# Relationship Assessments in Marital and Cohabiting Unions across Europe

Kenneth Aarskaug Wiik, Statistics Norway (kaw@ssb.no)
Trude Lappegård, Statistics Norway (lap@ssb.no)
Renske Keizer, Erasmus University Rotterdam (keizer@fsw.eur.nl)

Paper for the American Population Association Annual Meeting 2010.

**Abstract**

Most studies find that cohabitors are less committed to and satisfied with their partnerships than those married. In this study, we utilize data from the first wave of the Generations and Gender Surveys to investigate commitment and relationship quality among currently married and cohabiting individuals aged 18 to 55 ($N = 41, 666$) in eight European countries (Bulgaria, France, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Romania, Russia, and the Netherlands). We expected there to be less differences between cohabitation and marriage in counties where cohabitation is widespread. The analyses show that in all countries cohabitors more often have breakup plans are significantly less satisfied (except Hungary and the Netherlands) than those married. Controlling for a range of available characteristics of respondents and their partners (e.g., common children, union duration, education) we find that this "cohabitation gap" is largest in Russia, Romania, Germany and Bulgaria.

## Introduction

Most studies find that cohabitors are less committed to and satisfied with their partnerships than those married (Brown, 2003; Hansen, Moum, and Shapiro, 2007; Nock, 1995; Wiik, Bernhardt and Noack, 2009). There are, however, reasons to assume that there are regional variations in the degree to which relationship assessments differ across union types, mainly due to country differences in institutionalization and prevalence of unmarried cohabitation. The Scandinavian countries are, for instance, often cited as examples of countries where cohabitation is largely indistinguishable from marriage. In South-eastern Europe, on the other hand, this living arrangement is far less common. One recent example is Heuveline and Timberlake (2004) who proposed a typology with six ideal types of cohabitation. According to them, cohabitation has evolved from a marginal position associated with clearly negative public attitudes to one where it is common and largely identical to marriage. They classify 17 Western countries and it is argued that cohabitation is almost indistinguishable from marriage in Sweden whereas it is an alternative to marriage in France. In the other end of the spectrum we find Italy, Spain and Poland where cohabitation is a highly marginal phenomenon (Heuveline and Timberlake, 2004).

Utilizing comparable data from a range of European countries (Bulgaria, France, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Romania, Russia, and the Netherlands), we investigate relationship satisfaction and breakup plans in marital and cohabiting unions. As there seems to be small differences between cohabitors with plans to marry their partners and those who are already married (Brown and Booth, 1996; Wiik et al, 2009) we are not only focusing on union type but also on short-term marriage intentions. In particular, we assess in which countries the differences between cohabitation and marriage in union quality and breakup plans are most pronounced and in which countries marriage and cohabitation are more or less identical. Our general hypothesis is that differences between cohabitors and marrieds in relationship

satisfaction and break up plans are more pronounced in countries where cohabitation is less widespread and less institutionalized. For instance, as cohabitation is less widespread and institutionalized in South-eastern Europe, the differences between marriage and cohabitation may be more pronounced there. In Northern Europe, where most people cohabit prior to an eventual marriage and cohabitation is more institutionalized, one would expect smaller differences between the union types.

Similar comparative studies have been carried out earlier, but they have mainly focused on the actual demographic behaviour of cohabitors and those married (e.g., Kiernan, 2004; Liefbroer and Dourleijn, 2006; Prinz, 1995). A recent exception is the study of Soons and Kalmijn (2009) who investigated the "cohabitation gap" in well-being in 30 European countries. Using multilevel models, they found that this gap was smaller in countries where cohabitation was common and institutionalized than in countries where cohabitation was a marginal phenomenon. However, to our knowledge, there are no comparative studies on relationship quality and commitment in marriage and cohabitation. Such a comparative study should give valuable insights into our understanding of unmarried cohabitation in different contexts. And, most of the research on relationship assessments is from the U.S. As unmarried cohabitation has become an increasingly popular living arrangement in many European countries it is important to gain new knowledge.

**Relationship assessments in cohabitation versus marriage**

Defining commitment as the perceived costs of exiting a union, Nock (1995) found significantly lower levels of commitment among cohabiting relative to married individuals in the U.S. Further, comparing currently married individuals with cohabitors without definite marriage plans, Stanley, Whitton, and Markman (2004) found that the first group was significantly more dedicated to their relationships (i.e., a desire to prioritize the relationship),

even after controlling for satisfaction levels.

Relationship satisfaction has been the focus of several studies. Among those explicitly comparing cohabitation and marriage, the majority concludes that married individuals are more satisfied with their relationships than those living in cohabiting relationships (e.g., Brown, 2003, 2004; Brown and Booth, 1996; Stanley et al., 2004). Correspondingly, comparing those who cohabited with their current spouse prior to marriage with those who married without cohabiting first and those who were currently cohabiting, Nock (1995) found that cohabitors were less happy with their relationships than both groups of married individuals. However, as the differences between the union forms lost statistical significance when commitment was included as a predictor of relationship happiness, cohabitors' lower level of relationship quality could be due to their inferior commitment (Nock, 1995). Studying co-residential relationships' in midlife in Norway, Hansen et al. (2007) found that cohabitors reported lower levels of relationship happiness compared with marrieds.

Some studies indicate that the views of cohabitors who report that they intend to marry their current partners differ much less from those of married respondents than cohabitors with no marriage plans. Brown and Booth (1996) emphasize that for many couples cohabitation serves as a preface to marriage, and it is therefore essential to take into account their marriage intentions, which could be indicative of cohabitors' relationship quality. Their results show that the relationships of cohabitors with marriage plans were not qualitatively different from those of marrieds. Analyses showing poorer relationship quality among cohabitors than marrieds could therefore reflect the lack of a control for marriage intentions among the cohabitors, which, in turn, is related to commitment (Brown and Booth, 1996). This conclusion was later supported by Brown (2004), who reported no differences in relationship quality between cohabitors who plan to marry their partners and cohabitors who actually marry. In Sweden and Norway, the analyses of Wiik et al. (2009) revealed that cohabitors

overall were less serious and less satisfied with their relationships. They were also more likely to consider ending their current relationships than are married respondents. However, the views of cohabitors who reported that they intend to marry their current partners within two years differed much less from those of married respondents than cohabitors without marriage plans.

One explanation for cohabitors' inferior union commitment and satisfaction could be that cohabitation and marriage are qualitatively different union forms. Correspondingly, Nock (1995) argues that marriage and cohabitation must be seen as qualitatively different forms of relationships in the U.S. because of differential institutionalization of the relationships (legal vs. extralegal, normatively approved vs. emerging and novel). Cohabitation is, however, widespread and increasingly accepted and institutionalized in several countries. For instance, in Norway about three-quarter of all existing cohabitations couples have lived together for a minimum of two years or have children together (Noack and Seierstad, 2003). Although such marriage-like unions have most of the same rights and duties as married couples, there are continuing differences in the area of private law, which to a large degree is left to the cohabitors themselves to regulate by private agreement. There are still relatively few cohabitors who make such agreements (Noack, 2010).

Also, differences in commitment and relationship quality by union type could be a consequence of the marriage itself and the norms and values associated with the institution of marriage. Not only the wedding ceremony itself, but several rituals and practices remain reserved for entering marriage. Perhaps more importantly, individuals that do marry exhibit socially accepted behavior and they may receive social approval from society, family and the social surroundings in general. This could be of particular importance in countries in which cohabitation is less accepted.

Conversely, selection, not the experience of cohabitation *per se* could be the driving force

behind marrieds' superior relationship quality and commitment. That is, cohabitation and marriage could attract different types of individuals initially. For instance, cohabitors are more likely to possess characteristics that are associated with union dissolution, like lower socioeconomic status (Kravdal, 1999). Also, research has found that cohabitors overall are less religious (Thornton, Axinn, and Xie, 2007; Wiik, 2009). Additionally, cohabitors could have certain attitudes and values that "predispose" them to be less committed and satisfied. There are evidence that cohabitation is selective of more individualistic, egalitarian, and nontraditional individuals, at least in the U.S. (Brines and Joyner, 1999; Smock, 2000).

**Other factors influencing relationship assessments**

In addition to these differences in relationship assessments by union type, the association between union form and union commitment and quality may be influenced by a range of other factors. As many of these factors themselves can be associated with cohabitation, they are possible confounders in the link between union form and relationship assessments.

*The role of children*

It seems plausible that couples with common children are more committed to the union than couples without children. Joint children can act as "glue" in situations where a break-up would otherwise be a likely solution and several studies have shown that union dissolution risks are significantly lower when couples have joint children. Some of this may be due to selectivity of happy couples into childbearing, but studies from the U.S. and U. K. indicate that there is also a causal component in this relationship (Lillard and Waite, 1993; Steele, Kallis, Goldstein, and Joshi, 2005). According to Stanley and Markman (1992), children create "internal constraint commitment," defined as actual or perceived costs of exiting a

union, and they argue that the greatest increase in constraint commitment may come when couples have children. Most studies of relationship commitment or quality as well as studies of dissolution risks therefore take into account the presence of children.

Although children normally reinforce commitment, they may also put stress on relationships (Brown and Booth, 1996). The presence of children is significantly associated with lower levels of relationship quality (Brown, 2003, 2004; Wiik et al., 2009), whereas Nock's (1995) results showed that having children in preschool age decrease relationship happiness among men and women alike. Further, the presence of step children in the household seems to be associated with a lower relationship quality (Brown, 2004), as well as a higher dissolution risk (Clarke-Stewart and Brentano, 2006). On the other hand, the findings of Moors and Bernhardt (2009) indicate that cohabiting couples planning to have children are more likely to marry and less likely to break up. Wiik et al. (2009) found that birth plans was positively associated with relationship satisfaction and seriousness and negatively related to breakup plans.

*Socioeconomic variables and relationship assessments*

The level of union commitment and quality may be associated with socioeconomic variables as well. First, having a partner whose education and/or income is high could be positively related to being satisfied with the union. Such a partner is more likely to contribute to the household economy, and could bring social status and prestige to the couple. Previous studies also find that married and cohabiting couples that are heterogamous with respect to traits such as age, education, and income have an elevated risk of splitting up than is the case for homogamous couples (Brines and Joyner, 1999; Goldstein and Harknett, 2006). Moreover, educational heterogamy (Tynes, 1990) and age heterogamy (Wiik et al., 2009) reduces relationship satisfaction. Also, couples' status inconsistency in occupation and

earnings is associated with low relationship quality, particularly if women have higher status than men (Brennan, Barnett, and Gareis, 2001; Rogers and DeBoer, 2001). One reason why homogamous couples should be more satisfied with and committed to their current unions and less likely to split up than heterogamous couples could be that they fit together better and share "a common universe of discourse" (DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985: 1234).

Not only the socioeconomic composition of the couple, but also individuals' own level of education and income, could be associated with relationship assessments. Although some studies report no association between educational attainment (Brown, 2003, 2004; Nock, 1995; Wiik et al., 2009) and earnings (Nock, 1995) and relationship quality, Brown and Booth (1996) found a positive relation between education and union quality in the U.S. Also, education decreases perceived dissolution risk among married couples (Thomson and Colella, 1992).

*Partnership history, gender and attitudes*

Relationship duration could be another factor influencing breakup plans and satisfaction with the union. The probability of being satisfied (and committed) could be at its highest in the earliest phase of a partnership, which may be evidence of a "honeymoon effect." The assumption that relationship duration is inversely related to satisfaction has been confirmed in earlier research (e.g., Brown and Booth, 1996; Nock, 1995; Wiik et al., 2009). Further, some studies report that prior cohabitation experience is significantly associated with lower levels of relationship quality (Brown, 2003, 2004).

Regarding gender differences, Brown and Booth (1996) reported no significant differences between women and men in relationship happiness, although they did find that women were less inclined to report relationship disagreement and fairness. In Sweden and Norway, on the other hand, women are significantly more serious about their relationships than men (Wiik, et

al. 2009). Moreover, age has a negative effect on relationship quality (Brown and Booth, 1996; Wiik, et al. 2009). Finally, being religious is associated with traditional attitudes toward marriage and family life in general. In particular, religious individuals have substantially higher marriage rates and lower cohabitation rates than the less religious (Thornton et al., 2007; Wiik, 2009), and several studies find that religion decreases the risk of divorce (Clarke-Stewart and Brentano, 2006).

**Data and method**

We use data from the first wave of the national Generations and Gender Surveys (GGS) in Bulgaria ($N$ = 12,858), France ($N$ = 10,079), Germany ($N$ = 10,017), Hungary ($N$ = 13,540), Norway ($N$ = 14,882), Romania ($N$ = 11,986) and Russia ($N$ = 11,261) carried out in the period 2003-2007. The GGS is a set of comparative surveys which interviewed nationally representative samples of the 18-79 year-old resident population in each country. Among many other appealing features, these data allow us to study women's and men's commitment and relationship satisfaction within marriage and cohabitation. For the Netherlands we use data from the first wave of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study. This survey, which is now officially the Dutch part of the GGS, was conducted in 2002-2003 and includes a representative sample of adults aged 18 to 79 ($N$ = 8, 150). The overall response rate of the first wave was 45% similar to comparable large-scale family surveys in the Netherlands (Dykstra et al., 2005).

In the current paper, we exclude respondents not living in a co-residential relationship as well as those older than 55 ($n$ = 51,107). This gives a sample of 41,666 currently married or cohabiting individuals in the age group 18 to 55. The sample sizes per country are: Norway ($n$ = 6,721); Bulgaria ($n$ = 6,252); Hungary ($n$ = 6,049); Romania ($n$ = 5,605); Russia ($n$ = 5,028); Germany ($n$ = 4,181); France ($n$ = 4,006); the Netherlands ($n$ = 3,824).

*Dependent Variables and Procedure*

In order to capture various aspects of the degree to which married and cohabiting respondents are committed to and satisfied with their present relationship, we utilize two outcome variables. The first of these, *relationship satisfaction*, was measured by asking respondents how satisfied they were with their current unions. This variable has values ranging from 1 = *very dissatisfied* to 10 = *very satisfied*. We use ordinary least squares regression to test the effect of union type on relationship satisfaction.

The second dependent variable was made by utilizing a question asking respondents whether they themselves had *considered breaking up the union* in the year preceding the survey. When respondents had considered splitting up during the last year they were coded 1. Negative answers were coded 0. This question was not included in the Dutch survey. Binomial logistic regression analysis was used to model the likelihood of having breakup plans.

In the results section we present two sets of regression models: One for relationship satisfaction with/without controls and one for breakup plans with/without controls (Table 3). To test whether there are differences in the effect of union type and relationship assessments across country, significant interactions in the effects of country on our outcomes by union type are presented in Table 4.

*Independent Variables*

Our main explanatory variable is type of union. In addition to information on cohabitation and marriage, we use a question about marriage intentions among cohabiting respondents, i.e., whether they are intending to marry their current partners within the next three years. The response categories were: “Definitely not,” “probably not,” “probably yes,” or “definitely

yes." Cohabitors who were probably or definitely intending to marry within the next three years were defined as having marriage intentions. In the Dutch and Norwegian surveys the response categories were simply "yes" or "no". Thus, we made a three category variable separating between married respondents (1), cohabitors with intent to marry within the next three years (2), and cohabitors without such intentions (3). A set of dummy variables were also included to capture any effect of country, with Norwegian respondents being the reference group.

We include a range of covariates in the equations to control for possible confounding sources of variation in comparing the union types, as prior research show that they are correlated to cohabitation and our two outcomes. First, we control for the presence of common children of the couple in the household. This variable was coded 1 if one or more child(ren) of the couple resided in the household. Couples with no common children were coded 0. Also, we include an indicator for presence of step children in the household, coded 1 if the respondent or his or her partner had prior children who were living in the household and 0 otherwise. Lastly, respondents were asked if they plan to have (more) children. Those with preferences for (more) children were coded 1, whereas those without birth plans were coded 0.

Further, respondents' age was measured in years.[1] Moreover, we made an indicator to control for age homogamy in the couple. When the age difference between the respondent and his or her partner was less than six years, they were coded as age homogamous (1). Age heterogamous couples were coded 0. Another variable measures any effect of the respondent's gender with values 0 for men and 1 for women. A further variable captures the duration of the co-residential relationship in years. We also include a quadratic term to control for nonlinearity in the effect of union duration. Also, a dummy indicating whether (1) or not (0) respondents have experienced prior marital or nonmarital union(s) was incorporated.

Educational attainment was grouped into three categories depending on whether respondents had completed any education at the primary, secondary or university level. Another variable measures the educational composition of couples. Couples with the same level of education (primary, secondary, or tertiary) were defined as educationally homogamous. Religiousness was measured by responses to a question asking respondents how often they attend religious services (apart from weddings, funerals and the like). This covariate was dichotomized. Those who attend to more than one religious service(s) per month were defined as religious (1), whereas those who attend religious services less frequently were coded 0.

**Results**

Descriptive statistics for the variables used in the analyses are presented in Table 1 and show that cohabitors overall are less satisfied and more often have breakup plans than those married. We also note that a substantially higher share of married individuals have common children compared with their non-married counterparts. Cohabitors, on the other hand, more often have step children living in the household and are more often planning to have (more) children. Table 1 also shows that a higher share of the cohabitors live in relationships of shorter duration and more frequently report having experienced previous unions than married respondents. Although a slightly higher share of cohabitors are primary educated, there are no major differences between the married respondents and cohabitors with regard to the educational composition of couples. Cohabitors are also younger and more often live in age heterogamous relationships (+/-5 years) compared with those married.

[About here Table 1]

The mean score on the variable measuring relationship satisfaction and breakup plans by union type and country are presented in Table 2. In this table the countries are ranged

according to the share of cohabitors in each country. The shares of cohabitors as opposed to married individuals are highest in the Norwegian (31%) and French samples (27%) and lowest in Bulgaria (14%) and Romania (6%).[2] More importantly, we note that in all countries except Hungary and the Netherlands cohabitors are significantly less satisfied than those married. There is also evident that in all countries a significantly higher share of cohabitors has breakup plans compared with their married counterparts. Table 2 also shows that there are substantial country differences in the overall share of respondents who have thought about ending their unions, ranging from only about 3% Bulgaria to more than 18% in Russia. These results are illustrated graphically in Figures 1 and 2.

[About here Table 2]

Multivariate models for relationship satisfaction and having considered ending the current relationship are presented in Table3. Two sets of regression models are presented for each outcome: One with and one without controls. As prior studies indicate that there are difference between cohabitors with and without marriage plans, we have separated between cohabitors with intentions to marry their current partners within three years ($n$ = 3,144, 40.1%) and cohabitors without such plans ($n$ = 4,695, 59.9%).

The results from the first ordinary least squares regression model of relationship satisfaction including only union type and country in Table 3 (surprisingly) show that cohabitors with short-term marriage intentions are more satisfied with their relationship than marrieds. Adding the controls to this model, however, it is evident that cohabitors with and without plans to marry their partner are significantly less satisfied with their relationships compared with married individuals. Controlling for country, the presence of common children and step children in the household, birth plans, union duration, previous union(s), education of the respondent and his/her partner, age, age homogamy and gender, cohabitors without plans to marry their partners score 0.60 lower on the relationship satisfaction scale relative to

those married. Net of the other variables included, cohabitors who are planning to marry score 0.10 lower on the satisfaction scale. Also, the level of relationship satisfaction is significantly lower among respondents from all countries relative to Norwegians, except Romanians and Germans.

Turning to the controls, we first note that the presence of common children in the household significantly reduces relationship satisfaction, whereas having birth plans increases the level of satisfaction. This finding is in accordance with previous findings claiming that children may act as relationship stressors (e.g., Nock, 1995; Wiik et al., 2009). Further, the probability of being satisfied is at its highest for respondents living in partnerships of shorter duration. The negative effect of union duration is, however, curve linear. Respondents who have experienced one or more prior relationships are significantly less satisfied than respondents with no prior relationship experience.

Regarding respondents' education, we see that university educated respondents as well as those with a secondary education are significantly more satisfied with their current unions than primary educated respondents. Next, couples who have completed the same level of education as well as respondents whose partners have a higher level of education than themselves are significantly more satisfied than respondents with lower educated partners. From the model of relationship satisfaction in Table 3 it is also evident that female respondents are significantly less satisfied with their relationships than male respondents. Last, Table 3 shows that older respondents are less likely to be satisfied relative to younger respondents.

From the second model presented in Table 3 we see that cohabitors are significantly more likely to have considered ending their current unions than what is the case for married respondents. Although this positive effect of cohabitation is statistically significant for both groups of cohabitors, it is particularly strong for cohabitors without plans to marry their

partner. Controlling for relevant characteristics, the relative rise in the risk of having breakup plans is nearly three times as high for this group of cohabitors compared with married respondents. Cohabitors with plans to marry their partners have, on the other hand, 29% higher odds of considering a breakup relative to their married counterparts. We also note that the risk of having breakup plans is particularly strong among Russian respondents compared with Norwegians. Bulgarians and Romanians are, on the other hand, nearly 60% less likely to have breakup plans relative to Norwegians.

Further, there is a positive association between union duration and breakup plans. The squared term is negative and statistically significant implying that the likelihood of having breakup plans increases and then decreases for couples who have lived together for longer periods. Respondents with prior union experience have 57% higher odds of thinking of breaking up compared with those in their first union. Also, university educated respondents are 14% more likely to have breakup plans relative to the primary educated. Finally, we note that older respondents are less likely to consider ending their unions whereas women more often have breakup plans than men.

[About here Table 3]

From the results presented so far, it is evident that cohabitors, regardless of whether they are planning to marry their partners or not, are significantly less satisfied and have an elevated risk of considering ending their unions that what is the case for married individuals. The second main objective of this paper was to assess possible country differences in this "cohabitation gap" in relationship assessments. To test whether there are significant country differences in the effect of cohabitation on our two outcomes, results from multivariate models including interaction terms between country and union type (as well as controls for all variables included in Table 3) are presented in Table 4. As we found no significant differences between cohabitors with and without intentions to marry their current partner, and

in order to reduce the number of parameters when included in the interaction terms, union type is included as an indicator with the values 0 (marriage) and 1 (cohabitation) in these models.

[About here Table 4]

From the first model with interactions between union type and country in Table 4 we note that the negative association between cohabitation and relationship satisfaction is stronger in all countries (except the Netherlands) compared with Norway. This interaction effect between union type and country is, however, only statistically significant ($p < .05$) for Russia, Romania, and Bulgaria. The difference in relationship satisfaction between cohabitation and marriage is, in other words, more pronounced in these countries relative to Norway. The country differences in the association between cohabitation and having breakup plans are, on the other hand, much smaller: The positive relation between cohabitation and breakup plans is significantly stronger in Germany compared with Norway. Separate models for each country sub sample are presented in the Appendix.

As Russia, Romania, Bulgaria and Germany are the countries where cohabitation is least prevalent, we have partly confirmed our hypothesis claiming that that the cohabitation gap in relationship satisfaction and breakup plans is bigger in countries where cohabitation is less prevalent than in those where the union form is widespread.

**Notes**

1. In additional analyses age squared was also included to control for nonlinearity. As the association between age and our outcomes were linear this variable was not included in our final models.
2. To be sure, restricting our sample to respondents aged 40 or less, the share of cohabitors becomes markedly higher in all countries (e.g., 45% in Norway, 25% in Germany, 22% in

Russia, 32% in the Netherlands, and 38% in France). This sample restriction does not, however alter our main finding that cohabitors are significantly less satisfied and more often are considering breaking up.

**References**


Brines, J., and Joyner, K. (1999). The Ties That Bind: Principles of Cohesion in Cohabitation and Marriage. *American Sociological Review*, 64, 333 – 355.

Brown, S. L. (2003). Relationship Quality Dynamics of Cohabiting Unions. *Journal of Family Issues*, 24, 583-601.

Brown, S. L. (2004). Moving from Cohabitation to Marriage: Effects on Relationship Quality. *Socials Science Research*, 33, 1 – 19.

Brown, S. L., and Booth, A. (1996). Cohabitation versus marriage: A comparison of relationship quality. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 58, 668-678.

Cherlin, A. J. (2004). The Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family,* 66, 848-861.

Clarke-Stewart, A., and Brentano, C. (2006). *Divorce: Causes and Consequences*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Dykstra, P. A., Kalmijn, M., Knijn, G. C. M., Komter, A. E., Liefbroer, A. C., and Mulder, C. H. (2005). *Codebook of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, a multi-actor, multi-method panel study on solidarity in family relationships, Wave 1. NKPS working Paper No.4*. The Hague, Netherlands: Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute.

Goldstein, J. R., and Harknett, K. (2006). Parenting across Racial and Class Lines: Who are Married, Cohabiting, Dating or no Longer Romantically Involved? *Social Forces,* 85, 121-143.

Hansen, T., Moum T., and Shapiro, A. (2007). Relational and Individual Well-being among Cohabitors and Married Individuals in Midlife: Recent Trends from Norway. *Journal of Family Issues*, 28, 910-933.

Heuveline, P., and Timberlake, J. M. (2004). The Role of Cohabitation in Family Formation: The United States in a Comparative Perspective. *Journal of Marriage and Family,* 66, 1214-1230.

Hoem, J. M., Kostova, D., Gabrielli, G., Matysiak, A., and Jasilioniene, A. (2010). Levels of Recent Union Formation: Six European Countries Compared. *Demographic Research*, 22, 199-210.

Kiernan K. E. (2004). Redrawing the Boundaries of Marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, 980-987.

Kiernan, K. (2002). The State of European Unions: An Analysis of FFS Data on Partnership Formation and Dissolution. In M. Macura and G. Beets (Eds.) *Dynamics of Fertility and Partnership in Europe. Insights and Lessons From Comparative Research,* pp. 57-76 . New York: United Nations.

Kravdal, Ø. (1999). Does Marriage Require a Stronger Economic Underpinning than Informal Cohabitation? *Population Studies*, 53, 63-80.

Liefbroer, A. C. and Dourleijn, E. (2006). Unmarried Cohabitation and Union Stability: Testing the Role of Diffusion Using Data from 16 European Countries, *Demography*, 43, 203-221.

Lillard, L. L. and Waite, L. J. (1993). A Joint Analysis of Marital Childbearing and Marital Disruption. *Demography*, 30, 653-681.

Noack, T. (2010). *En stille revolusjon: Det moderne samboerskapet i Norge* [*A Quiet Revolution: The Modern Form of Cohabitation in Norway*]. Unpublished Manuscript.

Noack, T. and Seierstad, A. (2003). Utviklingen i samliv: Heller jeg enn vi? [The

Development of Unions: Me Rather Than Us?]. *Samfunnsspeilet*, 17, 19–26.

Nock, S. L. (1995). A Comparison of Marriages and Cohabiting Relationships. *Journal of Family Issues*, 16, 53-76.

Perelli-Harris, B., Sighle-Rushton, W., Lappegård, T., Jasilioniene, A., DiGuilio, P., Keizer, R., Koeppen, K. and Kostova., D. (2009). Does Childbearing Change the Meaning of Cohabitation? Examining Nonmarital Childbearing across Europe. Paper presented at the Population Association of America meetings, Detroit, MI. April 30 to May 2, 2009.

Prinz, C. (1995). *Cohabiting, Married, or Single: Portraying, Analyzing, and Modeling New Living Arrangements in the Changing Societies of Europe*. Aldershot: Avebury Press.

Rogers, S. J., and DeBoer, D. D. (2001). Changes in Wives' Income: Effects on Marital Happiness, Psychological Well-being, and the Risk of Divorce. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63, 458-472.

Smock, P. J. (2000). Cohabitation in the United States: An Appraisal of Research Themes, Findings, and Implications. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 1-20.

Soons, J. P. M. and Kalmijn, M. (2009). Is Marriage More than Cohabitation? Well-being Differences in 30 European Countries. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71, 1141-1157.

Stanley, S. M., Whitton, S. W., and Markman, H. J. (2004). Maybe I do. Interpersonal Commitment and Premarital or Nonmarital Cohabitation. *Journal of Family Issues,* 25, 496-519.

Steele, F., C. Kallis, H. Goldstein, and H. Joshi (2005). The Relationship between Childbearing and Transitions from Marriage and Cohabitation in Britain. *Demography*, 42, 647-673.

Thomson, E., and Colella, U. (1992). Cohabitation and Marital Stability: Quality or Commitment? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 54, 259-267.

Thornton, A., Axinn, W. G., and Xie, Y. (2007). *Marriage and Cohabitation*. Chicago:

University of Chicago Press.

Tynes, S. R. (1990). Educational Heterogamy and Marital Satisfaction between Spouses. *Social Science Research*, 19, 153-174.

Wiik, K. Aa. (2009). 'You'd Better Wait!' Socio-economic Background and Timing of First Marriage versus First Cohabitation. *European Sociological Review*, 25, 139-153.

Wiik, K. Aa., Bernhardt, E. and Noack, T. (2009). A study of commitment and relationship quality in Sweden and Norway. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71, 465-477.

**Table 1** Descriptive Statistics on Variables Used by Union Type. Mean (sd) or % *(N* =41,666)

| Variables | All | Married | Cohabiting |
|---|---|---|---|
| Dependent variables | | | |
| Satisfied (0 – 10) | 8.6 (1.7) | 8.7 (1.6) | 8.5 (1.7) |
| Breakup plans (% yes)[a] | 7.7 | 6.2 | 14.1 |
| Independent variables | | | |
| Common children (% yes) | 71.3 | 77.9 | 42.9 |
| Step children (% yes) | 7.2 | 5.0 | 16.5 |
| Birth plans (% yes) | 16.3 | 12.9 | 30.9 |
| Union duration in years | 15.4 (9.6) | 17.4 (9.2) | 6.9 (6.4) |
| Previous union(s) (% yes) | 17.1 | 12.0 | 38.9 |
| Education level R | | | |
| Primary | 21.2 | 20.0 | 25.5 |
| Secondary | 50.7 | 52.2 | 44.6 |
| University | 28.1 | 27.8 | 29.9 |
| Couple's education | | | |
| Homogamous | 64.6 | 65.1 | 62.0 |
| R > partner | 17.9 | 17.6 | 19.3 |
| R < partner | 17.5 | 17.3 | 18.7 |
| Age | 39.7 (9.2) | 40.9 (8.6) | 34.1 (9.2) |
| Age homogamous (% yes) | 77.3 | 78.9 | 70.7 |
| Female (% yes) | 56.2 | 56.4 | 55.4 |
| Religious (% yes) | | | |
| Country | | | |
| Norway | 16.1 | 13.7 | 26.6 |
| France | 9.6 | 8.6 | 14.0 |
| Hungary | 14.5 | 14.8 | 13.4 |
| Netherlands | 9.2 | 8.8 | 10.9 |
| Russia | 12.1 | 12.3 | 11.0 |
| Germany | 10.0 | 10.4 | 8.6 |
| Bulgaria | 15.0 | 15.9 | 11.0 |
| Romania | 13.5 | 15.5 | 4.6 |
| *n* | 41,666 | 33,827 (81.2%) | 7,839 (18.8%) |

[a] Data on breakup plans not available for the Netherlands.

**Table 2** Satisfaction with current union and breakup plans by union type and country ($N$ = 41,666)

| Country ($n$) | Union type | Cohabiting ( %) | Satisfaction (0-10) | Breakup plans (% yes) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Norway | Cohabitation | 31.0 | 8.47 | 13.4 |
| (6,721) | Marriage | | 8.68 * | 7.0 * |
| France | Cohabitation | 27.4 | 8.37 | 14.3 |
| (4,006) | Marriage | | 8.54 * | 6.5 * |
| Netherlands | Cohabitation | 22.3 | 8.71 | n.a. |
| (3,824) | Marriage | | 8.66 | |
| Hungary | Cohabitation | 17.3 | 8.52 | 13.2 |
| (6,049) | Marriage | | 8.64 | 6.5 * |
| Russia | Cohabitation | 17.2 | 7.77 | 28.0 |
| (5,028) | Marriage | | 8.13 * | 15.9 * |
| Germany | Cohabitation | 16.1 | 8.72 | 14.2 |
| (4,181) | Marriage | | 8.86 * | 4.7 * |
| Bulgaria | Cohabitation | 13.8 | 8.47 | 5.4 |
| (6,252) | Marriage | | 8.72 * | 2.7 * |
| Romania | Cohabitation | 6.5 | 8.43 | 6.6 |
| (5,605) | Marriage | | 8.96 * | 2.2 * |

*Note:* Data on breakup plans not available for the Netherlands.
* Differences between cohabitors and married respondents are statistically significant at $p < .05$.

**Figure 1** *Satisfaction with current relationship (0-10). By union type and country.*

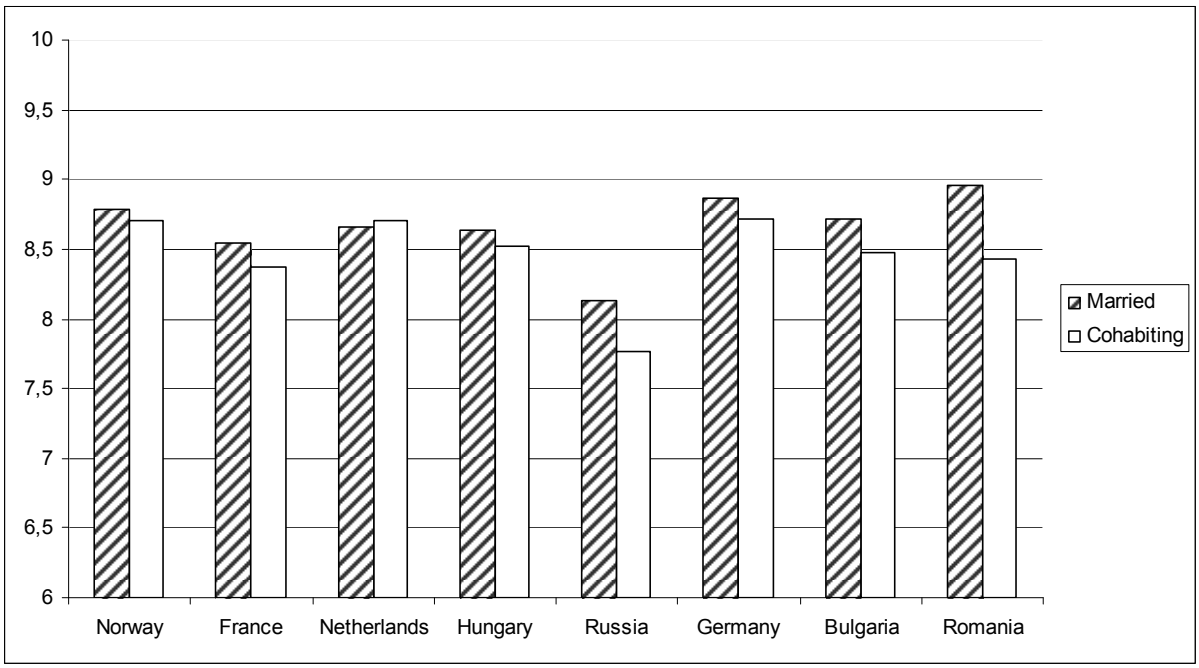


**Figure 2** *% who have considered breaking up the union (0/1). By union type and country.*

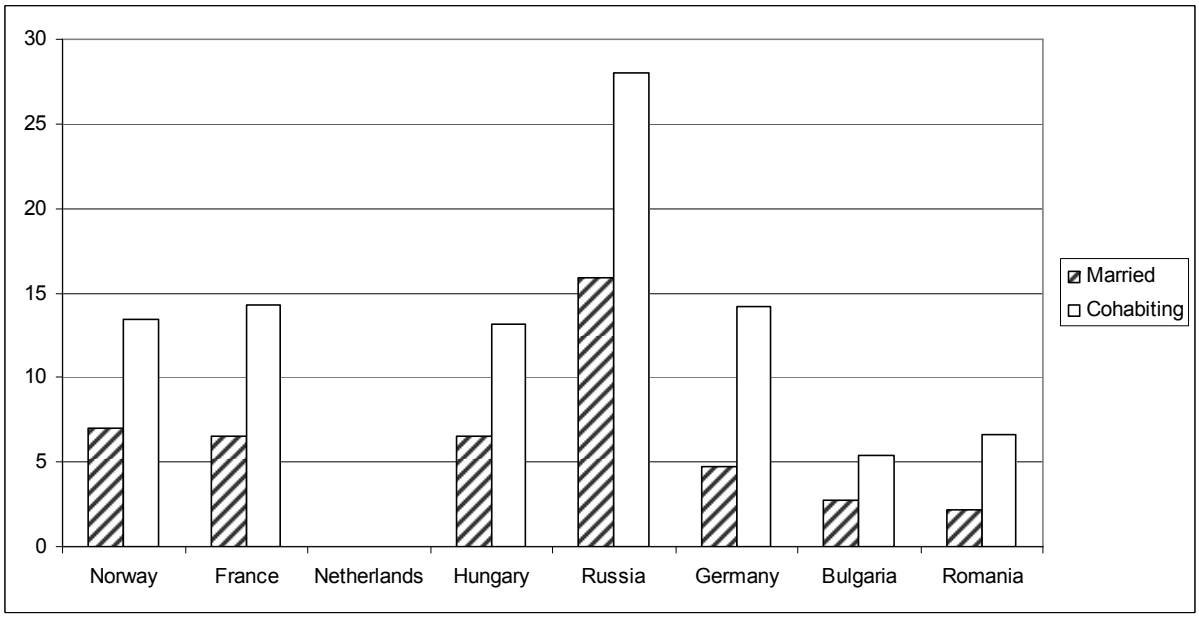

**Table 3** Multivariate models for a) Relationship satisfaction (0-10, OLS) and b) Breakup Plans (0-1, Logistic regression)

| | Relationship satisfaction (0-10) | | | | Breakup plans (0-1) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Model w/o controls | | Model with controls | | Model w/o controls | | | Model with controls | | |
| Independent variables | *b (se b)* | | *b (se b)* | | *b (se b)* | | $e^b$ | *b (se b)* | | $e^b$ |
| Union type (Married = ref) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cohabiting, intent to marry | 0.24*** | 0.03 | –0.10** | 0.04 | 0.35*** | 0.07 | 1.49 | 0.25** | 0.08 | 1.29 |
| Cohabiting, no intent to marry | –0.46*** | 0.03 | –0.62*** | 0.03 | 1.07*** | 0.05 | 2.91 | 0.96*** | 0.06 | 2.60 |
| Country (Norway = ref) | | | | | | | | | | |
| France | –0.31*** | 0.03 | –0.31*** | 0.04 | 0.05 | 0.07 | 1.06 | 0.07 | 0.07 | 1.08 |
| Hungary | –0.23*** | 0.03 | –0.24*** | 0.03 | 0.05 | 0.07 | 1.05 | 0.10 | 0.07 | 1.11 |
| Netherlands | –0.16*** | 0.03 | –0.16*** | 0.04 | n.a. | | | n.a. | | |
| Russia | –0.78*** | 0-03 | –0.75*** | 0.03 | 1.03*** | 0.06 | 2.80 | 1.02*** | 0.06 | 2.79 |
| Germany | 0.01 | 0.03 | 0.01 | 0.03 | –0.20** | 0.08 | 0.82 | –0.17** | 0.08 | 0.85 |
| Bulgaria | –0.15*** | 0.03 | –0.14*** | 0.03 | –0.90*** | 0.09 | 0.41 | –0.90*** | 0.09 | 0.41 |
| Romania | 0.06* | 0.03 | 0.06 | 0.03 | –1.02*** | 0.10 | 0.36 | –0.90*** | 0.10 | 0.41 |
| Controls | | | | | | | | | | |
| Common children | | | –0.15*** | 0.02 | | | | 0.01 | 0.05 | 1.01 |
| Step children | | | –0.04 | 0.03 | | | | –0.02 | 0.07 | 0.98 |
| Birth plans | | | 0.13** | 0.03 | | | | –0.09 | 0.06 | 0.91 |
| Union duration | | | –0.03*** | 0.01 | | | | 0.03** | 0.01 | 1.03 |
| Union duration squared | | | 0.01*** | 0.01 | | | | –0.01* | 0.01 | 1.00 |
| Previous union(s) | | | –0.06* | 0.03 | | | | 0.45*** | 0.06 | 1.57 |
| Education level (Primary= ref) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Secondary | | | 0.20*** | 0.02 | | | | –0.01 | 0.06 | 0.99 |
| University | | | 0.27*** | 0.03 | | | | 0.13* | 0.06 | 1.14 |
| Couple's education (R>partner= ref) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Homogamous | | | 0.08*** | 0.02 | | | | –0.04 | 0.05 | 0.96 |
| R<Partner | | | 0.22*** | 0.03 | | | | –0.02 | 0.07 | 0.98 |
| Age | | | –0.01*** | 0.01 | | | | –0.02*** | 0.01 | 0.98 |
| Age homogamous | | | 0.03 | 0.02 | | | | –0.01 | 0.05 | 0.99 |
| Female | | | –0.39*** | 0.02 | | | | 0.61*** | 0.04 | 1.84 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | 8.86*** | 9.67*** | –2.58*** |

*Note:* $e^b$ = exponentiated b. Data on breakup plans not available for the Netherlands.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

**Table 4** Multivariate Models for a) Relationship satisfaction (0-10, OLS) and b) Breakup Plans (0-1, Logistic regression) with Interaction Terms Between union Type and Country

| | Relationship satisfaction (0-10) | | Breakup plans (0-1) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Country*union type | *b (se b)* | | *b (se b)* | |
| Norway*married (ref) | | | | |
| France*cohabitation | –0.14 | (0.08) | 0.16 | (0.14) |
| Hungary*cohabitation | –0.14 | (0.07) | 0.07 | (0.15) |
| Netherlands*cohabitation | 0.10 | (0.08) | n.a. | |
| Russia*cohabitation | –0.28** | (0.07) | –0.02 | (0.13) |
| Germany*cohabitation | –0.12 | (0.08) | 0.50** | (0.17) |
| Bulgaria*cohabitation | –0.18* | (0.07) | 0.01 | (0.20) |
| Romania*cohabitation | –0.38*** | (0.10) | 0.41 | (0.25) |

*Note:* Controlled for all the other variables included in Table 3. Data on breakup plans not available for the Netherlands.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

**Appendix** Relationship satisfaction (0-10, OLS regression). By Country

| | Norway | France | Netherlands | Hungary | Russia | Germany | Bulgaria | Romania |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *b* | *b* | *b* | *b* | *b* | *b* | *b* | *b* |
| Union type (Married = ref) | | | | | | | | |
| Cohabiting | -0.33*** | -0.47*** | -0.31*** | -0.48*** | -0.76*** | -0.33*** | -0.33*** | -0.47*** |
| Common children | -0.15** | -0.24** | -0.37*** | -0.02 | -0.14 | -0.22*** | -0.15* | -0.08 |
| Step children | 0.01 | 0.11 | 0.25 | 0.05 | 0.22 | -0.44*** | -0.19 | 0.06 |
| Birth plans | 0.21*** | -0.08 | 0.30*** | 0.22** | 0.24* | 0.11 | 0.01 | 0.10 |
| Union duration | -0.04*** | -0.03* | -0.03 | -0.05*** | -0.06*** | -0.03* | -0.03** | -0.02** |
| Union duration squared | 0.01*** | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01** | 0.01*** | 0.01** | 0.01*** | 0.01** |
| Previous union(s) | -0.07 | -0.12 | -0.25** | -0.09 | -0.03 | 0.12 | -0.20 | -0.17* |
| Education level (Primary= ref) | | | | | | | | |
| Secondary | -0.02 | -0.07 | 0.02 | 0.45*** | -0.01 | 0.21** | 0.41*** | 0.46*** |
| University | -0.21*** | 0.02 | -0.01 | 0.69*** | 0.33*** | 0.35*** | 0.50*** | 0.74*** |
| Couple's education (R>P= ref) | | | | | | | | |
| Homogamous | 0.01 | 0.07 | 0.23** | 0.17* | 0.13 | 0.06 | 0.20** | 0.21*** |
| R<Partner | -0.02 | 0.16 | 0.23 | 0.40*** | 0.16 | 0.20* | 0.36*** | 0.53*** |
| Age | -0.01* | -0.02** | -0.02** | -0.01 | -0.01 | -0.01** | -0.02** | -0.01* |
| Age homogamous | 0.01 | 0.18** | 0.04 | -0.01 | 0.06 | 0.05 | -0.43 | 0.01 |
| Female | -0.12*** | -0.36*** | -0.25** | -0.41 | -0.93*** | -0.24*** | -0.40*** | -0.38*** |
| Constant | 9.74*** | 9.78*** | 9.98*** | 9.13*** | 9.50*** | 9.53*** | 9.44*** | 9.15*** |

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

**Appendix** Breakup plans (0/1). Odds ratios from logistic regression. By Country

| | Norway | France | Hungary | Russia | Germany | Bulgaria | Romania |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $e^b$ | $e^b$ | $e^b$ | $e^b$ | $e^b$ | $e^b$ | $e^b$ |
| Union type (Married=ref) | | | | | | | |
| Cohabiting | 1.94*** | 2.12*** | 2.34*** | 2.14*** | 2.87*** | 2.12** | 1.36 |
| Common children | 0.87 | 0.94 | 0.87 | 1.14 | 1.44* | 1.04 | 1.02 |
| Step children | 1.07 | 0.89 | 1.14 | 0.89 | 0.95 | 1.09 | 1.06 |
| Birth plans | 0.72* | 1.15 | 0.83 | 0.96 | 0.71 | 1.09 | 0.82 |
| Union duration | 1.04 | 1.02 | 1.08** | 1.04* | 1.03 | 1.05 | 0.96 |
| Union duration squared | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00* | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Previous union(s) | 1.47*** | 1.80*** | 1.18 | 1.49** | 2.56*** | 0.56 | 2.00* |
| Education level (Primary=ref) | | | | | | | |
| Secondary | 0.82 | 1.25 | 0.79 | 1.23* | 0.80 | 1.05 | 0.35*** |
| University | 0.86 | 1.56* | 0.77 | 1.27* | 0.88 | 1.68 | 0.36** |
| Couple's education (R>P= ref) | | | | | | | |
| Homogamous | 1.08 | 0.98 | 0.70* | 1.02 | 0.90 | 0.76 | 0.40*** |
| R<Partner | 0.97 | 1.08 | 0.74 | 1.09 | 0.78 | 0.63 | 0.20*** |
| Age | 0.98** | 0.99 | 0.98* | 0.97*** | 0.98 | 1.00 | 1.02 |
| Age homogamous | 0.96 | 1.04 | 0-93 | 0.99 | 1.12 | 0.76 | 1.09 |
| Female | 1.49*** | 2.32*** | 1.82*** | 2.04*** | 1.52** | 1.68** | 3.55*** |

*Note:* $e^b$ = exponentiated b. Data on breakup plans not available for the Netherlands.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.