

## **Children at Home, Staying Alone? Paths towards Repartnering for Men and Women**

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### **Summary**

In France, a growing number of people are experiencing the social, familial and economic consequences of union breakdown. This talk addresses individual partnership behaviours after separation, using classical demographic methods in parallel with statistical analyses. More specifically, we look at differences between men and women for repartnering, depending on the presence of children. The work is based primarily on retrospective data, from the French Generation and Gender Survey (2005). First we show that in France, repartnering is more likely to occur at younger ages but also after a long relationship and after a marriage for women. Second, separated mothers are less likely than women without children and than men to repartner, while for men children on the whole don't make a difference. However, men whose children are at home the year following the separation seem specifically less likely to repartner than other men.

### **Extended abstract**

#### ***Introduction***

In France, new forms of partnering have emerged since the 1970s. The proportion of unmarried couples has significantly risen, in parallel with a process of "individualization" of couple and family life (Singly, 2007). Although marriages are still common, cohabitation without marriage is more and more widespread. In the generations of the beginning of the 1970s, 65% of individuals are estimated to marry at least once before age 50 (Prioux, 2007).

France also has a high total divorce rate (with unchanged divorce behaviours, 45 % of marriages starting in 2004 would end in divorce), and an even higher number of separation among cohabiting couples (25 % of first unions started in 1995-1999 are broken during the 5 first years). A growing number of people are then experiencing the social, familial and economic consequences of union breakdown.

Repartnering has also developed, and is widely accepted today in France. However, remarriage is on the decline, and people prefer a more informal second union. Previous studies have highlighted that women with children are particularly disadvantaged in the repartnering process (Andersson, 2003 ; Cassan *et al.*, 2001). Children custody is given to the mother most of the time, and joint custody remains rare. From Goldscheider and Sassler, women without children custody would have the same repartnering behaviours as men in the same condition (Goldscheider et Sassler, 2006). However, men with the custody seem to enter a new union quicker than the others.

Our purpose is to analyse how the conditions of the first disrupted union affect the subsequent reconstruction of partnership. We especially investigate gender differences in repartnering and the influence of children custody: are mothers less likely to repartner because they most often have their children at home, or is this explanation unlikely?

### ***Data and method***

Using classical demographic methods in parallel with regressions and event history analysis, I study transition to a second partnership for people who experienced a separation. The study is based on retrospective fertility and partnership history data, from the French Generation and Gender Survey (2005). Carried out on more than 10,000 men and women, the survey contains data on individuals' trajectories and their characteristics. All unions and births dates are asked to the respondent, a union being a cohabitation, a marriage, or a cohabitation transformed into a marriage, that lasted at least three months. The sub-sample selected for this study is based on all persons who separated, thus excepting people whose partner died. Using logistic regressions based on the socio-demographic characteristics of the individuals, we establish if the characteristics of the previous union and the children custody have an effect on formation of following partnership. We especially detail the influence of factors such as age at separation, pre-separation children, status of the previous union, education level.

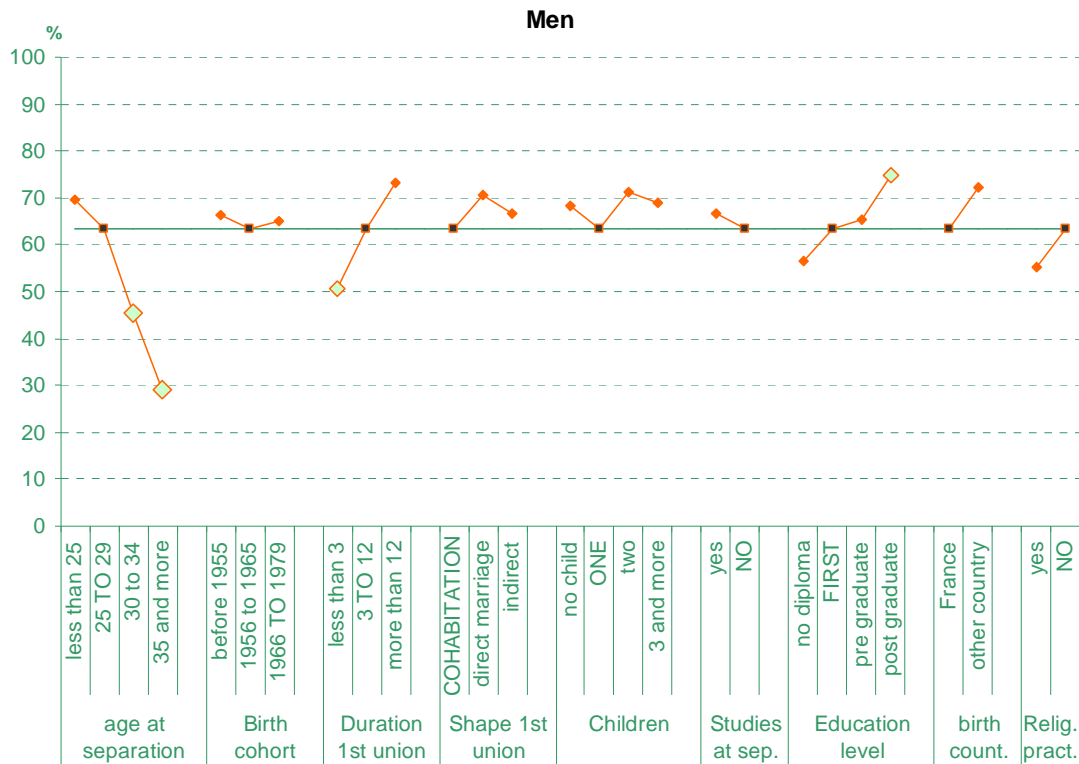
### ***Results***

The estimated probability of repartnering during the five years that follow separation decreases sharply with age for both men and women (figure 1). Moreover, repartnering occurs more frequently when the first union lasted more than three years than otherwise. For women only, marriages are more likely to be followed by a second partnership than cohabiting first relationships. Highly educated men are finally the most likely to repartner within five years<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> These results have been tested with a duration model and are very stable depending on the model.

**Figure 1:** Estimated probability of repartnering within five years after a separation for men and women (reference population in block letters)



**Field:** men and women aged less than 50 at separation time, separated of a divorce or a cohabitation between 1980 and 1999

Men and women behaviours differ widely depending on whether they have children at separation or not. While mothers repartnering risks are the lowest compared to other women, men risks do not seem to depend on their children. The number of children ever had doesn't change these results. However, when detailing the presence of children in the household the year following the separation (table 1), it appears that men who have the main custody of children have depressed risks of repartnering, like women. And women who live without their children are as likely to repartner as childless women. On the whole, presence of children and repartnering risk are highly correlated, even if the number of men concerned is quite low.

**Table 1:** Logistic regression of repartnering within five years after a separation for men and women (log-odds, standard error)

	men	women
<b>Children</b>		
no children	<i>ref</i>	<i>ref</i>
children at home	-0.85** (0.4)	-1.1*** (0.22)
children somewhere else	-0.11 (0.22)	0.2 (0.35)
<i>sample</i>	625	782

**Field:** men and women aged less than 50 at separation time, separated of a divorce or a cohabitation between 1980 and 1999

**Other controls:** age at breakup, year of first union disruption, duration, birth and marital status in first union, education level, country of birth, religious practice

## Discussion

In France, men and women repartnering behaviours differ, and depend on their sociocultural characteristics. Separated mothers are less likely than women without children or than men to repartner. It also seems that men whose children are at home repartner less, like custodian mothers do. We propose various explanations to this phenomenon and to the difference with previous studies.

It is possible that people cohabiting with their children have lower need to repartnering, because they find affective substitute in their children (Villeneuve-Gokalp, 1994). On the other hand, children at home can be an obstacle to cohabiting with a new partner, for material or organisational reasons, which would make them having the same impact on men and on women's repartnering behaviours. Since women have their children at home more often than men, this might explain most of the difference between mothers and fathers in their repartnering process.

However, we still can't be sure that men and women behave the same way when they have children. As said before, Goldscheider and Sassler found that men with children custody repartner more quickly. Where does the difference come from? Since men having their children custody are very rare, it is possible that they include a selection of men whose wife left, leaving them alone with the children. In that case, they certainly didn't anticipate repartnering, and might have had some organisational issues at the beginning, which would postpone meeting a new partner and repartnering. It is then possible that the other men repartner quickly, what we can't observe because of the group less likely to enter a new partnership. Other selection processes might also happen for women, and this makes us careful for further conclusions on comparison between men and women.

## ***References***

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