

Neither single, nor in a couple. A study of living apart together in France

Éva BEAUJOUAN, Arnaud REGNIER-LOILIER, Catherine VILLENEUVE-GOKALP¹

Introduction

In France, many different forms of cohabitation have emerged over the past forty years. The most widespread change came after 1968 with the increase in the number of couples living together outside marriage, firstly as a premarital “trial period”, and then as a stable form of union. In the early 1990s, nine out of ten couples began their union without marrying and ten years later half of all first births were out of wedlock. In 1999, a civil union was created, the “*Pacte civil de solidarité*” (civil solidarity pact, known as Pacs) in order to establish an institutional framework for cohabiting couples who do not wish to marry, or for homosexual ones who cannot. The success of Pacs continues to grow and in 2006 nearly 77,000 such unions were celebrated². In the past twenty years, sociologists and demographers have been observing trends in another type of union: non-cohabiting partnerships. This may include individuals who have not entered into any contractual obligation as well as married couples.

In 1986, the *Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques* (INED) and the *Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques* (INSEE) carried out a joint survey of these couples in France. The “Family Situations Survey” revealed that 2% of respondents who were married to their partner and 7% of those who were unmarried but reported being “in a couple” had “retained their separate households”. Similarly as far as separate living arrangements and intimate relationships go, one quarter of the men and one third of the women who described themselves as “living alone”, reported being in a “stable intimate relationship” (Leridon and Villeneuve-Gokalp, 1988). Eight years on, one of the aims of the “Family Situation and Employment Survey” (ESFE, 1994) carried out by INED and INSEE on 20-50 year-olds, was to observe possible developments in these “non co-residential” couples. This new research concluded that the proportion of couples concerned was very stable. Couples frequently had separate homes at the start of a union but rarely for long because separation was often perceived as a necessity rather than a choice, as much by respondents who considered themselves to be “in a couple” as those who described themselves as “alone” (Villeneuve-Gokalp, 1997). Moreover, in the case of young adults, their desire for independence rarely withstood the demands of a pregnancy and the financial burden of two homes. With few exceptions, non-cohabitation only lasted in the case of couples who met after a separation or widowhood, and who had children. Couples who formed after the age of 50 tended to enter this type of union for reasons specific to their age. They wished to remain faithful to their past (if the first partner had died), keep their inheritance — especially their homes — and not risk upsetting their relationship with their adult children (Caradec, 1996).

¹ Institut National d'Études Démographiques (Ined – Paris – France) ; Contacts : eva.beaujouan@ined.fr / arnaud.regnier-loilier@ined.fr / gokalp@ined.fr

² Source: French Ministry of Justice – SDSED (statistics, studies and documentation department)

Studies on living apart together (LAT) carried out in other Western countries have had the same objectives: to evaluate the number of these relationships, their development and the reasons behind them. They are based on surveys that ask respondents if they have a non-cohabiting partner but without asking them if they considered themselves to be in a “couple”. Consequently these studies faced a problem of definition. Most of the surveys contained a series of questions that combined objective and subjective criteria: the existence of a shared residence, the duration of the relationship, whether the separation was by choice or necessity, etc. The main drawback to this method was that it required far too many questions. Levin and Trost (1999) defined a LAT relationship as one in which “a couple does not share a household, each of the two individuals lives in his or her own household in which other persons also might live; they define themselves as a couple and they perceive that their close surroundings also do so”. Haskey (2005) suggested describing a LAT relationship in a few sentences (according to criteria that have yet to be defined) and then asking respondents to situate their own circumstances on a cohabitation scale. As far as the voluntary or involuntary nature of the relationship is concerned, the results of the foreign surveys converge with those of the French ones. Voluntary separation increases with age (Haskey, 2005), and the motivations and plans of couples who have come together after the age of 50 are very specific to their age. In the Netherlands for instance, one couple in three does not cohabit if the relationship started after the age of 50 (de Jong Gierveld, 2004).

Although we were able to ascertain both the scarcity and stability of LAT relationships in 1994, we wanted to find out what the situation was a decade later. Prolonged further education the spread of individualistic values (de Singly, 2000; Kaufmann, 1999), a greater number of break-ups of second unions, as well as the abundance of media reports about couples in LAT relationships, may have contributed to the rise of a more independent form of relationship, even though childlessness has tended to decrease through the generations and women generally do not want a child outside of a well-established couple relationship (Régnier-Loilier, 2007).

INED’s 2005 survey on family and intergenerational relationships (“*French Generations and Gender Survey*”, French GGS) also looked at “stable intimate relationships”. This formulation was the same as in the two previous French surveys, but unlike these GGS did not allow respondents to state whether they were a non-cohabiting or a “semi-cohabiting” couple. When partners were absent for fewer than three days a week or were absent for work or study-related reasons, they would be placed in the household composition table (HCT)³. Conversely, spouses living in separate residences for more than half of the week without being obliged to for occupational reasons, would not be placed in the HCT and respondents were deemed to be living alone. However, in this case respondents could state whether or not they were in a “stable intimate relationship”.

The impossibility of distinguishing non-cohabiting couples from stable intimate relationships in GGS prevented us from observing any possible changes to the definition of a couple that was

³ Respondents could note regular 2-3 day absences of their own in the questionnaire but not those of their partners. Moreover these absences could correspond to weekends spent by the couple in a second home. Among the individuals living with a partner, 4.2% declared that they were regularly absent, but nearly half had “additional accommodation”, which could be a second home, rented or borrowed accommodation, or merely a place used by the respondent.

independent of cohabitation⁴. The ESFE survey demonstrated that in the absence of a shared household, the main difference between a non-cohabiting couple and a stable intimate relationship lay in the intentions: six non-cohabiting couples out of ten intended to live together within two years, compared with 45% of those in a stable intimate relationship. The former also saw each other every day unlike the latter (41% vs. 25%). On the other hand, there was only a 10% difference in the distribution of voluntary and involuntary non-cohabitation between the non-cohabiting couples and the stable intimate relationships (Villeneuve-Gokalp, 1997). The way the relationship is defined depends very much on the age of the partners and their past. Those who had already cohabited, as well as those who were older and had already experienced love relationships were more likely to view themselves as a couple than younger individuals, and their relationship had lasted longer. From respondents' life event histories we established that 42% who reported in intimate relationships were aged between 21 and 24 and two-thirds of these were aged between 21 and 30. Conversely, only 40% of respondents in non-cohabiting couples were aged under 30.

A comparison of all LAT relationships in the ESFE and EFFI surveys was possible if we merged the non-cohabiting couples with the stable intimate relationships in ESFE⁵. Taken together, seven respondents in ten lived with a partner, two in ten were "alone" and one in ten had a long-lasting relationship with a non-cohabiting partner. The differences observed in the two surveys were not significant. The proportion of persons in a LAT relationship did not increase, moreover the duration of the relationships was identical, as was the frequency with which the partners saw each other and their perception of whether the separation was a matter of choice or imposition.

In a first stage, we shall use the GGS study to ascertain the main characteristics of the individuals aged from 18 to 79 in a stable LAT relationship (gender, age, work situation as well as marital and reproductive history) and endeavour to find out why they live apart. Next, using multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) we will establish a number of standard profiles for these respondents in order to study the characteristics of their relationships and their future plans.

Box 1. The French Generations and Gender Survey

The "Generations and Gender Survey" has been conducted in around twenty industrialized countries. It was carried out in France by INED and INSEE in the autumn of 2005 on a sample of 10,079 men and women aged between 18 and 79 (also known as "*Étude des relations familiales et intergénérationnelles*", ERFI). Respondents were asked about their working activity, their health, their family situation, their children, their parents. The same people will be interviewed again in 2008.

⁴ This will change in the second part of the GGS survey scheduled for autumn 2008 on the same respondents as in 2005, because specific questions have been included in the French version of the Generation and Gender Survey (GGS) questionnaire.

⁵ To make the ESFE and GGS surveys more comparable, we regrouped individuals in ESFE who reported living as a couple but whose partner was not listed in the HCT, with individuals living alone but who had a "stable intimate relationship". When both partners appeared in the HCT we placed them with the cohabiting couples. In this group of individuals in a stable non-cohabiting relationship, 85% were in intimate relationships and 15% "in a couple".

In both studies, individuals in a relationship for less than three months were grouped with those who were "alone". This decision was taken according to the definition of "cohabitation" for couples, which was living together for minimum of three months. Even discarding relationships less than three months old, some were still too short to be considered "stable" but the partners were doubtless anticipating that they would endure.

In this article, we focus on the answers to specific questions: "Are you currently having an intimate (couple) relationship with someone you're not living with ?", "Are you living apart because you and/or your partner want to or because circumstances prevent you from living together ?", "Why do you / does your partner want to live apart ?" or "Under which circumstances ?" and "Do you intend to start living with your partner during the next 3 years ?"

I. Neither single, not a couple. Who and why?

Why do two individuals who consider themselves in a stable love relationship decide not to live together? To understand the reasons we need to know the demographic and occupational characteristics of individuals in LAT unions. A broad variety of people live in such relationships, including young adults waiting to acquire financial independence and leave their parents, women living with their children, or widows living alone. The range of situations enables us to interpret respondents' motives.

1. *Who are they?*

The percentage of 18-79 year-olds living in a stable non-cohabiting relationship is the same for men and for women: 8%. In France, just over 3.8 million individuals are concerned.

a. **More frequently young adults**

While the average age of the first union has risen slightly over the generations from an average 23.3 years for men and 22.2 years for women in the 1946-50 cohorts, to 25.2 years and 23 years respectively for the 1976-80 cohorts, nevertheless young adults do not leave the family home any later than they did thirty years ago (Régnier-Loilier, 2006) and when they do leave, they are less likely to do so for the purpose of moving in with a partner (Régnier-Loilier and Vivas, 2008). Thus there is an "in-between" period during which young adults experiment with their love lives until they meet the first person with whom they want to form a couple — before possibly moving in with him or her. Living apart together is first and foremost a young persons' relationship, concerning 26% of men and 31% of women aged between 18 and 24, and 15% and 12% respectively of those aged between 25 and 29, compared with 8% of the total population of 18-79 year olds. Individual living apart are therefore younger (the men are aged 34 on average, and the women 35) than people living as a cohabiting couple (49 and 47 years) or living alone (38 and 49 years) (Table 1).

Because mostly young people live in LAT relationships, these appear mainly as provisional arrangements during a turning point in their lives between studies and work, living at home and living on their own, financial dependence and independence. Many young adults still live with their parents (37% of men and women), which is rare in the case of cohabiting couples (in less than 1% of cases couples live with one or the other partner's parents; more frequently the reverse is true: couples may have a dependent parent under their roof). Moreover, when young adults leave home to live alone, they are still not necessarily independent from their parents, especially in the case of students. Some 90% of student households live below the poverty line, but that figure drops to 20% when parental resources are included (Robert-Bobbé, 2002). For instance, 21% of young adult respondents lived in one room compared with less than 5% of total respondents, and only 80% had a washing machine

compared with 96% of total respondents. Moreover, while one of the partners may be living independently, the other might still be living at the parental home⁶.

The provisional nature is also reflected in the greater proportion (one in three) of students in an LAT relationship. It is rare for students to live together as a couple and only 8% of male students and 17% of female students did so. Precarious situations such as unemployment also appear to prevent couples from living together and there were more unemployed men (14%) and women (11%) in LAT relationships. Unemployment also reflected the difficulties young adults have in finding work after they have left the educational system. Lastly — and still age-related — there was a greater proportion of non-cohabiting lovers among single men and women (17% and 18% respectively). A first definition of a LAT relationship would appear to be a provisional couple situation that concerns young adults. But this type of relationship does not only concern young adults and is not just synonymous with a gradual entry into a first conjugal relationship. One third of respondents in an intimate relationship were aged 40 and over (29% of men and 33% of women), nearly half were employed and just under 10% were retired.

b. Separated or divorced

A second category emerged composed of individuals who had already lived as a couple, especially divorced people: 17% of divorced men and 16% of divorced women did not live with their partner and similarly 13% of all separated men and 12% of all separated women (see Table 1). While men are more likely than women to enter another union after a separation (41% of male divorcees live in a cohabiting couple compared with only 28% of female divorcees), the smaller proportion of women living with a partner is not offset by a greater propensity to have an intimate relationship but live separately. Stable non-cohabiting relationships increase after a first break-up, but being in a couple or alone depends on whether or not there are children. When there are no children from a previous relationship, the conjugal situations of men and women are almost identical. However, when there are children, men are more likely to form another couple than women, even when the men live with their children (Cassan, Mazuy and Clanché, 2005). After the children have left home, the number of fathers in couple unions is almost the same as the men with childless first unions (50% and 55% respectively were cohabiting couples, 12% and 13% non-cohabiting couples). Nearly six women in ten with children from a previous union lived alone and this proportion appears to be independent of whether or not their children live with them.

These discrepancies between men and women according to whether they were in a previous union or had children from a previous union, is not only a gender difference. It is also an age one, with women being older on average. Indeed, women who are not living with their children are usually older women whose children are adult and independent since young children generally live with their mothers, even after their parents separate. Conversely, fathers who are not living with their children may well be young when they separate from the mother of their children. We used logistic regression to look at LAT relationships without mixing age-related issues or conjugal and family histories.

⁶ The 2005 GGS survey did not provide this information; it will be part of the second phase in 2008.

Table1. Breakdown of conjugal situations of men and women according to their social and demographic characteristics

		MEN				WOMEN			
		Alone	Cohabiting couple	Non-cohabiting	ALL	Alone	Cohabiting couple	Non-cohabiting	ALL
AGE	<25	60.4	13.9	25.7	100.0	42.2	26.7	31.1	100.0
	25-29	24.8	60.1	15.1	100.0	20.5	67.2	12.2	100.0
	30-39	19.4	75.2	5.4	100.0	16.1	78.9	5.0	100.0
	40-49	17.5	77.1	5.4	100.0	18.2	76.8	5.1	100.0
	50-59	13.7	82.6	3.7	100.0	20.8	73.7	5.6	100.0
	60-69	13.2	83.0	3.8	100.0	29.7	65.5	4.8	100.0
	70-79	20.7	76.9	2.4	100.0	52.3	46.2	1.5	100.0
	<i>Average</i>	<i>38.3</i>	<i>49.0</i>	<i>33.7</i>	<i>45.3</i>	<i>48.6</i>	<i>46.6</i>	<i>34.6</i>	<i>46.1</i>
OCCUPATIONAL STATUS	Employed	18.5	74.6	7.0	100.0	18.4	73.9	7.8	100.0
	Student	62.1	7.8	30.1	100.0	48.3	17.1	34.6	100.0
	Unemployed	36.7	49.6	13.8	100.0	31.7	57.0	11.3	100.0
	Retired	15.5	81.3	3.2	100.0	39.8	56.8	3.4	100.0
	Other inactive	42.6	51.7	5.8	100.0	20.9	76.3	2.9	100.0
LIVING WITH PARENTS	Yes	72.2	3.5	24.3	100.0	58.0	3.1	38.9	100.0
	No	16.4	77.9	5.8	100.0	23.7	70.6	5.7	100.0
LEGAL MATRIMONIAL STATUS	Unmarried	49.3	33.5	17.2	100.0	45.9	35.7	18.3	100.0
	Married	1.1	98.2	0.7	100.0	1.9	97.1	1.0	100.0
	Divorced	41.5	41.3	17.3	100.0	56.0	27.6	16.4	100.0
	Widowed	83.8	7.9	8.3	100.0	86.9	5.5	7.6	100.0
NATIONALITY	French	23.2	68.7	8.1	100.0	26.5	65.1	8.4	100.0
	Foreign	17.2	76.6	6.2	100.0	25.2	69.0	5.8	100.0
CONJUGAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HISTORY	No previous union	18.3	75.4	6.4	100.0	15.3	77.8	7.0	100.0
	Union(s), but no children	32.5	54.6	12.9	100.0	34.9	52.9	12.2	100.0
	Union(s) + cohabiting children	48.1	38.4	13.5	100.0	58.1	29.5	12.5	100.0
	Union(s) + non cohabiting children	37.8	50.2	12.0	100.0	59.5	30.4	10.1	100.0
ALL		22.8	69.3	7.9	100.0	26.4	65.2	8.4	100.0

Source: Ined-Insee, GGS-Ggs1, 2005
Population: Total survey population aged 18-79

c. Confirmed results “all other things being equal”

We estimated the probability of partnered individuals living or not living with their partners by looking at their social and demographic characteristics and by gender distinction. In interpreting this model it is necessary to bear in mind that a cross-sectional approach to these relationships gives rise to an under-representation of the shortest lasting ones, namely the non-cohabiting relationships. These end faster than cohabiting unions (44% of on-going non-cohabiting unions were under two years-old) either because they break-up more quickly or because they are transformed into cohabiting unions (Villeneuve-Gokalp, 1997). Moreover, it is impossible to eradicate this problem by controlling for the duration from the start of the relationship, since in this survey the start will vary depending on the type of union. It may be the actual beginning of the relationship in the case of stable intimate non-cohabiting relationships, or at the time the couple moves in together for the others.

We were unable to introduce simultaneously age, occupational status and living with parents into this model, because of the colinearity between age and the two other variables; for instance most students are under 25 and so are most individuals still living with their parents. However, the percentage of individuals in a cohabiting couple and living with a parent is nil whereas it is quite considerable (37%) in the case of non-cohabiting couples. To avoid this manifest heterogeneity in the sample that might have distorted the results of the regression analysis, we preferred to exclude individuals living with their parents from the model.

The variables used were age, nationality (since coming to work in France may be a reason for non-cohabitation for foreigners), past conjugal history, as well as an overall variable that includes employment and the socio-occupational status of the respondent and his/her partner. This variable indicates the respondent’s occupational status when s/he is employed, or unemployed status if applicable, and combines all other economically inactive categories such as students, retired people, homemakers or employees on parental leave. For the previously-mentioned reasons of colinearity governing age, no distinction was possible between students and retired people.

Figure 1 suggests the estimated probability for men and women of “going it alone” rather than living in the same household. For respondents whose situation would exactly match the reference situation, namely: being French, aged between 30 and 39, employed, with a working partner, having already lived as a couple and without children, this probability is 12% for men and 13% for women.

For both sexes, the effect of youth on the propensity not to cohabit with a partner was clearly confirmed. For the under 25 year-olds, the estimated probability for men was 72% and 68% for women, all other characteristics being equal. It was still 38% for men and 33% for women in the 25-29 year age group, but after the age of 40 the estimated probability of not cohabiting decreases significantly in the case of men but not for women: it falls to 6% for the 50-59 year-old women, then 4% and 2% for the 60-69 year-olds and the 70-79 year-olds respectively. LAT relationships therefore seem less likely for older men, partly because widowhood is less frequent for men and partly because in the event of a separation men are more likely to cohabit with a new partner than women. This effect doesn’t appear for women, because their probability of living in a non-cohabiting relationship remains stable in all ages after thirty. Since women usually live with their children after a separation they are also less likely to cohabit than men.

Conjugal and reproductive history is a determining factor for both sexes. Individuals who live with children from a previous union but who have a new partner are less likely to cohabit with their partner than childless individuals who have already lived as a couple, the estimated probability being 34% for women and 31% for men compared with 13% and 12% respectively for those without children from a previous relationship. Not living with children from a previous union also favours living apart but to a lesser extent: here the probability is 27% for women and 24% for men, all other things being equal. On the other hand, individuals who have never cohabited in the past are more attracted to cohabitation once the age effect and employment situation have been controlled for.

Employment has relatively little influence on whether or not a couple cohabits. Only “economically inactive” men were more likely to live apart from their partners, but we included too many diverse situations (retired people, students and inactive) in this category to be able to interpret that. There are, however, a few differences according to the partner’s socio-occupational status. In particular, women whose partners are manual workers are more likely to cohabit. Previous sociological studies have already demonstrated that forming a couple constitutes material security for the working classes (de Singly, 1987).

Lastly, foreign men are far more likely than French men to live apart from their wives (18% vs. 12%). That is the probable effect of immigrant workers who come to the country without their families. However, nationality has no effect on the cohabitation situation of women.

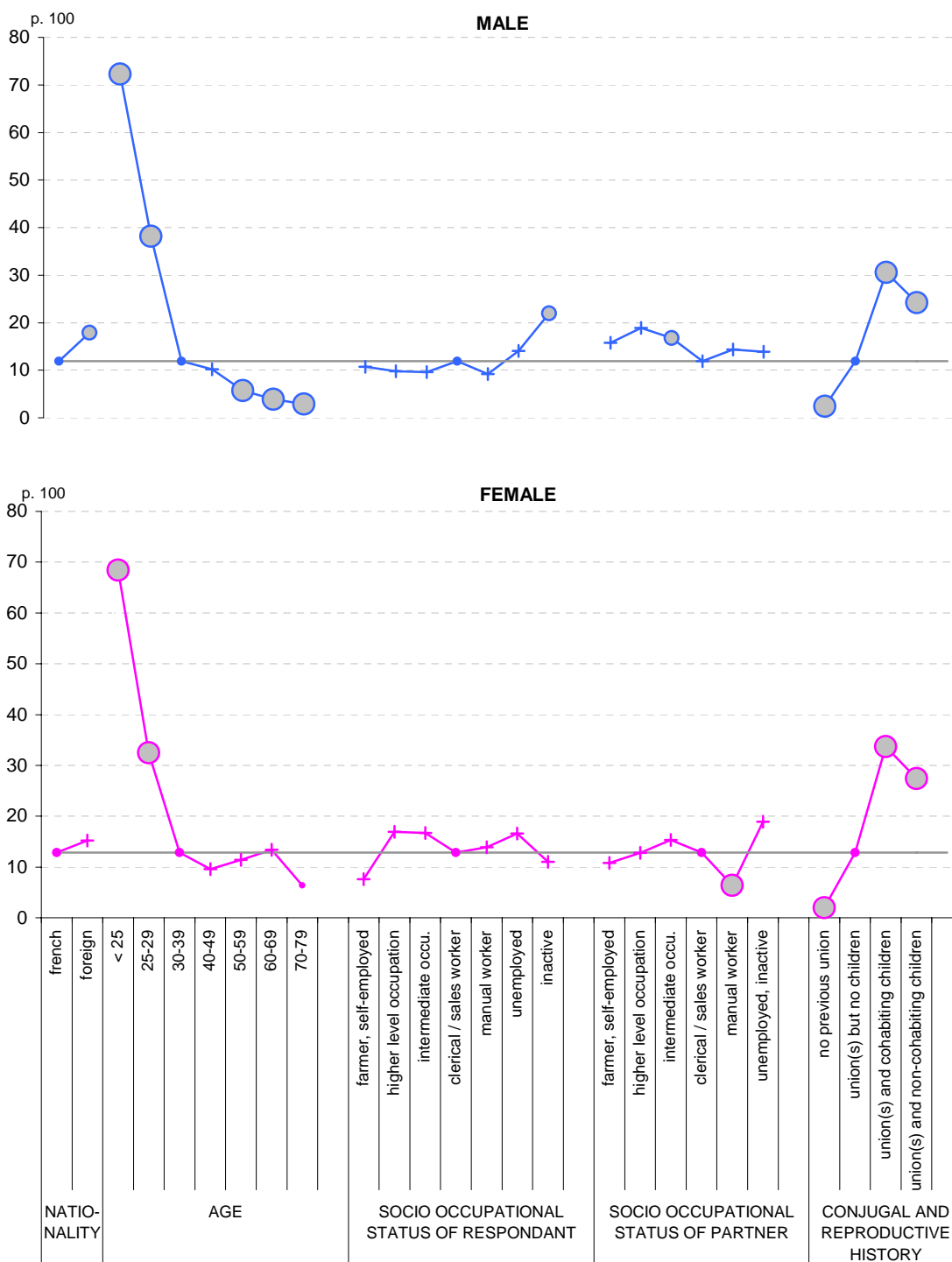


Figure 1. Estimated percentage of individuals living apart from their partners for 100 individuals living as a couple (*logit* model)

Key: Large grey dots correspond to significant factors

2. Separation is often imposed rather than chosen

Respondents were asked to state whether their residential separation was voluntary or involuntary and to provide the reasons in both cases. When separation was voluntary they were asked to state if it was their own choice or their partner's, or a joint decision taken by both (see Box 1).

Box 2. Stable intimate non-cohabiting relationships: between choice and circumstance

Q1. Do you live separately by choice or because circumstances prevent you from living together?

1. I want to live alone
2. My partner and I decided to live separately
3. My partner wants us to live separately →Q3
4. We are obliged to by circumstance →Q4
5. Other reasons

Q2. (If 1 or 2 in Q1) Why do you want to live separately?

1. For financial reasons
2. To remain independent
3. Because of the children
4. I'm not yet ready to live with someone
5. Other reasons

Q3. (If 2 or 3 in Q1) Why did your partner choose to live separately?

1. For financial reasons
2. To remain independent
3. Because of the children
4. He's not yet ready to live with someone
5. Other reasons
6. Don't know

Q4. (If 4 in Q1) What are the reasons?

1. Occupational
2. Financial
3. Housing
4. The partner's state of health
5. Legal problems
6. Your partner has another family
7. Other

Most non-cohabitants stated that they were obliged to live separately because of circumstances (Figure 2), with no major difference between men and women (64% of men and 61% of women). Occupational reasons were most frequently cited (around 4 out of 10), usually due to the geographic distance of the workplace of one of the partners. Women mentioned financial or housing issues slightly more frequently than men, while men mentioned work or personal reasons more frequently. Men were twice as likely as women to say that their partner had "another family" (13% vs. 7%). Although the question was ambiguous (a respondents could have another family because they had another partner, or because they were raising their children, or because they were living with an

elderly relative⁷), we presumed that the discrepancy between men and women was because in the majority of cases separated women with children had custody of those children.

While 18% of men and 23% of women perceived separation as a joint decision, 17% of men and 15% of women viewed their separation as a personal choice, not shared by their partner. Logically we would expect similar proportions for the “I want to live alone” and “my partner wants us to live separately” categories, but only 1% of men and women gave the second reply. This paradox reveals the difficulty couples have in recognising that their partner is the only one who wants to live separately.

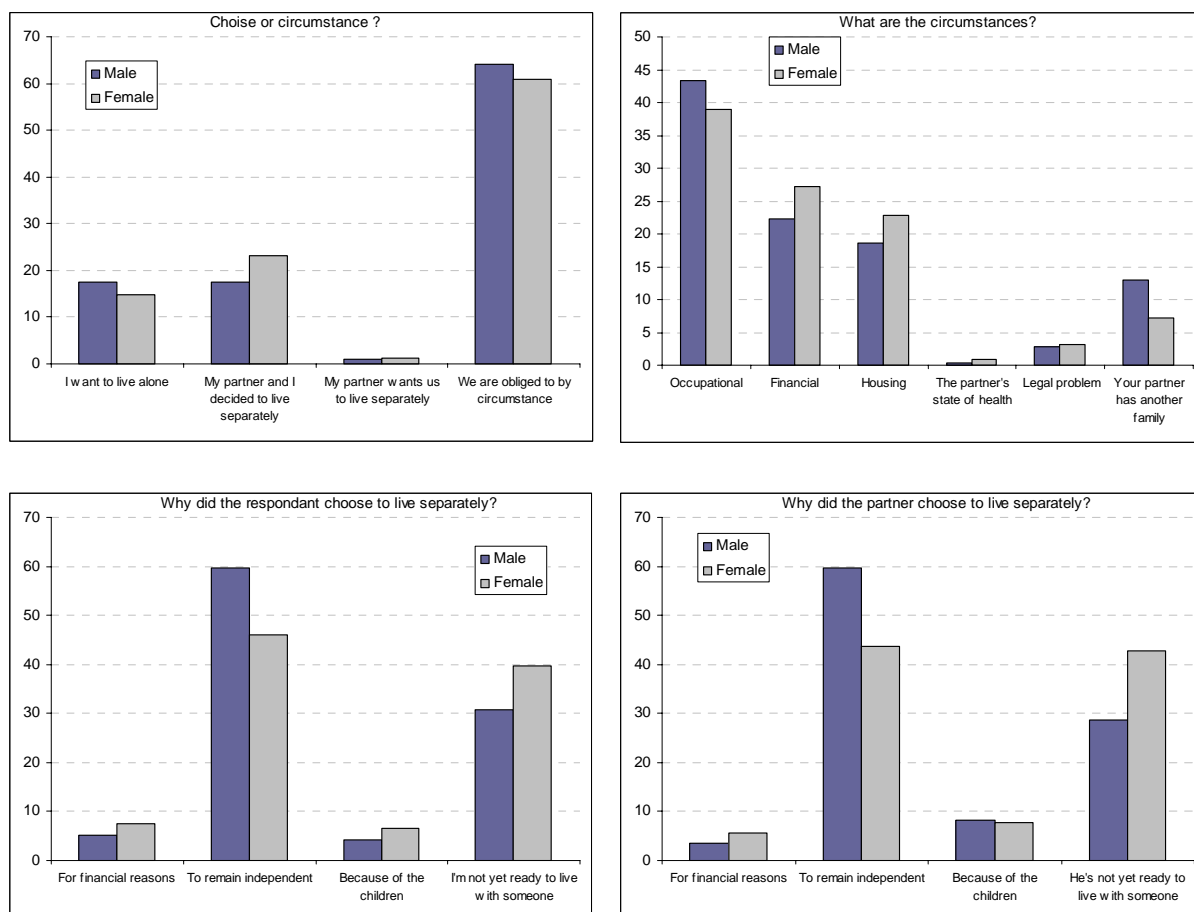


Figure 2. Reasons for living apart (Men, Women, %)

Source: INED-INSEE, GGS-Ggs1, 2005
Population: All individuals stating that they lived in a “stable intimate non-cohabiting relationship”

The reasons for the “choice” are largely due to a desire to remain independent or a feeling of not being ready to cohabit. However, there are two different rationales behind this. The desire to remain independent indicates a refusal to cohabit but translated into a more stable relationship in duration (these relationships had already lasted an average of 6.7 years) whereas the feeling of not being ready acknowledges a transitory, less long-lasting situation (the relationship had lasted an average 2.4 years). The desire to remain independent was stronger in men (60%) than women (46%) while “not being ready” was more prevalent in women (40% vs. 31%). Conversely financial reasons or the presence of

⁷ Levin & Trost (1999) for Sweden and Milan & Peters (2003) for Canada, have stated that one of the reasons for LAT is the need for one of the partners to live with an elderly relative for whom s/he feels responsible.

children appears to have little bearing on the decision. The male/female discrepancy was quite marked when we asked respondents about their partner's reasons: 60% of men stated that their partner wanted to remain independent and 29% said that their partners didn't feel ready. Women were split between those who thought their partners wanted to remain independent (44%) and those who thought they didn't feel ready (43%).

These results reflect the different expectations of men and women, and people's propensity to attribute their own expectations to their partners: 60% of men pursue their desire for independence and 60% believe their partners share that desire; 46% of women want to remain independent and 44% attribute the same aspiration to their partners. Among male respondents, 31% chose: "I don't feel ready to cohabit" and 29% believed their partners felt the same. Among the women, 40% agreed with that choice for themselves and 43% attributed it for their partners. The discrepancies only emerge when delving into the reasons given by the respondents for themselves and for their partners when they stated that LAT was a shared decision (which has yet to be proven): 44% of men reported that both partners wished to remain independent, compared with 33% of women; conversely, men were less likely than women to state that neither of them were ready to cohabit (20% vs. 30%).

II. Different types of LAT relationships

Several types of LAT relationships emerge from the preceding descriptions but one must suppose that their operational logic and the intentions to cohabit differ. We therefore decided to classify “non-cohabiting” individuals in order to study their motivations and plans while taking into account their very heterogeneous characteristics. Multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) is an effective tool for establishing comparisons between individuals living the same experience according to certain of their characteristics. Classification “by factor” using the factorial coordinates resulting from the MCA, allowed us to draw up a typology of non-cohabiting relationships, net of structural effects.

1. Typology of “non-cohabitants” using multiple correspondence analysis

Since we could not determine the typology from variables such as LAT motivation (voluntary or involuntary), plans to live together or the duration of the union — precisely those aspects of the relationship we wanted to study — we used respondents’ individual characteristics (e.g. sex, age, nationality, partners' employment status) rather than those describing their relationships. We also took the situation at the outset of the relationship such as the number of previous unions, legal matrimonial status and the distance between the two partners’ homes. However, we were unable to introduce some of those characteristics as active variables in the analysis. For instance legal matrimonial status, which was both too closely correlated to the number of previous unions and sometimes dependent on the present relationship (some non-cohabiting couples were married), employment situation, which was too closely related to age, or even nationality, because some categories did not include a sufficient number of individuals (Table 3).

The MCA was therefore based on the respondent’s sex, the couple’s occupational status, the number of previous unions, and the distance between the partners’ homes. Only these “active” variables were included in the calculations to determine the position on the axes or the participation of modalities in the construction of categories. The other, so-called “illustrative” variables, merely complete the observation by positioning themselves in relation to the partitions already defined.

Three main groups stand out on the two first axes of the MCA (Figure 3):

- Young adults, usually still students, with no prior cohabitation history or children, who generally give financial reasons for not cohabiting;
- Older individuals, some of whom are widowed, without a co-habiting child, who generally believe they have chosen this type of relationship;

- Individuals, aged from 25 to 54, with children living at home, who have already cohabited in a relationship.

Table 3. Choice of active and illustrative variables in the MCA and classification

ACTIVE VARIABLES		ILLUSTRATIVE VARIABLES	
	No. of respondents		No. of respondents
Age		Couple's employment status	
18 to 24 years	292	2 students	103
25 to 54 years	500	1 student + 1 other	133
+ 55 years	176	2 working	398
Child prior to the union		1 working + 1 not working	201
Child from prev. co-hab.	122	2 not working	133
Prev. child from non-cohab	245	Legal conjugal status	
No previous child	601	Unmarried	680
Number of unions		Married	62
no union	470	Divorced	167
1 union or +	498	Widowed	59
Sex		Reason for LAT	
Female	575	Independence	202
Male	393	Not ready	113
Distance from partner in mins.		Other partner's choice	79
under 30 mins	531	Financial/housing constraint	126
+ 30 mins	437	Work reasons	196
		Other obligation	191
		Not a choice, not an obligation	61

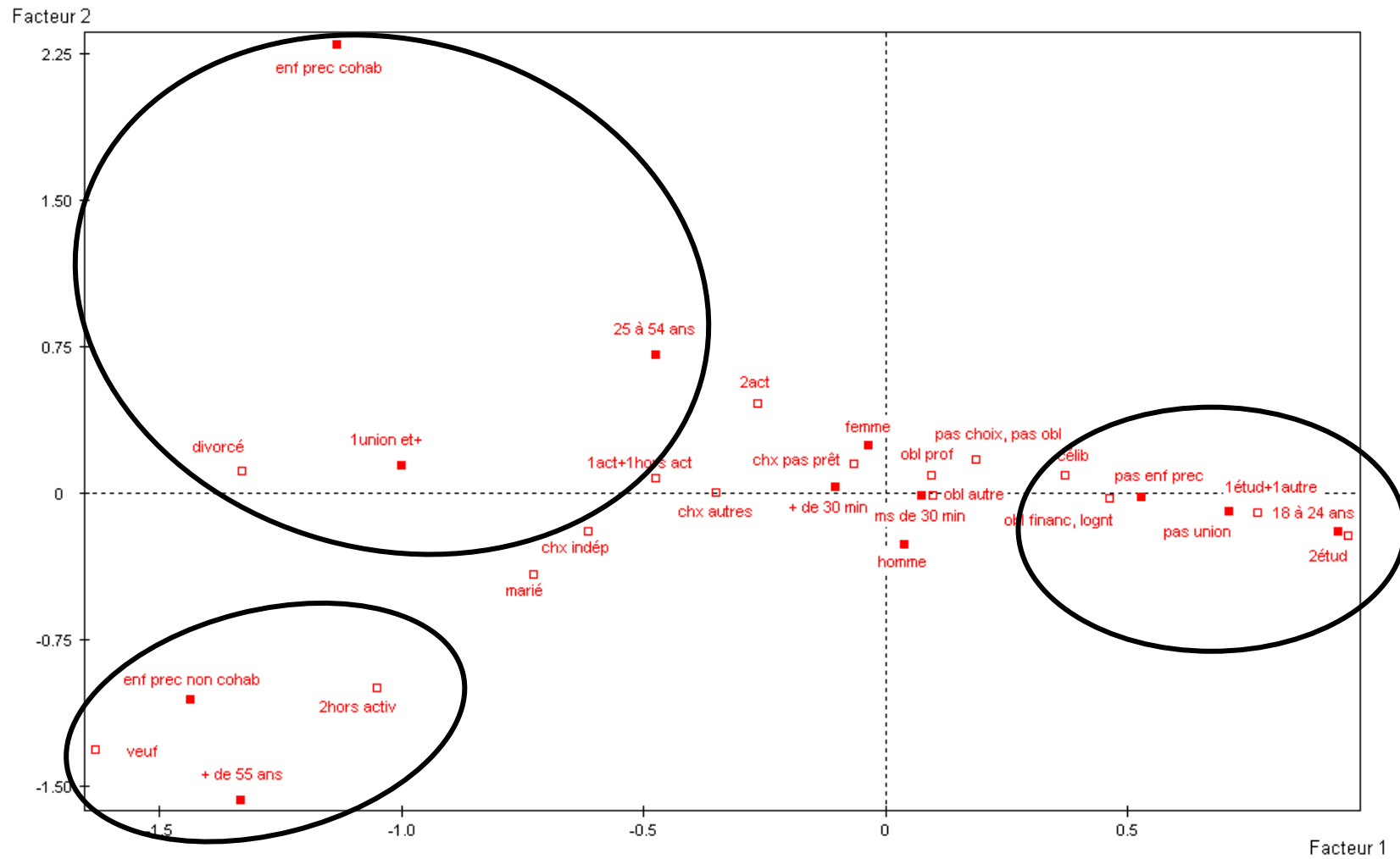


Figure 3. MCA of individuals in intimate non-cohabiting relationships

Prior investigation of MCA data revealed sub-groups almost entirely determined by age and the presence or absence in the home of children born prior to the union. Using factor classification, each respondent was attached to the group with which s/he shared the most characteristics. The model fixed an optimum number of four groups.

The modalities which contributed most to the formation of a group are those with the highest test values. These are shown in Table 4 together with, for each modality, the proportion of individuals of this modality included in the group. For instance, 65% of persons in a stable intimate non-cohabiting relationship without a previous union were found in the “Young adults” group (see below for the group names).

Given the limited number of active variables and modalities, there was a high risk that certain modalities would be preponderant when forming the groups. Nevertheless, the resulting classification, however perfunctory, served our purpose, which was to find the distribution net of structural effects that was best suited to the study. Although variables such as sex, the fact of having lived as a couple or not, and travel time between the two residences contributed to the factor calculations, they were dominated in the classification process by the variables of age and presence of children.

Table 4. Typologies based on classification by factors
Test values and percentage of modality in each group

Young adults			Out of a family		
Characteristic modalities	Test value	% of the group in the modality	Characteristic modalities	Test value	% of the group in the modality
Aged 18 to 24	32.7	99.1	Aged 25 to 54	26.0	79.7
No previous child	17.6	58.3	1 union or +	4.6	44.2
No union	17.2	65.3	Male	4.2	42.4
Distance under 30 mins	2.7	45.9	Previous child, non-cohab.	3.9	48.6
Single parents			Seniors		
Characteristic modalities	Test value	% of the group in the modality	Characteristic modalities	Test value	% of the group in the modality
Child in previous cohab.	22.3	100.0	+ 55 years	22.3	98.5
Aged 25 to 54	10.0	20.3	Previous child non-cohab	9.1	51.4
1 union or +	9.1	20.3	1 union or +	4.5	26.8
Female	4.4	13.7			

2. Description of the four profiles

The first group was composed solely of *young adults* aged under 25 years, without children, single (99%) and who had never lived as a couple (except 9%). Women were slightly more numerous than men in this group because they begin their conjugal life at a slightly younger age. Because of their youth, in three cases out of four at least one of the partners was a student (Table 5).

The second group, mostly female (77%), consisted of *single parents families*. All were aged between 25 and 54, except 3% who were younger. There were many divorcees in this group (41%) and only 4% were married, three out of four to their present partner.

The third group included all respondents aged 55 and over. This is an age when individuals are freed from the daily tasks related to raising children or may no longer be working. If they have children (and 70% do), they are adults and no longer live at home, or they may live with their other parent. Lastly, in nine cases out of ten, both partners are no longer working. Respondents in this group were older so we called them “*seniors*”. Although this is a coherent group in terms of employment, minimum age and absence of children at home, it nevertheless covers a wide range of conjugal histories: 20% of *seniors* never cohabited with a partner whereas 22% lived in several cohabiting relationships, 26% were widowed (which rarely occurs in the younger groups), 3% had not divorced from their previous spouses and 12% were married to their present spouses.

The fourth group may be distinguished more by its differences from the three others than by any similarities between the component members. It includes individuals aged between 25 and 54 without children (74%) or not living with them (26%). It is the only group in which men are more numerous than women (57%). Because of respondents’ age (half are between 25 and 34 years old compared with one quarter in the *single parents* group), their conjugal history (half have never lived in a union) and the absence of children living with them, this group in an intermediary position between *young adults* and *single parents*, even though in terms of work they are closer to the *single parent* group. To differentiate this group from *young adults* and *single parents* we called it “*out of a family*” because unlike the majority of *young adults*, these were independent from their parents and, unlike the *single parents*, they had no children or did not live with them. Their family situations were closer to those of the *seniors* but the respondents were younger. Whereas the older respondents had passed the major milestones in their family and professional lives, members of the “*out of a family*” group were still mid-way through theirs. More than three-quarters of respondents were still single, 14% were divorced, 2% were still married to a partner from whom they were separated and 6% were married to their present partners. In the latter case, two out of three partners were foreign and no family reunification had occurred.

Table 5. Main characteristics of individuals in non-cohabiting relationships (%)

		Young adults	Out of a family	Single parents	Seniors	All
Non-weighted numbers		287	385	122	174	968
Distribution (after weighting)		42.1	34.8	9.3	13.8	100.0
Respondent's sex	Male	45.4	57.5	22.9	43.6	47.3
	Female	54.6	42.5	77.1	56.4	52.7
Age	18-24 years	100.0	0.3	3.1	0.0	42.2
	25-34 years	0.0	54.4	19.5	0.0	20.8
	35-44 years	0.0	23.5	43.1	0.0	12.3
	45-54 years	0.0	21.8	32.0	0.0	11.6
	55 -79	0.0	0.0	2.3	100.0	14.1
Children	Without	100.0	73.6	0.0	30.0	71.7
	Non-cohabiting children	0.0	26.4	0.0	70.0	18.9
	Cohabiting children	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	9.4
Conjugal experience	No previous union	91.4	47.4	10.0	20.1	58.5
	One	7.8	42.3	74.0	58.2	33.1
	Several	0.8	10.3	16.0	21.7	8.4
Legal matrimonial situation	Unmarried	98.7	77.0	52.7	27.3	76.9
	Married	1.3	7.9	4.1	14.9	5.8
	Divorced	0.0	13.8	41.0	31.5	13.1
	Widowed	0.0	1.3	2.2	26.3	4.2
Partners' occupation	One or both students	75.3	10.2	2.5	0.0	35.3
	Both working	15.9	60.7	59.4	11.6	35.0
	One or both is unemployed, inactive, or retired	8.8	29.1	38.1	88.4	29.7

Interpretation: 45% of "young adults" are male.

Among the individuals in a LAT relationship, 42% were *young adults*, 35% were *out of a family*, 14% *seniors* and 9% *single parents*. Despite this distribution, there were more young people in LAT relationships with 28% of the under 25 year-olds, followed by the 25 to 54 years age group. Respondents living with a child from a previous union (14% of single parent families aged between 25 and 54 years) were far more numerous than those who had no children or did not live with them (6% of others in this age group). Lastly, *seniors* were relatively less likely to live in LAT relationships (4% of the 55-79 year-olds).

III. Relationship characteristics

1. Distance between homes and frequency of meetings

Half the couples covered the distance between their two homes in under 25 minutes. In four cases out of ten, travel time was under 15 minutes but in one out of three it took over one hour, which implies the use of a motor vehicle, or even a plane in the case of the furthest distances. We used the journey time separating LAT couples' homes to define the four groups but this did not contribute greatly since geographic distance did not contrast LAT couples when all the other characteristics were taken into account (Table 6). The *young adults* and the *single parents* generally took ten minutes less to meet (median difference) than the *out of a family* and the *seniors*. The *young adults*, mostly students, often lived less than 15 minutes apart (47%). Conversely, 23% of the *out of a family* category had more than two hours of travel time, with the greatest distances being work-related.

Table 6. Travel time between homes and frequency of meeting (median and distribution)

		Young adults	Out of a family	Single parents	Seniors	ALL
Travel time between homes	Median in minutes	20	30	20	30	25
	< 15 minutes	47.1	36.2	43.6	33.2	41.1
	15-59 minutes	26.3	25.3	25.7	29.9	26.4
	1 hour	11.5	15.2	14.9	23.6	14.7
	2 hours et +	15.1	23.3	15.8	13.2	17.8
Total		100	100	100.0	100.0	100
Frequency of meeting	Median: times/week	3.0	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.8
	Daily	33.3	20.2	26.0	36.0	28.4
	4 to 6.	15.9	22.3	17.4	10.9	17.6
	1 to 3.	36.0	39.6	42.6	32.7	37.4
	<1 time	14.8	17.9	14.0	20.4	16.6
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
If travel time less than 30 minutes maximum						
Median		6.0	5.0	4.6	5.2	5.0

Nearly half the couples saw each other at least three times a week and only 17% did not meet once a week. The closer proximity of *young adults* enabled one third of them to see each other every day. However, travel time is not the only determinant in the frequency of LAT couples getting together. When both partners lived less than half an hour away from each other, half the *young adults* saw each other six times a week compared with four or five times (4.6 times) in the case of *single parents* and five times for the *out of a family* and *senior* groups. Studying at the same institution may explain the near-daily meetings of the young people.

2. Duration of the relationship

Couples could be differentiated by the duration of their relationship even more than by the frequency with which they saw each other. Quite logically, relationships could only be recent for the youngest respondents and increase in duration with age. The relationships of half the *young adults* had lasted for under 20 months, 29 months for the *out of a family* group, 36 months for the *single parents* and 7.5 years for the *seniors* — 46% of whom had been in their relationships for more than ten years (Table 7).

Table 7. Relationship duration (median and distribution)

		Young adults	Out of a family	Single parents	Seniors	ALL
Duration of the relationship in months	Median in months	20	29	36	90	27
	<1 year	31.2	24.3	15.8	6.5	24.0
	1 year	25.0	19.4	20.4	54.9	19.8
	2 years	20.4	12.0	13.6	9.8	15.3
	3 – 4 years	14.9	15.6	19.1	12.4	15.2
	5-9 years	8.5	18.0	21.3	19.9	14.6
	>9 years	0	10.7	9.8	46.5	11.1
	Total	100	100	100.0	100.0	100.0

But age does not fully explain the duration of a relationship. Couples will endeavour to put and end to residential separation if it is dictated by circumstance. Conversely, they will continue to live apart if it is of their choosing. Among the 25 to 54 year age group, the median duration of a relationship was 43 months for couples in which at least one of the partners wanted to retain his/her independence, and 30 months if the separation was involuntary. Where one partner did not feel “ready to cohabit”, the median duration was 25 months. The intention to live together or the desire not to was as much a factor in explaining the duration as the motives given for dual residence.

IV. Motives and plans

1. *Separation: voluntary or involuntary, temporary or lasting*

The different reasons for LAT relationships may be interpreted both by the way the couples perceive the reasons for their residential separation and, by their plans for living together, or not. Six couples out of ten perceived their separation as a constraint (Table 8) and seven out of ten intended to live together within three years (Table 9). Couples' intentions and reasons for living separately depend very much on each other but not to the extent one might have thought: 81% of those who perceived their separation as an imposition did intend to cohabit within a few years, as did 62% of those who felt they were not ready. However, this was also the case for one respondent in three who reported having chosen separation. So how should one interpret this apparent contradiction? Not all the work-related separations were imposed, some were "chosen" to advance a career. In such cases geographic distance was not perceived as a constraint but a choice and the couple intended to live together in the future.

Nearly three quarters of *young adults* reported that their separation was involuntary, the main reason given being their lack of financial independence and consequently for 30% of them, the inability to pay rent (Table 8). *Young adults* were also more likely to intend to live together within three years (84%) (Table 9). The frequency with which they reported that separation was "involuntary" was because of their studies (in three out of four cases at least one partner was a student) or unemployment (once in ten cases for at least one partner). The other groups were less likely to report this but it was never totally absent. It is rare for young people who have never lived as a couple to want a LAT relationships (6%) and only one in ten reported not feeling ready.

Conversely, six *seniors* out of ten elected to maintain separate households (Table 8) and nearly seven out of ten did not intend to live together in the next few years (Table 9). For 40% of respondents in this category the decision corresponded to a desire for lasting independence, and in the case of 11% meant temporary independence until they were ready. In one out of two cases, the union had lasted 10 years, confirming that the *seniors* did not plan to live with their present partners. Widows were more likely to choose LAT relationships (26%), than separated or divorced individuals, doubtless out of respect for their dead partner or for their children's sakes. Three-quarters of widows lived separately by choice. However, those who had never lived as a couple (20%) were not necessarily "hardened" singles, who refused to change their habits. On the contrary, half perceived their residential separation as imposed by circumstance, compared with only 34% of those who had already lived as a couple.

The *out of a family* and *single parent* groups were mid way between the two positions. The former perceived LAT more as a constraint (55%) and 72% of these respondents intended to live together within three years. An important segment of the *out of a family* category who chose

separation only did so for a limited period of time, but two out of ten did not intend to cohabit in the future.

In the case of *single parents*, separation was often a choice (47%) rather than a constraint (45%). Their desire to live alone was no greater than the *out of a family* category, but 11% of the *single parents* wanted to live alone with their children. This decision may be in the interest of the children or because single parents find it suits them better. Like the other groups, some of the *single parents* who stated that separation was a choice did perceive it to be temporary.

Table 8. Reasons for LAT

		Young adults	Out of a family	Single parents	Seniors	All
A choice	Overall	20.8	36.6	47.4	61.9	34,4
	Remain independent	5.9	20.4	18.3	40.8	16,9
	Wait until ready	9.5	9.1	15.6	10.7	10,1
	Children	0	0.9	10.8	2.4	1,7
	Other reason	5.4	6.2	2.7	8.0	5,8
A constraint	Overall	71.7	55.3	46.0	34.5	58,5
	Occupational	18.5	23.9	11.4	7.8	18,3
	Financial, housing	29.5	13.9	9.2	6.0	18,3
	Other reason	23.7	17.5	25.4	20.6	21,3
Both a choice and a constraint		7,5	8.1	6.6	3.6	7.1
Total		100,0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 9. Intend to live together within 3 years

Profiles	Yes (probably)	No (probably)	Doesn't apply or don't know	Total
Overall	70.0	25.0	5.0	100.0
Young adults	84.1	12.5	3.4	100.0
Out of a family	71.7	22.2	6.1	100.0
Single parents	60.8	28.4	10.8	100.0
Seniors	28.4	67.8	3.8	100.0
Perception of LAT				
A constraint	80.8	15.7	3.5	100.0
"Not ready"	61.6	29.8	8.6	100.0
A choice	49.2	43.1	7.7	100.0

2. Obstacles to cohabitation

Respondents were asked what the outcome of living with their partners might be. The main attractions cited were the pleasure and satisfaction of communal life, as well as the consequences on the couple's sex life. This view was shared by all individuals in a stable relationship. But future plans depend on external factors quite independent of the couple's love or their desire to share their day-to-day lives or to remain independent. The following series of questions was designed to gauge precisely what these factors were: "To what extent does your decision to live with your partner in the next three years depend on the following factors: Your personal financial situation? Your work? Your housing? Your health? Your love relationship? Your children?" In the case of the *seniors*, the work question

should be understood as anticipation of retirement. Very few respondents replied that their plans depended on their health so we have excluded this for reasons of brevity.

Five answers were suggested for each question, ranging from “not at all” and “not concerned” to “enormously”. To interpret the answers we established a score for the replies that conferred a value of 3 on “enormously”, 2 on “a great deal”, 1 on “a little”, and 0 on “not at all” and “not concerned”. We then calculated the average number of replies for each question, distinguishing respondents by profile and their plans for the next three years (Figure 4). A low score indicated factors that had little impact on the decision to cohabit with their partners, or else influenced very few respondents.

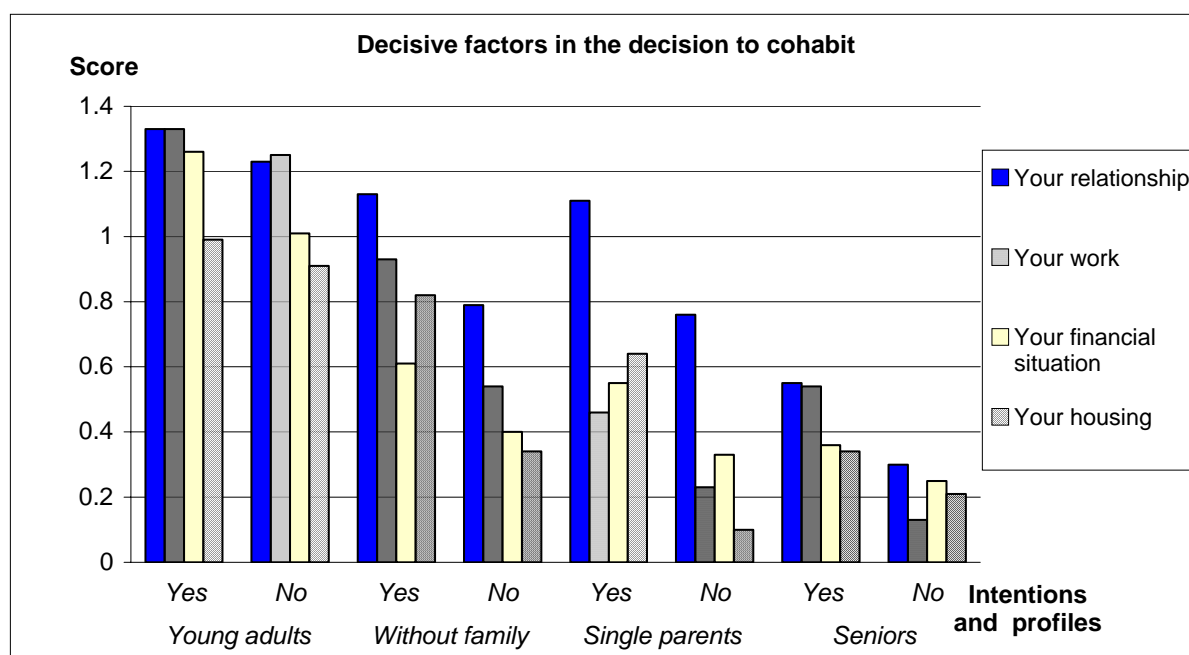


Figure 4. Decisive factors in the decision to cohabit

Source: INED-INSEE, GGS-Ggs1, 2005

It comes as no surprise that first and foremost developments in the love relationship affect couples' decisions to cohabit. But while this is very important for *young adults*, *seniors* appeared to be far less concerned. This somewhat disconcerting result may be explained by the duration of their relationships: the longer they lasted, the less the soundness of the relationship was questioned and the less likely respondents were to reply that their plans depend on them.

After developments in the love relationship, the decision to live together depended on work, finances and housing, in that order. For those in the *out of a family* category who intended to cohabit, housing was more important than financial independence. For all the *single parents* and *seniors* who did not intend to cohabit with their partners, the financial situation, and sometimes housing, were more important than work. All these conditions for cohabitation were more likely to be present and were more important for *young adults* starting out in life, than for the other couples. Usually a weak score

signifies a strong proportion of “not at all” replies, and Figure 4 shows that these increase with age. This is because the answers fitted the situations of young people and increasingly less so as the age group increased. For instance, changes in the *seniors*’ lifestyles were less likely to be a result of occupational, financial or residential changes, so reasons for LAT must be found elsewhere. The decision for parents to live as a couple may depend on their children. All the *single parent* group, and part of the *out of a family* and *seniors* were asked about this, but only *single parents* stated that their decision depended on their children because they lived with them, and only if they wanted to live with their partners.

Conclusion

Will LAT relationships continue to increase? Three INED surveys carried out at ten-year intervals show no change. Nevertheless, the growing number of women who refuse to abandon their professional careers to join their partners, the growing number of couples breaking up and forming new relationships — even until a fairly old age, and the establishment of individualistic values, are so many incentives to develop this type of relationship. Moreover, we have observed a similarity between the cohabiting unions of the early 1970s and LAT relationships today. Cohabitation outside marriage first started among students and unemployed young adults before spreading to the rest of society. Today these same categories of the population most frequently enter stable intimate non-cohabiting relationships. At that time, marriage took place soon after the beginning of cohabitation; today, six LAT people out of ten intend to live together within the next three years. The age at which people marry has risen since 1972, whereas the age at which they form first couples has remained stable and cohabitation has become a lasting way of life. More recently, people have started living together at a later age, so what will become of LAT? Desire to have children and the birth of a child is, and will remain, the decisive factor in couples sharing their accommodation. Most of the respondents we classified as *young adults* and *out of a family* wanted to live together within three years, probably because they intended to have a child. Conversely, respondents who already had children and lived with them, or those who were too old to have children, were less motivated to live with their partners.

For many years, marriage was sufficient to define a couple. Then as informal unions became widespread, this was replaced by a “sharing a home”. So what criterion or criteria can we use to define a couple when they live separately? Young people’s relationships are more intense than those of their elders. They see each other almost every day and they want and intend to live together in the future. With age, career decisions, break-ups and children, LAT relationships have become increasingly well thought out, and instead of being involuntary they are becoming a matter of choice. But this study of LAT relationships does not provide a definition of a couple; still less an indicator for counting them.

Perhaps we should abandon, at least temporarily, the idea that an indicator must be “verified” or should be “objective” and allow the individuals concerned the possibility of declaring themselves to be “non-cohabiting couples”, “engaged in a serious unmarried intimate relationship” or “without ties”.

References

- CARADEC, V., 1996. "Les formes de la vie conjugale des 'jeunes' couples 'âgés'", *Population*, 51, n° 4-5, p. 897-927.
- CASSAN F., MAZUY M., CLANCHE F. (2005), "Refaire sa vie de couple est plus fréquent pour les homes", in *Histoires de familles, histoires familiales : les résultats de l'enquête Famille de 1999*, Ed. Cécile LEFEVRE and Alexandra FILHON, Paris, Les Cahiers de l'Ined, n°156, pp. 223-231.
- De JONG GIERVELD J. 2004 "Remariage, unmarried cohabitation, living apart together: partner relationships following bereavement or divorce", *Journal of marriage and family*, February, n°66, pp. 236-243.
- De SINGLY F., 1987. *Fortune et infortune de la femme mariée*. Paris, PUF.
- De SINGLY F., 2000. *Libres ensemble. L'individualisme dans la vie commune*. Nathan, Essais et Recherches collection, 253p.
- HASKEY J., 2005, "Living arrangements in contemporary Britain: having a partner who usually lives elsewhere and living apart together (LAT)", *Population Trends*, n° 122, Winter 2005, p. 35-45 (P 1058 122/2005).
- KAUFMANN J.-C., 1999, *La femme seule et le prince charmant*, Paris, Nathan, Pocket, 281 pages.
- LERIDON H., VILLENEUVE-GOKALP C., 1988. "Les nouveaux couples : Nombre, caractéristiques et attitudes", *Population*, 43, n° 2, p. 331-374.
- LEVIN I., TROST J. 1999, "Living apart together in Community work and family", *Community, Work & Family*. Vol. 2, n°3 pp. 279-294.
- MILAN A., PETERS A., 2003, "Couples living apart", *Canadian Social Trends*, n°11-008, pp. 2-6.
- Régnier-Loilier A (2006), "How often do adult children see their parents?", *Population & Societies*, n°426, Ined, 4 pages.
- REGNIER-LOILIER A., VIVAS É. (2008), "Départ du foyer parental et déterminants de la fréquence des rencontres avec les parents", in REGNIER-LOILIER A. (ed.), *Photos de familles. Premiers résultats de l'étude des relations familiales et intergénérationnelles*, Cahiers de l'Ined collection, in preparation.
- ROBERT-BOBBE I. (2002), "Les étudiants sont les plus aidés par leurs parents", *Insee Première*, n°826, 4 pages.
- VILLENEUVE-GOKALP C., 1997. "Vivre en couple chacun chez soi", *Population*, 52, n° 5, p. 1059-1082.
- VILLENEUVE-GOKALP C., 2000. "Les jeunes partent toujours au même âge de chez leurs parents", *Économie et statistique*, n°337-338, p. 61-80.