is very robust to control by covariates correlated with age. Thus age is not only a confounding variable but has a specific effect, even if other covariates also have a major impact.

In particular, there is a net partnership history effect. The partnership trajectories of non-cohabiting widowed persons are much more stable than those of single persons having lived as a couple, with a much lower propensity to have

moved in together, and, to a lesser extent, to have ended their relationship. Married persons, whose number in the survey is small, are significantly less likely to have ended their relationship. The same holds for the divorced, but to a lesser extent.⁹ However, the presence in the household of children from a previous union has no significant effect here.

Nor is the partnership trajectory significantly related to having a parent with functional limitation or disability (thus validating H3); on the contrary, this situation increases the risk of the relationship having ended. However, this finding is difficult to interpret because we do not know the reason for the end of the relationship (separation or death of partner). The frequency of having a parent with a disability or functional limitation increases with age, as does the risk of a partner dying. On the other hand, moving in together is less likely where functional limitations directly affect one of the partners, without increasing the risk of separation. Hypothesis H4 is thus confirmed.

It is similar for hypothesis H6. No effect of reasons for not living together emerges from Model 1 because the intention to cohabit is included, which has a major effect on the outcome of the relationship. The intention to cohabit and reasons for not living together are correlated. 70% of those who said in 2005 that they were living apart to maintain their independence did not intend to move in together, compared to 8% of those living apart for occupational reasons and 21% of those living apart for some other reason. Model 1 shows that those who do not intend to live together are much less likely to have moved in together than still to be living apart. However, the certainty of this intention does not affect the end of the relationship, *ceteris paribus*, unlike what was observed in the descriptive analysis. Model 2, which does not include the respondent's intention or their partner's views, confirms a lower propensity to have moved in together rather than to continue to live apart among those who explained not living together by their desire to maintain their independence. On the other hand, occupational constraints led more often to living together three years later: The constraints were temporary, and in the end the partners managed to move in together.

Although outright homeowners are proportionately more likely to have remained in a non-cohabiting partnership from 2005 to 2008 (Table 1), the model

⁹ Model 1 groups together many different age groups, which may be differently affected by life course events. Especially, we can hypothesise that the effect of partnership history differs between older and younger people (for instance, being widowed might only reduce the probability of moving in together for older people). However, we do not have enough married or widowed persons below age 40 to split our sample into two age groups or to introduce interactions with age to test this hypothesis. Therefore, to reduce collinearity with age, we replicated the same model for the 40–79 age group only. The effect of partnership history – and of the other covariates – on this subsample remains the same (finding not shown here).

reveals no net effect, holding other characteristics constant. This is due in particular to the inclusion of the age variable.¹⁰ Therefore, our findings do not validate hypothesis H5.

The hypothesis of a specific effect of the partners' educational level on the outcome of their relationship (H7) is not validated. But since the level of education is relatively imprecise for students (the level may change in the future), we ran the same model while excluding them from the population (results not shown here). The most highly educated men have a slightly lower propensity to have moved in with their partner rather than be still in a non-cohabiting relationship, but no significant effect appears for women.¹¹

Finally, the correlation between relationship characteristics and partnership trajectory almost completely disappears in the modelling process. This is particularly the case for the length of the relationship. Only relationships of less than 2 years are slightly more likely to have ended between 2005 and 2008. This greater fragility of very recent relationships is consistent with the idea that some of the non-cohabiting relationships we capture from quantitative surveys correspond to a period marked by strong uncertainty about the relationship outcome. It is in the early days of the relationship that partners get to know one another and find out whether the relationship satisfies them enough to progress to cohabitation (Giraud 2014). The small number of relationships with a particularly low frequency of meeting (a few times a year) end more often in separation. The low frequency of meeting may reveal a relationship in which neither partner is strongly committed, or one that is too complicated to continue.

¹⁰ The same model was repeated without the age variable. The effect of the other variables remains the same but owning one's home outright significantly reduces the chances of having moved in together (finding not shown here).

¹¹ Note that the effect of the other variables included in the model does not change when students are not taken into account.

Table 2: Factors relating to partnership trajectory from 2005 to 2008 of persons in stable non-cohabiting relationship (multinomial regression; *logit* coefficient β and significance threshold)

	Model 1			Model 2		
	Attrition	Moved in together	Relationship ended	Attrition	Moved in together	Relationship ended
Constant	0.69	1.90 **	1.39 **	0.44	1.12 *	1.35 **
Gender (ref. = Male)						
Female	-0.14	0.08	-0.22	-0.15	0.03	-0.23
Age (ref. = 28-40 years)						
18-21	-0.19	-0.35	-0.28	-0.21	0.48	-0.26
22-27	1.22 **	0.92 *	0.63	1.23 **	0.96 *	0.63
41-52	-0.54	-1.31 *	-1.14 ***	-0.61 *	1.60 ***	-1.11 ***
53 and over	-1.13 ***	-1.27 **	-1.18 ***	-1.22 ***	1.87 ***	-1.14 ***
Marital history (ref. = Unmarried, has been in couple)						
Unmarried, never in couple	0.06	-0.52	-0.46	0.07	0.46	-0.47
Divorced	-0.33	-0.46	-0.68 **	-0.31	0.28	-0.68 **
Married	0.72	0.37	-1.31 *	0.73	0.50	-1.25 *
Widowed	-0.48	-1.84 **	-0.92 **	-0.49	1.77 **	-0.89 *
Number of children from previous union in household (ref. = None)						
One or more	0.20	0.22	0.12	0.21	0.19	0.12
Disability or functional limitations of one partner (ref. = No)						
Yes	-0.64 **	-0.73 *	-0.29	-0.64 **	0.62 *	-0.26

Table 2: (Continued)

	Model 1			Model 2		
	Attrition	Moved in together	Relationship ended	Attrition	Moved in together	Relationship ended
<i>Disability or functional limitations of respondent's parent(s)</i> (ref. = No)						
Yes	0.13	0.29	0.61 **	0.12	0.28	0.59 **
<i>Housing tenure</i> (ref. =Owner)						
Buying	-0.14	0.58	0.11	-0.16	0.48	0.13
Tenant	0.54 **	0.01	-0.03	0.55 **	0.02	-0.01
<i>Length of relationship</i> (ref. = 2 or 3 years)						
Less than 2 years	0.21	0.02	0.48 *	0.22	-0.01	0.47 *
4 or 5 years	-0.02	-0.39	-0.12	-0.06	-0.48	-0.12
6 years or more	-0.12	-0.16	0.00	-0.16	-0.27	0.00
<i>Frequency of meeting</i> (ref. = Several times a week)						
Every day	0.13	0.39	-0.10	0.15	0.62 **	-0.11
At least once/week	-0.39	-0.39	-0.45	-0.41	-0.45	-0.42
Several times a month	0.21	-0.28	0.16	0.18	-0.38	0.20
Several times a year, never	1.23 *	0.69	1.25 *	1.20 *	0.75	1.23 *
<i>Intention to cohabit within three years</i> (ref. = Yes)						
Probably	-0.22	-0.68 **	-0.10			
Probably not	-0.25	-1.51 ***	-0.20			
No	-0.39	-1.84 ***	0.20			

Table 2: (Continued)

	Model 1			Model 2		
	Attrition	Moved in together	Relationship ended	Attrition	Moved in together	Relationship ended
<i>Partner's opinion about cohabiting (ref. = Yes)</i>						
Hesitant, doesn't know	0.00	-0.33	0.11			
No	-0.14	-0.69 *	0.08			
<i>Reasons for not cohabiting (ref. = Other)</i>						
Choice, to keep independence	0.25	-0.52	0.32	0.16	-0.90 **	0.28
Occupational constraints	0.04	0.15	0.10	0.14	0.52 *	0.10
<i>Man's educational level (ref. = Upper secondary)</i>						
Lower secondary	0.43	-0.26	0.26	0.50	-0.10	0.27
2 years' higher education	-0.15	-0.27	0.42	-0.07	-0.08	0.38
3+ years higher education	-0.19	-0.50	0.14	-0.13	-0.35	0.12
Don't know	0.38	0.05	0.08	0.42	-0.01	0.16
<i>Woman's educational level (ref. = Upper secondary)</i>						
Lower secondary	0.61 **	0.14	0.29	0.62 **	0.16	0.30
2 years' higher education	0.73 *	0.48	0.55	0.76 *	0.52	0.61
3+ years higher education	0.50	0.60	0.15	0.52	0.67 *	0.16
Don't know	1.01 *	-0.91	0.47	0.95	-1.08	0.48
<i>Numbers (ref. "Still non-cohabiting" = 155)</i>						
	413	189	276	413	189	276

Source: INED-INSEE, Éri-GGS1-2-3 2005, 2008, 2011. Coverage: persons in a stable, non-cohabiting intimate relationship in the first wave (2005). Key: ns nonsignificant chi-square $p > 0.10$; *** significant $p > 0.01$; ** $p > 0.05$; * $p > 0.10$. Interpretation (e.g., "Moved in together"): a statistically significant positive (negative) value of β indicates a factor that increases (reduces) the probability of having moved in together versus still living apart. The higher the value of β , the greater the impact of the factor.

5.2.3 Changes in personal situation and partnership trajectory

To complete this study of the partnership trajectories of non-coresidential relationships, it may be instructive to compare their outcomes with changes in the respondents' personal situations during the same period. Unfortunately, changes in situation are few in number given the small size of the sample of non-cohabitants resurveyed in 2008. Furthermore, it is impossible to establish a chronology of events, since some of them are not dated. Despite these limitations, we compared the respondent's partnership trajectory with their situation in terms of place of residence (living with parents or not), occupation, and parents' health (Table 3).

First, leaving the parental home and moving in with the partner go together. 56% of those who moved out of parental home between 2005 and 2008 also moved in with their partner during the same period. Only 7% were still living apart in 2008. This is not easy to interpret, however. It was not necessarily moving out of the parental home that led to moving in together, and it may be that moving in with the partner led to moving out of the parental home. Among those still living with their parents, a high proportion of relationships were already ended after three years (73%). But here, too, interpretation is not easy. These relationships may be experiments with intimacy, but on the other hand, it may also be the end of a relationship that leads the young people concerned to stay on in the parental home. These respondents are also on average slightly older (22.9) than those who left the parental home (21.7).

Table 3: Changes in respondent's personal situation between 2005 and 2008 and partnership trajectory (%)

		Three years later			
		Still non-cohabiting	Moved in together	Relationship ended	N
Cohabitation with parents ***	Not living with parents in 2005	27.0	29.6	43.2	491
	Moved out between 2005 and 2008	7.0	55.7	37.3	76
	Still living with parents in 2008	26.6	0.0	73.4	54
Employment changes ***	Retired in 2005 and 2008	52.5	4.2	43.3	90
	Working in 2005 and 2008	19.2	34.7	46.1	218
	Student, short-term contract or unemployed in 2005 and 2008	16.8	23.7	59.5	103
	Student, short-term contract or unemployed in 2005, working in 2008	17.6	46.0	36.4	97
	Other changes	18.5	35.5	46.0	112
Changes to parents' health ns	No disability for either parent in 2005 or 2008	22.6	31.9	45.5	472
	Parents with disability in 2005 and 2008	20.7	31.2	48.2	57
	No parents with disability in 2008	20.9	20.9	58.2	51
	Parent acquired disability between 2005 and 2008	21.9	27.7	50.4	40
ALL		22.3	30.9	46.8	620

Source: INED-INSEE, Érfi-GGS1-2-3 2005, 2008, 2011. Coverage: persons in a stable, non-cohabiting intimate relationship in the first wave (2005), resurveyed in 2008.

Interpretation: 27% of persons not living with their parents either in 2005 or 2008 are still living apart together with the same partner in 2008. Key: ns nonsignificant chi-square $p > 0.10$; *** significant $p > 0.01$

Changes in employment status seem to correlate little with partnership trajectory. Except for those retired in both waves, where living apart is particularly stable and moving in together extremely rare (in line with the findings for the oldest respondents), any differences are slight. Moving in together is, however, more frequent (46%) among those whose employment has stabilised (students, the unemployed, or those on short-term contracts in wave 1 who are on permanent contracts in wave 2). It is reasonable to suppose that a better job position, often with more income, makes it easier to find housing and move in with their partner.

The lack of any correlation between parents' health and the outcome of living apart together is confirmed once more.

6. Conclusion and discussion

Media discourse on ‘living apart together’ focuses on chosen relationships where both partners wish to keep their independence in the long term. LAT is presented as a partnership form that favours individual personal development and ensures a more egalitarian relationship. And yet this pattern is far from representing the majority among those in a stable non-coresidential intimate relationship.

6.1 Longitudinal data throws new light on non-coresidential partnerships

Although living apart relationships are frequently observed in cross-sectional surveys (nearly one in ten of the 18–79 age group in France in 2005), the longitudinal data shows that only 22% of the individuals concerned are in the same situation with the same partner three years later, and only 12% six years later.¹²

Although the length of non-cohabiting relationships observed in cross-sectional surveys – generally short or very short – is sufficient to perceive their temporary nature, it does not explain why this is so. This situation could equally be a transitional stage before living together, the start of a long-term non-coresidential relationship, or an experiment leading to separation. Longitudinal data teases out various patterns of non-cohabitation and its significance at various ages.

In the younger age groups, two profiles emerge. One comprises young people for whom a non-cohabiting relationship is a stage on the way to moving in together. It enables both partners to see if they get on well together and to overcome any material obstacles. Students rarely move in together and a stable job is often a prerequisite for cohabitation. The longitudinal data reveals a link between the end of education or irregular employment and the conversion of a non-coresidential partnership into living together in the same home. For the second group, living apart looks more like an experiment that one or other of the partners did not wish to pursue. Because living apart involves less commitment, it allows either partner to easily end the relationship if they find it is no longer satisfactory. Because for very young people this type of relationship is accepted by society (the younger they are the lower the social pressure to live together), it is easy for them to end one or more non-cohabiting relationships on a trial-and-error basis.

At the other end of the age range, intimate non-coresidential relationships look more like a sustainable form of coupledness: after the age of 50, fewer partners move

¹² These proportions are liable to be overestimated because of the stock sampling effect and left-truncation. Some of the most recent and potentially most fragile relationships – the period when the two partners are discovering each other – are not observed during the first wave (cf. 4.3.1).

in together and relationships last longer. Vincent Caradec's research (1997) clearly describes the reasons why these partners keep their own homes. In addition, there is one less reason for living together: they are no longer concerned about fertility, whereas the 'reproductive norm' requires younger people to be living together before starting a family.

Between these contrasting ages, two further situations emerge. First, although the presence of children from a previous union does not appear to affect the outcome of non-coresidential relationships, the divorced do seem to live apart longer than the single and to have a lower propensity to move in together. Second, where one of the partners has a disability or is dependent, living apart is a more lasting situation and less often leads to moving in together. Qualitative investigation of these situations would be useful in order to identify the precise reasons.

Conversely, our data reveals hardly any non-coresidential relationships resulting from a duty of care towards either children from a previous union or a dependent parent. Similarly, while marital behaviour varies by level of education, no significant effect appears here. This finding nuances some of the results obtained from qualitative study.

6.2 'LAT' versus 'stable non-coresidential intimate relationship'

It should be kept in mind that the 'stable non-cohabiting relationships' recorded in the GGS cover a much broader range of situations than the LAT concept often considered in qualitative research. Our results emphasize that for most individuals a non-cohabiting relationship is most often a step leading to moving in together (i.e., a transitory situation) or a 'romantic experience' that quickly ends in separation rather than a real 'non-cohabiting couple.' From this perspective, it seems inappropriate to speak of LAT (which is generally understood as a specific form of coupledom that is chosen and permanent) or to seek to estimate the prevalence of LAT using data on 'stable non-cohabiting relationships.' This confusion, present in most demographic papers, is hardly ever discussed. However, it produces a 'magnifying effect' and leads to overestimation of the prevalence of a phenomenon, 'real LAT,' that applies to a minority of relationships.

This discussion suggests that it is necessary to think more about what we want to collect in demographic surveys. Do we wish to study a new form of union, its frequency and its organization, or just describe a romantic situation at a given moment? In France, recent surveys now ask people more directly about their 'couple' situation using a simple question: "Are you currently in a couple? Yes, with someone who lives in the household / Yes, with someone who lives in another

dwelling / No.” Only 3% of persons aged 18–79 report being in a “couple with someone who lives elsewhere,” versus 9% who report being in a “stable non-cohabiting relationship.”

6.3 Limitations and further research

This first study based on longitudinal data has some limitations. As we have seen, a cross-sectional approach fails to capture some of the most recent relationships, because of both a stock sampling effect – at the time of the survey, the likelihood of encountering someone in a particular situation increases with the duration of that situation – and the problem of determining the starting-point of the relationship – people do not report being in a stable, intimate relationship at the outset of this relationship and when they do give a start date it is often earlier than the actual moment when they considered themselves to be in such a situation. There is no real way to get around this limitation, which is common to all surveys that address this topic from a cross-sectional perspective. A retrospective approach to relationship history, including a description of non-cohabiting relationships (which is not the case in the GGS), would simply shift the problem elsewhere: respondents would be more likely to omit the shortest broken relationships, even if they were seen as ‘stable and intimate’ when they were still ongoing. With hindsight and in the light of subsequent romantic experiences, the respondent may conclude that the terminated relationship was neither really intimate nor stable. Moreover, the precise timing of non-cohabiting relationship sequences is difficult: feelings of love often develop gradually and are difficult to pin down in time, especially if the relationship ended a long time ago.

Moreover, it is regrettable that neither the date nor the circumstances (separation or death) of the end of a non-coresidential relationship are known. Since the relationship ended less than three years previously (the interval between waves), it is reasonable to assume that most respondents are able to give a date for the event. This would make it possible to undertake more granular analysis using duration models. How the relationship ended is also necessary information. With younger couples, a reasonable assumption is that it ended in separation. With older ones, it may be the death of the partner, which does not have the same significance for the future of the non-coresidential relationship.

It is also a pity that we have no information about the partners’ relationship histories. A couple comprises two individuals, each with their own biography, and it is very possible that partnership situations and trajectories are linked to various patterns. A few simple indicators probably known to the respondent would enrich

the analysis. For example, has the partner already lived in a couple? What is the partner's marital status (single, divorced, widowed)? Does the partner have children from a previous union, and, if so, do they live with the partner?

Despite these limitations, for the first time the GGS survey enables us to follow people in non-cohabiting relationships over time and to study the outcomes of these relationships. As a follow-up to this study and to the comparative analysis by Aart Liefbroer, Poortman, and Seltzer (2015), it would be instructive to study the development of non-cohabiting relationships in various contexts. Although the data from the three GGS waves is not yet available, the data from the first two waves has been released for some countries. Since there appears to be an east-west divide with respect to non-cohabiting relationships, we may posit that partnership trajectories will also vary by country.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Supplementary data

Table A-1: Characteristics of people in stable non-cohabiting relationships

		Whole sample in 2005		Respondents resurveyed in 2008	
		%	N	%	N
Gender	Male	48.0	422	47.0	246
	Female	52.0	611	53.0	375
Age	18–21	26.7	189	29.1	115
	22–27	25.6	220	22.7	113
	28–40	17.8	214	18.5	138
	41–52	13.8	192	12.6	109
	53 and over	16.0	218	17.2	146
Marital history	Unmarried, never in couple	56.0	472	56.0	269
	Unmarried, has been in couple	21.5	259	22.0	166
	Divorced	14.1	191	15.2	124
	Married	4.3	50	2.5	19
	Widowed	4.2	61	4.4	43
Children previous union in household	None	90.4	899	90.9	539
	1 or more	9.6	134	9.1	82
Health problems for one or both partners	None	89.4	907	88.0	536
	Disability or limitations	10.6	126	12.0	85
Parents with limitations	None	86.0	863	86.0	513
	Disability or limitations	14.0	170	14.0	108
Housing tenure	Owner	21.8	199	22.0	136
	Buying	18.4	168	21.5	127
	Tenant	59.8	666	56.5	358
Length of relationship	Less than 2 years	44.6	421	44.6	252
	2 or 3 years	25.1	242	23.9	146
	4 or 5 years	10.9	112	11.3	64
	6 years or more	19.4	258	20.2	159

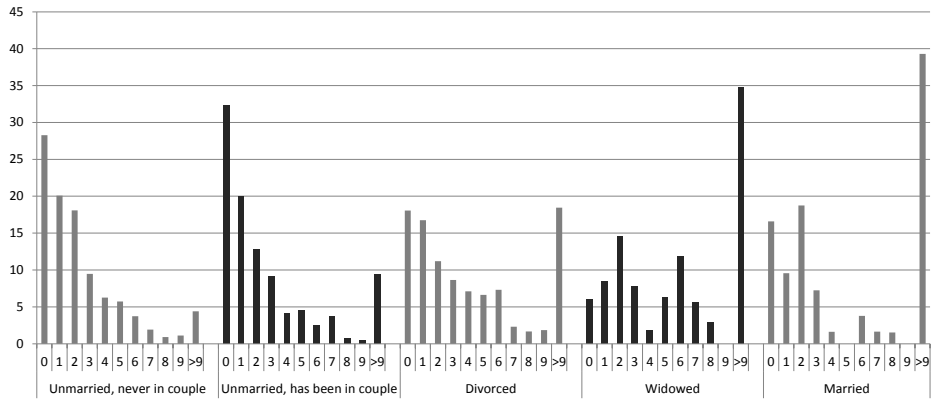
Table A-1: (Continued)

		Whole sample in 2005		Respondents resurveyed in 2008	
		%	N	%	N
Frequency of meeting	Nearly every day	27.9	259	27.8	162
	At least once / week	12.2	143	13.0	91
	Several times / week	43.3	458	45.3	277
	Several times / month	11.5	120	10.0	68
	Several times / year, never	5.2	53	3.9	23
Intention to cohabit within 3 years	Yes	37.6	376	41.0	227
	Probably	35.4	334	33.7	196
	Probably pas	13.3	146	11.7	85
	No	13.8	177	13.7	113
Partner's opinion about cohabiting	Yes	59.3	581	60.7	347
	Hesitant	20.9	232	20.5	135
	No	19.8	220	18.8	139
Reasons for not cohabiting	Choice, to keep independence	16.0	206	13.4	116
	Occupational constraints	17.3	200	17.5	120
	Other	66.8	627	69.0	385
Man's educational level	Lower secondary	38.4	413	38.4	231
	Upper secondary	25.0	213	25.0	138
	2 years higher education	12.0	130	12.0	81
	3+ years higher education	21.9	231	21.9	143
	<i>Don't know</i>	2.7	46	2.7	28
Woman's educational level	Lower secondary	36.9	388	36.9	226
	Upper secondary	26.1	242	26.1	155
	2 years higher education	10.7	125	10.7	74
	3+ years higher education	22.2	241	22.2	148
	<i>Don't know</i>	4.1	37	4.1	18
All		100.0	1,033	100.0	621

Source: INED-INSEE, Érfi-GGS1-2, 2005-2008. Coverage: 'Whole sample in 2005,' persons in a stable, non-cohabiting intimate relationship in the first wave (2005); 'Respondents resurveyed in 2008,' persons in a stable, intimate relationship in the first wave and resurveyed in 2008.

Interpretation: (e.g., 'whole sample in 2005'): 27% of persons in a stable, non-cohabiting relationship are aged 18–21.

Figure A-1: Time since entry into a stable non-cohabiting relationship, in 2005, by marital status (%)



Source: INED-INSEE, Érfi-GGS1, 2005

Coverage: persons in a stable, non-cohabiting intimate relationship in the first wave (2005).

Interpretation: 28% of non-cohabiting relationships of persons who are "unmarried, never in a couple" began less than one year previously.

Appendix B: Survival of stable non-cohabiting intimate relationships: Comparison of estimates based on cross-sectional data (2005) and longitudinal data (2005-2008)

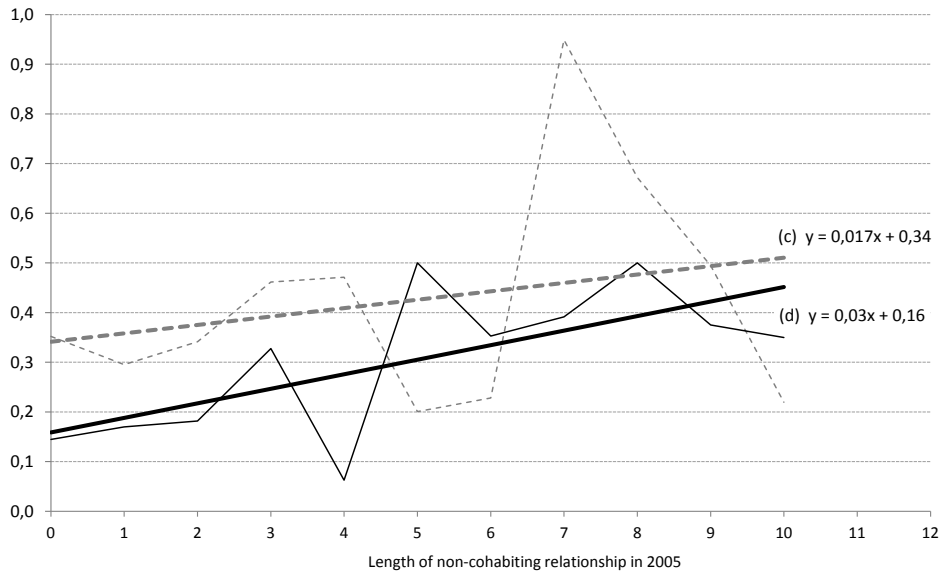
Given that the length of the relationship was recorded in the first wave (2005), the survival of the relationship can be estimated year by year, and hence at three years (interval between waves). The table below gives the detailed calculations. Survival at three years, based on longitudinal data (columns c and d of the table) is represented in Figure A-2. Estimated survival based on 2005 cross-sectional data is greater than that observed with longitudinal data. The stock sampling effect and the imprecise dating of the start of the stable intimate relationship suggest that under a cross-sectional approach the survival of non-cohabiting relationships is overestimated.

Table A-2: Survival of stable intimate non-cohabiting relationship by time since start of relationship

Length of non-cohabiting relationship in wave 1 (2005) x	Cross-sectional approach			Longitudinal Approach
	(a) Estimated number of individuals in non-cohabiting relationship in 2005 (weighted data)	(b) Survival S_x	(c) Survival after 3 years $(S_{x+3})/S_x$	(d) Proportion of non-cohabiting relationships still intact in wave 2 (2008) $(S_{x+3})/S_x$
0	1,001,014	1.00	0.35	0.14
1	708,380	0.71	0.30	0.17
2	609,156	0.61	0.34	0.18
3	352,546	0.35	0.46	0.33
4	209,129	0.21	0.47	0.06
5	207,961	0.21	0.20	0.50
6	162,682	0.16	0.23	0.35
7	98,514	0.10	0.95	0.39
8	41,758	0.04	0.67	0.50
9	37,108	0.04	0.49	0.38
10	93,517	0.09	0.22	0.35
11	28,055	0.03		0.60
12	18,354	0.02		0.50
13	20,552	0.02		0.43

Source: INED-INSEE, Érfi-GGS1, 2005 (columns a to c); INED-INSEE, Érfi-GGS1, 2005-2008 (column d)
 Coverage: persons in a stable, non-cohabiting intimate relationship in the first wave (2005).

Figure A-2: Probability of survival at three years of stable intimate non-cohabiting relationships by time since start of relationship



Source: INED-INSEE, Érfi-GGS1, 2005-2008.

Coverage: persons in a non-cohabiting stable intimate relationship in wave 1 (2005).

Key: (c) estimated survival based on 2005 cross-sectional data; (d) observed survival based on longitudinal data 2005-2008.

Appendix C: Estimated probability

Table A-3: Estimated probability (%) of partnership trajectories from 2005 to 2008 of persons in stable non-cohabiting relationship (determined from the *logit* coefficients: Table 2)

	Model 1				Model 2			
	Attrition	Moved in together	Relationship ended	Still living apart	Attrition	Moved in together	Relationship ended	Still living apart
Constant	15	49	29	7	16	32	41	11
Gender (ref. = Male)								
Female	13	55	24	8	16	37	36	12
Age (ref. = 28-40 years)								
18-21	16	45	29	10	18	27	42	14
22-27	21	53	23	3	25	37	33	5
41-52	22	34	24	19	23	17	34	27
53 and over	14	40	26	21	15	15	39	32
Marital history (ref. = Unmarried, has been in couple)								
Unmarried, never in couple	22	41	26	10	24	27	35	14
Divorced	16	49	23	11	18	36	30	16
Married	26	61	7	6	31	49	11	10
Widowed	25	22	32	20	24	13	39	25
Number of children from previous union in household (ref. = None)								
One or more	15	51	28	6	18	34	40	9
Disability or functional limitations of one partner (ref. = No)								
Yes	13	39	36	12	13	25	46	16
Disability or functional limitations of respondent's parent(s) (ref. = No)								
Yes	12	46	38	5	13	29	51	7
Housing tenure (ref. = Owner)								
Buying	9	63	23	5	11	42	38	9
Tenant	23	45	26	7	25	29	36	9

Table A-3: (Continued)

	Model 1			Model 2			
	Attrition	Moved in together	Relationship ended	Attrition	Moved in together	Relationship ended	Still living apart
<i>Length of relationship (ref. = 2 or 3 years)</i>							
Less than 2 years	15	41	39	16	25	51	8
4 or 5 years	18	41	32	19	24	44	13
6 years or more	14	46	32	16	27	45	12
<i>Frequency of meeting (ref. = Several times a week)</i>							
Every day	13	59	21	15	48	29	8
At least once/week	14	48	27	16	30	39	15
Several times a month	19	38	36	19	22	49	10
Several times a year, never	19	38	40	20	25	51	4
<i>Intention to cohabit within three years (ref. = Yes)</i>							
Probably	17	35	38				
Probably not	21	20	45				
No	16	13	59				
<i>Partner's opinion about cohabiting (ref. = Yes)</i>							
Hesitant, doesn't know	16	39	36				
No	17	32	42				
<i>Reasons for not cohabiting (ref. =Other)</i>							
Choice, to keep independence	24	38	28	26	18	42	14
Occupational constraints	14	51	29	15	42	35	8

Table A-3: (Continued)

	Model 1			Model 2			
	Attrition	Moved in together	Relationship ended	Attrition	Moved in together	Relationship ended	Still living apart
Man's educational level (ref. = Upper secondary)							
Lower secondary	21	36	36	23	24	44	9
2 years higher education	16	49	25	18	36	33	13
3+ years higher education	16	40	34	17	27	43	13
Don't know	19	46	28	22	28	42	9
Woman's educational level (ref. = Upper secondary)							
Lower secondary	21	43	30	23	28	41	8
2 years higher education	18	47	30	20	31	43	6
3+ years higher education	16	58	22	19	42	32	7
Don't know	35	17	41	33	8	51	8
Numbers	413	189	276	413	189	276	155

Source: INED-INSEE, Éri-GGS1-2-3 2005, 2008, 2011. Coverage: persons in a stable, non-cohabiting intimate relationship in first wave (2005). Interpretation (e.g., Model 1, 'Still living apart'): an individual with all reference characteristics (man, 28-40, unmarried, etc.), has a probability of 7% of still living apart 3 years after. This probability reaches 21% for an individual with the same characteristics but aged 53 and over. The difference between these two proportions measures the specific effect of age.