

**Do Reasons for Living Apart Affect Intentions to Live Together?
A Comparison by Age and Gender**

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A Comparison by Age and Gender

Rates of marriage and remarriage in most European countries have declined. Fewer younger Europeans are marrying, and those who eventually do marry are older than in previous generations. Yet being unmarried does not necessarily mean being un-partnered. Studies indicate that people spend longer periods in non-marital partnerships such as cohabitation and living apart together (LAT); And while cohabitation has captured the attention of researchers, we still know relatively little about non-cohabiting (LAT) relationships. One of the central questions is whether these partnerships are temporary arrangements and should be viewed as part of courtship towards marriage or cohabitation, or whether they are a long-term arrangement replacing marriage and cohabitation. The current study sets out to fill this gap and asks about intentions to cohabit. This study further asks whether reasons for being in a non-cohabiting relationship affect intentions to cohabit.

In this study I argue that the role of LAT relationships may change along the life course. Among young, never-married adults, living apart together may be a temporary arrangement, allowing partners to develop emotional and financial readiness for cohabitation and marriage. Among single parents, LAT relationships may reduce the conflict between caretaking responsibilities and maintaining a romantic relationship. Among older adults, living apart together may provide a combination of a long-term intimate relationship with high levels of social and financial independence. This study examines the reasons for being in an LAT relationship and how they are related to intentions to cohabit, by age.

This study draws on the first wave of the cross-national comparative Generations and Gender Program (GGP) which includes a panel survey of the dynamics of family relationships in a series of Eastern and Western European Countries, and Australia (United Nations, 2005). I selected respondents that were unmarried and responded positively to the

question: “Are you currently having an intimate (couple) relationship with someone you’re not living with?” Age was collapsed into three categories: age 20-31, age 31-50, age 51 and over ¹.

Preliminary findings

Figure 1 shows the percentage distribution of LAT by GGP country. Figure 2 shows the age distribution of LAT couples in GGP countries. These charts show that GGP countries differ both in the prevalence of LAT and in its distribution by age. The following analyses are presented by age, and future multivariate analyses will control for country.

Figure 3 shows that intentions to cohabit among people in LAT relationships differ by age and gender. The great majority of young people (74% of men and 77% of women) intend to cohabit within three years, whereas only 35% of the older men and 25% of older women have these intentions. The findings also reveal an interesting gender difference, among the youngest age group a higher percentage of women have intentions to cohabit than men, but among the older age groups the pattern is reversed, and a lower percentage of women have intentions to cohabit.

Figure 4 shows that the reasons for living apart differ by age. The most common reason for younger people to live apart is that they do not feel ready, whereas the most common reason for older people to live apart is to maintain their independence. In the next stage of the analysis I will ask whether reasons for living apart affect intentions to live together.

¹ Data for Austria are not available for this age category, therefore Austria does not appear in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1 – The distribution of LAT in GGP countries.

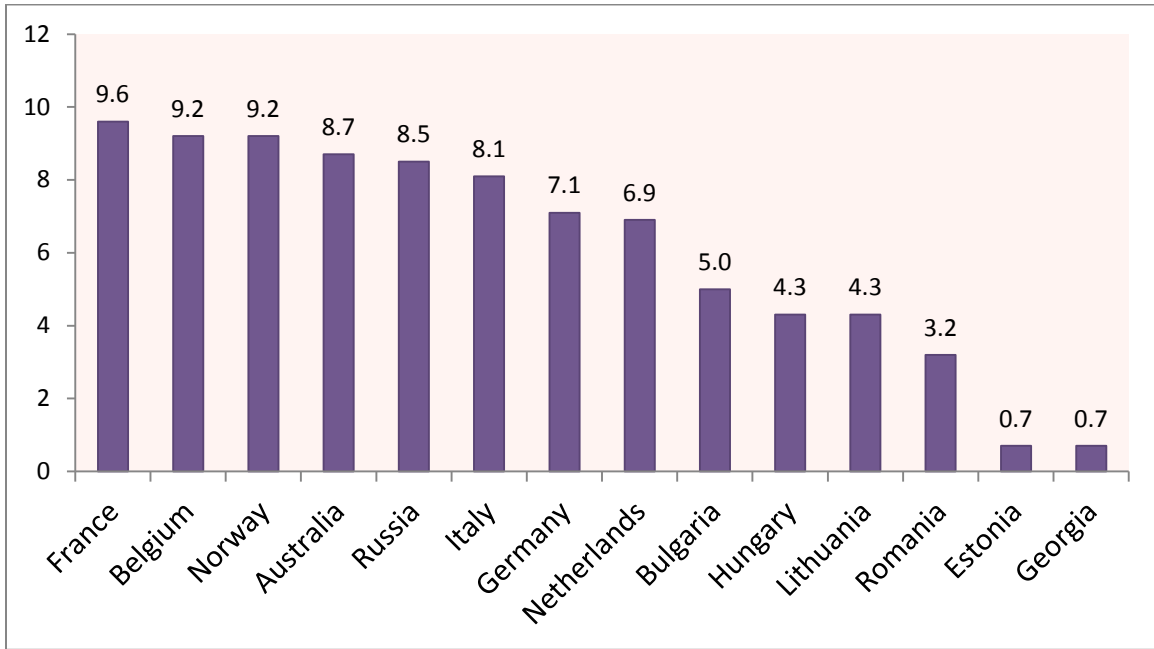


Figure 2 – The distribution of LAT by age and country.

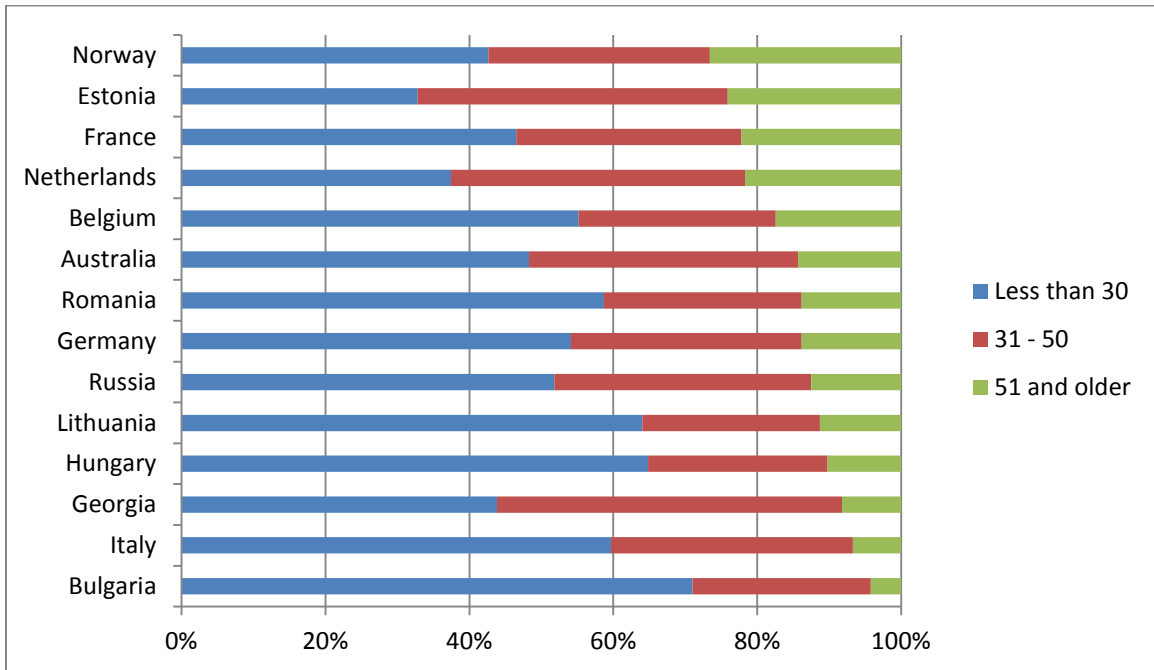


Figure 3 – Intentions to cohabit in the next 3 years, by age and gender

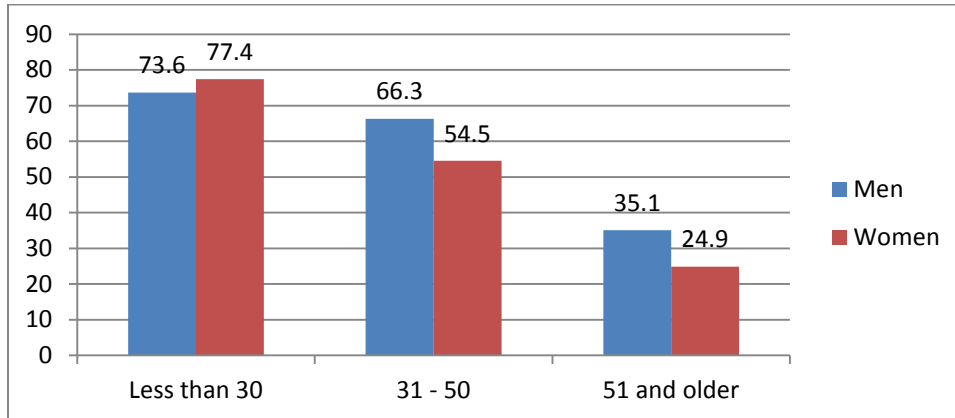


Figure 4 – Reasons for living apart together, by age

