

Changes in family and partnership life courses for men and women over cohorts in France and differences according to social background

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Experiencing at least one partnership over one's life is as frequent for young cohorts as for older ones. Nevertheless, changes occurred over cohorts. The entry in partnership starts later for the young cohorts and they split unions more frequently than the older cohorts. Among the people aged 26 to 65 in 2013, one person out of five do not live anymore with her/his first partner five years after the beginning of the cohabitation. In 2013, 25% of people aged 26 to 65 have already experienced two cohabiting unions or more. Cohabiting with a new partner after a separation is more frequent for men than for women. Other changes over time occurred: the first child comes later after the beginning of the first cohabitation. The percentage of people who have their first child with their second cohabiting partner has increased. Nevertheless, couples give birth to a child as frequently as before. An increasing number of children experience the end of their parent's union.

The way people enter in cohabiting partnership has been changing for several years. Family life courses are much more diversified than in the past. The present study relies on data from the EPIC survey (Études des parcours individuels et conjugaux, Ined-Insee, 2013-2014).

To live in couple remains the most usual way of life.

Almost all the people live with a partner during his/her life. In 2013, 95% of the people aged 26 to 65 years old live or have already lived with a partner and 90% (87% of men and 92% of women) live or have already lived with a partner into the same home (cohabiting partnership). Even if the people born in the 1950's are more likely to remain single than those born in the 1930's, the trend has then reduced. Actually, the proportion of people who have never lived in couple before age 35 is almost steady ever since: 12% of the people born between the years 1948 and 1957 and 13% for those born twenty years later (in 1968-1977) (figure1). Entering in the first partnership after age 35 is rare: the proportion of people born between 1948 and 1957 who have never lived in couple is only 3% lower at age 45 than at age 35 and 1% lower at age 55 than at age 45. As a result, only 8% of the 1948-1957 cohort who have never lived in couple before age 55 (8% for men and 7% for women). Among men of this cohort, this situation is more frequent for less-educated men (10% of those who have not been to high school¹ against 5% of those who have).

¹ The end of high school in France is recognized by the baccalaureate. This is a diploma which leads to upper studies. In this article people without the baccalaureate will be named "less-educated" and people with the baccalaureate will be named "most-educated".

The EPIC survey

The EPIC survey was done in 2013 by the french institute for demographic studies (INED) and the french national institute of statistics and economic studies (INSEE). 7825 individuals aged 26 to 65 were interviewed in metropolitan France. Questions about individual's past allow us to follow life course evolution. However, age restrictions are needed to analyze evolution through time. Indeed, the farther we go in the past, the younger are the individuals. For example, in 1970 interviewees were 22 or less.

Figure 1. Couple state evolution according to age and generation

Generations	in %				
	at 18	at 25	at 35	at 45	at 55
Has never lived in couple					
1948-1957	96	33	12	9	8
1958-1967	97	40	15	10	
1968-1977	98	45	13		
1978-1988	98	42			
Living first cohabiting couple					
1948-1957	4	63	71	66	59
1958-1967	2	52	62	55	
1968-1977	2	44	58		
1978-1988	2	45			
Does not live in couple after a first break-up					
1948-1957	0	3	6	8	12
1958-1967	0	5	8	11	
1968-1977	0	6	8		
1978-1988	0	7			
Has lived at least twice in couple					
1948-1957	0	2	11	17	21
1958-1967	0	4	15	25	
1968-1977	0	5	22		
1978-1988	0	6			

Coverage : men and women aged 26-65 in 2013, metropolitan France.

Sources : *Ined-Insee, Épic, 2013-2014.*

On average, people start to live in the same home almost 2 years after the beginning of the relationship.

Couple relationships or serious intimate relationships (“which counts or counted in the past”) not always lead to cohabitation: 35% of people aged 26 to 65 have already lived a relationship without cohabiting with their partner. The study focuses on relationships which led to a cohabitation. More than 9 cohabiting relationships out of 10 is preceeding by a non-cohabiting period, which lasted 1.8 year on average. People who started their relationship before age 18 waited 3 years on average before setting up together, whereas this duration is 1.4 year for those who started their relationship after age 18. This duration is steady over cohorts.

Young cohorts enter in partnership at older ages than older cohorts.

Alongside with the increase in the age of completion of schooling [Dalous and al., 2014] and the age at first job, the first cohabiting couple starts at older ages than before. Half of the people born in the years 1948 to 1957 have already lived with a partner at age 22.6 and the median age at first cohabiting partnership is 24.1 for those born in 1968-1977 .

This raise of the median age at first cohabitation reflects a postponement of the first union rather than a movement away from cohabitation [Rault and Régnier-Loilier, 2015]. This delay affects all the social groups, men as well as women. Furthermore, that median age at first cohabiting partnership is the lowest for less-educated women (21.4 for those born in 1968-1977) and is the highest for most-educated men (25.6 for the same cohort).

The percentage of people who experience several cohabiting relationships during their life increased.

Long duration relationships are less frequent. For example, 70% of the people who enter their first union in the 1980's and were aged 20 to 31 at that time, remained at least 15 years with their partner without breaking up, vs. 65% of those who started their cohabitation in the 1990's. Hence, living several relationships has become more frequent. In 2013, 19% of the people aged 26 to 65 have already lived twice in couple and 5% have already experienced three cohabiting relationship or more (same proportion for men and women).

2. Proportion of unbroke relationships according to couple durations

	in %				
	5 years or more	10 years or more	15 years or more	20 years or more	25 years or more
Beginning of the relationship					
1979-1988	86	78	70	63	56
1989-1998	84	73	65		
1999-2008	79				

Coverage : men and women aged 26-65 in 2013, who started their first relationship between 20 and 31 leading to a cohabitation before 2013, metropolitan France.

Sources : Ined-Insee, *Épic*, 2013-2014.

This diversification of couple life courses does not call into question the fact that living with his or her first partner remains the main situation : at age 35, 58% of the people born between 1968 and 1977 live in couple with their first and only partner (71% for people of the 1948-1957 cohort) and 22% have already lived at least two cohabiting partnerships (11% for those born in 1948-1957). Live three times or more in couple is rare : at age 45 , only 6% of people born between 1958 and 1967 are in this case.

Even if most-educated people enter cohabitation at older ages than less-educated ones, they tend to live more cohabiting relationships during their life. This is the consequence of the changing structure in the population, which is more and more educated as time goes by. Yet young cohorts experience more numerous partnerships than older ones. However among the 1948-1967 cohort we observe that, regardless of population structure, most-educated people have lived more relationships than less-educated ones. As a matter of fact, at age 45, respectively 28% of most-educated people born in 1958-1967 have already lived at least two times in couple ; and 23% for the less-educated ones.

Furthermore, the proportion of people who remain single after the breaking-up of their first cohabiting partnership is slowly increasing with age, and at a given age, it is increasing from a

cohort to another. For example, at age 45, 11% of the 1958-1967 cohort live alone (meaning that they are not cohabiting with a partner) after having lived a first cohabiting relationship, vs. 8% in the 1948-1957 cohort.

3. People who lived no relationship, 1 or more than 1 relationship

		Less-educated			Most-educated			in %
Number of relationships		No relationship	One	2 or more	No relationship	One	two or more	
Cohort	<i>Before 35</i>							
1948-1957		12	78	10	12	74	13	
1958-1967		15	71	14	13	69	19	
1968-1977		13	66	21	11	67	22	
	<i>Before 45</i>							
1948-1957		9	75	15	7	72	21	
1958-1967		12	65	23	6	66	28	
		Women			Men			
Number of relationships		No relationship	One	2 or more	No relationship	One	two or more	
Cohort	<i>Before 35</i>							
1948-1957		11	77	11	13	76	11	
1958-1967		10	72	18	18	68	14	
1968-1977		9	69	23	15	64	21	
	<i>Before 45</i>							
1948-1957		8	76	16	9	73	19	
1958-1967		7	67	27	13	64	23	

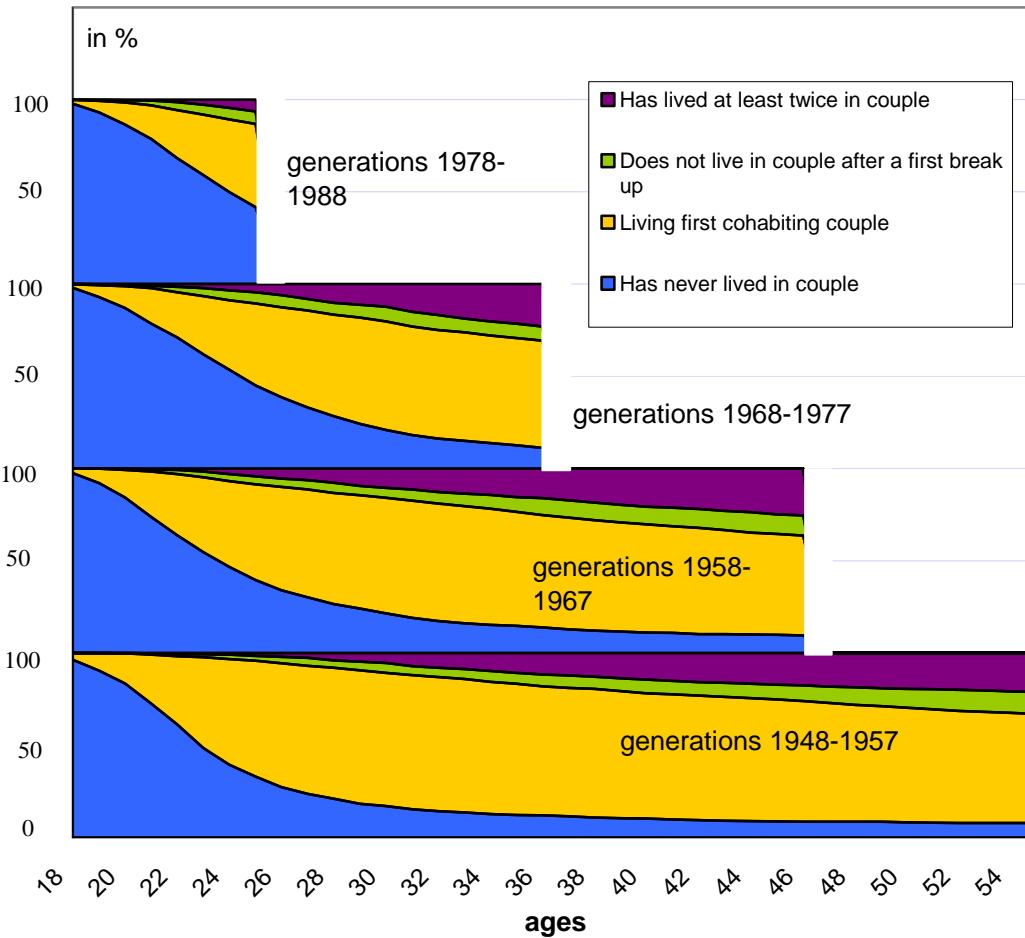
Coverage : men and women aged 26-65 in 2013, metropolitan France.

Sources : *Ined-Insee, Épic, 2013-2014.*

Marriage is not as frequent as before.

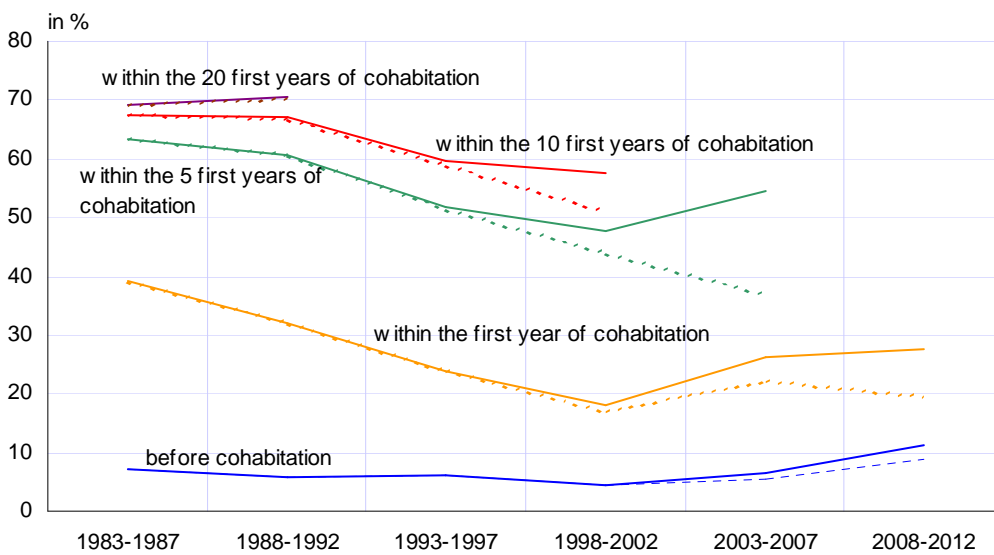
The way people are getting into couples has deeply changed since the end of the second world war. Until the end of the 1960's, more than 8 couples out of 10 got married before settling in the same home and child's birth occurring before marriage was rare. The number of marriages in France dropped from the 1970's until the 1990's when it started to stabilize [Prioux, 2005]. Getting married before settling in the same lodging is now unusual. Since the 1980's, less than one person out of 10 who started to live in couple between age 24 to 34 got married before cohabiting. Nowadays, people who still get married take more time to do so than before. From the 2000's, the proportion of couples who get married during the first year of cohabitation has slightly increased to settle at 19%, far beyond the 1980's level of 39%.

4. Conjugal status evolution by age and cohort



Coverage : men and women aged 26-65 in 2013, metropolitan France.
Sources : Ined-Insee, Epic, 2013-2014.

5. Proportion of first relationships which led to a marriage or a Pacs, by cohabitation duration.



Coverage: men and women aged 26-65 in 2013, who started to live in couple between 24 and 34.

Note : Dash lines show contractualizations by marriage or Pacs, whereas plain lines show marriages only
Sources : Ined-Insee, Epic, 2013-2014.

The Pacs (french contract of civil union) makes it possible since 1999 to contractualize a relationship without getting married. The Pacs is spreading out in the society. However, it remains less frequent than marriage. For example, among people who have started to live in couple between age 24 to 34 and during the years 2003 to 2007, 18% of them have contractualized their relationship with a Pacs and 37% with a marriage (whithout a Pacs before).

The creation of the Pacs leads to an increase in the proportion of first relationship contractualization, which dropped since the beginning of the 1980's.

The duration from the beginning of the first cohabitation to the birth of the first child is increasing.

In France, the total fertility rate falled down quickly between the year 1965 and 1975, before stabilizing. This is the result of two phenomena: on the one hand, parents wanted fewer children and on the other hand, there were less undesired children [Leridon, 1985]. This change in fertility occurred partly thanks to medical contraception legalized in 1967 in France and refunded from 1974 on.

Nonetheless, almost all long duration couples have children. Indeed, this is the case for 95% of the people who started to live for the first time in couple before age 30 and whose relationship have lasted at least 15 years.

In a life course viewpoint, the duration between the beginning of the first cohabitation and the birth of the first child is widening over cohorts, which shows that there is a growing dissociation between entering partnerships and entering families. As a consequence, age at first child is extending faster than age at first cohabitation. The gap betwven median age at cohabitation and median age at first birth illustrates that phenomenon: it passed from 3 years for people who started their first cohabitation before age 30 in the years 1978-1984 to 4.5 years for people who started their relationship 20 years later. The rise is more significant for most-educated people (from 4 years to 5.5 years) than for less-educated ones (for 2.5 years to 3 years).

6. Proportion of relationships which lead to the birth of a child or to marriage or Pacs.

Cohabitation duration	Less than 5 years			15 years or more			in %
	1978-1984	1985-1991	1992-1998	1978-1984	1985-1991	1992-1998	
At least one child is born	24	19	18	93	94	94	
Contractualization of the relationship	29	17	12	92	83	82	
Contractualization of the relationship and birth of a child	15	8	6	87	80	79	
: birth before contractualization	15	27	36	

Coverage : men and women aged 26-65 in 2013, who started to live in couple before 30, metropolitan France.

Sources : Ined-Insee, Epic, 2013-2014.

This growing gap is the result of the fact that birth of the first child comes later during the first relationship and that the first child is born more often during a second or more relationship than before.

Indeed, three years after the beginning of the first cohabitation which occurred before age 30, 52% of people still in couple had a child within that couple if they started to live in the same home between the years 1978 and 1984 vs. only 36% of those who settled in between the years 1999 and 2005.

Relationships are contractualized after first child's birth more frequently than before. Among people who have lived together in couple for more than 15 years and got married or established a Pacs, 15% of them gave birth to their first child before the contractualization if the cohabitation began in the early 1980's vs. 36% if it began in the mid 1990's.

7. Conjugal status at the birth of first child, according to education and cohort of child birth

in %

Child birth cohort	Less-educated people					
	Men			Women		
	1990-1997	1998-2005	2006-2013	1990-1997	1998-2005	2006-2013
within a cohabiting relationship	96	97	96	89	87	95
within the first relationship	82	81	79	72	71	73
within the second relationship	11	15	15	14	14	17
within the third or more relationship	3	2	2	3	3	5
outside a cohabiting relationship	4	3	4	11	13	5
without having ever been in a relationship	1	2	2	4	4	2

Child birth cohort	Most-educated people					
	Men			Women		
	1990-1997	1998-2005	2006-2013	1990-1997	1998-2005	2006-2013
within a cohabiting relationship	97	98	98	97	98	98
within the first relationship	83	78	79	77	78	74
within the second relationship	9	17	18	19	16	20
within the third or more relationship	5	3	1	2	4	4
outside a cohabiting relationship	3	2	2	3	2	2
without having ever been in a relationship	3	1	0	1	1	1

Child birth cohort	Men and women					
	Men			Women		
	1990-1997	1998-2005	2006-2013	1990-1997	1998-2005	2006-2013
within a cohabiting relationship	96	98	98	94	95	97
within the first relationship	82	79	79	75	76	74
within the second relationship	11	16	17	17	15	19
within the third or more relationship	3	2	2	2	4	4
outside a cohabiting relationship	4	2	2	6	5	3
without having ever been in a relationship	2	1	1	2	2	1

Coverage : people aged 26-65 in 2013, who give birth to a child between 25 and 42, metropolitan France.

Sources : Ined-Insee, Epic, 2013-2014.

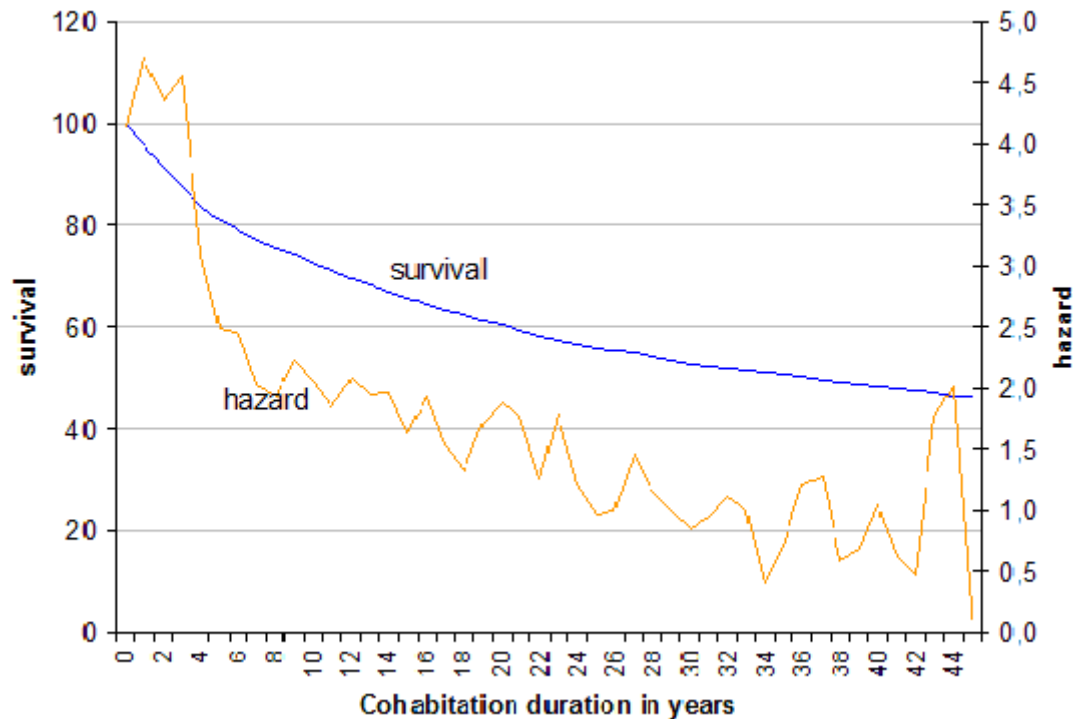
Breaking-up unions is more likely at the very beginning of the couple life than after.

On average between the years 2009 and 2012, 293,000 couples in which at least one partner is 25 to 60 years old split up every year .

First relationships are becoming shorter over cohorts. We will focus here on the duration between the beginning of the first cohabitation in couple and the end of this couple (break-up or death of the partner). Durations models are used to analyze those durations. The likelihood that a first relationship split up is the highest during the four first years of cohabitation. It then reduces slowly but steadily as time goes by. Five years after the first cohabitation, we estimate that 80% of people are still living with their partner. Ten years after, this proportion drops to 73% and 35 years after, to 50%.

Over cohorts, first cohabiting couples are becoming shorter. According to the estimated models, 40% of people born in 1978-1987 do not live anymore with their partner 5 years after their first cohabitation, vs. 16% of people of the 1948-1957 cohort. The most-educated people born during the 1950's and 1960's tend to have shorter relationships than the less-educated ones. Nonetheless this difference vanished, which reveals that less-educated people behaviors have reached most-educated people behaviors.

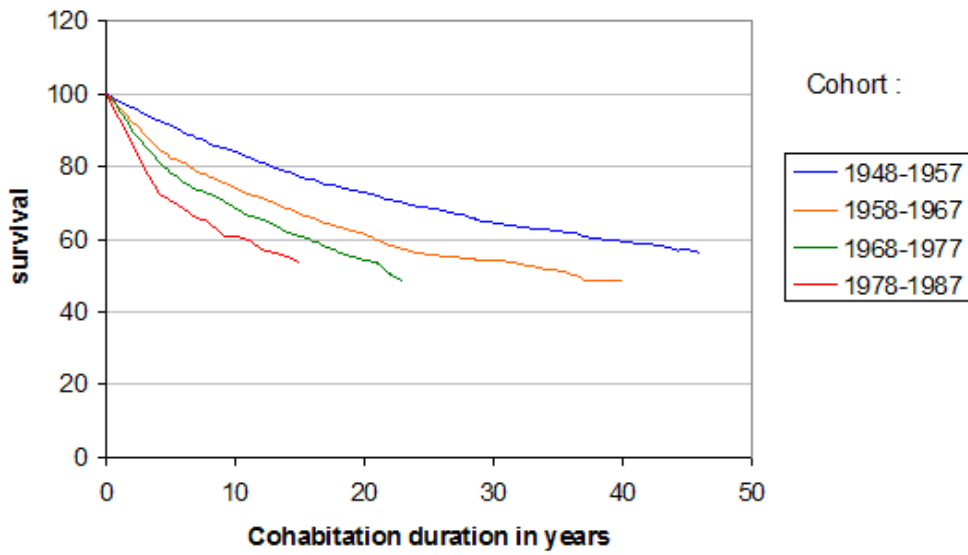
8. Survival function and hazard function for couple duration



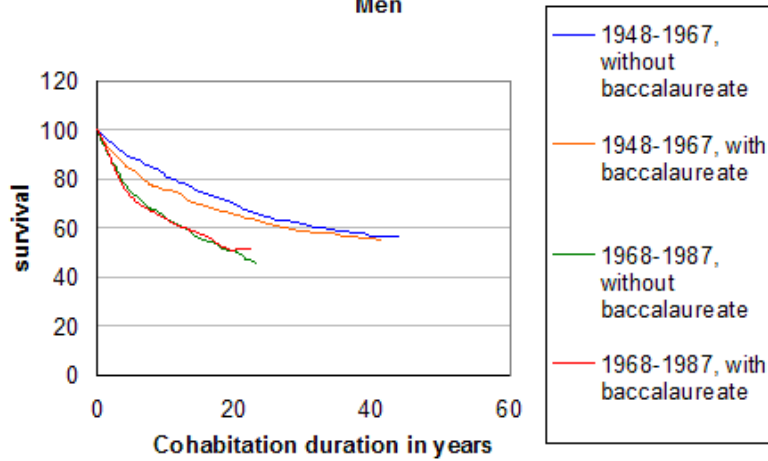
Coverage : men and women aged 26-65 in 2013, who have lived at least cohabiting relationship, metropolitan France.
Sources : Ined-Insee, Épic, 2013-2014.

9. Survival functions of couple duration, by cohort, gender and education attainment

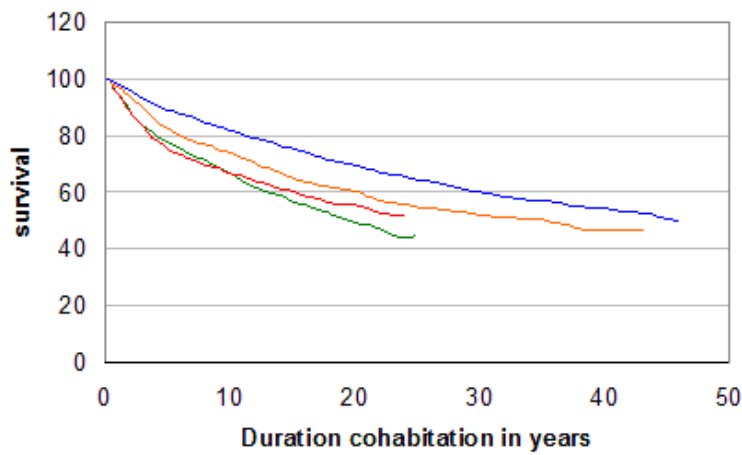
By cohort



Men



Women



Coverage : men and women aged 26-65 in 2013, who have lived at least cohabiting relationship, metropolitan France.
Sources : Ined-Insee, Épic, 2013-2014.

Contractualizing a relationship and having children diminish break-up hazard

At a given duration, married couples (or couples with a Pacs) have a lower probability to split up than couples without any contract. This hazard diminishes by more than 60% other things being equal. Having young children within a relationship is also correlated to a lower hazard: it is divided by two if the youngest child is less than 5 years old. When children reach 10 years old, there is no more significant effect. Those correlations do not indicate any causality. Marriage, Pacs as well as having children can prevent from breaking-up. The other way of causality is also possible, namely people who face a lower break-up hazard tend to contractualize their relationship or to have children more often.

People whose parents broke up when minor show a higher risk to break up their own relationship once they are adult: the hazard is 65% higher for women and 72% higher for men. Moreover, people settling in together at age 25 or more will have a longer relationship than those who settled before this age. Actually, break-up hazard decreases with the age at settling in and with the non-cohabiting duration before settling in. Finally, the cohort effect still exists when controlling the model by all these previous variables. All things being equal, the level of diploma effect remains for women from the 1948-1967 cohort but disappears for younger cohorts.

10. Cox proportional hazard model for break-up hazard

	Women		Men	
	Coefficient	Odds ratio	Coefficient	Odds ratio
Cohort				
1948-1957	Réf.		Réf.	
1958-1967	0,23	1,26	n.s.	
1968-1977	0,18	1,19	0,27	1,31
1978-1988	0,31	1,37	0,50	1,64
Education attainment				
Without baccaulaureate	Réf.		Réf.	
With baccaulaureate	n.s.		n.s.	
Non-cohabiting duration	-0,04	0,96	-0,07	0,93
Parents always lived together during childhood (before 18)				
Yes	Réf.		Réf.	
No	0,50	1,65	0,54	1,72
Departure from home				
Before 23	Réf.		Réf.	
At 23 or later	-0,16	0,85	-0,20	0,82
Age at cohabitation				
At 19 or before	Réf.		Réf.	
Between 20 and 24	-0,15	0,86	-0,25	0,78
Between 25 and 30	-0,29	0,75	-0,31	0,73
After 30	-0,46	0,63	-0,44	0,64
Age of the youngest child				
Without child	Réf.		Réf.	
Between 0 and 4	-0,68	0,51	-0,71	0,49
Between 5 and 9	-0,31	0,73	n.s.	
Between 10 and 14	n.s.		n.s.	
Between 15 and 19	n.s.		n.s.	
After 20	n.s.		n.s.	

Contractualization of the relationship					
Not contractualized	Réf.		Réf.		
Contractualized (marriage or Pacs)		-0,98	0,38	-1,02	0,36

n.s. not significant

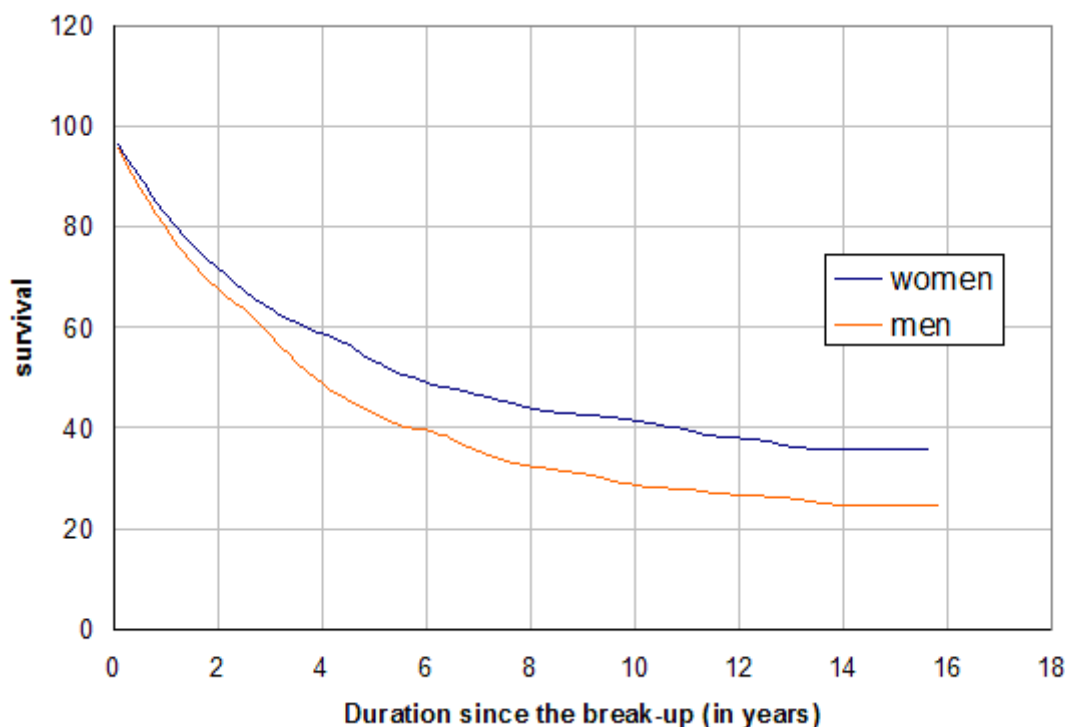
Coverage : men and women aged 26-65 in 2013, who have already lived in couple, metropolitan France.

Sources : Ined-Insee, Epic, 2013-2014.

Men start a new relationship after a breaking-up more frequently than women.

In 2013, one person aged 26 to 65 out of three experienced a break-up after a first cohabiting relationship. It is estimated that 5 years after a break-up which occurred between age 25 and 50, more than half of the people start a new cohabiting relationship. This is more often the case for men (57%) than for women (46%). Fifteen years after a break-up, 75% of men and 64% of women live again in cohabiting couple. This means that almost one third (30%) of people who broke up between age 25 and 50 never live in couple during the 15 years following the end of their relationship.

11. Survival of duration between break-up and new couple life



Coverage : men and women aged 26-65 in 2013, who started to live in couple between 25 and 50, metropolitan France.

Sources : Ined-Insee, Epic, 2013-2014.

The duration needed to start a new relationship is mainly explained by the age at separation: the higher it is, the lower the instant probability of living anew in couple. This is more pronounced for women than for men. Moreover, people who take the decision (alone or together) to end the relationship will start a new life couple more rapidly than the other ones. This may be because some people leave their partner to be in couple with another person. Some factors act differently on men and women. All things being equal, men with a high school diploma have a higher probability of living again in couple than the other men. This is

not the case among women. However, to be a student decreases that probability for women but not for men. Moreover, having a child under age 20 is an obstacle for women to start a new cohabiting relationship. The fact that it is not the case for men can be explained by the fact that after a break-up, the mothers generally continue to live with the children. All things being equal, younger cohorts tend to start a new life couple faster than older ones. The duration of the previous relationship does not impact the probability of living anew in couple. After a separation, all the new relationships do not necessarily lead to a cohabitation. Considering duration between separation and the beginning of a new relationship, leading or not to cohabitation, gives logically different results. For example, 5 years after a separation, 71% of men and 67% of women have started a new relationship, and 15 years after, proportions reach respectively 87% and 79%. The gap between men and women still exists but it is reduced. Moreover, most-educated women tend to start a new relationship more rapidly than less-educated ones. It means that most-educated women start a new relationship which does not lead to cohabitation more frequently than less-educated ones.

12. Cox proportional hazard model for duration between break-up and new couple life

	Women		Men	
	Coefficient	Odds ratio	Coefficient	Odds ratio
Cohort				
1948-1957	<i>Réf.</i>		<i>Réf.</i>	
1958-1967	0,18	1,20	0,2	1,22
1968-1977	0,23	1,26	0,21	1,23
1978-1988	0,29	1,34	0,32	1,38
Education attainment				
Without bacculaureate	<i>Réf.</i>		<i>Réf.</i>	
With bacculaureate	n.s.		0,16	1,17
Age at separation				
0-24	0,32	1,38	0,27	1,31
25-34	<i>Réf.</i>		<i>Réf.</i>	
35-44	-0,70	0,50	-0,60	0,55
45 and more	-1,72	0,18	-1,07	0,34
Duration of previous relationship				
moins de 2 ans	<i>Réf.</i>		<i>Réf.</i>	
entre 2 et 3 ans	n.s.		n.s.	
entre 4 et 9 ans	n.s.		n.s.	
plus de 10 ans	n.s.		n.s.	
School completion				
Yes	0,41	1,51	n.s.	
No	<i>Réf.</i>		<i>Réf.</i>	
Who decided to break-up ?				
The partner	-0,14		-0,27	0,76
The person	<i>Réf.</i>		<i>Réf.</i>	
Common decision	-0,34		-0,31	0,73
Age of the youngest child				
Without child	<i>Réf.</i>		<i>Réf.</i>	
less than 5	-0,61	0,54	n.s.	
between 5 and 9	-0,45	0,64	n.s.	
between 10 and 14	-0,29	0,75	n.s.	
between 15 and 19	-0,34	0,71	n.s.	
20 or more	n.s.		n.s.	

n.s. : not significant

Coverage : men and women aged 26-65 in 2013, who lived at least one separation during their life, metropolitan France.
Sources : Ined-Insee, *Epic*, 2013-2014.

The number of children facing their parents' separation is increasing.

Every year, the number of separations is higher. Between the years 1993 and 1996, there were each year on average 155,000 couple separations among which at least one of the partner was between age 25 and 45. Half of those separations (75 000) included children under 18. Sixteen years later, between the years 2009 and 2012, there were 253 000 separations each year, 155,000 of which included minor children. As a consequence, the number of children facing their parent's separation has been increasing since the 1990's. It passes from 145,000 to 191,000 between those two periods. Nevertheless, we observed that this number started to decrease resulting from a diminishing number of separations including children. On average, the youngest child is 6 years old when a separation occurred. This has not changed since the 1990's.

The increased number of children facing their parent's separation is mainly due to parents who have a high school diploma, resulting from a shift in population structure, which is more and more educated.

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