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**Doctoral Thesis**  
*Doctoral Programme in Demography*

**Partnership dynamics in contemporary Spain**

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## PREFACE

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The completed dissertation consists of three essays, each touching upon an aspect of partnership dynamics in the contemporary Spanish context. The release of the newest Spanish Fertility Survey in 2018 greatly influenced the direction of this work. Spain had undergone rapid structural and institutional changes since the last Fertility Survey in 1999 and a gap of nearly two decades needs to be filled in. Two overarching questions for this dissertation are: How do partnership dynamics look in contemporary Spain? And how does Spain's current situation fit in the broader European context? More specifically, the thesis explores questions which revolve around partnership formation, partnership types, and family formation processes – since the intensity of partnership formation are important factors when it comes to fertility –. These questions are as follows: How, and to what extent, is partnership formation associated with family formation processes? What newer partnership types are prevalent nowadays, and how does this differ by life stage? What demographic and socioeconomic factors influence individuals to form certain partnership types? In what ways have these contemporary trends in partnership dynamics changed how Spain fits in with the rest of Europe? The essays altogether provide an updated picture of partnership dynamics in Spain.

Work on my first chapter, “Partnership dynamics and the fertility gap between Sweden and Spain,” began during my time as a student in the European Doctoral School of Demography (EDSD). The idea for the paper was developed together with my EDSD thesis supervisor, and now, PhD thesis supervisor, Dr. Albert Esteve. The study's aim was to explore how differences in partnership formation – both the quantum and timing – may be shaping the differences in fertility levels we observe across societies with below-replacement level fertility. Since existing literature and theories on the cross-national variation in fertility of high-income countries had not explicitly analyzed the role partnership dynamics plays for fertility levels, this work adds some understanding to the importance of being able to form stable partnerships, and when, for having children. Sweden was chosen as the country for comparison as it differs from Spain in several relevant ways – its relatively higher level of below-replacement fertility, earlier timing of adulthood transition events, culture, and comprehensive welfare system. Dr. Esteve's patience, guidance, and support since the EDSD not only helped me personally but has helped elevate this paper to the point of publication. This paper could not have been completed, however, without the advice and much needed technical support from my good friend, colleague, and co-author, Qi Cui. With his help, we were able to perform a

comprehensive analysis on the role of partnership dynamics in explaining fertility differences using three, separate analytical strategies. In 2022, this work was published in *Genus* (co-authored with Dr. Albert Esteve and Qi Cui).

The second chapter is entitled “Living apart together in contemporary Spain: Diversity of meanings by life stage.” During the process of my literature review on partnership dynamics in Spain, I came across many iconic papers by Dr. Teresa Castro-Martín from the Spanish National Research Council. One stood out in particular and that was her work documenting living-apart-together relationships in Spain using the 1999 Spanish Fertility Survey. This essay updates Dr. Castro-Martín’s previous work by taking advantage of the most recent Fertility Survey. The 2018 Survey also allowed us to incorporate and examine new factors that may contribute to being in a living-apart-together relationship – specifically, perspectives on gender and life stage. I have also been in a long-distance, living-apart-together relationship, and so this was a topic I related with and wanted to understand further. One of my thesis supervisors, Dr. Albert Esteve, put me in contact with Dr. Castro-Martín and our wonderful collaboration began. Her unrivaled expertise in the partnership and family formation dynamics of Spain, and moreover, her continuous kindness, support, and guidance from then on has helped me – and this paper – develop greatly. We hope to have this paper accepted in an international journal by the time of my thesis defense. Currently, it has been submitted to a journal and is awaiting a decision.

The focus of the third and final chapter, “Trends in repartnering by birth cohort and education in Spain”, is on the repartnering dynamics of women in contemporary Spain. As more studies in recent decades have documented increasing union instability and dissolution, more studies have also focused on understanding repartnering dynamics. However, existing literature typically highlights Western contexts. There has been a gap in the literature regarding the context of Southern European societies. I brought the idea to my two supervisors, Dr. Mariona Lozano and Dr. Diederik Boertien. We then further developed the direction of the paper together. Most high-income, Western societies have experienced increasing rates of non-marital cohabitation and separations in recent decades. While there are studies on repartnering dynamics of many high-income, Western societies, and two notable ones taking a cross-national perspective, none had focused solely on the case of Spain. Spain has always been a late-comer in the diffusion of ‘new’ family formation processes, and therefore, what we knew about repartnering dynamics in contemporary Spain was scarce at the time we began work on this paper. Upon my initial review of existing studies, I discovered the growing attention on

serial cohabitation in repartnering studies. We then were not only interested in the prevalence of repartnering but also in the repartnering pathways of Spanish adults and the development of serial cohabitation in Spain. We plan to submit this paper to an international journal in Demography in the near future.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

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The Introduction provides an overview of the general context of partnership dynamics within which to place the thesis, as well as the main relevant theoretical frameworks.

Profound demographic changes have occurred in the past decades. Life expectancy has reached unexpected levels, countries across the world are experiencing below-replacement fertility, and strong flows of international migration have rapidly increased the foreign-born population in many high-income societies. Within family demography, family formation trajectories have become more complex and diverse over time (Billari and Liefbroer 2010, Van Winkle 2018). What families look like and who makes up a family has drastically changed. The idea of families only consisting of married, heterosexual couples with biological children is also incomplete (Raley and Sweeney 2020, Smock and Schwartz 2020). Partnership dynamics make up a significant part of family formation processes, meaning that the observed changes in partnership dynamics have occurred adjacent to changes in family formation. Having a stable partner, for example, is an important aspect of partnership dynamics and has traditionally been a pre-requisite to start a family (Esteve et al. 2020, Holdsworth 2005, Moreno 2012). The normalization of non-marital cohabitation, surge in union instability and dissolutions, and rise in repartnering witnessed in recent decades have generated opportunities for increasingly diverse and complex partnership dynamics across the life course (Van Winkle 2018, Raley and Sweeney 2020, Smock and Schwartz 2020). Exploring and documenting changes in partnership dynamics is essential to improve our understanding of other societal aspects, such as childbearing behaviors, shifting gender roles, and relationships in later life.

Spain has undergone significant sociocultural and demographic changes within the last few decades. However, the partnership and family formation processes in the Spanish context have not been thoroughly explored relative to other European contexts (i.e., Sweden, Italy, etc.). The main reason for this had been the unavailability of detailed, high-quality data. Moreover, structural changes such as the massive increase in women's labor market participation and educational attainment in the 1980s were followed by the emergence of new family formation behaviors – already present in many high-income Western societies. Although Spain was a latecomer in observing these behaviors, the phenomena diffused rapidly. To improve our understanding of partnership dynamics in Spain after a period of

rapid structural and institutional transformation, we ask the following questions in the dissertation: To what extent can partnership formation explain entry into parenthood? What kind of partnerships are prevalent in contemporary Spain? What individual-level determinants are associated with the rising prevalence of newer partnership types?

The following subsection will broadly discuss the observed patterns of increasingly diverse and complex partnership dynamics in contemporary high-income societies.

### **INCREASINGLY DIVERSE AND COMPLEX PARTNERSHIP DYNAMICS**

Partnership dynamics have become increasingly diverse and complex over time, particularly among individuals in high-income Western countries (Billari and Liefbroer 2010, Van Winkle 2018). While getting married was once the norm, the deinstitutionalization and retreat from marriage have become more commonplace in the modern-day (Cherlin 2004). The increasing prevalence and societal acceptance of divorce, as well as non-marital cohabitation as both a transition phase and an alternative to marriage, are major behavioral changes that have shaped the family formation dynamics we observe now. In addition, partnership dynamics change and vary in their significance throughout one's life course. Events tend to occur more frequently in the early life stage as part of the transition to adulthood and the family formation process, although the ongoing postponement and foregoing of such events have been well-documented (Sobotka and Toulemon 2008). Family demographers are dedicating a great deal of attention to the consequences of rising economic instability and uncertainty of recent years on the partnership and family formation dynamics among young adults. Many studies have indeed found that the increase in economic instability and uncertainty has strongly contributed to the delaying and foregoing of family formation events, such as childbearing (Matysiak et al. 2021, Vignoli et al. 2020b). The combination of extended life expectancies and the spread of divorce and non-marital cohabitation within societies in recent decades have also piqued the interest of partnership dynamics in the later life stage among scholars. Notably, studies from the last several decades have found a surge in gray divorces, blended families, repartnering, and living-apart-together relationships (Solaz 2021).

Researchers have developed various theoretical frameworks to understand these family changes, I introduce the two most relevant theoretical frameworks below – the Second Demographic Transition and Pattern of Disadvantage.

*Theoretical frameworks: Second Demographic Transition and Pattern of Disadvantage*

The Second Demographic Transition (SDT) may be the most prominent theory used to explain changes in family formation dynamics (Lesthaeghe 2010, van de Kaa 1968). The SDT posited changes such as less and later marriages, rise in cohabitation and non-marital childbearing, rise in union dissolution, declining and very low rates of fertility, less and later childbearing, and increase in childlessness. The theory proposed that these changes in family formation behaviors were driven by changes in the values and attitudes of individuals – in particular, the growing emphasis on ‘higher order’ needs such as individual autonomy and self-actualization. The SDT hypothesized that a selected group would take up the ‘innovative’ behaviors in partnership and family formation – the highly educated, who tended to have more progressive norms and attitudes. Another feature of the SDT is the idea of convergence. Namely, countries will experience the same changes and go through the same stages as the forerunners albeit at different speeds.

Perelli-Harris and Gerber (2011) found that the situation of some societies did not align with the ideas proposed by the SDT and presented an alternative framework – the Pattern of Disadvantage (POD). In contrast to the SDT, the POD suggested a negative association between educational attainment and the uptake of new family formation behaviors. Instead of these new behaviors representing the expansion of secularization and egalitarianism, the idea behind the POD is that the emergence of such behaviors represents widening inequalities and increasing disadvantage. Thus, these behaviors were either the result of socioeconomic disadvantage (e.g., economic needs) or an attempt to mitigate losses (Dewilde and Uunk 2008). Similar to the United States (Wu 2017), non-marital childbearing in Russia is predominantly associated with lower levels of educational attainment. Rather than the rejection of marriage as an institution for personal autonomy, Perelli-Harris and Gerber (2011) speculate that this may be because least-educated women in Russia are viewed as ‘unsuitable’ for marriage based on economic or other shortcomings. Ideas from the POD theory can also be present in repartnering behaviors. The financial and emotional losses attributed to union dissolution may be challenging to recover from alone. Therefore, repartnering allows disadvantaged individuals – who are known to face more strain in various aspects of life (Hogendoorn, Kalmijn, and Leopold 2022) – to form a new partnership and share (un)tangible resources amongst themselves. This could be considered a strategy to alleviate the consequences of union dissolution.

The next subsection reviews the trends of pertinent events which fall under the umbrella of partnership dynamics. The goal of this subsection is to give a general overview of patterns and associations to socioeconomic determinants for each event in high-income societies today. These events are divorce, cohabitation and non-marital childbearing, living apart together, and repartnering. These aspects of partnership dynamics either significantly or directly associated with the core Chapters of this thesis that will follow (Chapters 2-4). Socioeconomic determinants related to each event are discussed for two reasons. First, socioeconomic determinants tend to influence aspects of partnership and family formation in high-income Western societies. Second, two of the Chapters in this dissertation examine socioeconomic characteristics in relation to forming newer partnership types.

### **Partnership dynamics: trends and socioeconomic determinants**

#### *Divorce*

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many Western societies observed dramatic increases in divorce. One explanation for the initial surge in divorces may be the increasing independence of women. Women increasingly entered the labor market and achieved higher levels of education in their respective societies between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Women were able to establish their own financial autonomy and gain bargaining- and decision-making power in their intimate relationships. These changes gave them the opportunity to leave unsatisfactory marriages and have more choice in how to live their life (Kalmijn 2011). The introduction of contraceptives also gave women more control over their fertility and timing of family formation (Goldin and Katz 2002). With women becoming more financially independent, the benefits attached to the traditional male breadwinner model has diminished. Furthermore, divorce has become more accessible over time and less socially stigmatized.

While Southern European countries only witnessed a rapid rise in marital disruption in recent decades (Bernardi and Martinez-Pastor 2011), recent studies on the United States and several European societies have also found evidence of a potential decline in divorce (Cohen 2018, Esping-Andersen 2016, Kennedy and Ruggles 2014). While divorce is another phenomenon within partnership dynamics that was spearheaded by the highly educated, high-income societies in the modern-day have documented a weakening or reversal of the positive association between educational attainment and divorce (Bernardi and Martinez-Pastor 2011, Härkönen and Dronkers 2006, Matysiak et al. 2014). In the United States, marriage has become regarded as a milestone and a status symbol for the high

socioeconomic group. Studies have posited that these highly educated individuals who marry tend to have unions that are more stable (Cohen 2018, Kennedy and Ruggles 2014). This can be one explanation for the recent decline in the divorce rate. The spread of cohabitation has also likely contributed to the decline in divorces as separations are replacing divorces. Regarding socioeconomic determinants of being at-risk of marital disruption, lower educated individuals experience less stability in their unions compared to the highly educated (Hogendoorn et al. 2020, Matysiak et al. 2014).

### *Cohabitation and non-marital childbearing*

The rate in which non-marital cohabitation diffused among high-income societies varied cross-nationally. Scandinavian countries have been regarded as the leaders of adopting new family behaviors in Europe, documenting a high prevalence of cohabitation since the mid-1900s (Sobotka and Toulemon 2008). In Sweden, for example, cohabitation is both socially and legally indistinguishable from marriage as an environment for family formation. Most high-income countries from the mid- to late-1900s observed a positive association between educational attainment and cohabitation, as well as non-marital childbearing (Lesthaeghe 2020, Perelli-Harris et al. 2010). On the other hand, Southern European countries, which held more traditional norms and attitudes at the time, lagged behind in adopting cohabitation as part of the family formation process. Countries like Spain were a paradox of the SDT – experiencing very low levels of fertility and no notable rise in prevalence of cohabitation. Only from the 1990s had Spain observed a rapid increase in pre-marital cohabitation (Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martín 2013). As cohabitation spread across Southern Europe, an increase in non-marital childbearing also occurred (García Pereiro et al. 2014). Over time, these behaviors diffused across social strata and are now represented by a more heterogeneous group in most high-income countries (Lesthaeghe 2020).

There are several non-Western societies that are still lagging behind this trajectory of the SDT observed in the West. In East Asian societies such as Japan and South Korea, for example, marriage and childbearing are still closely attached to one another and remain the norm (Raymo et al. 2009, Raymo et al. 2015). However, there have been noticeable changes in family formation such as the postponement and decline in nuptiality and fertility. Pre-marital cohabitation rates have also observed a modest increase over time (Lesthaeghe 2010, Raymo et al. 2009, Raymo et al. 2015). Findings for Latin American societies have challenged the positive association between educational attainment and cohabitation. Esteve and others (2012) documented a negative relationship for the initial rise in cohabitation but

noted that the acceleration of the cohabitation boom from the 1990s was observed among individuals from all social strata. Furthermore, some countries – including the United States (Rindfuss et al. 1996) and Russia (Perelli-Harris and Gerber 2011) – had observed a negative association between educational attainment and non-marital childbearing.

Researchers have a growing interest in assessing the stability of unions given the pervasiveness of cohabitation in many contemporary societies – for example, the stability of marriages that began as pre-marital cohabitations or the stability of cohabitations as an alternative long-term arrangement as opposed to the traditional marital union. Liefbroer and Dourleijn (2006) found pre-marital cohabitation to be associated with higher risks of marital dissolution relative to individuals who had directly married. This challenged the idea of cohabitation as a testing ground for marriage. However, scholars have also found the opposite to be true – more union stability with pre-marital cohabitation (Schnor 2015) – or that the relationship has disappeared altogether given cohabitators have become a more heterogeneous group (see Rosenfeld and Roesler 2019 vs. Manning et al. 2019 for the debate). Overall, cohabiting unions tend to be less stable than marital ones, and particularly so in countries where cohabitation is indistinguishable from marriage (Poortman and Lyngstad 2007).

### *Living apart together*

European societies have documented the emergence of newer partnership types such as living-apart-together relationships (Liefbroer et al. 2015, Pasteels et al. 2017). A living-apart-together relationship is one where two intimate partners that form a couple reside in separate households, and therefore, are not co-residing together. LAT relationships are the most common among young adults as a transition phase prior to co-residing with a stable partner (Castro-Martín et al. 2008). However, constraints can also be related to the likelihood of being in a LAT relationship as economic instability is a strong deterrent for co-residence, especially for men (Castro-Martín et al. 2008, Liefbroer et al. 2015, Régnier-Loilier et al. 2009, Wagner et al. 2019). However, economic constraints can take many forms and hinder partners from living together – limited access to affordable housing, unstable work contract (i.e., temporary), and uncertainty about future work trajectories (Kreyenfeld et al. 2012, Bolano and Vignoli 2021, Palumbo et al. 2022). Although men's economic status is the most influential for family formation processes within couples,

studies have been documenting the growing requirement for women's economic stability to co-reside with a partner and start a family (De Hauw et al. 2017, van Wijk et al. 2021).

Living-apart-together relationships are also a popular alternative among ever-separated individuals and older adults (Liefbroer et al. 2015, Pasteels et al. 2017). Compared to young adults, individuals in the later life stage are more likely to consciously choose LAT relationships due to individual preferences and desires (e.g., maintaining independence). Parents with children from a previous relationship are also more likely to be in a LAT relationship instead of having a co-residential living arrangement with a new partner. One reason single parents may prefer LAT relationships is to avoid exposing their child(ren) to a new family situation which could negatively impact their child(ren)'s well-being (Lewin 2018, Wagner al. 2019). Research on living-apart-together relationships have also found that women prefer this type of union over men, especially women who have previously been in a co-residential union. An explanation for this observation may be that women hold a stronger desire to maintain their autonomy (de Jong Gierveld 2004) or avoid falling back into unsatisfactory patterns experienced in these former unions – for instance, an unequal gendered division of domestic labor and caretaking (Ghazanfaraeeon Karlsson and Borell 2002, Upton-Davis 2012). Living-apart-together relationships are more common among the highly educated and is currently in line with the SDT (Coulter and Hu 2017, Liefbroer et al. 2015, Régnier-Loilier and Vignoli 2018, Reimondos et al. 2011, Strohm et al. 2009) – with Sweden as an exception (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008, Oláh et al. 2021). Studies are yet to document a diffusion of this type of partnership across social strata.

### *Repartnering*

The rise in union instability has led to the emergence of a separation surge (Boertien 2020, Kalmijn and Leopold 2022). A growing share of ever-separated individuals also implies a growing share of individuals re-entering the partner market and who are at-risk of repartnering or forming a second- or higher-order union. In general, individuals born in recent cohorts repartner more often and more quickly after union dissolution than those born earlier (Eickmeyer and Manning 2018). High-income societies have, in fact, witnessed increasing levels of repartnering in recent decades (Cherlin 2017, Gałęzewska 2016, Smock and Schwartz 2020). In the early 2000s, 31% of women born between 1955-1964 had repartnered in the United States. The highest proportion of repartnered women in a European country was 29% in Norway. Other high-income countries such as France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and the United Kingdom observed 15-21% of ever-repartnered women by age 40



(Gałęzewska 2016). Repartnering rates were notably lower with less than 5% of Italian and Spanish women born between 1955-1964 having ever repartnered by age 40 (Gałęzewska 2016). Repartnering behaviors also differ by gender with men being more likely to repartner than women. Behaviors also vary when accounting for one's previous family formation experiences, especially the presence of children. Single parents are less likely to form a second union relative to ever-separated, childless individuals (Beajouan 2012) – with mothers less likely than fathers (Ivanova et al. 2013). If repartnering does occur, mothers are more likely to be in a non-coresidential relationship (Oláh et al. 2021, Régnier-Loilier 2016, van der Wiel et al. 2020).

There are several repartnering pathways, including remarriage and serial cohabitation. Remarriage is the most traditional and common repartnering pathway. Countries such as the United States, however, have observed a decrease in repartnering rates specifically through the decline in remarriage (Schweizer 2019). The increasing occurrence of cohabitation and separations may be what is replacing remarriages as the preferred type of second union (Brown and Wright 2017, Poortman 2007, Wu and Schimmele 2005). Divorcees are less likely to repartner in general compared to cohabitators and less likely to repartner through remarriage (Wu and Schimmele 2005). Cohabitators also end up repartnering more quickly than divorcees (Poortman 2007, Skew et al. 2009). Cohabitation is an appealing alternative to remarriage since non-marital unions often involve less economic and emotional risks and commitment (Lyngstad, Noack, and Turfte 2011, Wiik et al. 2009). The flexibility associated with cohabitation also suggests that individuals can repartner more quickly by cohabiting than remarrying after union dissolution (McNamee and Raley 2011). Another repartnering pathway that is gaining traction in the modern-day is serial cohabitation. Serial cohabitation is being in a non-marital cohabiting union for at least two consecutive unions (e.g., first and second unions). While literature on this type of partnership trajectory has been limited, studies over the last decade have observed an increasing trend in serial cohabitation across several Western societies including the United Kingdom, Norway, United States, and Germany (Bukodi 2012, Dommermuth and Wiik 2014, Eickmeyer and Manning 2018, Hiekel and Fulda 2018, Lichter and Qian 2008, Lichter et al. 2010). Overall, however, serial cohabitation remains a relatively marginal phenomenon.

Studies on the association between socioeconomic status and repartnering behaviors have presented mixed findings (e.g., negative association: Bukodi 2012, Eickmeyer and Manning 2018, Lichter and Qian 2008, Lichter et al. 2010/ positive association: Dommermuth and

Wiik 2014, Pasteels and Mortelmans 2017/ weak or no association: de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003, Dewilde and Uunk 2008, Hiekel and Fulda 2018, Meggiolaro and Ongaro 2008, Shafer and James 2013). In some contexts, such as in the Nordic countries, the highly educated were found to repartner more often (Dommermuth and Wiik 2014). In others, such as in Britain, the socioeconomically disadvantaged (i.e., unstable work histories) were found to repartner more frequently (Bukodi 2012).

### **Partnership formation and fertility**

It is crucial to consistently update our understanding on the changing partnership dynamics as they also influence other aspects of a society. For instance, stable partnership formation remains an integral part of the family formation process. Co-residential partnership formation, in particular, can be considered a prerequisite to parenthood or a type of social determinant of fertility (Esteve et al. 2020).

With the retreat from marriage, relevant discourse began focusing more on the diffusion of cohabitation and non-marital childbearing. Scandinavian countries, where cohabitation is accepted as an arrangement indistinguishable from marriage, had already observed relatively higher rates of non-marital childbearing from 1970 (Hoem and Hoem 1988, Kiernan 2004). Non-marital childbearing in other European societies increased over the next several decades, but cross-national variation remains (Perelli-Harris et al. 2010). Today, around 43% of births in the European Union are by couples in a non-marital cohabitation (Eurostat 2022a).

A gradual rise in childbearing among single women without partners has also been documented in recent decades (Harkness et al. 2020). On one hand, the postponement of childbearing among adults have put them in a difficult position to bear children due to infertility, particularly for women who also must consider their biological age limits (Beajouan et al. 2019). On the other hand, there are more individuals now, relative to before, who try for a child at later ages (Beaujouan 2020, Beaujouan and Sobotka 2019, Sobotka and Beaujouan 2018) and who experience a (first) birth while single (Koops et al. 2021). Advancements in assisted reproduction technologies (ART) provide opportunities for both couples and singles dealing with infertility or the desire to have children on their own, although social acceptance, accessibility, and affordability of ART vary across countries. Despite these developments, only around 3% of births are conceived through ART within

Europe (Wyns et al. 2020). The majority of childbearing still occurs within (co-residing) couples.

New partnerships are also a setting for having (additional) children. For childless women who experienced a separation, higher-order unions may accelerate the timing of childbearing (Beaujouan and Solaz 2012). Having children with more than one partner is known as multi-partner fertility, and several studies have found the likelihood of parity progression to be greater in second- or higher-order unions (Beaujouan 2010, Ivanova et al. 2013). Regardless, multi-partner fertility only makes up a modest share of total fertility – up to 9% – across European countries (Thomson et al. 2020). In the United States, on the other hand, over 20% of total fertility is attributed to multi-partner fertility. Recent evidence on the association between repartnering and fertility suggests that remarriage and non-marital repartnering may contribute differently to total fertility (Andersson et al. 2022). While remarriage appears to contribute positively to cohort fertility, non-marital repartnering is strongly associated with low fertility.

In modern times, many countries across the globe have low levels of fertility (Bongaarts 2015). Many high-income countries in the West have observed fertility decline since the mid-1900s, and for many, below-replacement fertility (total fertility rate of less than 2.1) has persisted for several decades. Existing literature on explaining cross-national differences in fertility have simply assumed stable partnership formation or have indirectly considered the impact of stable partnerships. Notable theoretical frameworks have focused predominantly on variations in historical patterns (Hajnal 1956, 1982), strength of family ties (Reher 1998), welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen 1990), gender equality (Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015, Goldscheider et al. 2015), and economic uncertainty (Alderotti et al. 2021, Matysiak et al. 2021, Vignoli et al. 2020a, 2020b) to explain differences in fertility levels. Therefore, studies that have solely or directly considered the influence of differences in partnership dynamics to explain variances in the levels of low fertility across high-income societies are limited. A recent exception is a study by Hellstrand and colleagues (2022) which explores the contribution of partnership dynamics to the fertility decline observed in Finland from the 2010s. The authors examined whether this unexpected decline was due to the changes in partnership formation or changes in the childbearing behavior of couples and found the latter contributed more to the fertility decline than the prior. Meaning that in Finland, established couples were having less children than they had been before. The recent fertility decline observed in the Nordic countries challenge the foundation of the

Gender Revolution theories which suggested higher levels of fertility among countries that observed more gender equality within couples (Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015, Goldscheider et al. 2015).

## **THE SPANISH CONTEXT**

Spain has witnessed drastic demographic changes over the last several decades. While the country has historically been rooted in Catholic ideals and values, the secularization of Spanish society occurred rapidly. In particular, family and partnership dynamics have transformed significantly over the last two decades.

Studies from the early 1990s had documented a slight shift in the traditional patterns of family formation in Spain – the postponement of marriages and disassociation between marriage and first childbirth (Castro-Martín 1992, 1993). Although marriage remains a capstone of the family life course (Baizán et al. 2003, García Pereiro et al. 2014), it has undergone changes as an institution. Nearly 80% of all marriages were religious in 1999 – mainly by the Catholic rite. In 2020, however, this proportion declined to 11% (INE 2022b). The majority of marriages are now civil marriages. In addition, around 2% of all marriages are between same-sex partners since the legalization of same-sex marriages in 2005 (Cortina 2016). The average age at marriage among same-sex partners tends to be higher than their heterosexual counterparts (Garrido et al. 2012).

Compared to other Western European societies, the postponement and foregoing of adulthood transition and family formation events occurred later in Spain. The delaying of family formation events has especially become a prominent feature of Spanish society. The pattern is referred to as ‘latest-late’ and often represents the situation of Southern European societies in the literature (Baizán et al. 2003, Esteve et al. 2021, Kohler et al. 2002). For example, the average age at first childbirth in 2020 for women in Spain is 31.2 years old (INE 2022a). Meanwhile, the average age for women in the EU is 29.5.

One explanation for why Spain has observed changes in the timing of these events may be the late exit from the parental home among young adults. Previously, leaving the parental home also coincided with co-residence with an intimate partner, marriage, and entering parenthood (Baizan et al. 2002). This synchronized path of household formation that was once the norm in Spain, however, has become complex and diverse over time. Now, on average, Spanish men leave the parental home at age 30.7 and Spanish women at age 29.8

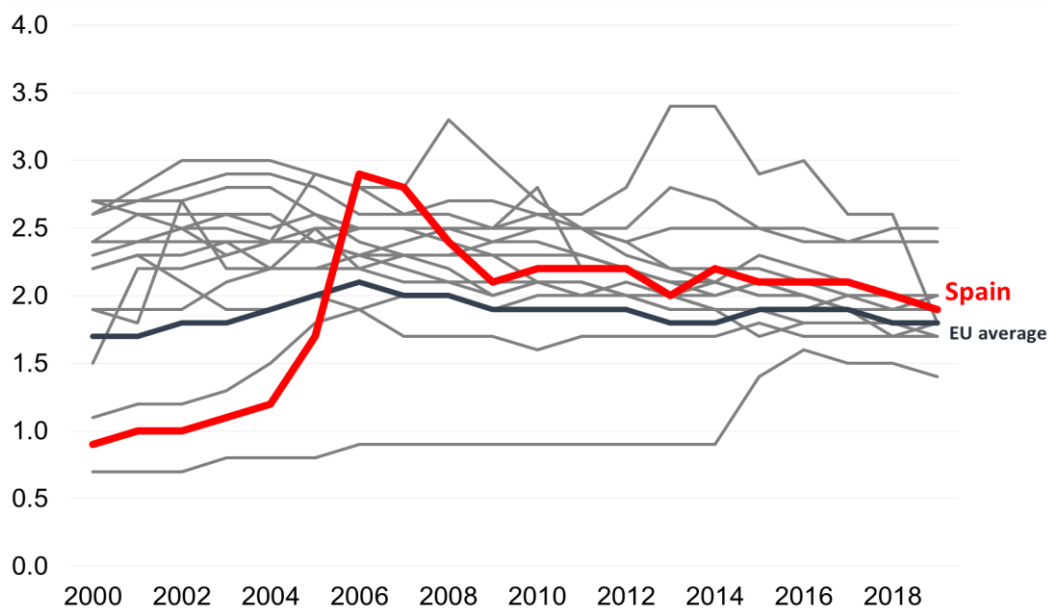
(Eurostat 2022b). Unlike the case of many Northwestern European societies, young adults in Spain may receive support from their parents through non-economical means such as co-residence and time transfer instead of financial assistance (Brandt and Deindl 2013, Kohli et al. 2007, Moreno Mínguez 2018).

Spanish young adults are living through an economic environment that is characterized by high unemployment rates and a large share of temporary work contracts among young adults. The growing economic uncertainty, which has intensified since the 2008 financial crisis and further worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, have led young adults to postpone and forego family formation events (Aassve et al. 2021, Kreyenfeld et al. 2012, Sobotka et al. 2021). Young adults in Spain also face other constraints such as finding stable and properly paid employment and accessing affordable housing, both which may be considered key prerequisites to family formation (Holdsworth 2005, Moreno 2012). These factors can also influence individuals in the early life stage to form more non-traditional partnership types relative to older adults. This can be due to either constraints (e.g., economic) or preferences (shaped by their demographic and socioeconomic circumstances).

In terms of how Spain's situation fits in the broader European context of partnership dynamics, Spain has generally lagged behind in regard to observing changes in family formation events, such as non-marital cohabitation, childbearing within non-marital cohabitation, and divorce. Spain only began observing notable developments in these phenomena around the turn of the century. However, changes have progressed rapidly in the last two decades. For instance, non-marital cohabitation has increasingly become the dominant pathway to union formation. Among women born in the 1970s, a third had cohabited before age 30 (Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martín 2013). Compared to women born in the 1960s, this is an increase of nearly 20 percentage points. On the other hand, 38% of respondents in the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey had cohabited prior to marriage (author's calculations). As non-marital cohabitation has become widespread in Spanish society, marriage is also no longer perceived as a precondition for childbearing. In recent years, non-marital childbearing had made up 40% of all births (Eurostat 2022a). Although unpartnered late motherhood is also an emerging trend in Spain (Castro-Martín and Cortina 2018), childbearing in Spain still largely occurs within co-residential partnerships (Nishikido et al. 2022). Therefore, in terms to what extent partnership formation may be associated with family formation, the intensity and timing of partnership formation may have an important bearing on fertility and childlessness levels in Spain. In

that sense, a relatively high prevalence of partnership types induced by constraints might lead to further postponement of union formation and childbearing, whereas a relatively high prevalence of partnerships motivated by choice (e.g., desire for independence) might lead to foregoing union formation and possibly childbearing. The duration of the preceding non-coresidential period, however, has been found to be positively associated with union stability (Schnor 2015), which may favor childbearing. On the other hand, childlessness has rapidly increased among the Spanish. Among women born in the early 1970s, 20% remained childless by the end of their reproductive career (Esteve et al. 2016). A large segment of childless individuals consists of never-married and highly educated women (Reher and Requena 2019).

**Figure 1.1.** Crude divorce rates in Spain and the European Union, 2000-2019



*Source:* Eurostat 2021a.

The drastic upsurge in divorces took place following a legal change in 2005 that made the procedure easier and more accessible across socioeconomic strata. During this time, the crude divorce rate in Spain skyrocketed (Figure 1.1) and remained above the EU average in 2019 despite experiencing a decline and plateauing after the sudden surge in separations. In contemporary Spain, there is also an increasing share of young adults who remain single upon leaving the parental home (van den Berg and Verbakel 2022). This, however, does not

imply that they are truly partnerless as there is also a notable share of young adults – who are often looked over – with an intimate partner living in a separate household (i.e., in living-apart-together relationships) (Castro-Martín et al. 2008).

The structural changes in Spain have greatly contributed to this shift from traditional norms, attitudes, and behaviors associated with family formation dynamics among adults in contemporary Spain to non-traditional ones. Namely, Spanish women began entering the labor market in masses from the fall of the Franco dictatorship in the 1980s (León and Migliavacca 2013). Women were also becoming more highly educated, to the point that they have surpassed the share of men who have a tertiary level education (OECD 2022). The rise of working, highly educated, and financially independent women meant that women were gaining more autonomy over their life choices and decision-making power within the couple and the household. The male breadwinner model remains the primary household arrangement in family formation and partnership dynamics in Spanish society, however, studies have documented an increase in women as equal – and even main – earners of the household (Vitali and Mendola 2014). The financial stability of women is increasingly becoming a pre-requisite for couples to start a family, which is also the product of the accumulating economic uncertainty over the last two decades (Brinton et al. 2018).

Overall, Spain's demographic landscape has radically changed over the past decades. Living arrangements and family formation trajectories have become increasingly diversified. Exploring the prevalence, correlates, and implications of partnership formation with recent Spanish survey data could provide new insights into contemporary partnership arrangements in a societal context characterized by postponed adulthood transitions, increasing non-marital cohabitation and union instability, and lowest-low fertility.

## DATA

The thesis predominantly takes advantage of the release of the most recent 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey to analyze modern partnership dynamics. The Survey is cross-sectional in nature and provides many relevant details on family formation processes at the individual level. In particular, retrospective information on partnerships allowed for the construction of (co-residential) partnership histories which was used in Chapters 2 and 4. Information on current partnerships, including non-coresidential ones, also allowed Chapter 3 to study living-apart-together relationships. The Harmonized Histories dataset, part of the Generations and Genders Programme, was particularly useful for the analyses conducted in

Chapter 2 as it had included relevant information from the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey and served as a condensed version of it. For comparison against the Spanish context, Swedish survey data from the Generations and Genders Surveys is also used in Chapter 2. Given that the 2018 Spanish Survey was partially based on the Generations and Genders Surveys, variables were easily comparable.

## **OUTLINE OF THE THESIS**

Following the Introduction, this thesis consists of three chapters and closes with the Conclusions. Chapter 2 explores to what extent stable partnership formation can explain the fertility gap between two high-income societies – Sweden and Spain – with differing levels of below-replacement fertility. Existing literature has focused on explanations that often do not place attention solely or directly on the association between partnership formation and first births. Therefore, the aim of this study is to provide potential insights on the role of partnership dynamics in shaping varying childbearing behaviors. Sweden was selected as the country for comparison because of several factors (e.g., Sweden has low levels of fertility, but higher rates compared to Spain; Swedes leave the parental home notably earlier than the Spanish which may imply earlier stable partnership formation among the prior). We employ three separate exercises to examine the timing and quantum of stable partnership formation, analyze the likelihood of having a first birth given one's stable partnership status, and decompose how much of the fertility differential in first births between Sweden and Spain can be explained by differences in first birth rates or differences in stable partnership formation. This work is co-authored with Dr. Albert Esteve and Qi Cui and was published in *Genus* Volume 78, Article 26 in 2022.

Chapter 3 aims to provide an updated picture of living-apart-together relationships in contemporary Spain and fill the gap in knowledge of how living-apart-together relationships may differ in meaning based on one's life stage. Not much has been explored yet on this topic among Spanish adults in the later life stage, and it may provide crucial insights given Spain's rapidly graying population. Using data from the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey, we run multinomial logistic regressions separately by life stage to study the likelihood of being in a living-apart-together relationship relative to not having a stable partner, cohabitation, or marriage. We include relevant demographic, socioeconomic, and previous family formation characteristics in the models to assess their influence on the likelihood of being



in a certain type of partnership. This work is co-authored with Dr. Teresa Castro-Martín (CSIC) and has been submitted to a journal. Currently, we are awaiting a decision.

Previous studies had not focused heavily on repartnering dynamics in Spain as rates of non-marital cohabitation and divorce have only become more aligned with that of other European societies in the past two decades. However, this means that we do not yet know of how repartnering dynamics look in modern-day Spain. Chapter 4, therefore, investigates the repartnering dynamics among women in contemporary Spain. The prevalence of repartnering and repartnering pathways are documented separately by birth cohort and educational attainment.

Chapter 5 presents a summary for each of the aforementioned Chapters, a discussion of the notable findings in the thesis, and suggestions for future research with broader implications of the findings.

## 2 PARTNERSHIP DYNAMICS AND THE FERTILITY GAP BETWEEN SWEDEN AND SPAIN

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### INTRODUCTION

As it is widespread and known, Swedish fertility is higher than that of the Spanish in the present-day. In both countries, however, the vast majority of children are born within the context of a stable partnership, which makes partnership and childbearing strongly connected. Cultural (Lesthaeghe 2010, Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 1988, Reher 1998, van de Kaa 1987), economic (Alderotti et al. 2021, Matysiak et al. 2021, Vignoli et al. 2020a, 2020b), and gender-related (Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015, Goldscheider et al. 2015, McDonald 2000) reasons have been posited to contribute to cross-national differences in low fertility settings, and are generally assumed to have implications for higher order childbearing. Moreover, the most influential theories on fertility and family behavior have all directly or indirectly addressed the issue of partnership formation. While most implicitly assume that partnership formation matters for the timing and quantum of childbearing, they often do not address cross-national fertility differences by partnership status, and few research has provided direct quantification of its importance for cohorts.

In this paper, we examine the extent to which partnership dynamics account for the fertility gap between Spain and Sweden –two high-income European societies with below-replacement level fertility, where the observed fertility often falls below the ideal family size (Sobotka and Beaujoan 2014). More specifically, the aim of our exploratory study is to explore the role of stable partnership formation in the transition to first birth within Spain and Sweden, taking a cohort approach and considering the role of age and intensity of partnership formation. We ask the following questions: How do first-birth transition probabilities vary between Sweden and Spain based on partnership status, gender, and age groups? To what extent can the gap in first-order TFRs between Sweden and Spain be explained by compositional differences (proportion in stable partnership) or by rate changes (partnered first-order TFR)? Assuming fertility rates do not change, what would be the effect of postponing partnership formation on first-order TFR in Sweden and

Spain? When referring to partnerships<sup>1</sup>, we refer to coresidence with a partner in the same household – combining marriage and cohabitation –, and use it as a proxy for economic independence from parents and engagement in a stable relationship. Furthermore, the focus is placed on the transition to first birth, as it is the parity transition for which (not) having a partner matters the most (Esteve et al. 2021). The impact of partnership dynamics on first birth also has consequences on higher-order fertility; not only does foregoing first births reduce the probability of having a second child, but it clearly impedes transition to higher parities. The answers to the research questions may have significant implications for theory development.

Given the biological limits of reproduction, the timing of partnership formation matters; therefore, we take a longitudinal perspective based on the experiences of Swedish and Spanish men<sup>2</sup> and women born between 1962 and 1979, highlighting the 1965-1969 cohort.<sup>3</sup> We follow their partnership histories and entrance into parenthood throughout their reproductive careers (between 18 and 40 years old) by utilizing retrospective information from survey data compiled in the Harmonized Histories dataset for Sweden and Spain (Perelli-Harris et al. 2011). Within the confines of our data, we take three complementary strategies for our two-country comparison. First, we calculate and compare the probabilities of transitioning to first birth based on partnership status at a given age. Second, we apply the Kitagawa decomposition method to examine the contribution of compositional differences in partnership status (partnered vs. non-partnered) to fertility rate differences based on partnership status. Third, we use standardization to investigate hypothetical first-birth outcomes based on earlier or later partnership formation (relative to the observed) for each country and gender. Before presenting the data and results, we provide some context for the comparison between Sweden and Spain.

## BACKGROUND

Below-replacement fertility is a universal trend across European and other high-income countries (Billari and Kohler 2004, Kohler et al. 2002). However, significant cross-national differences exist. Southern European societies are characterized for having very low levels

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, we use *partnership* and *stable partnership* interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> The inclusion of men contributes to the increasing empirical evidence on male fertility, for which we know comparatively less than women (Goldscheider & Kaufman 1996, Schoumaker 2019).

<sup>3</sup> This cohort is selected since it is the most complete in terms of observable partnership formation and first births until age 40.

of fertility. Specifically, Italy and Spain were the pioneers of low fertility from the early-1990s (Kohler et al. 2002). Conversely, most Northern and Western European countries have had fertility levels wavering much closer to replacement level over time.

Variation in fertility across European countries are often correlated with differences in the timing and intensity of adulthood transition events, such as leaving the parental home, forming a stable partnership, getting married, and entering parenthood. Comparative research on the transitions to adulthood has extensively shown the diverging patterns across European societies (Billari 2004, Billari and Liefbroer 2010, Buchmann and Kriesi 2011, Corijn and Klijzing 2001). For example, the age at first birth has been on the rise across European countries since the 1970s (Neels et al. 2017). Among them, Southern European countries report the highest mean age (Eurostat 2022a). The postponement of the transition to first child is strongly associated with other events such as leaving the parental home and, more importantly, forming unions (Baizán et al. 2003, Balbo et al. 2013, Billari et al. 2007, Billari and Liefbroer 2010, Esteve et al. 2020). The majority of first births occur within marriages or consensual unions in Europe (Kiernan 1999) and the lack of a stable partner has been reported as one of the reasons for unrealized fertility desires in Europe (Esteve et al. 2021, Testa 2007). Despite the importance of partnership formation as proximate determinant of fertility, we lack studies that quantify its contribution in comparative perspective (Esteve et al. 2020).

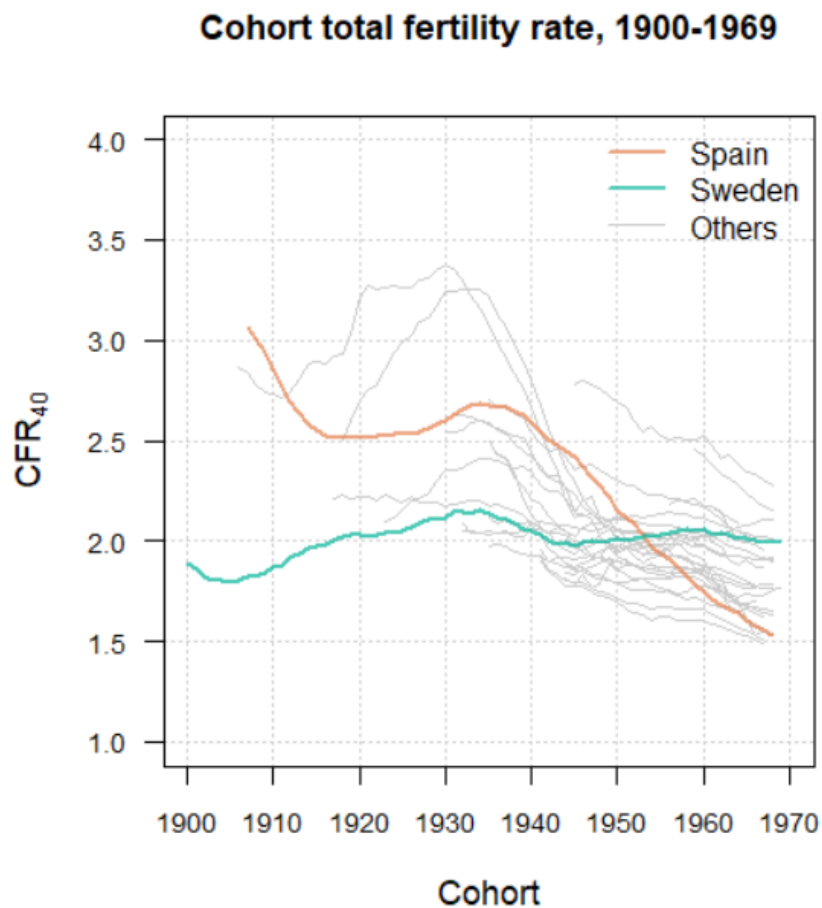
### **Sweden and Spain: providing context for the comparison**

#### *Different fertility trends but both below-replacement level*

While Scandinavian countries, the UK, and France are often categorized as having highest-low fertility in Europe, Southern European countries are categorized as the paradigm examples of having ‘lowest-low fertility’ (Billari and Kohler 2004, Kohler et al. 2002). While Spain has experienced three decades of below-replacement level fertility (below a TFR of 2.1), Sweden’s TFR has been quite stable prior to the unexpected decline from 2010 (a TFR fluctuation of around 2.0 before 2010 and currently, around 1.7) (Eurostat 2022a). Rates of childlessness differ between the two countries as well. On one hand, Spain continues to have one of the highest average ages at first childbearing in Europe and one of the highest rates of childlessness among women (Esteve et al. 2016) – around 20% of women born in the late 1960s (Reher and Requena 2019, Sobotka 2017). On the other hand, the proportion of childless Swedish women is around 14% (Sobotka 2017).

Relatedly, the completed fertility rates of more recent Spanish birth cohorts are relatively lower than the observed rates in Sweden and other Scandinavian countries. To illustrate this, Figure 2.1 shows the cohort fertility rates (CFR) of women born between 1900 and 1979 highlighting Spain and Sweden. The Swedish CFR for women was relatively high and stable, around 2.0 children per woman. In contrast, Spain experienced a continuous decline in CFR since the late-1930s birth cohort –from above 2.5 children per woman to 1.3 children per woman by the 1978 cohort. This rapid decline in fertility, however, appears to have stalled at around a 1.2 CFR among the late-1970s cohort in Spain.

**Figure 2.1.** Cohort fertility by age 40 of women in Spain, Sweden and selected countries



*Note:* CFR for Spanish women end with the 1978 cohort, respectively, while CFR for Swedish women end with the 1979 cohort.

*Source:* Calculated by authors based on Human Fertility Database (2021).

*Different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds*

When the second demographic transition (SDT) theory was formulated in the 1980s, Spain resembled a traditional, conservative country relative to its Nordic counterparts (Baizán et al. 2003, Kohler et al. 2002). In Spain, marriage was the main pathway to stable partnerships (Castro-Martín 1993, García Pereiro et al. 2014), with the majority of marriages being a religious marriage (Muñoz and Recaño 2011). Moreover, cohabitation and non-marital childbearing were still considered marginal phenomena (Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martín 2013), and divorce rates were still very low across the country (Bernardi and Martínez-Pastor 2011, Castro-Martín 1993, Miret-Gamundi 1997). Initially, Spain became a paradox of the SDT because it combined low levels of fertility and postponement of first partnership formation with a small share of cohabitation and non-marital childbearing (Dalla Zuanna and Micheli 2004). Only in recent decades has Spain undergone rapid political, economic, and cultural changes that have influenced family formation patterns (Martín-García 2013). During this period, earlier trends were replaced by new behaviors, such as the increasing postponement of first union and childbearing, increasing levels of union dissolution (Bernardi and Martínez-Pastor 2011, Castro-Martín 1992, Coppola and Di Cesare 2008), and increasing levels of cohabitation and non-marital childbearing (Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martín 2013). Non-marital fertility also rose rapidly from 11% in 1995 to 36% in 2010 (Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martín 2013). Most recent estimates from 2020 show that more than half of live births now occur within marriages (Eurostat 2022a).

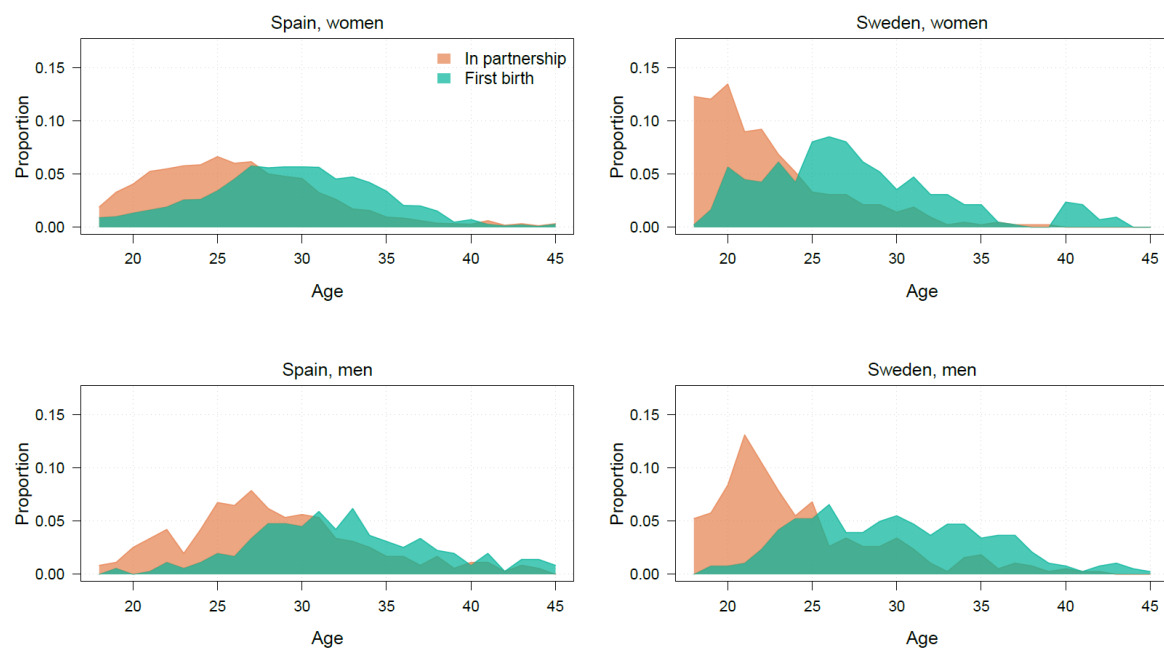
Sweden, on the other hand, has had individualism and egalitarianism embedded into its society and welfare state. The country has also been internationally known for their generous family policies supporting women maintain a work-life balance (Andersson 2020, Thomson et al. 2014), as well as their policies assisting young adults gain independence from their parental homes (Billari 2004). It has been argued that this government assistance has helped facilitate childbearing among Nordic societies prior to the fertility decline in 2010 (Andersson 2020). Sweden, in particular, has had one of the highest shares of premarital cohabitation and the highest share of births within cohabitation (Holland, 2013; Ohlsson-Wijk, 2011). In 2020, more than half of live births in Sweden occurred within non-marital couples (Eurostat 2022a). Additionally, co-residence with a stable partner has long been diffused across socioeconomic groups in Sweden, and cohabitation is a family form that has been indistinguishable from marriage—legally and societally (Hiekel et al. 2014, Hoem and

Hoem 1988, Ohlsson-Wijk et al. 2020). Therefore, it is no surprise that the majority of all first births in Sweden occur to unmarried, cohabiting couples (Holland 2013, Ohlsson-Wijk 2011).

### *Different age patterns in adulthood transitions*

Spain is known for its ‘latest-late’ transition to adulthood (Billari 2004), whereas Sweden is not. In our study, we consider two specific adulthood transition events: entering a stable partnership and experiencing a first childbirth.

**Figure 2.2.** Timing and intensity of first event occurrences by age, 1965-1969.



*Source:* Calculated by authors based on the Spanish Fertility Survey (2018) and Swedish Generations and Gender Survey (2013) from the Harmonized Histories dataset.

### *Entering a stable partnership*

In Sweden, approximately 97% of women born between 1965 and 1969 have ever been in stable partnership by age 45.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, only 80% of Spanish have ever been in a stable partnership by age 45. Men appear to experience the event less frequently than women in

<sup>4</sup> These results are based on the data used in our study from the Harmonized Histories dataset (Perelli-Harris et al., 2011). They are available upon request.

both countries, although, there are more Swedish women and men who have ever been in a stable partnership at all ages, relative to their Spanish counterparts. Around 88% of Swedish men have ever been in a stable partnership by age 45, On the other hand, 81% of Spanish men have ever been in a stable partnership by age 45.

For the Swedish, the median age of first stable partnership formation is 21 for women and 23 for men. On the other hand, the median age is relatively higher for their Spanish counterparts (women: 27 and men: 29). The late transition to partnership formation among the Spanish is closely associated with the late timing of leaving the parental home (Baizán et al. 2003). In 2020, the average age for women to leave their parental home in Spain was around 29, while for Spanish men, it was 31 (Eurostat, 2022b). On the contrary, leaving the parental home occurs much earlier in Sweden where the average age for women and men was 18 in 2020.

#### *Experiencing a first childbirth*

88% and 80% of Swedish women and men are ever-parents by the age of 45, respectively. The median age of first childbirth is 27 for women and 30 for men. Among the Spanish, 74% and 65% of women and men have a child by age 45, respectively. The median age of first childbirth is 32 for women and 36 for men. Traditionally, leaving the parental home would coincide with marriage and family formation in Spain (Baizán et al. 2003), and this is, indeed, what we observe in Figure 2.2.

#### **Existing theories explaining the Sweden-Spain fertility gap**

This section briefly describes where Spain and Sweden stand according to prominent theories attempting to explain differences in cross-national fertility. For instance, Spain is less advanced in the stages of the Second Demographic Transition (Lesthaeghe 2010) and Gender Revolution (Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015, Goldscheider et al. 2015) compared to Sweden –a paradigm example of being the most advanced in both theories–. Only in recent decades has divorce become legalized in Spain (Bernardi and Martinez-Pastor 2011), cohabitation recognized as a non-marginal pathway to family formation (Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martín 2013), and while Sweden is one of the most gender egalitarian societies (OECD 2016), Spain is not. Divorce has also existed in Sweden for over a century, and cohabitation is the norm prior to marriage –as well as its equal alternative (Holland 2013). The differences in the normalization of these processes within societies are most



likely related to the prevalence and timing of stable partnership formation, which we argue here are important features for entering parenthood.

Different welfare regimes have also been linked to differences in fertility behaviors (Blossfeld et al. 2006, Esping-Andersen 1999, Neyer 2013). The de-familialized regimes of the Nordic societies, where responsibilities of care and the welfare of households lie on the welfare state and not on the family, observe higher fertility. On the contrary, Mediterranean societies with familistic regimes, where financial and caring responsibilities fall on the family, observe lowest-low levels of fertility. Reher (1998) suggests that the historical North-South differences in (intergenerational) family ties influence current differences in fertility levels. Specifically, southern countries have strong family ties, or strong intergenerational relationships, and northern countries have weak ties, characterized by weak intergenerational relationships. The environment of the former may have made it easier for the normalization of delayed transition to adulthood, such as leaving the parental home. This, in turn, also influences the postponement of childbearing and lower fertility. Differences in welfare regimes may also influence the consequences of economic uncertainty on societies (Blossfeld et al. 2006). Young adults in Spain, for instance, experienced more negative economic consequences due to the 2008/9 financial crisis relative to Sweden (Puig-Barrachina et al. 2020). The rise in both subjective and objective economic uncertainty has also been found to deter childbearing, perhaps more so in Southern European contexts (Vignoli et al. 2020a, Vignoli et al. 2020b).

Such existing theories emphasize different aspects and confront the challenge of explaining why fertility is declining and why there are relatively large differences across European societies. It is uncommon to find studies focusing on how differences in partnership dynamics can explain fertility differences, as none of these theories explicitly question the importance of partnership dynamics.

## **DATA**

We use data from the Harmonized Histories dataset which has, to date, compiled and standardized 27 surveys from 23 various countries, the majority European (Perelli-Harris et al. 2011). In particular, we use the 2012/2013 Swedish Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) and the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey (SFS) within this larger dataset. The retrospective nature of these surveys allows us to reconstruct respondents' stable partnership

and childbearing histories as person-months. We exclude individuals with incomplete partnership histories from our final sample. For Sweden, we exclude 17 women and 17 men; for Spain, we exclude 158 women and 182 men.

The GGS is an international compilation of fertility surveys containing rich micro-level information on life-courses and family dynamics (Gauthier et al. 2018, Vergauwen et al. 2015). The 2012/2013 Swedish GGS interviewed women and men born between 1933 and 1994, ages 18 to 79; the sample is representative, and the respondents are based on random samples taken from the Swedish population registers. The original sample contains 9,688 individuals –4,991 women and 4,697 men. We end up with 1,372 and 1,280 women and men, respectively, after restricting the sample to native-born individuals born between 1962 and 1979. Birth cohorts are grouped by 5-years and are chosen based on the overlap between the two surveys, with foremost consideration towards following respondents through their reproductive career for as long as possible. The distribution of cases by birth cohort can be found in Table A1 in the Appendix. Finally, we end up with 1,355 Swedish women and 1,263 men.

The 2018 SFS interviewed women and men born between 1962 and 2000, ages 18 to 55. It is a representative, cross-sectional survey conducted by the National Statistics Institute of Spain and is a continuation of the fertility surveys conducted in 1977, 1985, and 1999. The original sample consists of 17,175 individuals –14,556 women and 2,619 men.<sup>5</sup> Restricting the Spanish sample as we did with the Swedish sample, we end up with 7,571 Spanish women and 1,301 men. This study defines being in a stable partnership as co-residing with an intimate partner and only considers biological childbearing. Furthermore, partnership status is a time-varying variable in our analysis, where dates are measured in months. Missing months<sup>6</sup> of an event occurrence are randomly imputed when the corresponding year is available. The main results will be presented based on the 1965-1969 birth cohort. This cohort is selected since it is the most complete in terms of observable partnership formation

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<sup>5</sup> The strong gender imbalance of the original Spanish sample is due to its survey design. For further information, please refer to [https://www.ine.es/en/metodologia/t20/fecundidad2018\\_meto\\_en.pdf](https://www.ine.es/en/metodologia/t20/fecundidad2018_meto_en.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> The date of interview required all months to be imputed, albeit, this was done based on the actual timeframe in which interview were conducted for each respective survey (between March and June). Among our sample of native-born Swedish women born between 1962 and 1979, we randomly imputed month values for the following number of event occurrences by sex: stable partnership formation (N=365 for women; N=349 for men), partnership dissolution (N=175 for women; N=118 for men), and first birth (N=1 for women; N=1 for men). Note that the N here are based on the partnership histories of our sample, meaning the N represents an occurrence of a specific event.

and first births until age 40. With the earlier cohort, only two years are covered (1962-1964), and with younger cohorts, first births at late ages are lost.

## METHODS

We employ the three techniques used to examine the influence of partnership dynamics on fertility, namely, transition probabilities to first birth, Kitagawa decomposition, and standardization. All of which are used to illustrate the Swedish-Spanish first-order TFR differences from distinct but inter-related dimensions. With the transition probabilities we focus on *behavior* across the reproductive period; specifically, we aim to explore whether fertility schedule differences exist after controlling for partnership status. Controlling for partnership status allows us to compare the first-birth probabilities between Swedish and Spanish individuals of the same age and with the same partnership status. For example, will the probability of entering parenthood within the next three years be similar between a 25 year-old Swedish and Spanish woman, both with a stable partner? The decomposition analysis, on the other hand, allows us to explore how much of the gap in first-order TFRs between Sweden and Spain is attributable to age-specific (1) differences in fertility *behavior* (e.g., the partnered first-order TFRs) or (2) differences in *composition* (e.g., the proportion of those in a stable partnership). In the decomposition, the former is referred to as the rate effect, and the latter, the composition effect. Lastly, standardization allows us to experiment with the influence of partnership *composition* on the first-order age-specific fertility rates in Spain and Sweden –keeping the observed partnership-specific first-order TFR constant in each respective country. We examine hypothetical age-specific first-order TFRs by pre-/postponing the observed stable partnership formation by one to three years. Below, we empirically illustrate these three techniques.

*First-birth probabilities to examine transition to first birth in the next three years based on partnership status*

Using retrospective data, we construct individual partnership and childbearing histories for native-born, childless women in each country and calculate first-birth probabilities as follows,

$$\begin{aligned} &Pr(x, t, p) \\ &= \frac{N(x, t, p, b = 1)}{N(x, t, p)}, \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where  $x$ ,  $t$ , and  $p$  indicate age, cohort, and partnership status, respectively.  $p = 1$  indicates women who have a stable partner, while  $p = 0$  indicates the opposite.  $b = 1$  indicates women who have a first birth within the next three years.  $N(x, t, p)$  represents native-born, childless women, given age, cohort, and partnership status. It should be noted that observations three years before the survey year of each respective country have been censored in order to calculate the first-birth probabilities using only known information. This means that we censor all observations after 2009 for the Swedish sample, as the majority of interviews took place in 2012, and 2015 for the Spanish.

*Kitagawa decomposition to distinguish rate and composition effects on first-order TFR differentials*

Since the probabilities do not consider the proportion of (un-)partnered individuals at a given age, we are unable to distinguish to what extent the first-order TFR and the composition of (un-)partnered women and men contribute to differences in the transition to first birth between Sweden and Spain. To quantify this, we use the Kitagawa decomposition approach. We compute the first-order TFR based on partnership status, which is expressed as,

$$\begin{aligned} TFR(t) &= \sum_{x=\alpha}^{\beta} ASFR(x, t) \\ &= \sum_{x=\alpha}^{\beta} \sum_{p=0}^1 ASFR(x, t, p) C(x, t, p), \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

where  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  represent the minimum and maximum reproductive ages.  $ASFR(x, t, p)$  and  $C(x, t, p)$  are the age-specific fertility rate and the proportion of women, respectively, given age, cohort, and partnership status. We follow the Kitagawa (1955) approach and decompose the difference in first-order TFR as the following,

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta TFR(c) &= \sum_{x=\alpha}^{\beta} \sum_{p=0}^1 \Delta ASFR(x, t, p) \bar{C}(x, t, p) \\ &\quad + \overline{ASFR}(x, t, p) \Delta C(x, t, p), \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

where  $\Delta$  and overbar mean the difference and average between two populations, separately. For example,  $\Delta ASFR(x, t, p) = ASFR(x, t, p, SWE) - ASFR(x, t, p, ESP)$ , and  $\bar{C}(x, t, p) = \frac{C(x, t, p, SWE) + C(x, t, p, ESP)}{2}$ . Based on Eq. (3), the two effects can be defined as,

Rate effect

$$= \sum_{x=\alpha}^{\beta} \sum_{p=0}^1 \Delta ASFR(x, t, p) \bar{C}(x, t, p), \text{ and} \quad (4)$$

Composition effect

$$= \sum_{x=\alpha}^{\beta} \sum_{p=0}^1 \overline{ASFR}(x, t, p) \Delta C(x, t, p). \quad (5)$$

Then, the Total effect = rate effect + composition effect. While the rate effect summarizes the effect of age- and partnership-specific first birth rates on the first-order fertility differentials, the composition effect summarizes the effect of age-specific partnership composition on the differentials. It should be mentioned that the rate and composition effects can be further separated by partnership, as Equations (4) and (5) show (for an example, see Figure A6 in the Appendix).

*Standardization to observe how earlier/later partnership formation may impact first-order TFR*

For the standardization, we employ Equation (2) to calculate hypothetical first-order TFRs. We have two distinct scenarios, namely, earlier and later stable partnership formation. We assume that the hypothetical proportion of stable partnerships at age  $x$  will reach the actual stable partnership proportion at age  $x + n$  (or  $x - n$ ),  $n$  representing the moving year(s). In other words, we move the  $C(x, t, p = 1, ESP)$  curve to the left (or right, correspondingly)  $n$  years (see Figure A2 in Appendix). Note that the hypothetical stable partnership proportion will remain the same as the observed proportion at the last age, and in the case of further postponement, we move the  $C(x, t, p = 1, ESP)$  curve to the right. At the first age, we consider that the declining speed is 0.02 per year. If the proportion is lower than 0, we force it to 0. Furthermore, we assume the  $ASFR(x, t, p, ESP)$  remains constant for both scenarios. Since the non-stable partnership proportion will change correspondingly,  $1 - C(x, t, p = 1)$ , and  $ASFR(x, t, p = 0)$  is negligible, this (direct) standardization can be employed to investigate the influence of stable partnership on first-order TFRs.

## RESULTS

In this section, we show the results for the 1965-1969 birth cohort. Full results are presented in the Appendix (Figure A1, A3, A4, and A5).

### *Transition to first birth among childless women and men by partnership status at a given age*

Figure 2.3 shows the probability of experiencing a first birth within the next three years at a given age for Swedish and Spanish women and men based on stable partnership status among those born between 1965 and 1969.<sup>7,8</sup>

Overall, we observe that having a stable partner drastically increases one's probability of entering parenthood within the next three years at practically all given ages for women (Figure 2.3). This is relative to not having a stable partner at that age. Although Swedish women with stable partners have higher probabilities for first childbirth compared to their Spanish counterparts, the probability of having a first child within the next three years among partnered women are the highest and most concentrated within the age range 25 to 35 for both countries. The average difference in transition probabilities among partnered women between these ages is approximately 12%, with Swedish women having a higher probability than the Spanish. While the transition probability to first birth within the next three years is highest at age 27 for Swedish women (0.52) and at age 29 for Spanish women (0.42), this concentration of ages may infer to the timing deemed 'societally acceptable' for childbearing among women born between 1965 and 1969 in Sweden and Spain.

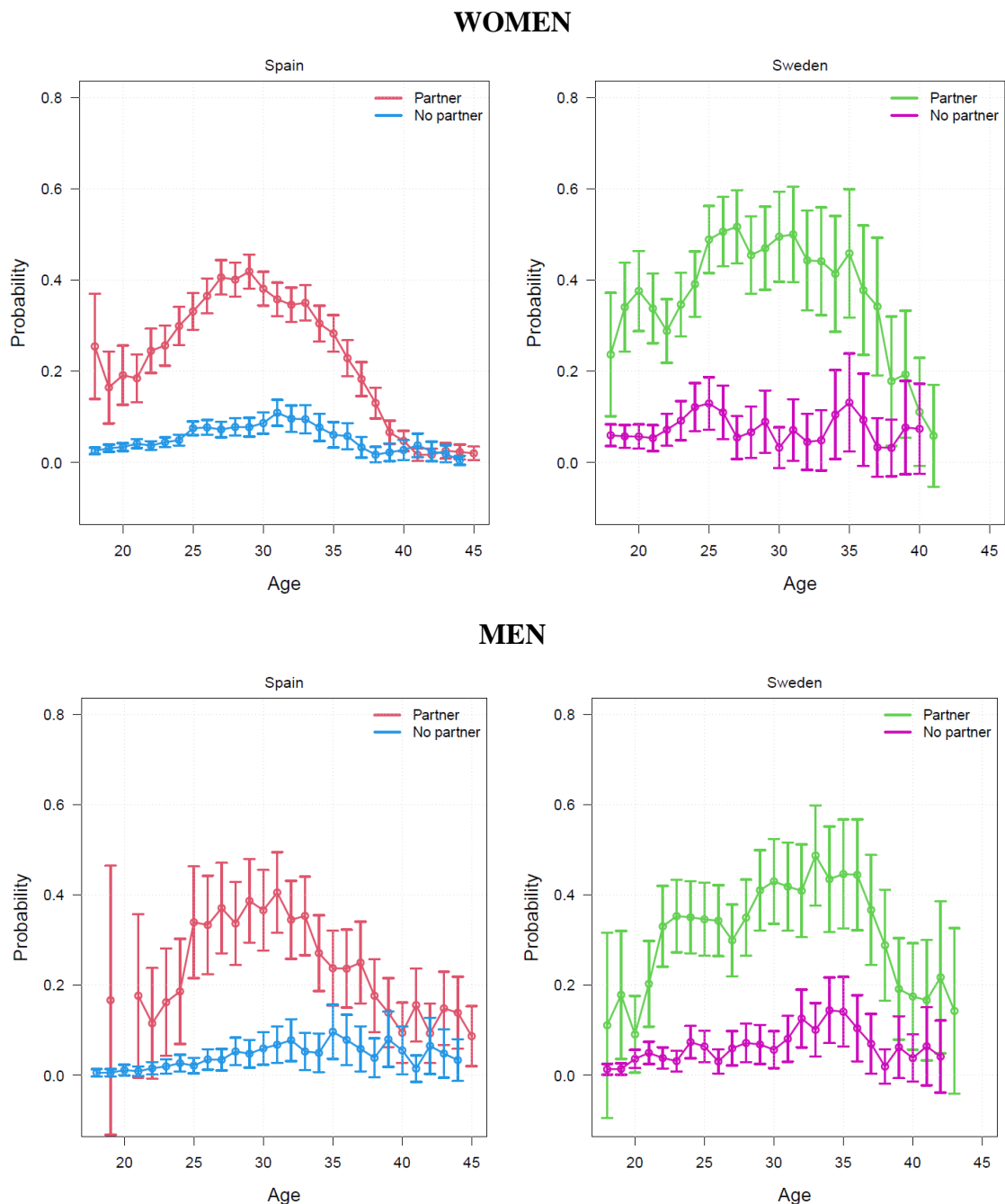
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<sup>7</sup> Given the different survey years of the Swedish and Spanish data, 2012/13 and 2018, respectively, and the three-year censoring, some caution may be necessary when interpreting results of the Spanish sample due to the overlap with the 2008/9 financial crisis. However, this is only in regards to the results of Spanish women and men born in the 1970s and not among those born in the 1960s. We are able to observe the partnership formation and childbearing behaviors of individuals in the latter, until at least age 39, prior to the crisis. Results of Spanish individuals born in the 1970s (in the Appendix), on the other hand, may need to be interpreted with this in mind.

<sup>8</sup> Partnership formation and childbearing are closely related and potentially endogenous. To test to what extent endogeneity could be an issue for our study, we conducted a sensitivity analysis for childbearing intentions within the next three years among childless women based on their partnership status. Calculating an index of dissimilarity per age between Sweden and Spain, we find very low dissimilarity scores between childless women in a stable partnership (0.086 per age) and their counterparts who are not in a stable partnership (0.092 per age) at the time of survey; likewise, we find very low dissimilarity scores between childless men in a stable partnership (0.127 per age) and their counterparts who are not (0.064 per age) at the time of survey. Thus, we can conclude that childbearing intentions within the next three years are similar among childless individuals in Sweden and Spain despite stable partnership status, and that the potential endogeneity issues for these two groups may be minimal.

Furthermore, it may indicate that having a stable partner earlier than age 25 or later than age 35 is less impactful in the transition to first birth.

**Figure 2.3.** First-birth probability within the next three years at a given age (with 95% confidence intervals) based on partnership status, 1965-1969.



*Source:* Calculated by authors based on the Spanish Fertility Survey (2018) and Swedish Generations and Gender Survey (2013) from the Harmonized Histories dataset.

The general results for men are similar to that of women as seen in Figure 2.3. For one, having a stable partner for men also shows a higher probability of experiencing a first birth within the next three years at a given age when compared to not having a partner.<sup>9</sup> The probabilities of entering fatherhood are lower for Spanish men than the Swedish at almost all ages –the exception being at age 27. First-birth probabilities for Spanish men with a stable partner are highest between the ages 25 and 35, similar to women. Contrastingly, first-birth probabilities for Swedish men are highest in the latter half of this timeframe, specifically, in their early 30s. Transition probabilities among partnered men between the ages 25 and 35 is approximately 5% on average, with Swedish men having a higher probability than the Spanish. The concentration of higher transition probabilities, once again, may indicate the timing in which stable partnership is most impactful in the transition to first birth.

#### *Decomposing differences in first births between Spain and Sweden*

Swedish women have a higher first-order TFR compared to Spanish women at age 40, approximately 0.88 and 0.71<sup>10</sup>, respectively. Figure 4 presents the results of our Kitagawa decomposition, decomposing the first-order TFR differential of 0.17 between Swedish and Spanish women.<sup>11</sup> Overall, the primary contributor to the first-order TFR differential between Sweden and Spain for women is the composition effect with 0.21. The total rate effect is trivial (0.04) and only slightly offsets the positive composition effect. More specifically, our decomposition results show that the difference in first-order TFR is negligible at the young ages between 18 and 19. For women, the total effect at these ages is only slightly in favor of a higher Spanish fertility contributed by the rate effect. The composition effect, meanwhile, plays a positively significant role between the ages of 20 and 29, suggesting that more Swedish women are in stable partnerships than their Spanish counterparts. Before age 30, the compositional effect accounts for 74% of the differences

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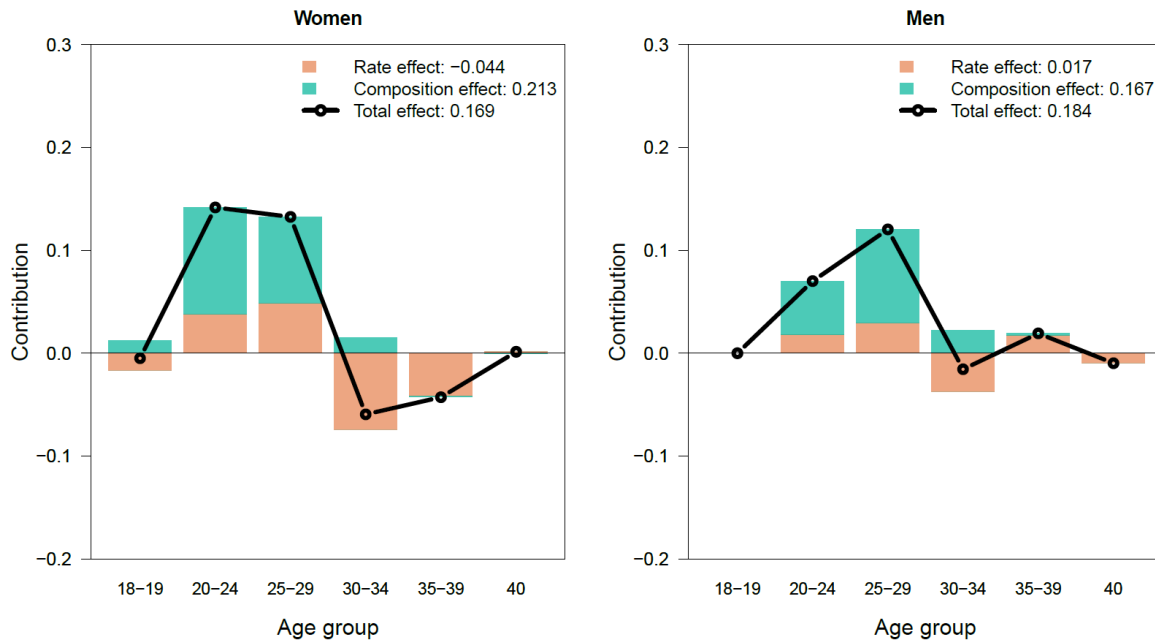
<sup>9</sup> We acknowledge that men's childbearing history may be less accurate than women's. For example, there may be underreporting of childbirth among men who have their first child outside of a stable partnership (Joyner et al., 2012, Rendall et al., 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Please note that first-order TFR values have been rounded up to two decimal points. More precisely, the first-order TFRs are 0.877 and 0.708 for Swedish and Spanish women, respectively. The difference is 0.169. For Swedish and Spanish men, the first-order TFRs are 0.760 and 0.576, respectively. This difference is 0.184.

<sup>11</sup> We also performed an additional, education-specific decomposition analysis. The results, however, were statistically imprecise due to the small sample size once age, birth cohort, gender, partnership status, and educational attainment were accounted for. The small sample size is particularly an issue for our selection of men and the low educated (for Sweden).



**Figure 2.4.** Contribution of first-order rate and partnership composition to the first-order TFR differential by age group, 1965-1969.



*Source:* Calculated by authors based on the Spanish Fertility Survey (2018) and Swedish Generations and Gender Survey (2013) from the Harmonized Histories dataset.

*Note:*  $\Delta TFR = TFR_{SWEDEN} - TFR_{SPAIN}$ .

between Sweden and Spain in first-order births. After age 30, however, Spanish women have a higher fertility than the Swedish. This is primarily driven by the rate effects.

We perform the same analysis for men. The total difference in first-order TFR between Swedish and Spanish men is 0.18, with a 0.76 Swedish first-order TFR and a 0.58 Spanish first-order TFR. The contributions of the rate and compositional effects toward this difference are illustrated again in Figure 4. The composition effect is also the principal contributor for fertility differentials between Swedish and Spanish men (difference of 0.17), while again, the rate effect contributes minimally (0.02). At the youngest ages, 18 to 19, there are no differences in first-order TFR between Swedish and Spanish men. Swedish men experience more fertility at all age groups except between ages 30 to 34 and at age 40. From the ages 20 to 29, the partnership composition of Swedish men is the dominant contributor to the higher Swedish fertility –the composition effect being the largest between the ages 25 and 29. Before age 30, 75% of the first-order TFR difference between Swedish and Spanish men can be explained by compositional difference in partnerships. Meanwhile, the rate

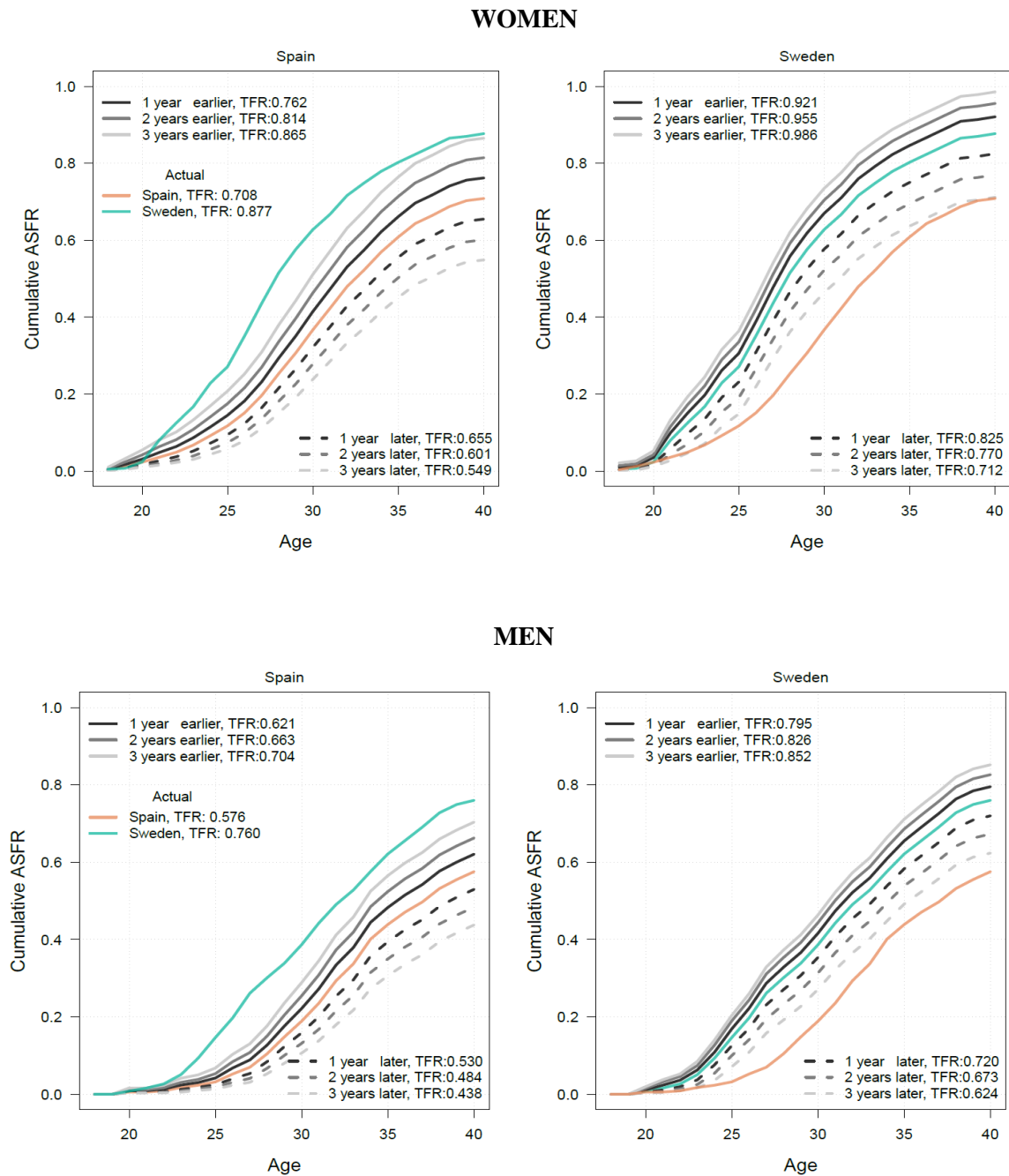
effect drives the fertility among men after age 30. Specifically, the rate effect explains the higher fertility of Spanish men relative to their Swedish counterparts. Between the ages 35 to 39, however, Swedish men appear to experience more first births. This differs from the situation of women, where Spanish women have higher fertility than the Swedish after age 30.

*What if Spanish women form stable partners earlier or later than what is observed?*

To further explore how the timing of first stable partnership formation impacts first-order TFR rates by age 40, we calculate hypothetical first-order TFRs for native-born Swedish and Spanish women and men as if they formed a stable partnership one to three years earlier.

In Figure 5, we observe a marginal increase in first-order TFRs each year partnership formation hypothetically occurs earlier than the observed. The largest increase is if Spanish women formed stable partnerships one year earlier than the observed. The hypothetical first-order TFR improves from 0.71 to 0.76. If stable partnerships would form three years earlier than the observed, the Spanish first-order TFR would nearly match the observed Swedish rate by age 40 – 0.87 and 0.88 first-order TFRs, respectively. Although the Swedish first-order TFR is higher than that of the Spanish before age 35, they converge by age 40. This is because most Swedish women have already entered parenthood prior to age 35, while most Spanish women only begin entering parenthood during their 30s. Figure 5 also shows hypothetical consequences of further delaying stable partnership formation one to three years later. The low scenario, a one-year delay, can result in a 0.05 decrease in Spanish first-order TFR by age 40 for a first-order TFR of 0.66. The middle, a two-year delay, and high, a three-year delay, scenarios show a potential decrease of 0.11 and 0.16 children per woman – a first-order TFR of 0.60 and 0.55, respectively.

**Figure 2.5.** Observed and hypothetical first-birth rates if first stable partnerships were formed earlier/later, 1965-1969.



*Source:* Calculated by authors based on the Spanish Fertility Survey (2018) and Swedish Generations and Gender Survey (2013) from the Harmonized Histories dataset.

For Sweden, where the observed first-order TFR is 0.88, earlier stable partnership formation by three years suggests a hypothetical first-order TFR of 0.99. On the other hand, a postponement of three years suggests that the first-order TFR of Swedish women would be very similar to the Spanish –both approximately 0.71. Again, since Swedish family transitions occur earlier than their Spanish counterparts, there is a convergence of first-order TFR at later ages when Spanish women ‘catch-up’ due to their delayed childbearing.

Despite less men becoming parents in general relative to women, Figure 5 further suggests Spanish men have a much lower transition to first birth than Swedish men –first-order TFR of 0.58 and 0.76, respectively. A delay of three more years from the actual situation could result in a first-order TFR of 0.44 for Spanish men. Similar to the convergence observed among women, the hypothetical Spanish first-order TFR for men converges with that of the observed Swedish rate at later ages. For Swedish men, postponing stable partnership formation impacts first-birth fertility levels to a greater extent compared to earlier partnership formation. This is due to partnership composition being the primary contributor to Sweden’s high fertility instead of the rate. In other words, the rate is unable to compensate for the negative impact of delaying partnership formation on the transition to first birth. Only marginal increases are observed in the hypothetical first-order TFRs with each year Swedish men form partnerships earlier. The already high contribution of partnership composition and the fixed fertility rate of entering fatherhood may explain this finding.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

The relationship between partnership dynamics and childbearing in below-replacement fertility contexts is important to address in contemporary fertility research as the landscape of family formation continues to evolve across European societies. For example, singlehood and childlessness has been on the rise, and the Nordic countries have experienced an unexpected decline in period fertility (Esteve et al. 2016, Hellstrand et al. 2021, Reher and Requena, 2019, Sobotka 2017). The findings of this study illustrate the importance of partnership formation with regards to entering parenthood. Furthermore, they indicate the necessity for more research on the determinants of partnership dynamics –especially, as it is likely related to transitions to adulthood and the difficulties young adults face to make these transitions.

Contextually, we compare the partnership formation and childbearing behaviors of Sweden and Spain. The inclusion of men in the study, which remains under researched in existing fertility literature, also provides a gender perspective. Sweden and Spain not only have different cultural, economic, and political histories, but they have distinct patterns in the timing of adulthood transition event occurrences (earliest-early vs. latest-late, respectively) (Billari 2004) and have different levels of below-replacement fertility (highest-low vs. lowest-low, respectively) (Billari and Kohler 2004, Kohler et al. 2002).

Several conclusions can be drawn from our analysis. First, having a stable partner could be a crucial element for childbearing regardless of country or gender. The immense majority of children are born within the context of a stable partnership, and having a stable partner could increase the probability of entering parenthood within the next three years. We find having a stable partner matters most from the ages 25 to 35 in entering parenthood, while first-birth transition probabilities are lower among those that have a stable partnership at older ages. Furthermore, first childbirth is particularly relevant to address when analyzing childbearing in below-replacement fertility societies as it not only allows for higher-order births, but recent studies exploring the parity-specific effects on fertility have found the decline in first-order births to be a significant contributor to the below-replacement-fertility trend in certain European countries (specifically, Southern European, German-speaking, and recently, Nordic countries) (Brzozowska et al. 2022, Hellstrand et al. 2021, Zeman et al. 2018).

Second, we find that partnership composition could explain more of the gap in first-order TFRs between Sweden and Spain, relative to childbearing behaviors based on partnership status. Between the ages 25 to 35, around 75% of the first-order TFR gap may be contributable to differences in partnership composition. While both Swedish women and men had higher first-order TFRs relative to their Spanish counterparts, our results illustrate a gender difference in the dominant contributing effect of the first-order TFR gap (i.e., the rate or composition effect) by age group. There is a higher proportion of young women forming stable partnerships in Sweden than in Spain, and we find that this is the most significant contributor to the first-order TFR differential between these two countries. At later ages, the childbearing of partnered Spanish women may also explain the first-order TFR differential between Sweden and Spain, however, much less so than the differences in partnership composition. The findings are similar for men, where the higher proportion of

stable partnership composition among young Swedish men could explain more of the first-order TFR gap between Sweden and Spain relative to the differences in partnered childbearing.

Third, the timing of first stable partnership formation may be imperative for improving the first-order TFR, particularly so for native Spanish women and men. Both the decomposition and standardization analysis suggest this. If Spanish women entered stable partnerships three years earlier than what is observed (specifically for the 1965-1969 birth cohort), however, the first-order TFR would become similar to the Swedish by age 40. This suggests that earlier stable partnership formation in Spain could contribute to higher first-order TFRs, even if their childbearing timing and intensity persists at the observed level. Forming a stable partnership three years earlier for Spanish women and, most likely, more than three years for men, results in first-order TFRs which are comparable to their Swedish counterparts. Results from our standardization exercise show Spanish men should enter a stable partnership several years earlier than Spanish women to potentially achieve a first-order TFR comparable to their respective Swedish counterparts. A likely explanation for this is that men do not have the same biological limitations of childbearing as women do; therefore, not only do men generally have their first child later than women, but the first-order TFRs for men are also more spread out over and less concentrated within a certain age range.

In general, we find that the Swedish form *more* stable partnerships and at *earlier* ages, and the Spanish form *less* stable partnerships and at *later* ages. We also find fewer Spanish individuals enter parenthood, and they tend to do so at later relative to their Swedish counterparts. There may be several explanations for the differences in the intensity and timing of partnership formation between Sweden and Spain. First, the variation in intensity of stable partnership formation may due to differences in the stage of SDT. The Nordic countries are often considered the leaders of the SDT, particularly in regards to ideological shifts toward individualism and self-realization, as well as the diffusion of cohabitation and non-marital childbearing. Despite these ideological changes, we find stable partnership formation occurs more frequently in Sweden than in Spain, where gender-egalitarian attitudes and norms have been on the rise in recent decades (Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martín 2013, García Pereiro et al. 2014, Muñoz and Recaño 2011). Non-marital cohabitation as a path to family formation in Sweden is well-established and a notable

difference between the two countries that may influence the intensity of stable partnership formation. Spain only started to observe notable increases in cohabitation since the 1990s, and marriage was the most common pathway to family formation before then (Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martín 2013, Martín-García 2013). The declines in marriage observed in Spain over time, together with the delayed diffusion of cohabitation, likely contributes to the low intensity of partnership formation.

Partnership formation occurring later among the Spanish may be due to several features, one of them being Spain's familistic welfare regime (Esping-Andersen 1999) and strong family ties (Reher 1998). These characteristics, for example, may have shaped how Spanish young adults cope with the rise in economic uncertainty following the 2008/9 financial crisis. For instance, on average, young adults in Spain reside in their parental home until their early 30s; meanwhile, Sweden's generous welfare system provides support for young adults to be able to leave the parental home by age 18.

Unlike existing theoretical explanations emphasizing aspects such as historical trajectories, cultural/ideological change, gender equality, and economic uncertainty, our study focuses on explaining the fertility difference between Sweden and Spain by highlighting differences in partnership dynamics. Meaning, if partnership dynamics between the countries were more analogous, Swedish and Spanish fertility may not be as notably different, but instead, closer to their shared desired number of children (Sobotka and Beaujouan 2014). This idea could contribute to theory development by focusing more attention on why couples are more likely to be formed in one country over another and why partnership formation can occur at earlier ages, rather than focusing on the characteristics of such couples. In terms of variation by gender, we find women and men tend to share a similar relationship between stable partnership formation and first birth, although, both events generally occur later for men.

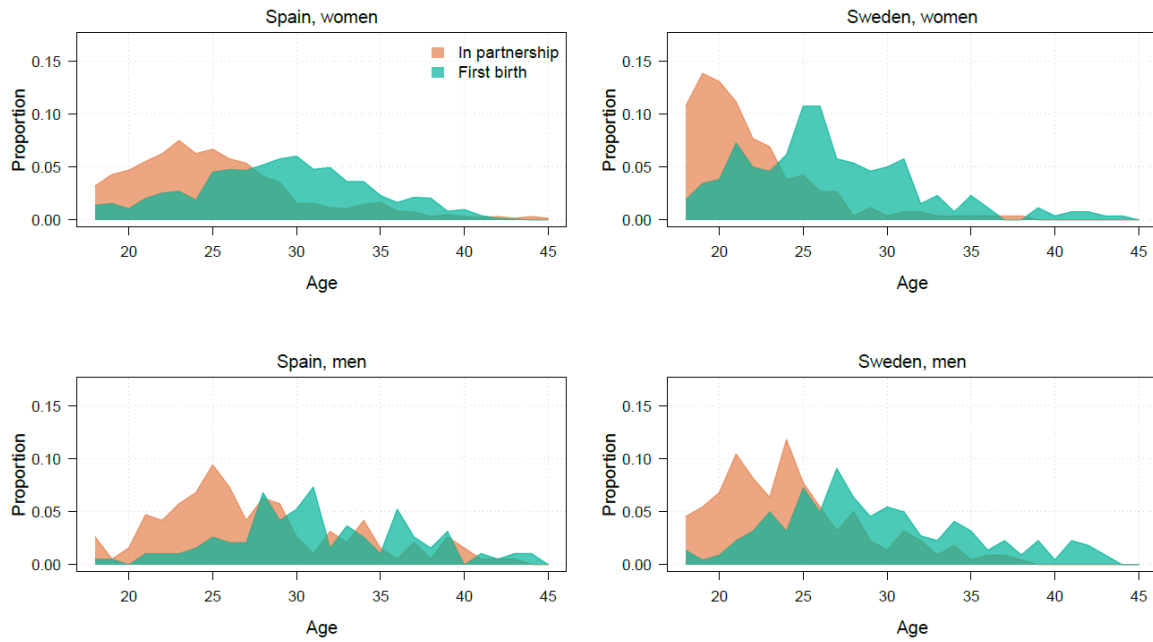
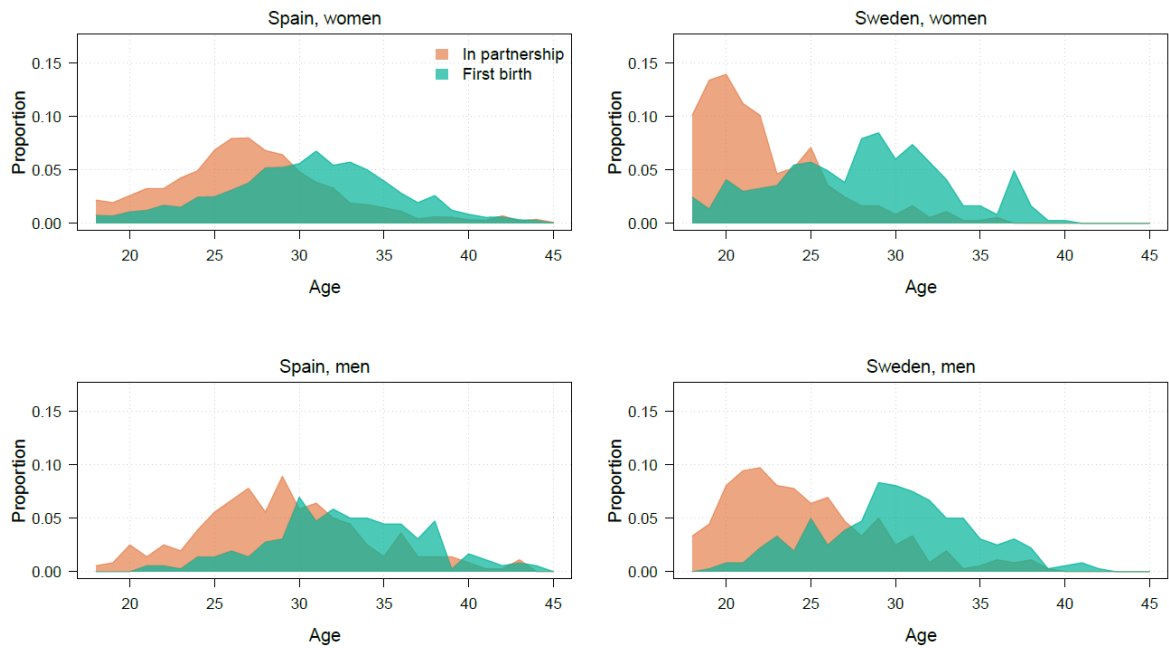
Lastly, we acknowledge several limitations of our exploratory study –one of them being the inability to establish any causal inference. Additionally, while we recognize that the features associated with existing macro-level theories on cross-national fertility variation may influence both stable partnership formation and childbearing behaviors, implying a potentially confounding relationship, it is outside the scope of the paper to address this appropriately. Furthermore, the retrospective information used in our analysis is subject to recall bias. The start and end dates of stable partnerships may be particularly susceptible to this as exact dates of every co-residential instance with an intimate partner may not be

remembered and reported. When these dates are recalled inaccurately, the share of births that occur within or outside stable partnerships at a given age may be subject to bias. Another limitation is the size of the Swedish sample, which contributes to some of the fluctuations observed in our results (i.e., first-birth probabilities based on partnership status at a given age). The small sample size also hindered the possibility for any additional analysis by socioeconomic characteristics, such as educational attainment. This may be interesting to explore in future research with larger datasets.

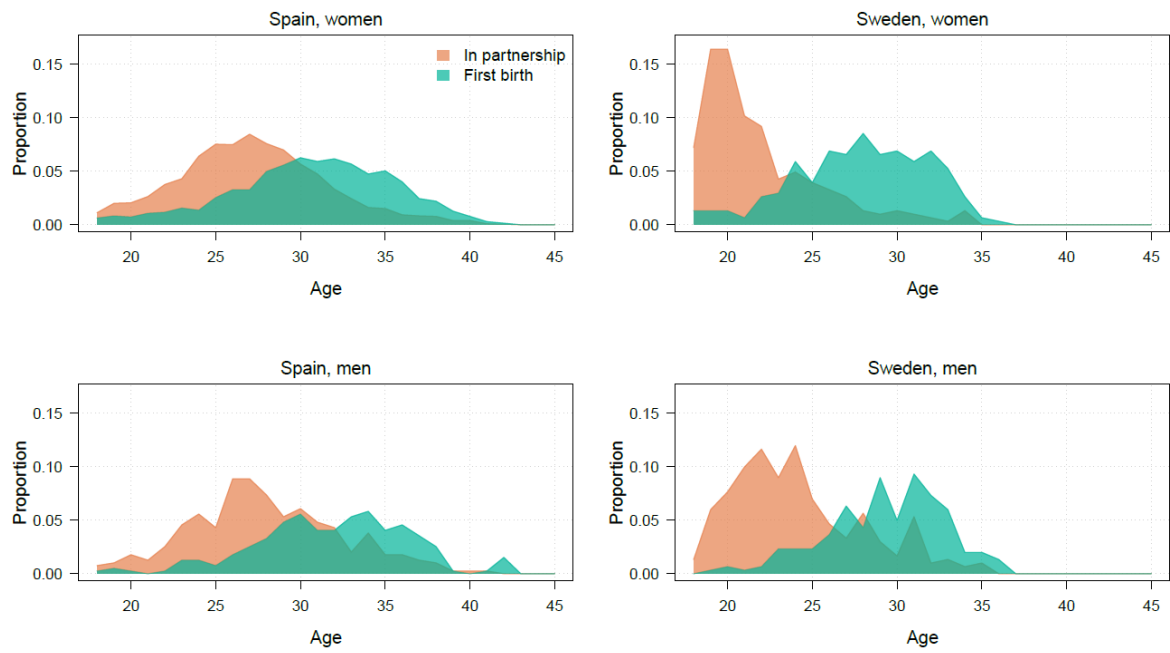
Despite the aforementioned shortcomings, however, our results still underline the need to place more attention towards the relationship between partnership dynamics and the transition to first birth –treating partnership dynamics as if it were a social proximate determinant of fertility (Esteve et al. 2020). This is especially relevant and important for future fertility research on societies with persisting levels of very low fertility. The influences of early partnership formation on childbearing found in the study also reveals the potential value of assisting young adults gain independence. Assistance, specifically, so that they may more easily leave the parental home. Here, leaving the parental home earlier might imply more time and opportunities for individuals to form stable unions and have a first child when desired –which is perhaps, at relatively early ages. This type of assistance is already provided in Sweden, and therefore, would, as our study suggests, have a large positive influence among developed countries continuously experiencing levels of very low fertility and delayed transitions to adulthood, such as Spain. These countries would also benefit from protecting childless, young adults from the continuing rise of economic uncertainty, as young adults, in particular, are negatively impacted during times of economic downturns (Sobotka et al. 2011).



## APPENDIX

**Figure A1.1.** Timing and intensity of event occurrences by age and birth cohort.**1962-1964****1970-1974**

### 1975-1979

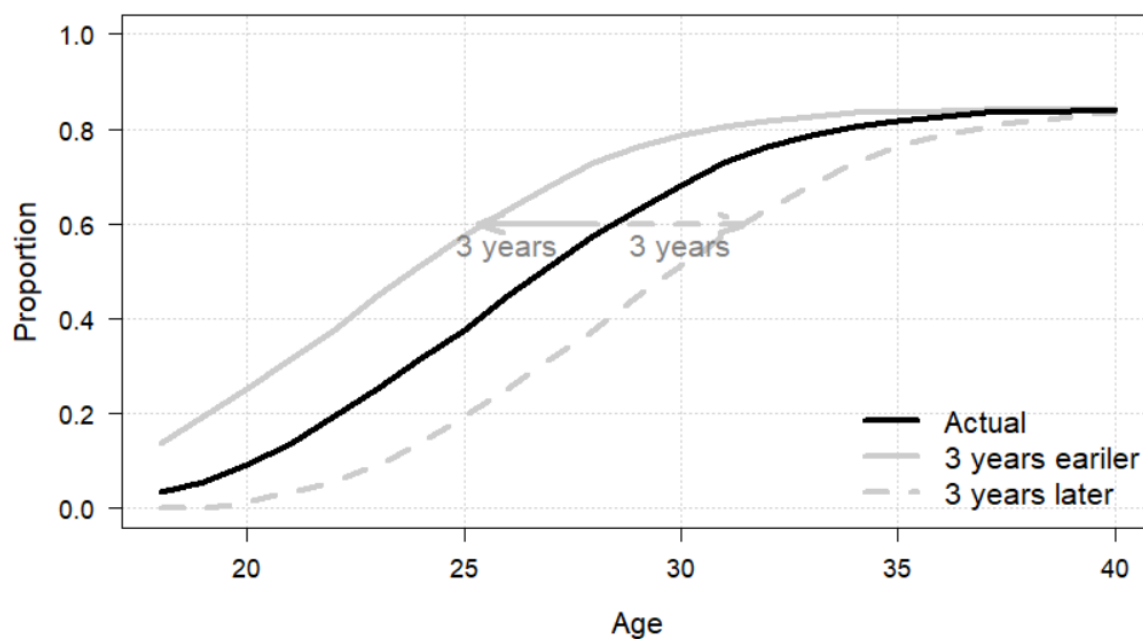


*Source:* 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey and 2012/2013 Swedish Generations and Gender Survey.

**Table A1.1.** Sample size by birth cohort for native-born Spanish and Swedish women and men.

| <b>WOMEN</b>        |              |               |
|---------------------|--------------|---------------|
| <b>Birth cohort</b> | <b>Spain</b> | <b>Sweden</b> |
| 1962-1964           | 1,212        | 260           |
| 1965-1969           | 2,097        | 424           |
| 1970-1974           | 2,115        | 366           |
| 1975-1979           | 2,047        | 305           |
| Total               | 7,471        | 1,355         |

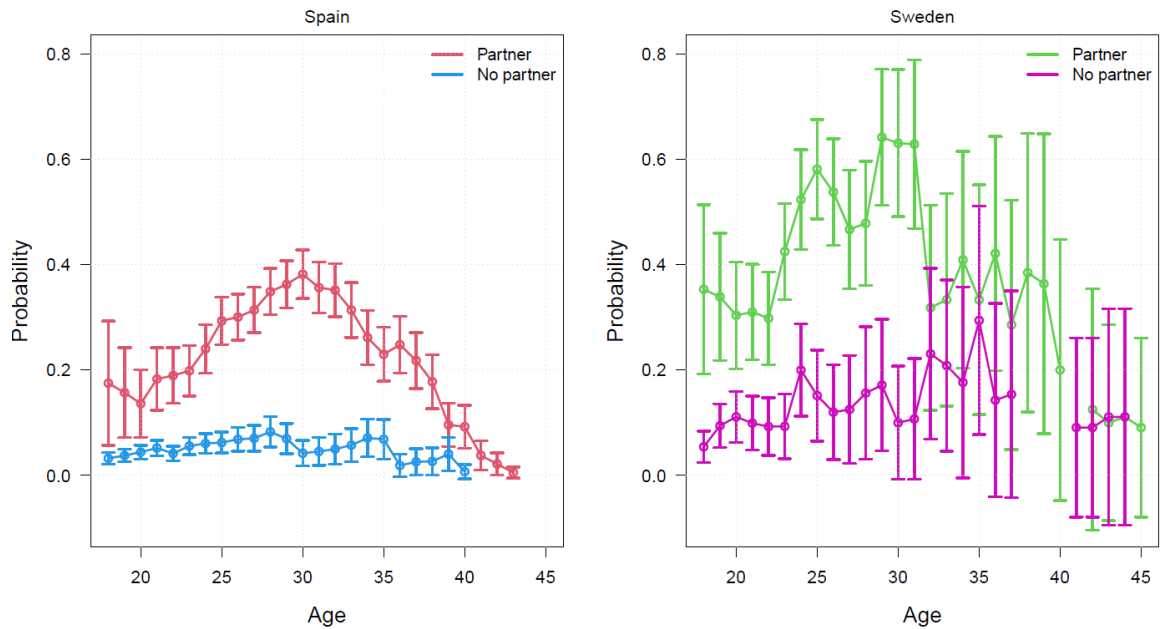
| <b>MEN</b>          |              |               |
|---------------------|--------------|---------------|
| <b>Birth cohort</b> | <b>Spain</b> | <b>Sweden</b> |
| 1962-1964           | 191          | 220           |
| 1965-1969           | 356          | 382           |
| 1970-1974           | 359          | 360           |
| 1975-1979           | 395          | 301           |
| Total               | 1,301        | 1,263         |

**Figure A1.2.** Hypothetical and actual prevalence of having a stable partner by age.

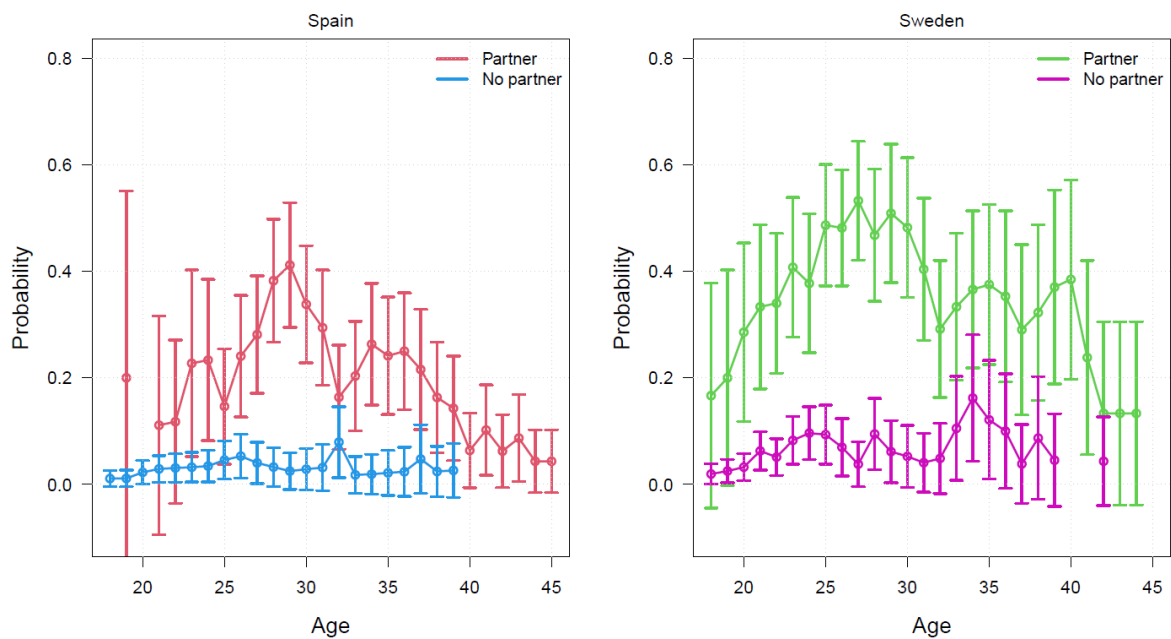
**Figure A1.3.** First-birth probability within the next three years at a given age (with 95% confidence intervals) based on partnership status.

**1962-1964**

**WOMEN**



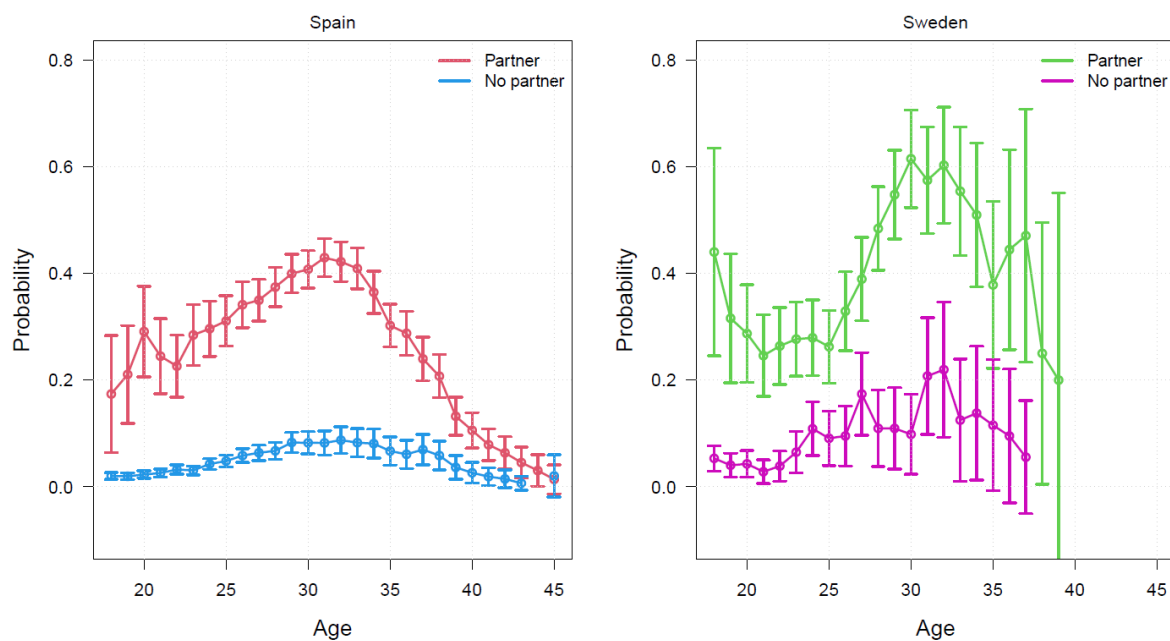
**MEN**



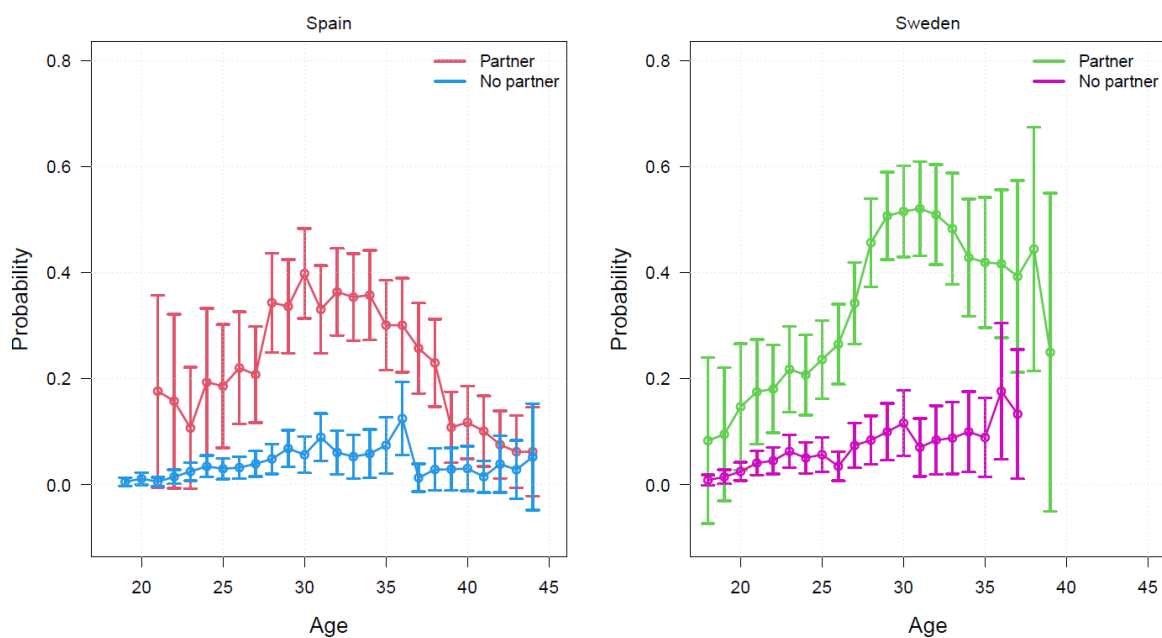
*Source:* 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey and 2012/2013 Swedish Generations and Gender Survey.

**1970-1974**

**WOMEN**



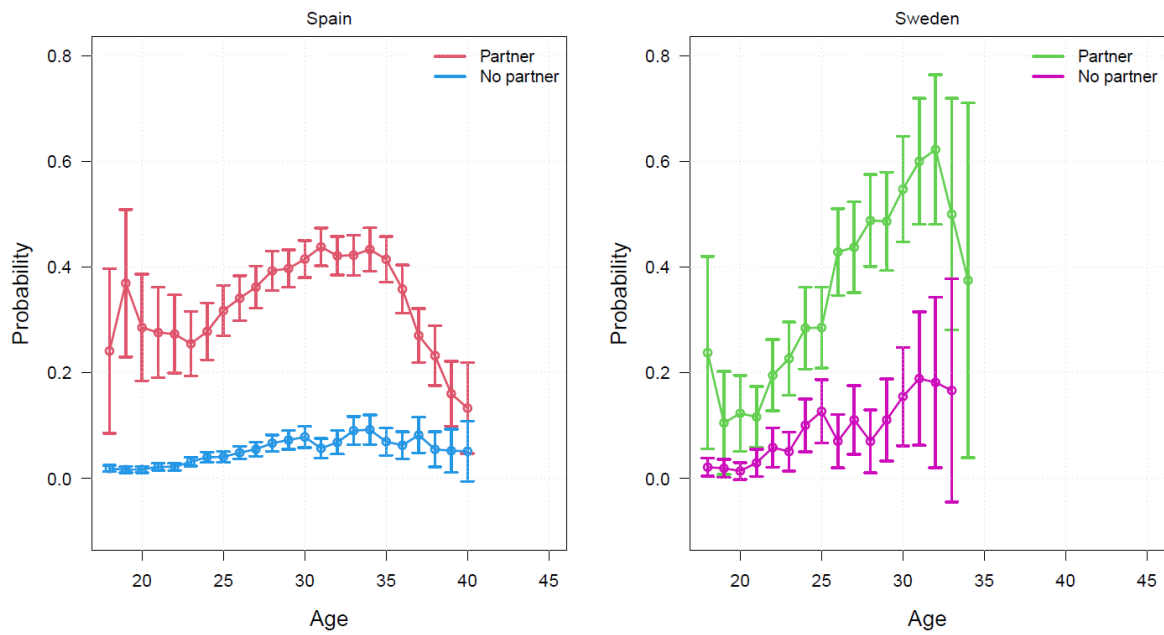
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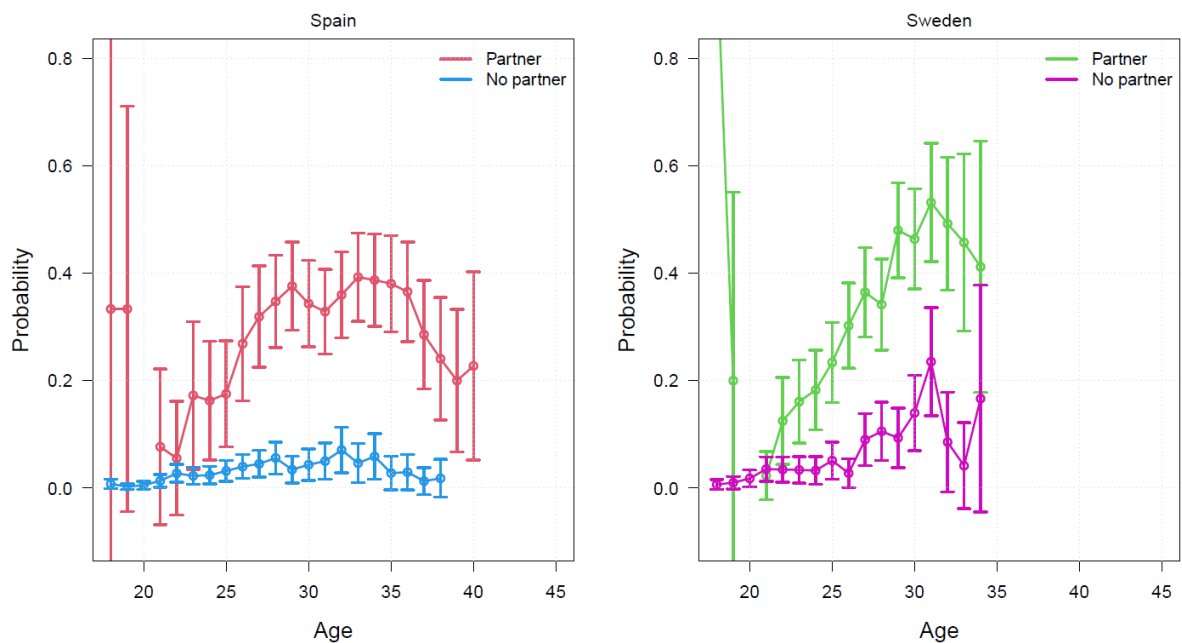
*Source:* 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey and 2012/2013 Swedish Generations and Gender Survey.

**1975-1979**

**WOMEN**



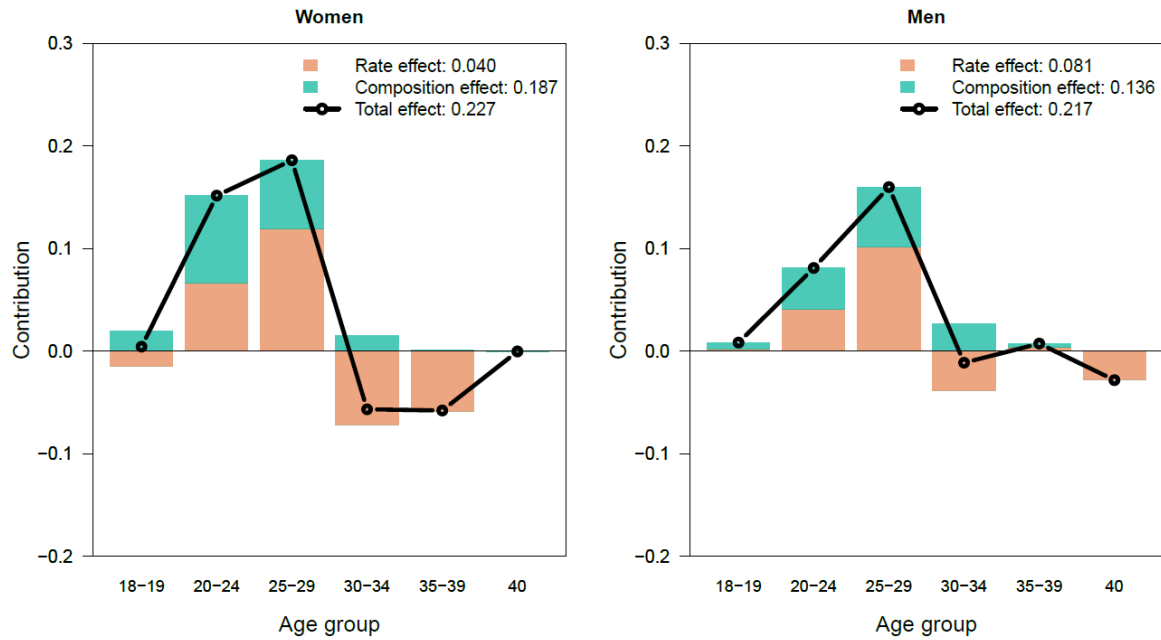
**MEN**



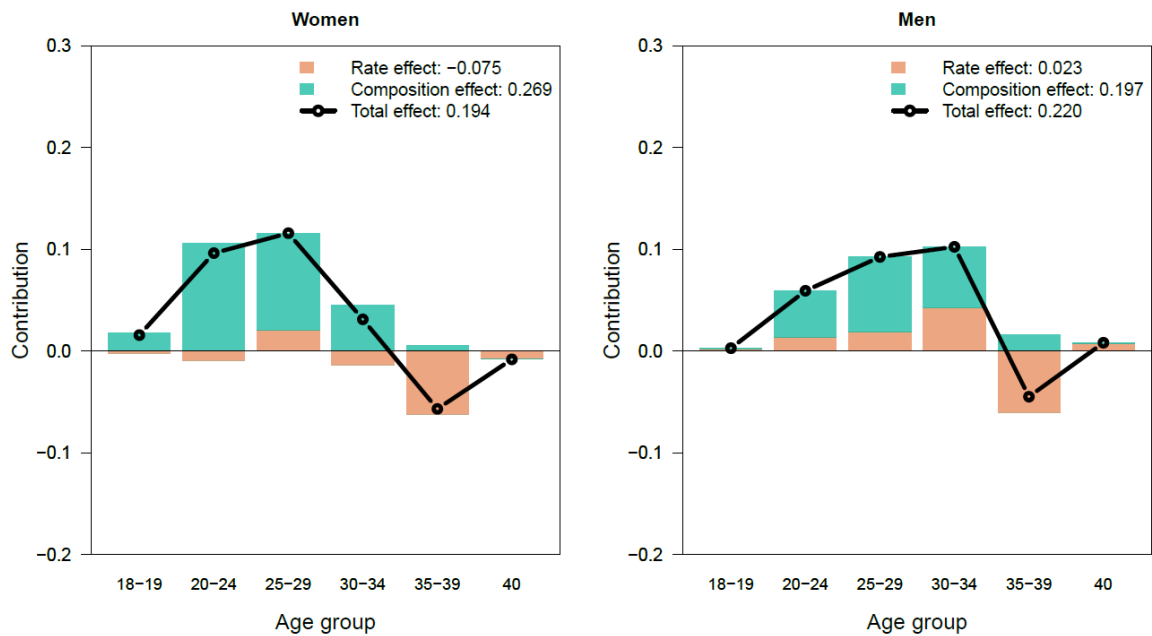
*Source:* 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey and 2012/2013 Swedish Generations and Gender Survey.

**Figure A1.4.** Contribution of first-birth rate and partnership composition to first-birth differential by age group and cohort.

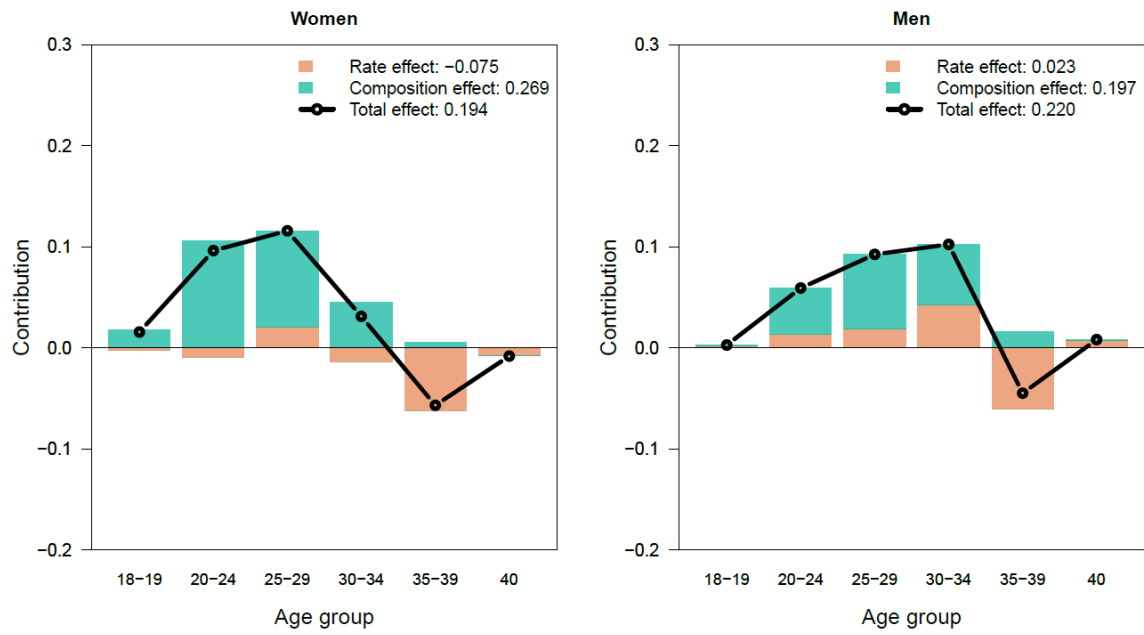
### 1962-1964



### 1970-1974

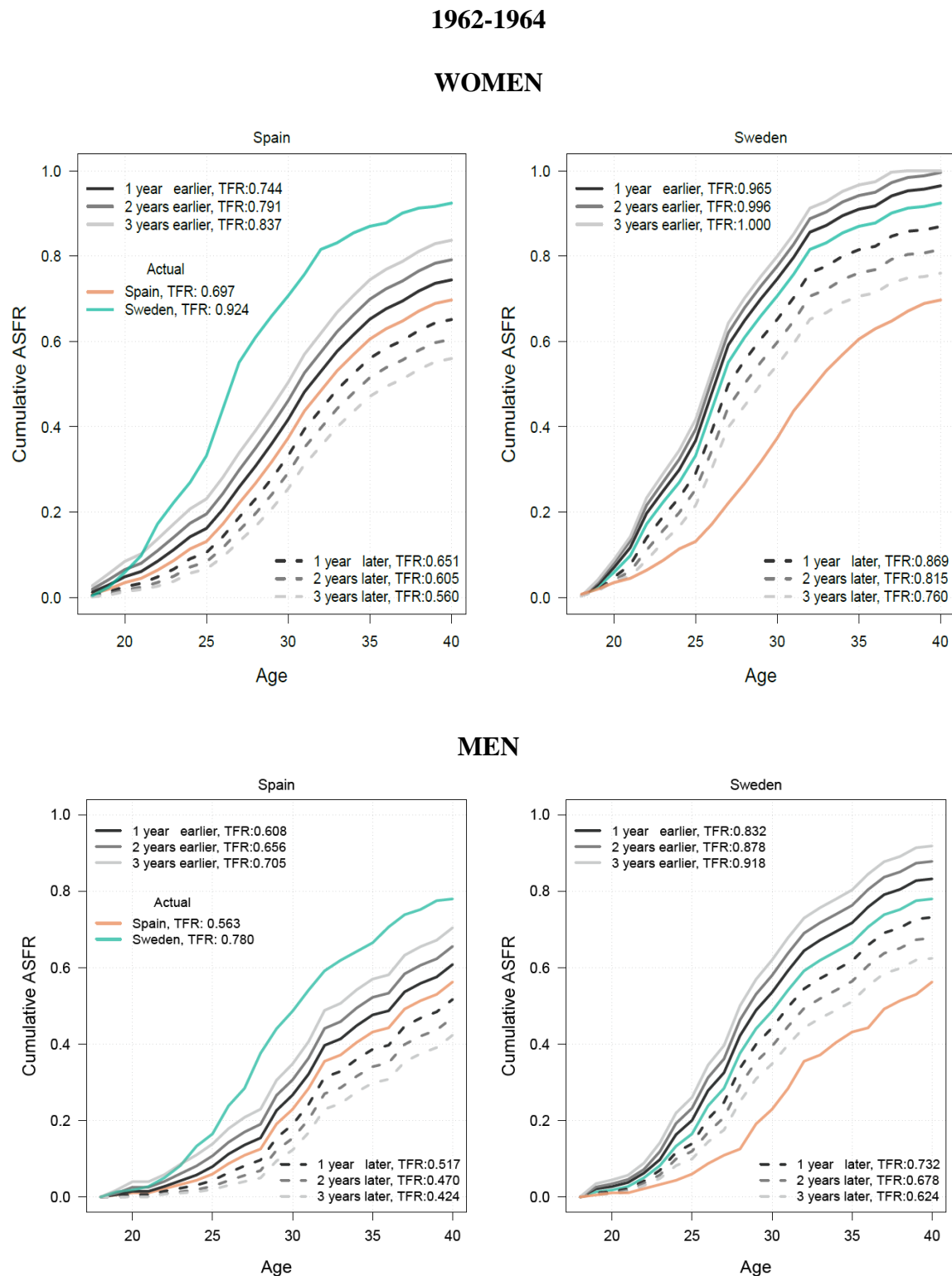




**1975-1979**

*Source:* 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey and 2012/2013 Swedish Generations and Gender Survey.

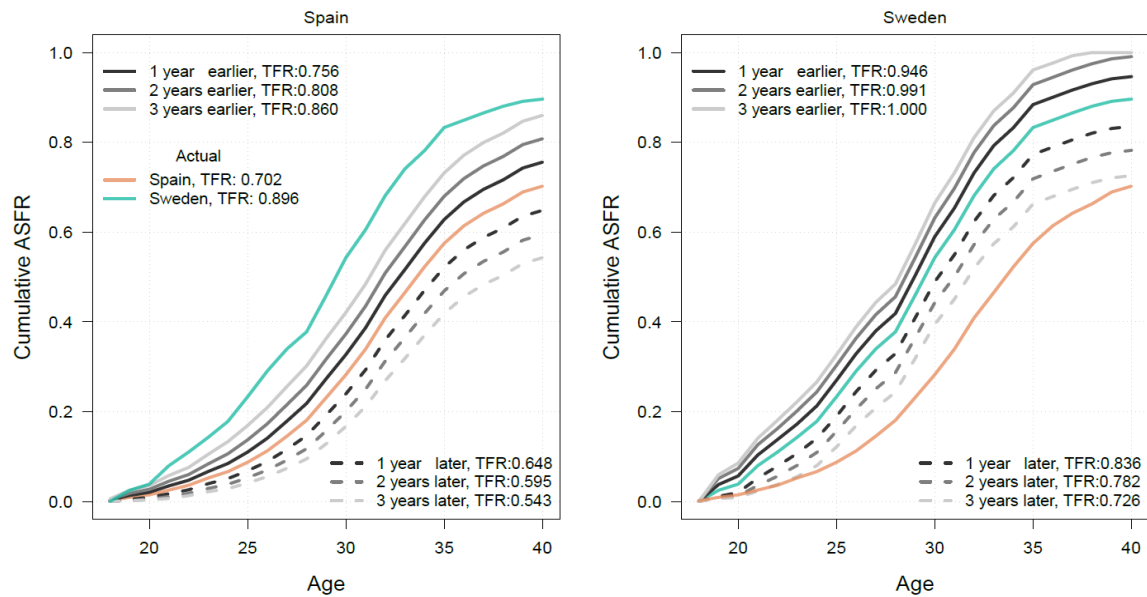
**Figure A1.5.** Observed and hypothetical first-birth rates if first stable partnerships were formed earlier/later.



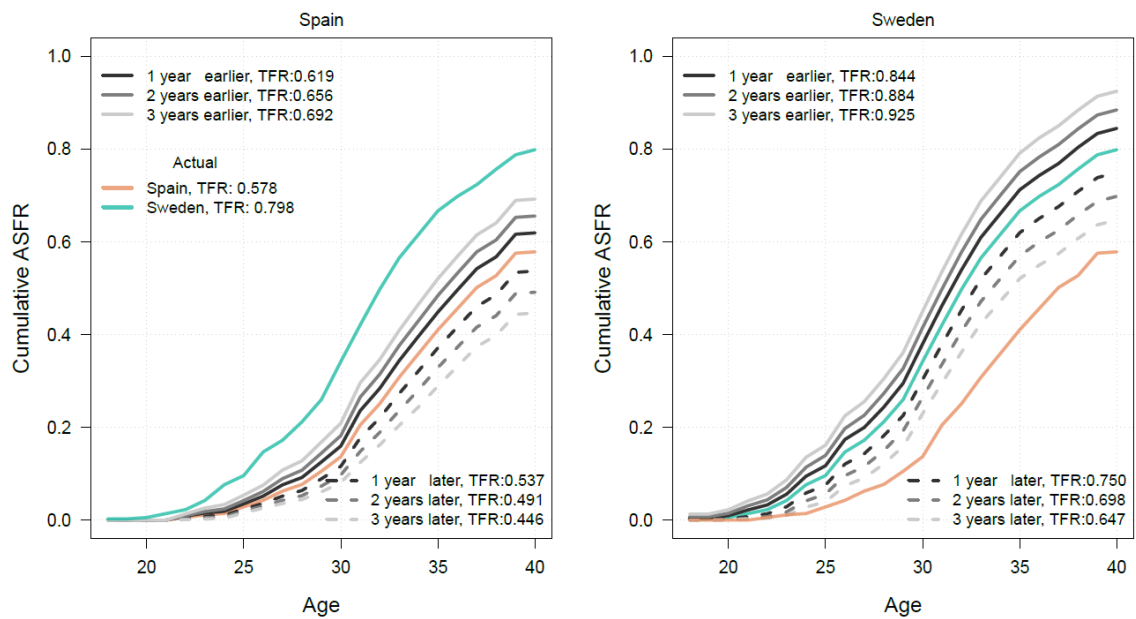
Source: 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey and 2012/2013 Swedish Generations and Gender Survey.

1970-1974

WOMEN



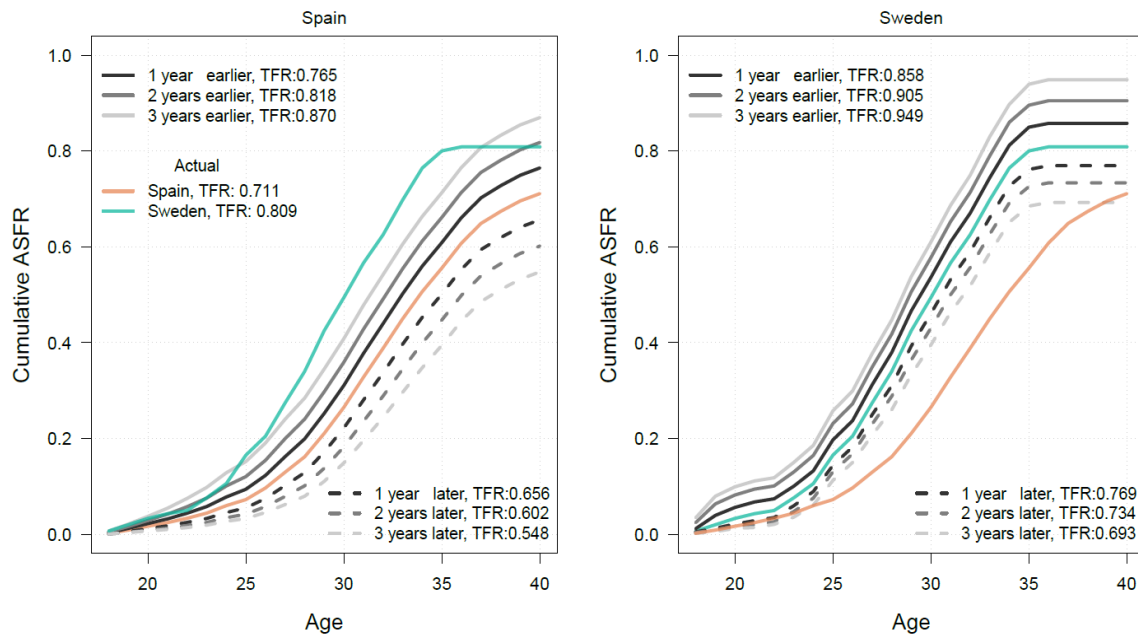
MEN



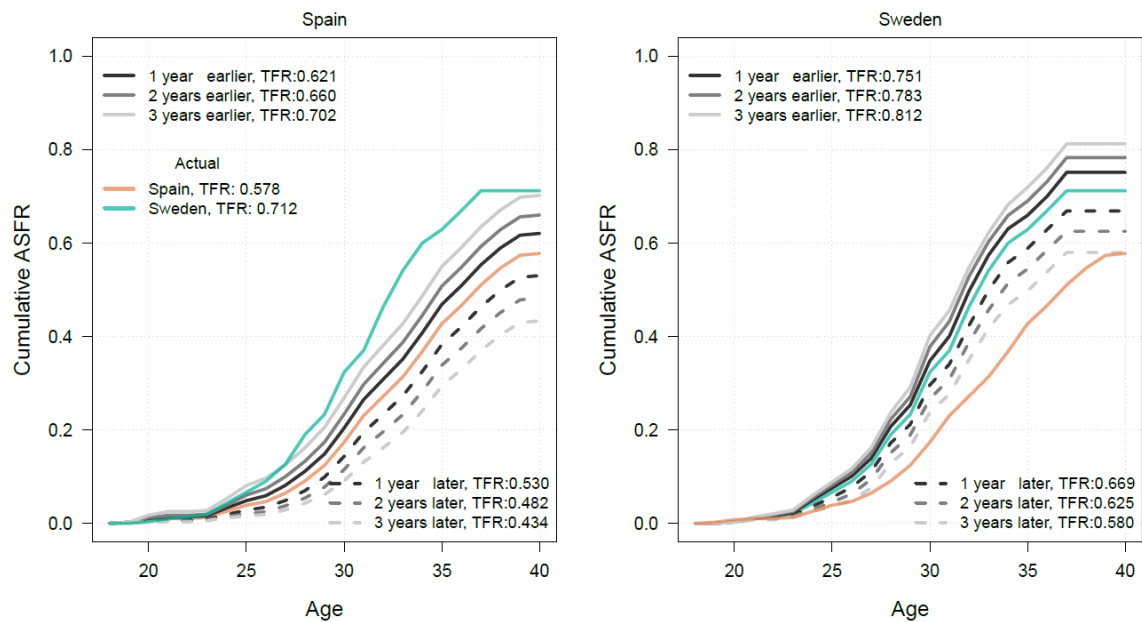
Source: 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey and 2012/2013 Swedish Generations and Gender Survey.

1975-1979

WOMEN

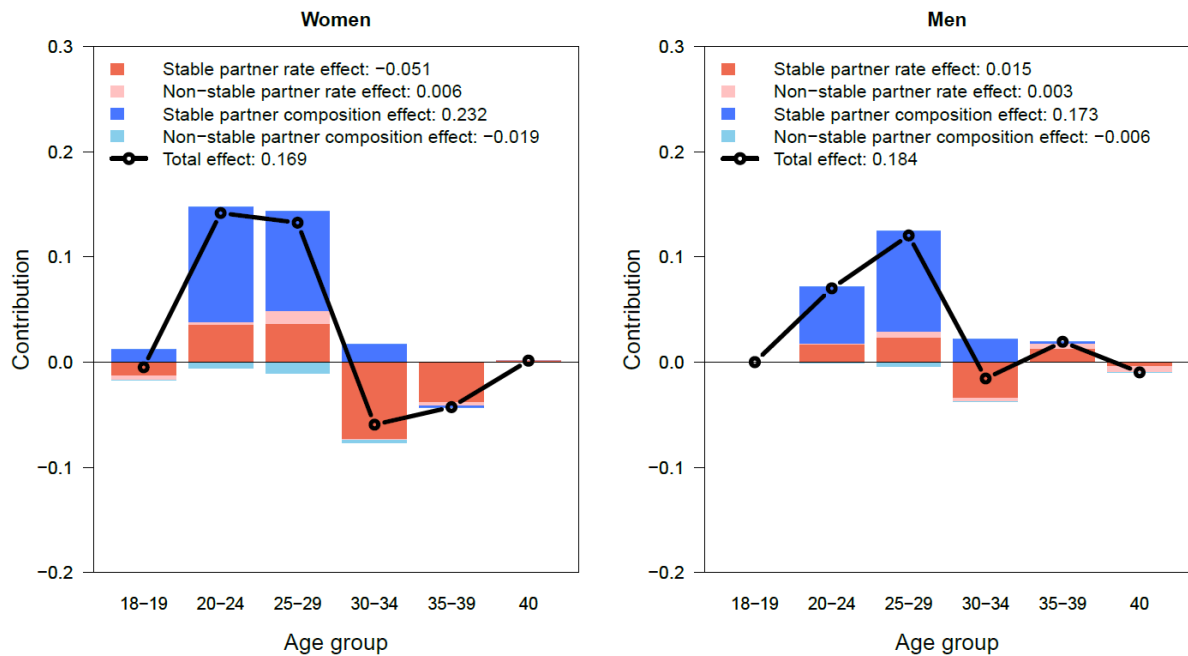


MEN



Source: 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey and 2012/2013 Swedish Generations and Gender Survey.

**Figure A1.6.** Contribution of partnership-specific first-birth rate and composition to the first-birth differential by age group, 1965-1969



*Source:* 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey and 2012/2013 Swedish Generations and Gender Survey.

### **3 LIVING APART TOGETHER IN CONTEMPORARY SPAIN: DIVERSITY OF MEANINGS BY LIFE STAGE**

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

In Global North societies, the prevailing pattern of transition to adulthood can be portrayed as “late, protracted and complex” (Billari and Liefbroer 2010) and typically entails a growing prevalence of singlehood (van den Berg and Verbakel 2022). Singlehood, however, should not be equated to being unpartnered, as a substantial proportion of singles are in a living-apart-together (LAT) relationship (i.e., have an intimate partner that lives in a separate household) (Ayuso 2019, Lewin 2018, Liefbroer et al. 2015, Pasteels et al. 2017).

The share of individuals in LAT relationships varies across countries, partly reflecting the existing diversity in age patterns of entry into first union and levels of union dissolution. European-based studies have provided a relatively wide range of estimates, from less than 2% of the adult population in Estonia and Georgia to nearly 10% in France, Norway, Belgium, and Russia (Liefbroer et al. 2015, Pasteels et al. 2017). Studies on countries such as Australia (Reimondos et al. 2011), the United States (Strohm et al. 2009) or Canada (Funk and Kobayashi 2016, Milan and Peters 2003) also observed around a 10% segment of the adult population in LAT relationships.

According to the 2020 Spanish Continuous Household Survey, a large share of young adults in their prime reproductive ages (25 to 34) – over half of women and two-thirds of men – were not co-residing with a partner in the Spanish context. This, however, should not be interpreted as a rejection of partnership formation. The 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey reveals that nearly 20% of women and 25% of men in the same age group (25 to 34) declared having an intimate partner that lived in a separate household.

A debate in the literature concerns the meaning and motivations for being in a LAT relationship. Specifically, are LAT relationships a transitory state prior to union formation (Liefbroer et al. 2015) or an alternative type of union (Connidis et al. 2017)? Are the reasons for being in a LAT relationship dependent on life course stage (Duncan and Phillips 2010, Roseneil 2006, Pasteels et al. 2017)? A previous study on Spain found LAT relationships among Spanish women in prime reproductive ages to be a precursor for cohabitation or marriage rather than an alternative union form (Castro-Martín et al. 2008). This is a common

finding across European societies, particularly among young adults (Liefbroer et al. 2015). For this sub-population, LAT relationships are sometimes akin to dating – partners are not ready to commit yet – and other times linked to some type of constraint, such as job precariousness, lack of financial resources, or inaccessibility to affordable housing. On the other hand, LAT relationships at later ages are more likely to represent a long-term arrangement based on personal choice. For example, living apart may be preferred among older adults with co-residential children (de Jong Gierveld and Merz 2013, Ivanova et al. 2013) or among those who desire the autonomy of living in one's own home and the flexibility of time spent with their partner (Connidis et al. 2017, Upton-Davis 2012).

In this paper, we use the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey to revisit the situation of LAT relationships in Spain. The previous study mentioned above was based on the 1999 Fertility Survey and only focused on women aged 20 to 34 (Castro-Martín et al. 2008). The objectives of the paper are to re-examine the prevalence, the associated demographic and socioeconomic factors, and the declared reasons for being in a LAT relationship in contemporary Spain. We will address the following questions: How prevalent are LAT relationships among women and men aged 20 to 55? Do the reasons for being in a LAT relationship differ by life stage? Do intimate partners live apart mainly due to constraints or by choice? To what extent are the reasons given for being in a LAT relationship associated with short-term intentions to co-reside? This study will be an update of nearly two decades, a period in which leaving the parental home has been increasingly delayed (Esteve et al. 2021), cohabitation is no longer a marginal family formation pathway (Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martín 2013), non-marital births have reached nearly half of all births (Eurostat 2022a), union dissolution has increased (Bernardi and Martínez-Pastor 2011), and repartnering has become commonplace. All in all, Spain is an interesting case study as it displays increasingly long postponements in key adulthood transition events – not only leaving the parental home, but finding full-time employment, starting to cohabit, and having a child. This accumulation of delayed transitions is likely to increase the prevalence of LAT relationships. Furthermore, Spain's relatively high separation and divorce rates might also encourage different types of partnerships such as LAT at later life stages.

The contributions of this study to the LAT literature are twofold. First, this work provides updated estimates of the prevalence and correlates of LAT partnerships in Spain, placing a special focus on the interactions among gender, sociodemographic factors, and life stage to

better understand the diversity of meanings of LAT relationships. Second, our study reveals the emergence of a relatively new kind of LAT partnership at later stages of the life cycle, based on preferences for individual autonomy, which was negligible in Spain two decades ago.

## **BACKGROUND**

While social norms concerning the appropriate timing of young adulthood transitions still condition individuals' behaviors, there is increasing flexibility and tolerance for dissent (Liefbroer and Billari 2010). LAT relationships, for example, have become progressively more common in many societies characterized by late union formation. The debate of whether a LAT relationship is a temporary stage in the family formation process or a new family form is somewhat analogous to former debates concerning cohabitation (Hiekel et al. 2014). Based on the narrative of the Second Demographic Transition theory (SDT) (Lesthaeghe 2010), LAT relationships could be considered an alternative type of union that fits well with the increasing emphasis on individualism and self-realization in developed societies. Living apart from intimate partners allows for more individual autonomy and might represent an advanced stage of the SDT (Levin 2004). On the other hand, LAT relationships can also serve as a temporary stage in the union formation process, mainly for partners who already have intentions to co-reside once circumstances allow (Ayuso 2019). Individual economic concerns, as well as macro-level economic uncertainty about the future, may deter individuals from entering (co-residential) unions (Bolano and Vignoli 2010, Castro-Martín et al. 2008, Palumbo et al. 2022).

Previous studies have found that LAT relationships are particularly frequent at younger ages (Liefbroer et al. 2015, Mauritz and Wagner 2021, Pasteels et al. 2017, Régnier-Loilier and Vignoli 2018). Young individuals may still be enrolled in education or unable to cohabit with a stable partner because of financial and residential dependence on parents (Castro-Martín et al. 2008, Régnier-Loilier et al. 2009). During early adulthood, it is also common to have multiple short-term relationships in search of the 'right' partner (Arnett 2000). Therefore, LAT relationships are rather customary among young adults – in some cases as a chosen partnership form (e.g., feeling “too young” for long-term commitment), and in other cases as a transitional stage in the family formation process linked to various constraints (Duncan and Phillips 2010, Haskey 2005, Haskey and Lewis 2006, Régnier-Loilier et al. 2009, Strohm et al. 2009).



LAT relationships at later life stages are more likely to be a consciously chosen living arrangement. For example, single parents may prefer LAT relationships to avoid exposing their child(ren) to a new family situation (Lewin 2018, Wagner et al. 2019). Repartnering behavior among single parents, however, differs by gender. Single mothers are more likely to be in a non-coresidential relationship compared to single fathers (Régnier-Loilier 2016, Oláh et al. 2021, van der Wiel, et al. 2020). In addition, individuals who have experienced a union break-up may also prefer to live apart from their current partner. Possible explanations for this preference may include the desire to maintain their autonomy (de Jong Gierveld 2004) or to avoid falling back into unsatisfactory patterns experienced in previous unions, for example, an unequal gendered division of domestic labor (Ghazanfaraeeon Karlsson and Borell 2002, Upton-Davis 2012).

Socioeconomic status and resources also influence the type of partnership one engages in. The association between employment status and being in a non-coresidential relationship has been found to be fairly consistent (Liefbroer et al. 2015, Régnier-Loilier et al. 2009). In particular, men's economic instability tends to decrease the likelihood of co-residence (Wagner et al. 2019). Constraints for cohabiting or marrying one's stable partner do not only encompass unemployment, but also limited access to affordable housing, working on a temporary contract, and uncertainty about future work conditions (Kreyenfeld et al. 2012, Vignoli et al. 2020). On the other hand, the highly educated are often overrepresented in LAT relationships across developed societies (Coulter and Hu 2017, Liefbroer et al. 2015, Régnier-Loilier and Vignoli 2018, Reimondos et al. 2011, Strohm et al. 2009), with Sweden as an exception – possibly due to limited social inequalities (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008, Oláh et al. 2021).

### **Partnership dynamics in Spain**

The postponement of family formation in Spain is well-established in the literature, and this pattern has often been labelled as *latest-late* (Baizán et al. 2003, Esteve et al. 2021, Kohler et al. 2002). The average age of leaving the parental home was 29.8 years in 2020 – 30.7 and 28.8 years for men and women respectively (Eurostat 2022b). Young adults in Spain typically receive support from their parents through co-residence and time transfer instead of economically (Moreno Mínguez 2018), as is often the case in Northwestern European societies (Brandt and Deindl 2013, Kohli et al. 2007). Spanish young adults also face numerous difficulties in accessing affordable housing and finding stable and properly paid

employment – all of which are perceived as key prerequisites to forming a family (Holdsworth 2005, Moreno 2012). The country's high unemployment rate and large share of temporary work contracts among young adults, coupled with a growing economic uncertainty – intensified since the 2008 financial crisis and further worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic –, are likely to continue fostering the postponement and even the forgoing of family formation (Aassve et al. 2021, Kreyenfeld et al. 2012).

The trend of postponing and forgoing marriage in Spain has been noticeable since the early 1980s, when the mean age at first marriage was around 24 for women and 26 for men. As of 2020, the national average age at first marriage reached 35 years for women and 37 years for men (INE 2022a). Spain has also experienced a rapidly increasing trend in childlessness, and one-fourth of women born in the early 1970s have completed their reproductive span without offspring (Esteve et al. 2016). A large fraction of childlessness is accounted for by women who never marry and women with a university-level education (Reher and Requena 2019). Although marriage continues to play a prominent role as the capstone of the family life course (Baizán et al. 2003, García Pereiro et al. 2014), the nature of marriage has also undergone fundamental changes. While 81% of all marriages were religious – mainly by the Catholic rite – in 1990, that proportion has declined to 16.6% in 2021; the rest are civil marriages (INE 2022b). Also, since 2005, when same-sex marriage was legally permitted, about 2% of all marriages had been between same-sex partners (Cortina 2016). Their average age at marriage, however, is even later than heterosexual marriages (Garrido et al. 2012). Non-marital cohabitation is increasingly becoming the normative pathway to union formation in Spain. A third of women born in the 1970s had cohabited before the age of 30, an increase of nearly 20 percentage points relative to women born in the 1960s (Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martín 2013). Moreover, 38% of respondents in the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey had cohabited prior to marriage.

Although marriage is no longer perceived as a precondition for childbearing, and there is an emerging trend of unpartnered late motherhood (Castro-Martín and Cortina 2018), childbearing in Spain largely occurs within co-residential partnerships (Nishikido et al. 2022). Therefore, the intensity and timing of partnership formation has an important bearing on contemporary fertility and childlessness levels in Spain. In that sense, a relatively high prevalence of LAT relationships induced by constraints might lead to further postponement of union formation and childbearing, whereas a relatively high prevalence of LAT

relationships motivated by choice (e.g., desire for independence) might lead to foregoing union formation and possibly childbearing. On the other hand, the duration of the preceding non-coresidential period tends to be positively associated with union stability (Schnor 2015), which may favor childbearing.

Overall, Spain's demographic landscape has drastically changed over the past decades. Living arrangements and family formation trajectories have become increasingly diversified, and LAT relationships are a relevant part of this change. Exploring the prevalence, correlates, and motivations for LAT relationships over the life course with recent data could provide new insights into contemporary partnership arrangements in a societal context characterized by delayed adulthood transitions, rising non-marital cohabitation and union instability, and lowest-low fertility.

## RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

In this section, we present several hypotheses based on existing empirical studies and theoretical considerations. As shown in the literature, the prevalence and reasons (i.e., constraints vs. choice) for being in a LAT relationship typically vary by gender, socioeconomic characteristics, and stage in one's life cycle. We account for these dimensions in the analysis by presenting separate models by life stage and including the interactions between socioeconomic variables and gender. With regard to the socioeconomic correlates of being in a LAT relationship, we focus primarily on three factors: work status, level of education, and prior union and parenthood experiences. We further analyze the reasons for living apart declared by respondents in a LAT relationship and link those reasons to short-term intentions to co-reside.

We may expect to observe an increase over time in the prevalence of LAT relationships in Spain based on the features of the SDT (Lesthaeghe 2010), such as the rising emphasis on individual autonomy, the postponement of family formation (Baizán, Aassve, and Billari 2003), and the rise in union dissolutions (Bernardi and Martínez-Pastor 2011). Taking these trends into consideration, *we expect an increase in the prevalence of LAT relationships among both young and older adults in modern-day Spain relative to two decades ago (H1).*

Economic (in)stability and uncertainty is becoming increasingly influential in family formation processes, particularly among young adults (Bolano and Vignoli 2021, Matysiak et al. 2020, Palumbo et al. 2022, Vignoli et al. 2020a, 2020b). Individuals who are in

financially uncertain situations (e.g., on temporary contracts or unemployed) may have no other option than to live apart from their stable partner due to insufficient resources for establishing a household (Oláh et al. 2021). The high share of temporary work contracts in Spain has left a large proportion of young adults unable to achieve economic stability – a perceived pre-requisite to leave the parental home, cohabit with a stable partner, and have children. In 2021, the proportion of temporary employees as a percentage of total workers was 51.2% among those aged 15-29, well above the average in the European Union (32.8%) (Eurostat 2022c). Therefore, *we could expect individual economic instability, proxied by unemployment and type of work contract, to deter co-residence and promote LAT, particularly among younger adults (H2)*. Economic constraints align better with the Pattern of Disadvantage (POD) perspective (Perelli-Harris and Gerber 2011) than with the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) narrative, but we may expect to find traces of both narratives in our results.

In most European societies, highly educated individuals are more likely to be in a LAT relationship than those with lower education (Liefbroer et al. 2015). There are several possible explanations. First, considering educational attainment as a proxy for socioeconomic mobility and expectations for the future, the highly educated may hold stricter criteria before co-residing with a partner (e.g., certain level of financial stability, home ownership). Second, the highly educated may feel a heightened desire for individual autonomy and self-realization. The diffusion of LAT relationships may possibly be comparable to the diffusion process of cohabitation described by the SDT (Lesthaeghe 2010) – where the forerunners were the highly educated. Therefore, *we expect highly educated individuals to be more likely to be in a LAT relationship than their less educated counterparts (H3)*.

Prior partnership and reproductive experiences also influence current partnership status. According to the literature, individuals who have ever separated or have any children from a previous partner are more likely to opt for a LAT relationship (Connidis et al. 2017, de Jong Gierveld and Merz 2013, Liefbroer et al. 2015). The probability of being in a LAT relationship is even higher if the child(ren) still resides at home (Ivanova et al. 2013, Régnier-Loilier et al. 2009). These individuals may prefer to reduce the involvement of new partners with children from previous relationships (de Jong Gierveld 2004). Based on the empirical findings from various societal contexts, *we expect individuals who have*

*previously co-resided or have any children from previous partnerships to show a higher likelihood of being in a LAT relationship compared to a co-residential union than individuals without previous family formation experiences (H4).* We also expect to find gender differences. Single mothers, for instance, are not only less likely to repartner than single fathers, but also more likely to be in non-coresidential unions (Ivanova et al. 2013). In the case of Spain, although shared custody of dependent children has increased substantially in the past decade – from 10% in 2007 to 41% in 2020 –, sole physical custody by the mother remains the most common arrangement after divorce (Solsona et al. 2020).

While some studies have classified LAT relationships based on intentions to cohabit in the near future (Haskey 2005, Reimondos et al. 2011), other studies have used self-reported reasons for living apart to proxy the stability of and commitment in LAT relationships (Levin 2004, Duncan and Phillips 2010, Roseneil 2006). Intentions to co-reside may differ based on the reasons why individuals live apart from their partners (i.e., constraints vs. choice). *We expect higher intentions to cohabit/marry among individuals in a LAT relationship due to constraints, as constraints can be overcome (H5).* Those who live apart by choice, on the other hand, are expected to have lower intentions to ever co-reside with their partner.

## DATA AND METHODS

We base our analysis on the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey (SFS) conducted by the National Statistics Institute. The original sample is nationally representative and includes 14,556 women and 2,619 men aged 18 to 55. The survey provides detailed cohabitation and marital histories, as well as information on whether respondents currently have an intimate relationship with a non-coresident partner. For our analysis, we exclude (i) women and men ages 18 to 19 (N=659), (ii) respondents in same-sex relationships (N=159), (iii) respondents born outside of Spain (N=1,932), and (iv) a relatively small proportion of married couples who are living apart (N=141). By gender, our final analytical sample consists of 12,091 women and 2,193 men aged 20 to 55. By life stage, our sample consists of 2,151 individuals in the early life stage (ages 20-34) and 8,036 individuals in the later life stage (ages 35-55).

The boundary between casual dating relationships and more committed LAT relationships is difficult to draw. In this study we define LAT relationships as those that have lasted at least 2 years, in order to focus on couples who are most likely to contemplate living together

and disregard the less committed relationships. Individuals in a couple who have lasted less than 2 years are considered ‘dating,’ and thus, classified as having ‘no stable partner’. Although the two-year cut-off point is somewhat arbitrary, it will facilitate the comparison with earlier studies in order to assess recent trends (Castro-Martín et al. 2008). It may further mitigate some underreporting of relationships by respondents with varying views of what is considered a non-coresidential ‘stable intimate couple’ (Haskey 2005).<sup>12</sup>

We rely on multinomial logistic regression models to estimate the probability of currently being in a stable LAT relationship relative to not having a stable partner, cohabiting, or being married. The analysis is presented separately for two life stages – ages 20-34 (early adulthood) and ages 35-55 (late adulthood). Separate models by gender could not be run because of the relatively small size of the male sample, but interactions of gender and the main covariates are assessed. Besides control variables (e.g., five-year age group, urban-rural residence, and religious practice), the main covariates in the model could be interpreted as related to *constraints* (e.g., work status) and *choice* (e.g., educational attainment, history of co-residence, having any children from a former partnership). We include the type of work contract in the work status covariate to better capture respondents’ financial stability (Adserà 2006). This variable is categorized as follows: employed with a permanent contract, employed with a temporary contract, unemployed, enrolled in education, inactive in the labor market, and other.<sup>13</sup> Educational attainment is divided into four categories: primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, and university level. Additional models were estimated including the sociodemographic characteristics of respondents’ partners (i.e., educational attainment, work status, and foreign-born status).

Since the 2018 SFS did not include a question on whether respondents in a LAT relationship were living apart because they wanted to or were constrained by circumstances, as in the Generations and Gender Surveys (see Liefbroer et al. 2015), we have to infer whether the main motivation reflects choice or constraints from the primary reason given for living apart.

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<sup>12</sup> As a sensitivity analysis, we ran the multinomial logistic regressions modifying the two-year threshold of a ‘stable’ LAT relationship to a one-year cut-off point. The main results and conclusions drawn did not substantially change (available from authors upon request).

<sup>13</sup> Individuals categorized as having permanent working contracts include employees in the public/private sector, as well as employers, those who are self-employed, members of a cooperative, or are family help. Individuals with temporary employment contracts include those who have fixed-term contracts in the public or private sector. Inactivity includes individuals who perform domestic tasks, are unable to work, are retired, pre-retired, or pensioners. Lastly, individuals are categorized as ‘other’ if they respond as either having ‘other situation’ in terms of employment or are employed with no contract.

We examine short-term intentions to cohabit/marry according to the reasons reported by women and men for living apart. Due to sample size limitations, we do not make a distinction here by life stage.

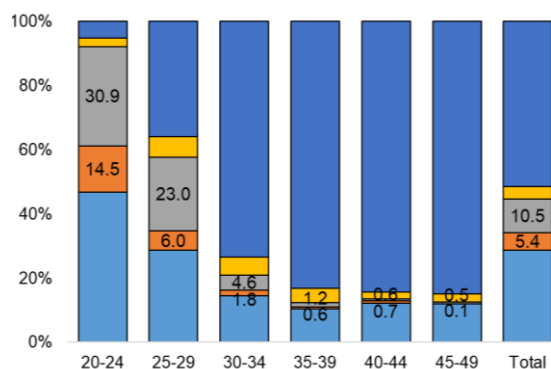
### **Descriptive analysis**

#### *Increase in the prevalence of LAT relationships*

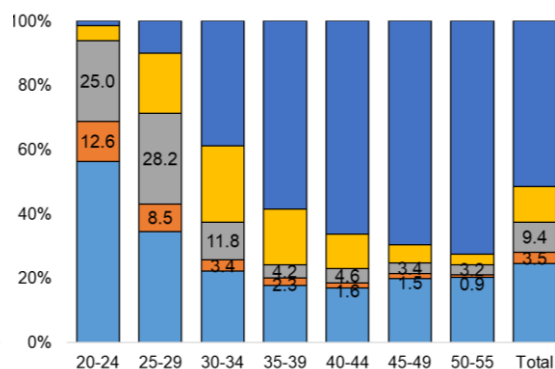
In the past two decades, the prevalence of LAT relationships has increased in Spain, particularly among young adults. LAT relationships have also become a more visible partnership choice among a small but growing segment of older adults. Between 1999 and 2018, the share of Spanish women in their prime reproductive ages with non-coresidential stable partners increased from 23.0% to 28.2% among women aged 25 to 29 and from 4.6% to 11.8% among those aged 30 to 34 (Figure 1). These results confirm our expectations of an upward trend (H1). Although the prevalence of LAT relationships at later life stages remains low, the share of women aged 35 to 49 with non-coresident partners has doubled: from 2.0% in 1999 to 4.2% in 2018. Data are unavailable for men in 1999 to estimate the rate of increase over time. Data for 2018, however, show that the share of men with a non-coresidential partner was 14.2% among those aged 25 to 34 and 3.7% among those aged 35 to 55.

**Figure 3.1.** Distribution of women by partnership status in 1999 and 2018, and of men in 2018.

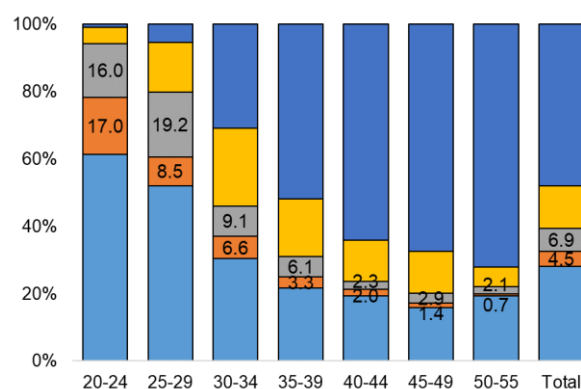
**WOMEN: 1999**



**WOMEN: 2018**



**MEN: 2018**



■ No partner ■ < 2 years (Dating) ■ 2+ years (LAT) ■ Cohabitation ■ Marriage

*Notes:* (1) Only the percentages of those in a dating or LAT relationship are shown. (2) Proportions weighted to represent population level.

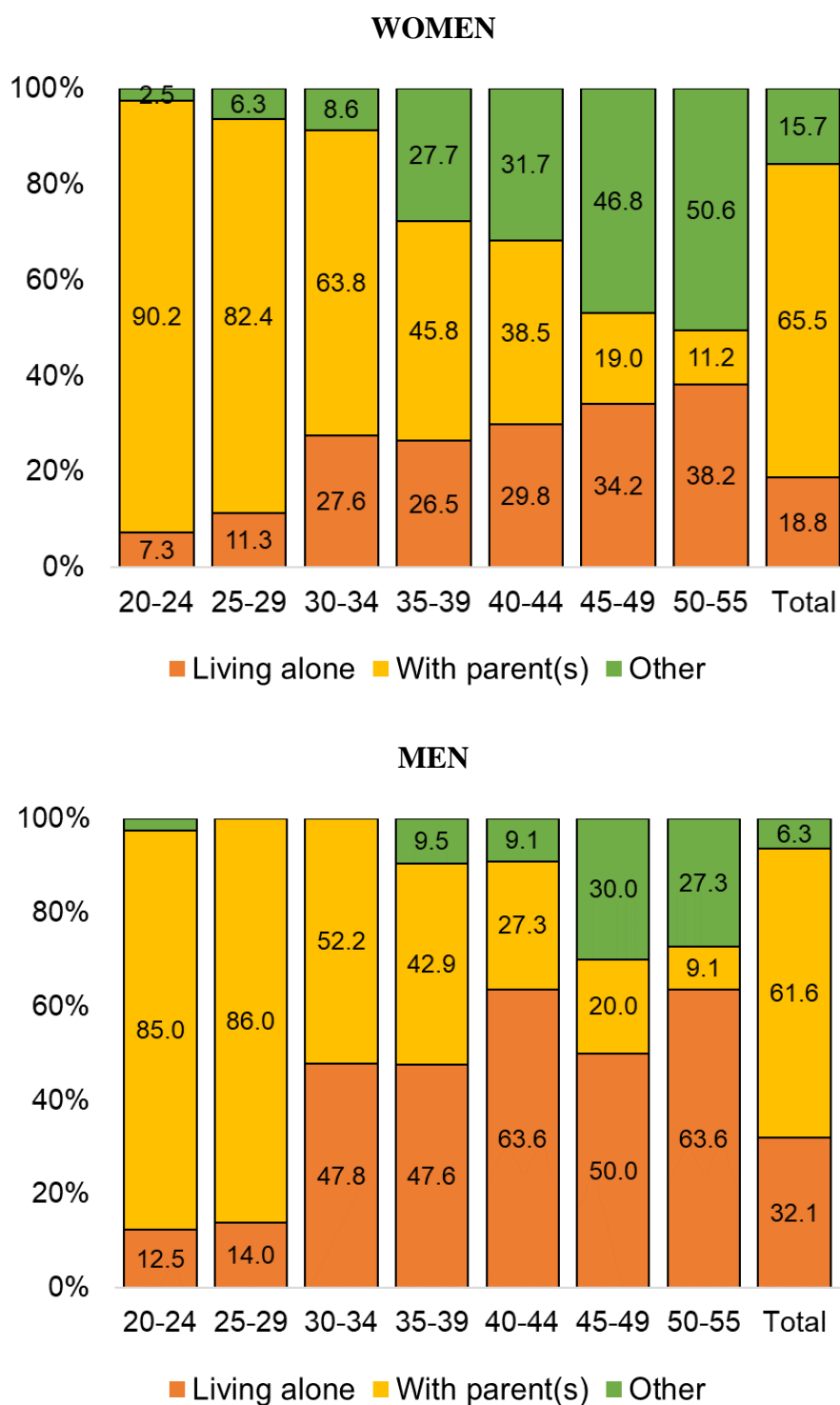
*Source:* Castro-Martín et al. 2008 (for women in 1999) and 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey (SFS).



*A large proportion of individuals in LAT relationships live in the parental home*

Southern European countries are well-known for the late residential independence of young adults. Remaining in the parental home is a common strategy to cope with unemployment, precarious jobs, and overall economic uncertainty. Some studies exclude young adults residing in their parental home when defining LAT relationships (on the basis that their relationships are often short-lived and they typically do not have the means to choose their desired living arrangement) (e.g., Duncan and Phillips 2010, Haskey 2005). However, this would not be appropriate in the Spanish case, where more than half of individuals aged 25 to 29 still live with their parents according to the 2020 Continuous Household Survey (INE 2022c).

Data from the 2018 SFS confirm that the large majority of women and men who are in a LAT relationship and younger than age 30 reside with at least one parent (Figure 3.2). Between ages 30 to 40, the proportion of LAT partners who live alone notably increases, particularly among men – 48% of men vs. 27% of women. Nevertheless, there remains a sizeable proportion of LAT partners in this age range who still reside in the parental home. After age 40, we also observe a significant gender gap. Living alone becomes the most frequent living arrangement for men in LAT relationships, whereas ‘other’ living arrangements – predominantly, residing with a child and/or another family member– are more common than living alone for women. Around 86% and 84% of women and men, respectively, who have ‘other’ living arrangements are single parents.

**Figure 3.2.** Distribution of women and men in a LAT relationship by current living arrangement.

*Notes:* (1) Proportions weighted to represent population level. (2) Only includes stable LAT relationships lasting at least two years. (3) The ‘Other’ category comprises living with own child(ren), living with family members other than parent(s), and living with non-family members).

*Source:* 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey.

*Sociodemographic profile of Spanish women and men in LAT relationships*

Distinguishing between two life cycle stages (young adults ages 20-34 and older adults ages 35-55), we describe and compare the sociodemographic profile of individuals in LAT relationships, relative to individuals with no stable partner, cohabiting, and married. Detailed Tables can be found in the Appendix (Tables A-1 and A-2).

The large majority of young adults in a LAT relationship have no previous experience of co-residence with a partner (95%). In terms of socioeconomic characteristics, young individuals in a LAT relationship are more likely to have a temporary work contract (22%) or be unemployed (14%) than those in a co-residential union and even those with no stable partner. As expected by the social norm of completing education before entering a co-residential union, the proportion of young adults in a LAT partnership enrolled in education (22%) is much higher than among those cohabiting or married, though lower than among those with no stable partner (30%). In regards to educational attainment, the proportion of individuals with a university-level education is highest among those in a LAT partnership (65%). Partners of respondents in LAT relationships are also more likely to have a temporary work contract (26%), to be enrolled in education (25%), and to have university level studies (61%) than partners of respondents in co-residential unions.

The sociodemographic profile of older adults in LAT relationships differs from that of their younger counterparts. For instance, 22% have children from a former partner. Older adults in LAT relationships tend to be economically stable (61% have a permanent work contract), although to a lesser extent than those who are cohabiting or married. Their level of education (55% have tertiary education) is also higher than their counterparts in co-residential unions. Furthermore, their LAT partners are also more likely to have tertiary education than partners of married respondents.

**Multinomial analysis**

We perform a multinomial logistic regression analysis to test the statistical significance of the demographic and socioeconomic factors potentially relevant to being in a LAT relationship. Since the former descriptive analysis revealed important differences regarding the correlates and possible meanings of LAT by life stage, two separate analyses are conducted: for 20- to 34-year-olds and for 35- to 55-year-olds. Tables show the relative risk ratios for being in a LAT relationship as compared to having no stable partner, being in a

cohabitation, or being married. For each life stage, we consider three models: Model 1 is the base model and is used to assess the general effects of the main covariates; Model 2 includes interaction terms in order to assess gender differentials in the effects of the main covariates; and Model 3 includes partner's characteristics in order to account for their influence on the respondent's partnership type. Given that the inclusion of interaction terms to the base model produced no notable changes in the main effects (in terms of magnitude and statistical significance), Table 4.1 presents the results from Model 2 which contains the interaction terms. All other models can be found in the Appendix (Models 1 and 3: Tables A3 and A4, respectively).

**Table 4.1.** Relative risks ratios from multinomial logistic regression on current partnership status, including interactions.

| <b>Model 2: Base model including interaction terms</b>  |                                  |                         |                        |                        |                                  |                         |                       |                       |
|---|----------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|   | Early life stage (ages 20 to 34) |                         |                        |                        | Later life stage (ages 35 to 55) |                         |                       |                       |
|   | LAT vs.<br>no stable<br>partner  | LAT vs.<br>Cohabitation | LAT vs.<br>Marriage    | LAT vs.<br>any union   | LAT vs.<br>no stable<br>partner  | LAT vs.<br>Cohabitation | LAT vs.<br>Marriage   | LAT vs.<br>any union  |
| <b>Respondents' gender (ref. Women)</b>                 |                                  |                         |                        |                        |                                  |                         |                       |                       |
| Men   | 0.435+<br>(0.202)                | 1.299<br>(0.706)        | 2.316<br>(1.426)       | 1.647<br>(0.840)       | 0.736<br>(0.386)                 | 0.746<br>(0.421)        | 0.695<br>(0.352)      | 0.747<br>(0.374)      |
| <b>Work status (ref. Permanent job)</b>                 |                                  |                         |                        |                        |                                  |                         |                       |                       |
| Temporary job   | 0.940<br>(0.123)                 | 1.320+<br>(0.212)       | 1.688**<br>(0.292)     | 1.468**<br>(0.209)     | 0.944<br>(0.178)                 | 0.901<br>(0.187)        | 1.304<br>(0.240)      | 1.206<br>(0.220)      |
| Unemployed  | 0.893<br>(0.135)                 | 1.485*<br>(0.279)       | 1.755**<br>(0.344)     | 1.603**<br>(0.265)     | 0.910<br>(0.166)                 | 1.047<br>(0.216)        | 1.381+<br>(0.248)     | 1.313<br>(0.234)      |
| Student   | 0.598***<br>(0.0782)             | 2.787***<br>(0.654)     | 8.430***<br>(3.727)    | 3.757***<br>(0.811)    | 1.118<br>(0.731)                 | 1.416<br>(1.052)        | 2.715<br>(1.754)      | 2.425<br>(1.542)      |
| Inactive  | 0.627+<br>(0.160)                | 0.690<br>(0.198)        | 0.300***<br>(0.0822)   | 0.448**<br>(0.113)     | 0.623*<br>(0.149)                | 0.783<br>(0.209)        | 0.500**<br>(0.117)    | 0.523**<br>(0.121)    |
| Other   | 1.186<br>(0.342)                 | 2.516*<br>(1.139)       | 1.287<br>(0.514)       | 1.770+<br>(0.603)      | 1.008<br>(0.359)                 | 0.901<br>(0.359)        | 1.350<br>(0.474)      | 1.252<br>(0.436)      |
| <b>Educational attainment (ref. Lower secondary)</b>    |                                  |                         |                        |                        |                                  |                         |                       |                       |
| Primary   | 0.867<br>(0.293)                 | 0.669<br>(0.244)        | 0.986<br>(0.387)       | 0.771<br>(0.266)       | 0.573+<br>(0.165)                | 0.619<br>(0.196)        | 0.702<br>(0.199)      | 0.692<br>(0.195)      |
| Upper secondary   | 0.949<br>(0.217)                 | 1.599+<br>(0.429)       | 1.149<br>(0.325)       | 1.362<br>(0.334)       | 1.073<br>(0.258)                 | 1.500<br>(0.408)        | 1.294<br>(0.305)      | 1.333<br>(0.312)      |
| University  | 1.286<br>(0.277)                 | 2.788***<br>(0.686)     | 2.661***<br>(0.696)    | 2.735***<br>(0.622)    | 1.102<br>(0.242)                 | 1.441<br>(0.353)        | 1.661*<br>(0.357)     | 1.641*<br>(0.350)     |
| <b>Co-residential history (ref. No)</b>                 |                                  |                         |                        |                        |                                  |                         |                       |                       |
| Yes   | 0.300***<br>(0.0680)             | 0.558*<br>(0.145)       | 1.081<br>(0.305)       | 0.745<br>(0.182)       | 0.759<br>(0.128)                 | 1.681**<br>(0.321)      | 8.765***<br>(1.509)   | 6.193***<br>(1.032)   |
| <b>Has child(ren) from previous relations (ref. No)</b> |                                  |                         |                        |                        |                                  |                         |                       |                       |
| Yes   | 1.579<br>(0.690)                 | 3.446*<br>(1.824)       | 12.23***<br>(9.085)    | 5.506***<br>(2.797)    | 0.870<br>(0.162)                 | 1.569*<br>(0.355)       | 2.953***<br>(0.610)   | 2.532***<br>(0.493)   |
| <i>Interactions</i>                                     |                                  |                         |                        |                        |                                  |                         |                       |                       |
| <b>Gender x Work status</b>                             |                                  |                         |                        |                        |                                  |                         |                       |                       |
| Men#Temporary job                                       | 1.183<br>(0.397)                 | 1.004<br>(0.427)        | 1.047<br>(0.511)       | 0.995<br>(0.388)       | 0.605<br>(0.359)                 | 1.576<br>(1.011)        | 1.017<br>(0.598)      | 1.089<br>(0.635)      |
| Men#Unemployed  | 0.967<br>(0.368)                 | 2.812+<br>(1.713)       | 2.664<br>(1.793)       | 2.749+<br>(1.436)      | 1.688<br>(0.709)                 | 3.411*<br>(1.659)       | 4.303***<br>(1.795)   | 4.095***<br>(1.682)   |
| Men#Student   | 0.750<br>(0.263)                 | 0.747<br>(0.482)        | 0.230<br>(0.212)       | 0.527<br>(0.301)       | 2.16E-06<br>(0.00222)            | 1.520<br>(1872.8)       | 3.39E-06<br>(0.00349) | 1.20E-05<br>(0.00790) |
| Men#Inactive  | 0.746<br>(0.610)                 | 1.354<br>(1.372)        | 9.616+<br>(12.81)      | 3.083<br>(2.993)       | 1.112<br>(0.770)                 | 2.908<br>(2.316)        | 7.515**<br>(5.233)    | 6.394**<br>(4.405)    |
| Men#Other   | 0.198<br>(0.216)                 | 0.111+<br>(0.142)       | 0.204<br>(0.280)       | 0.150<br>(0.180)       | 0.776<br>(0.881)                 | 1.131<br>(1.370)        | 1.019<br>(1.131)      | 1.035<br>(1.141)      |
| <b>Gender x Educational attainment</b>                  |                                  |                         |                        |                        |                                  |                         |                       |                       |
| Men#Primary   | 0.577<br>(0.526)                 | 0.242<br>(0.240)        | 0.0787*<br>(0.0833)    | 0.156+<br>(0.149)      | 0.958<br>(0.616)                 | 1.293<br>(0.909)        | 1.280<br>(0.808)      | 1.233<br>(0.772)      |
| Men#Upper secondary                                     | 1.537<br>(0.767)                 | 0.868<br>(0.526)        | 0.728<br>(0.494)       | 0.836<br>(0.470)       | 0.910<br>(0.521)                 | 0.553<br>(0.343)        | 1.275<br>(0.712)      | 1.060<br>(0.586)      |
| Men#University  | 1.202<br>(0.577)                 | 0.607<br>(0.349)        | 0.505<br>(0.329)       | 0.575<br>(0.309)       | 1.003<br>(0.528)                 | 0.764<br>(0.437)        | 1.105<br>(0.566)      | 0.993<br>(0.504)      |
| <b>Gender x Co-residential history</b>                  |                                  |                         |                        |                        |                                  |                         |                       |                       |
| Men#Co-resided  | 1.916<br>(1.156)                 | 1.827<br>(1.374)        | 1.009<br>(0.817)       | 1.429<br>(0.981)       | 1.028<br>(0.416)                 | 0.804<br>(0.357)        | 0.942<br>(0.395)      | 0.821<br>(0.332)      |
| <b>Gender x children from previous relations</b>        |                                  |                         |                        |                        |                                  |                         |                       |                       |
| Men#Children  | 1.62E-05<br>(0.0107)             | 7.23E-07<br>(0.000479)  | 2.34E-07<br>(0.000155) | 1.45E-07<br>(0.000167) | 1.606<br>(0.885)                 | 0.450<br>(0.272)        | 0.487<br>(0.289)      | 0.454<br>(0.254)      |
| Log likelihood  | -4334.714                        |                         |                        | -3539.155              | -7655.805                        |                         |                       | -5414.941             |
| R2  | 0.170                            |                         |                        | 0.180                  | 0.178                            |                         |                       | 0.187                 |
| N   | 4155                             |                         |                        | 4155                   | 10129                            |                         |                       | 10129                 |

Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses

+  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ 

*Notes:* (1) Additional control variables (i.e., age group, urban-rural residence, and religious practice) are included in the models. (2) LAT refers to non-coresidential partnerships with a duration of at least two years. Shorter, 'dating' relationships are included in the category of 'no stable partner.'

*Source:* 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey.

Work status is among the main factors that influence current partnership type. Results show that being unemployed is associated with being in a LAT relationship rather than in a co-residential union, although the strength of the association varies by life stage and gender. While in the younger life stage, unemployment increases the likelihood of being in a LAT partnership relative to cohabitation or marriage for both men and women, in the later life stage the association is only statistically significant for men. Having a temporary work contract also increases the likelihood of being in a LAT relationship, but this is only the case for younger men and women. These results are in line with H2: both unemployment and having a temporary work contract are significantly associated with LAT relationships in the early life stage, although in the later life stage only men's unemployment is significantly associated with being in a LAT partnership. The multinomial results also confirm that both young men and women enrolled in education are more likely to be in a LAT relationship than in a co-residential union; they are also more likely to have no stable partner than a LAT partner.

With regard to educational attainment, results show that having a tertiary education is generally associated with being in a LAT partnership rather than in a co-residential union. There are, however, some noteworthy differences by life stage and gender. Among women and men, a tertiary education increases the probability of being in a LAT relationship compared to cohabiting or being married in the younger life stage, though only relative to marriage after age 35. Men with only primary studies – a highly selected group – are less likely to be in a LAT union compared to marriage in the early life stage. Therefore, these findings support H3: highly educated individuals are more likely to be in a LAT relationship than their less educated counterparts.

Previous family formation experiences are also clearly associated with current union status (H4). In the early life stage, both women and men who have previously co-resided with a partner are more likely to have no stable partner or to be currently cohabiting rather than in a LAT relationship. In the later life stage, having experienced union disruption increases the probability of being in LAT partnership rather than in a co-residential union. Contrary to our expectations, we find no gender differences in the association between having children from a previous relationship and one's current union status. Namely, both mothers and fathers have a higher likelihood of living apart from their current intimate partner relative to being in a co-residential union, regardless of life stage.

*Partner's characteristics*

In order to account for the influence of partner's characteristics, we also performed a multinomial logit analysis on current partnership type confined to partnered individuals (Table A-4 in the Appendix). The sociodemographic characteristics of partners show similar associations regarding the likelihood to be in a LAT partnership by life stage, as those of the respondents themselves. For instance, in both life stages, economic instability (i.e., temporary employment contract, unemployment) is associated with a higher likelihood of being in a LAT relationship rather than in a co-residential union. In terms of educational attainment, the results show that younger respondents with highly educated partners are more likely to be in a LAT relationship relative to a cohabitation or marriage. In the later life stage, however, we do not find any strong associations between partner's educational attainment and respondent's partnership status. Overall, the inclusion of partner characteristics does not substantially change the results presented in Table 4.1. Furthermore, the effects of partner's characteristics, according to life stage, largely mimic those of the respondents.

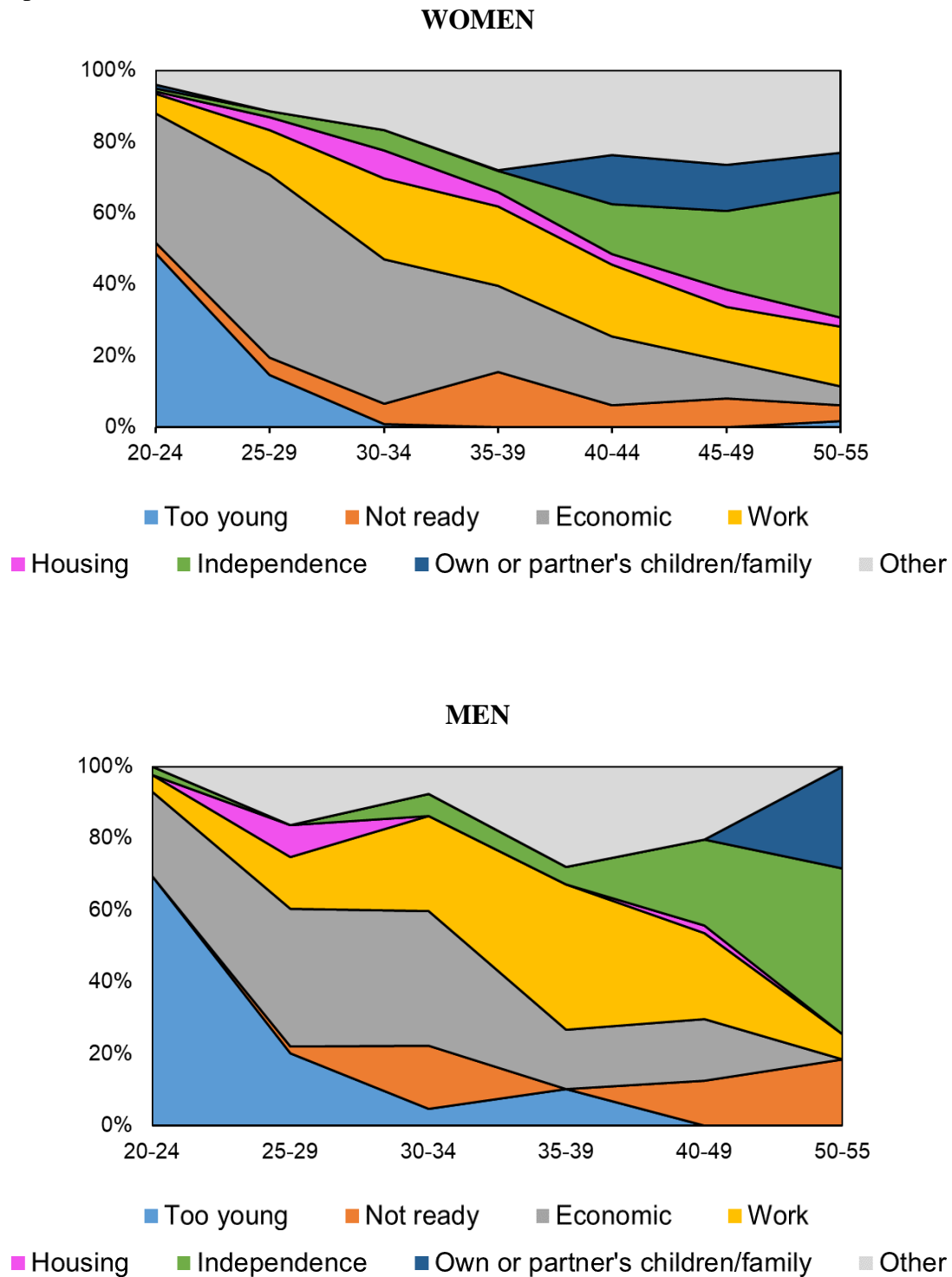
*Reasons for living apart and short-term intentions to cohabit or marry*

Like the Gender and Generations Surveys, the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey explicitly asked respondents to give the main reason why they were not co-residing with their current partner. Figure 3.3 shows how the reasons<sup>14</sup> declared by women and men are distributed across age groups. The examination of these reasons can give us some insights on whether constraints or preferences carry different weights according to life stage.

The general pattern is relatively similar among women and men, although we observe some gender differences. Being 'too young' is the primary reason individuals in their early 20s declare for living apart from their partner, particularly among men. Economic or financial concerns and work-related issues, which can be interpreted as constraints, become the most cited reasons among respondents in their mid-20s and 30s. Motives that could signal being

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<sup>14</sup> The 2018 SFS does not specify what economic-, work-, and housing-related issues consist of. Economic-related issues may be related to objective and subjective concerns (e.g., financial stability or economic uncertainty based on respondents' ideal situation for co-residing with a partner and starting a family). Work-related issues may include being physically apart due to employment in different places. Housing-related issues can refer to the state of the rental housing market or the difficulty in purchasing one's ideal home to start a family.

**Figure 3.3.** Main reason given for living apart by respondents in LAT relationships by age group.

*Notes:* (1) Proportions weighted to represent population level. (2) For men, age groups are categorized by 5 years except for the 40 to 49 age group due to small sample size.

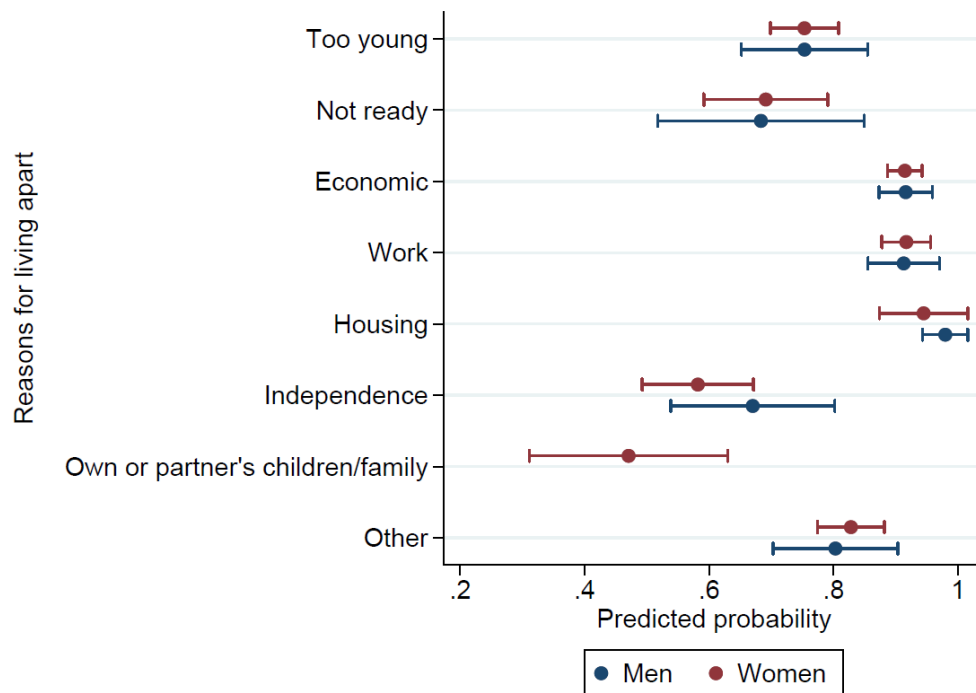
*Source:* 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey.



in a LAT partnership as a chosen alternative to a co-residential union only gain prominence after age 40. The desire to keep one's independence and having children from previous relationships (particularly for women) are among the main reasons reported by those who do not co-reside with their partner in the later life stage.

Figure 3.4 shows the predicted probabilities of intending to co-reside with one's current LAT partner within the next three years based on the reason given for living apart. Men and women who cited constraints (i.e., economic/financial, work, or housing concerns) as their main reason for being in a non-coresidential partnership display the highest probabilities of intending to cohabit/marry in the near future. Respondents who mentioned feeling too young or not ready to co-reside have comparatively lower intentions to move in together with their current partner than those who cited constraints. However, it is the individuals who live apart as a deliberate choice (i.e., to maintain their independence or because they have children from previous relationships) that have the lowest probabilities of intending to share a household with their LAT partner in the near future. As expected, we find higher short-term intentions to cohabit/marry among individuals who are in LAT relationships due to constraints rather than choice (H5), and there appear to be no significant gender differences.

**Figure 3.4.** Predicted probabilities of short-term intentions to cohabit/marry based on reason given for living apart by gender.



*Notes:* (1) Predicted probabilities derived from a model including variables for partner's characteristics and relationship satisfaction, using the entire sample regardless of life stage to mitigate issues of sample size. (2) Due to small sample size ( $N=4$ ), the probability for men who declare living apart due to children or their partner having a family is excluded.

*Source:* 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study has documented a notable increase in living-apart-together relationships during the past two decades in Spain. The largest increase was found among young adults and is consistent with the growing postponement of first union formation. Nevertheless, there has also been a nontrivial increase of this living arrangement in later ages, presumably linked to rising union disruption and new forms of repartnering.

In line with previous research based on other high-income societies (Levin 2004; Haskey and Lewis 2006; Roseneil 2006; Régnier-Loilier et al. 2009; Liefbroer et al. 2015), we have documented that the motivations and sociodemographic factors associated with being in a LAT relationship differ by life stage in the contemporary Spanish context. While constraints, such as financial instability, limited housing access, and work-related uncertainty, are

predominant reasons why young individuals do not co-reside with their stable partners, in the later life stage – which we have defined somewhat arbitrarily from age 35 on – being in a LAT relationship appears to be more of an active choice. In other words, LAT relationships in an early life stage represent mostly a transitional phase prior to cohabitation (or marriage), but later in life, LAT relationships often serve as an alternative partnership type, particularly for those who have previously experienced a union dissolution or have children from a previous partner, as well as those who want to preserve their autonomy. In contrast to the case of another Mediterranean country, Italy, where the association between age and being in a LAT relationship “by choice” was not found to be statistically significant (Regnier-Loillier and Vignoli 2018), we observe a notable increase in the proportion of LAT relationships by choice after age 40 in Spain. Our findings suggest that constraints and choice are complementary reasons for being in a LAT relationship across age groups (Roseneil 2006, Duncan et al. 2013), with one merely being more dominant than the other depending on the individual’s life stage.

The reasons declared by respondents on why they are in a LAT relationship, and the associated intentions to share a household with their partner in the near future, provide further insights into the different meanings attached to LAT partnerships. Intentions to cohabit or marry within the next three years were highest when the reason given for living apart was linked to financial-, work-, or housing-related constraints. This suggests that LAT relationships are largely perceived as a transitional stage in these cases. On the other hand, respondents in a LAT relationship because of previous family trajectories or a desire to preserve their autonomy – which we have interpreted as LAT by choice – expressed comparatively lower short-term intentions to cohabit/marry, suggesting LAT relationships could also serve as an alternative and longer-term union type. All in all, no significant gender differences were found.

Among both men and women, the importance of economic stability for co-residing with an intimate partner is most evident in the early life stage. These findings are echoed in qualitative research showing that young Spanish couples now believe that both partners should be economically stable for family formation (Brinton et al. 2018). Expectations of a dual-earner union in Spain reflect the country’s reversal of the gender gap in education – 54% of women aged 25-34 have a tertiary education compared to 41% of their male counterparts (OECD 2021) – and the convergence in labor force participation rates among

young adults– 80.7% among women aged 25-29 and 83.3% among men of the same age group (ILO 2020). In the later life stage, however, the influence of unemployment on the likelihood of living apart is stronger for men than women.

We find the forerunners of LAT relationships in Spain to be the highly educated, especially in the early life stage. Therefore, our results are in line with the SDT theory and with most empirical studies on other high-income societies (e.g., Strohm et al. 2009; Reimondos et al. 2011; Liefbroer et al. 2015; Coulter and Hu 2017; Régnier-Loilier and Vignoli 2018). With stronger gender-egalitarian attitudes, younger highly educated individuals may prioritize self-realization (e.g., career aspirations) over family formation and hold higher requirements regarding household formation (e.g., financial stability, home ownership). In the later life stage, high educational attainment is associated with being in a LAT relationship rather than in marriage. Older highly educated Spanish women and men often have the autonomy and resources to establish and maintain their own household. Women, in particular, may also prefer to live apart from an intimate partner to avoid the gendered division of household labor that still prevails in dual-earner married couples (Goñi-Legaz et al. 2010).

In line with existing literature, previous family experiences are associated with a higher likelihood of currently being in a LAT living arrangement rather than in cohabitation or marriage, particularly in the later life stage. Several reasons for this have been discussed in the literature. Divorced or separated individuals may choose to live apart from their current partner to avoid problems experienced in previous partnerships – for example, women may view LAT relationships as a more gender-egalitarian arrangement that allows them to avoid an increase of domestic and caregiving responsibilities (Abellán et al. 2017, Benson and Coleman 2016, Ghazanfaraeeon Karlsson and Borell 2002, Haskey and Lewis 2006, Levin 2004, Oláh et al. 2021). Some individuals may prefer to be in a LAT relationship to protect their assets for themselves or their children (de Jong Gierveld 2004). Parents may also want to protect their children from having to adapt to a new partner (Connidis et al. 2017, Levin 2004, Upton-Davis 2012, van der Wiel et al. 2020). Interestingly, having children from a previous partnership increases the likelihood of being in a non-coresidential relationship for both mothers and fathers in Spain. While this contradicts our expectations based on previous literature (i.e., mothers are usually more likely to be in a LAT relationship than fathers) (Coulter and Hu 2017, Oláh et al. 2021), it may partially reflect the country's substantial

increase in shared custody arrangements and fathers' involvement in childrearing after union dissolution (Solsona et al. 2020).

Differences exist between our study, based on the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey, and the previous work by Castro-Martín and colleagues (2008), based on the 1999 Spanish Fertility Survey. We extended the preceding study by providing both a gender and a life course perspective – specifically, with the inclusion of men and individuals over age 35 (and up to age 55) in our analyses. We also included variables concerning respondents' experiences with previous family formation events (i.e., having been in a co-residential partnership previously, having any children from previous relationships) and found meaningful results. Nonetheless, the main findings regarding young adults based on similar multinomial logistic regression models are comparable across studies. In both of them, highly educated individuals are more likely to be in a LAT relationship compared to their lesser educated counterparts, and men's unemployment is a strong deterrent of co-residence. However, we now find that the influence of unemployment on living apart is stronger for men than women particularly in the later life stage, and that the economic instability of women also hinders co-residence in the early life stage. As in the previous work, we conclude that LAT partnerships represent a temporary phase in the process of family formation among young adults, which is often linked to constraints. However, in the later life stage, we document the emergence of a different type of LAT partnership – a more long-term living arrangement based on personal preferences for autonomy –, which was not observed in Spain two decades ago.

There are several limitations in our study that need to be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional nature of the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey does not allow us to follow individuals over time. Though this survey provides retrospective information on cohabiting and marriage histories, no information is provided on prior histories of non-coresidential partnerships. Thus, we are unable to examine the transitions from non-coresidential to co-residential partnerships, and we can only examine intentions to co-reside with the current LAT partner at the time of the survey. Second, the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey only includes individuals up to age 55. Therefore, we are unable to explore the prevalence and reasons for LAT past this age. Increasing life expectancy in Spain – nowadays amongst the highest in the world (INE 2022d) – together with the increasing diversity and complexity in family trajectories may lead to a growing prevalence of LAT relationships at older ages.

Lastly, our results for men must be considered with caution due to the relatively smaller sample size in comparison to women.

Despite these limitations, this study makes a relevant contribution to the LAT literature by presenting updated estimates of the prevalence of LAT partnerships in Spain, and by providing new insights into the meanings and motivations for living apart from a stable partner based on gender and life stage. While social norms and attitudes towards partnership forms are rapidly changing, a large proportion of young Spanish men and women intend to move in together with their LAT partner. Economic uncertainty, however, often hinders them from doing so. Since having a stable, co-residential partnership remains important in regards to entering parenthood (Nishikido et al. 2022), the increasing prevalence of LAT relationships linked to constraints calls for more attention in societies with very low fertility. The rise in LAT relationships by choice at later life stages, though still an emerging trend, also highlights the importance of keeping track of the increasingly diverse partnership arrangements and lifestyle options over the life course – especially given Spain’s rapidly ageing society. Overall, partnership diversity and dynamics in contemporary Spain are becoming increasingly aligned with those in other European societies.

## APPENDIX

**Table A3.1.** Sociodemographic profile of individuals according to partnership status. Early life stage (ages 20 to 34).

|   | Early life stage  |       |              |          |       |
|---|-------------------|-------|--------------|----------|-------|
|   | No stable partner | LAT   | Cohabitation | Marriage | All   |
| <b>Work status</b>                      |                   |       |              |          |       |
| Permanent job                           | 0.331             | 0.367 | 0.593        | 0.631    | 0.423 |
| Temporary job                           | 0.163             | 0.218 | 0.185        | 0.141    | 0.173 |
| Unemployed                              | 0.139             | 0.143 | 0.098        | 0.091    | 0.126 |
| Student                                 | 0.296             | 0.217 | 0.042        | 0.014    | 0.200 |
| Inactive                                | 0.043             | 0.027 | 0.058        | 0.093    | 0.050 |
| Other                                   | 0.028             | 0.029 | 0.025        | 0.031    | 0.028 |
| <b>Educational attainment</b>           |                   |       |              |          |       |
| Primary                                 | 0.043             | 0.027 | 0.111        | 0.109    | 0.061 |
| Lower secondary                         | 0.091             | 0.060 | 0.118        | 0.086    | 0.089 |
| Upper secondary                         | 0.327             | 0.264 | 0.229        | 0.287    | 0.295 |
| University                              | 0.539             | 0.650 | 0.542        | 0.519    | 0.556 |
| <b>Co-residential experience</b>        |                   |       |              |          |       |
| No                                      | 0.907             | 0.954 | 0.913        | 0.934    | 0.921 |
| Yes                                     | 0.093             | 0.046 | 0.087        | 0.066    | 0.080 |
| <b>Children from previous relations</b> |                   |       |              |          |       |
| No                                      | 0.988             | 0.995 | 0.983        | 0.994    | 0.989 |
| Yes                                     | 0.012             | 0.005 | 0.017        | 0.006    | 0.011 |
| <b>Residence</b>                        |                   |       |              |          |       |
| Urban                                   | 0.538             | 0.481 | 0.574        | 0.507    | 0.529 |
| Intermediate                            | 0.323             | 0.385 | 0.291        | 0.363    | 0.335 |
| Rural                                   | 0.139             | 0.134 | 0.135        | 0.129    | 0.136 |
| <b>Practicing religion</b>              |                   |       |              |          |       |
| No                                      | 0.820             | 0.878 | 0.892        | 0.804    | 0.839 |
| Yes                                     | 0.045             | 0.032 | 0.026        | 0.092    | 0.047 |
| Prefer not to answer                    | 0.135             | 0.090 | 0.082        | 0.104    | 0.114 |
| <i>Partner's characteristics</i>        |                   |       |              |          |       |
| <b>Work status</b>                      |                   |       |              |          |       |
| Permanent job                           |                   | 0.348 | 0.551        | 0.654    | 0.509 |
| Temporary job                           |                   | 0.260 | 0.254        | 0.169    | 0.230 |
| Unemployed                              |                   | 0.123 | 0.128        | 0.091    | 0.115 |
| Student                                 |                   | 0.254 | 0.031        | 0.004    | 0.105 |
| Inactive                                |                   | 0.013 | 0.034        | 0.073    | 0.039 |
| Other                                   |                   | 0.001 | 0.002        | 0.008    | 0.004 |
| <b>Educational attainment</b>           |                   |       |              |          |       |
| Primary                                 |                   | 0.046 | 0.117        | 0.118    | 0.091 |
| Lower secondary                         |                   | 0.064 | 0.108        | 0.142    | 0.103 |
| Upper secondary                         |                   | 0.276 | 0.253        | 0.249    | 0.260 |
| University                              |                   | 0.614 | 0.522        | 0.491    | 0.546 |
| <b>Both Spanish</b>                     |                   |       |              |          |       |
| No                                      |                   | 0.029 | 0.030        | 0.051    | 0.036 |
| Yes                                     |                   | 0.971 | 0.970        | 0.949    | 0.964 |
| N                                       | 2004              | 838   | 613          | 700      | 4155  |

Notes: Proportions weighted to represent population level.

Source: 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey.

**Table A3.2.** Sociodemographic profile of individuals based on partnership status. Later life stage (ages 35-55).

|   | Later life stage  |       |              |          |       |
|---|-------------------|-------|--------------|----------|-------|
|   | No stable partner | LAT   | Cohabitation | Marriage | All   |
| <b>Work status</b>                      |                   |       |              |          |       |
| Permanent job                           | 0.550             | 0.614 | 0.693        | 0.687    | 0.656 |
| Temporary job                           | 0.133             | 0.103 | 0.117        | 0.079    | 0.095 |
| Unemployed                              | 0.172             | 0.185 | 0.111        | 0.095    | 0.116 |
| Student                                 | 0.008             | 0.006 | 0.003        | 0.003    | 0.004 |
| Inactive                                | 0.109             | 0.073 | 0.051        | 0.113    | 0.104 |
| Other                                   | 0.028             | 0.019 | 0.024        | 0.023    | 0.024 |
| <b>Educational attainment</b>           |                   |       |              |          |       |
| Primary                                 | 0.202             | 0.110 | 0.121        | 0.197    | 0.187 |
| Lower secondary                         | 0.117             | 0.128 | 0.104        | 0.133    | 0.127 |
| Upper secondary                         | 0.216             | 0.208 | 0.244        | 0.212    | 0.216 |
| University                              | 0.465             | 0.554 | 0.532        | 0.459    | 0.471 |
| <b>Co-residential experience</b>        |                   |       |              |          |       |
| No                                      | 0.507             | 0.580 | 0.695        | 0.936    | 0.810 |
| Yes                                     | 0.493             | 0.421 | 0.305        | 0.064    | 0.190 |
| <b>Children from previous relations</b> |                   |       |              |          |       |
| No                                      | 0.741             | 0.782 | 0.865        | 0.975    | 0.909 |
| Yes                                     | 0.259             | 0.219 | 0.135        | 0.025    | 0.092 |
| <b>Residence</b>                        |                   |       |              |          |       |
| Urban                                   | 0.564             | 0.593 | 0.535        | 0.499    | 0.519 |
| Intermediate                            | 0.289             | 0.250 | 0.344        | 0.363    | 0.342 |
| Rural                                   | 0.147             | 0.157 | 0.121        | 0.139    | 0.139 |
| <b>Practicing religion</b>              |                   |       |              |          |       |
| No                                      | 0.802             | 0.842 | 0.879        | 0.804    | 0.813 |
| Yes                                     | 0.080             | 0.035 | 0.033        | 0.093    | 0.083 |
| Prefer not to answer                    | 0.117             | 0.123 | 0.089        | 0.103    | 0.105 |
| <i>Partner's characteristics</i>        |                   |       |              |          |       |
| <b>Work status</b>                      |                   |       |              |          |       |
| Permanent job                           |                   | 0.661 | 0.642        | 0.663    | 0.660 |
| Temporary job                           |                   | 0.177 | 0.153        | 0.107    | 0.116 |
| Unemployed                              |                   | 0.089 | 0.133        | 0.102    | 0.105 |
| Student                                 |                   | 0.015 | 0.003        | 0.004    | 0.004 |
| Inactive                                |                   | 0.053 | 0.067        | 0.122    | 0.112 |
| Other                                   |                   | 0.005 | 0.003        | 0.003    | 0.003 |
| <b>Educational attainment</b>           |                   |       |              |          |       |
| Primary                                 |                   | 0.147 | 0.115        | 0.191    | 0.180 |
| Lower secondary                         |                   | 0.121 | 0.134        | 0.130    | 0.130 |
| Upper secondary                         |                   | 0.241 | 0.228        | 0.211    | 0.214 |
| University                              |                   | 0.491 | 0.523        | 0.468    | 0.476 |
| <b>Both Spanish</b>                     |                   |       |              |          |       |
| No                                      |                   | 0.022 | 0.068        | 0.024    | 0.029 |
| Yes                                     |                   | 0.978 | 0.932        | 0.976    | 0.971 |
| N                                       | 2093              | 369   | 843          | 6824     | 10129 |

Notes: Weighted to represent population level.

Source: 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey.



**Table A3.3.** Relative risks ratios from multinomial logistic regression on current partnership status.

| <b>Model 1: Base Model</b>                              |                                  |                         |                      |                      |                                  |                         |                     |                      |
|---|----------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
|   | Early life stage (ages 20 to 34) |                         |                      |                      | Later life stage (ages 35 to 55) |                         |                     |                      |
|   | LAT vs.<br>no stable<br>partner  | LAT vs.<br>Cohabitation | LAT vs.<br>Marriage  | LAT vs.<br>any union | LAT vs.<br>no stable<br>partner  | LAT vs.<br>Cohabitation | LAT vs.<br>Marriage | LAT vs.<br>any union |
| <b>Respondents' gender (ref. Women)</b>                 |                                  |                         |                      |                      |                                  |                         |                     |                      |
| Men   | 0.517***<br>(0.0648)             | 0.933<br>(0.154)        | 1.313<br>(0.235)     | 1.632<br>(0.825)     | 0.786<br>(0.131)                 | 0.690*<br>(0.123)       | 1.052<br>(0.171)    | 0.979<br>(0.158)     |
| <b>Work status (ref. Permanent job)</b>                 |                                  |                         |                      |                      |                                  |                         |                     |                      |
| Temporary job   | 0.962<br>(0.117)                 | 1.317+<br>(0.196)       | 1.674**<br>(0.270)   | 1.467**<br>(0.209)   | 0.878<br>(0.157)                 | 0.989<br>(0.194)        | 1.340+<br>(0.234)   | 1.249<br>(0.216)     |
| Unemployed  | 0.873<br>(0.121)                 | 1.649**<br>(0.292)      | 1.922***<br>(0.356)  | 1.604**<br>(0.265)   | 0.984<br>(0.161)                 | 1.285<br>(0.239)        | 1.749***<br>(0.282) | 1.652**<br>(0.263)   |
| Student   | 0.575***<br>(0.0715)             | 2.721***<br>(0.604)     | 6.845***<br>(2.658)  | 3.760***<br>(0.812)  | 0.965<br>(0.621)                 | 1.597<br>(1.182)        | 2.576<br>(1.647)    | 2.363<br>(1.490)     |
| Inactive  | 0.594*<br>(0.143)                | 0.706<br>(0.193)        | 0.339***<br>(0.0889) | 0.449**<br>(0.114)   | 0.615*<br>(0.139)                | 0.868<br>(0.219)        | 0.588*<br>(0.129)   | 0.609*<br>(0.133)    |
| Other   | 0.989<br>(0.264)                 | 1.888<br>(0.749)        | 1.131<br>(0.426)     | 1.768+<br>(0.602)    | 0.974<br>(0.329)                 | 0.937<br>(0.351)        | 1.379<br>(0.458)    | 1.282<br>(0.422)     |
| <b>Educational attainment (ref. Lower secondary)</b>    |                                  |                         |                      |                      |                                  |                         |                     |                      |
| Primary   | 0.845<br>(0.260)                 | 0.546+<br>(0.183)       | 0.658<br>(0.236)     | 0.776<br>(0.267)     | 0.565*<br>(0.145)                | 0.652<br>(0.184)        | 0.739<br>(0.187)    | 0.723<br>(0.182)     |
| Upper secondary   | 1.062<br>(0.215)                 | 1.542+<br>(0.370)       | 1.078<br>(0.274)     | 1.359<br>(0.333)     | 1.045<br>(0.227)                 | 1.257<br>(0.306)        | 1.326<br>(0.282)    | 1.316<br>(0.278)     |
| University  | 1.376+<br>(0.262)                | 2.571***<br>(0.570)     | 2.426***<br>(0.574)  | 2.720***<br>(0.617)  | 1.095<br>(0.218)                 | 1.321<br>(0.292)        | 1.678**<br>(0.327)  | 1.619*<br>(0.312)    |
| <b>Co-residential history (ref. No)</b>                 |                                  |                         |                      |                      |                                  |                         |                     |                      |
| Yes   | 0.324***<br>(0.0681)             | 0.599*<br>(0.146)       | 1.099<br>(0.291)     | 0.777<br>(0.177)     | 0.762+<br>(0.117)                | 1.615**<br>(0.277)      | 8.693***<br>(1.363) | 5.993***<br>(0.908)  |
| <b>Has child(ren) from previous relations (ref. No)</b> |                                  |                         |                      |                      |                                  |                         |                     |                      |
| Yes   | 1.515<br>(0.650)                 | 2.840*<br>(1.459)       | 8.858**<br>(5.990)   | 4.475**<br>(2.196)   | 0.905<br>(0.157)                 | 1.405<br>(0.291)        | 2.739***<br>(0.527) | 2.332***<br>(0.422)  |
| Log likelihood  | -7710.064                        |                         |                      | -5463.673            | -4356.031                        |                         |                     | -3543.179            |
| R <sup>2</sup>  | 0.172                            |                         |                      | 0.179                | 0.166                            |                         |                     | 0.179                |
| N   | 10129                            |                         |                      | 10129                | 4155                             |                         |                     | 4155                 |

Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses

+  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ 

*Notes:* (1) Additional control variables (i.e., age group, urban-rural residence, and religious practice) are included in the models. (2) LAT refers to non-coresidential partnerships with a duration of at least two years. Shorter, 'dating' relationships are included in the category of 'no stable partner.'

*Source:* 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey.

**Table A3.4.** Relative risk ratios from multinomial logistic regression on current partnership status, including partner's characteristics. Partnered individuals.

|  | <b>Model 3: Including partner's characteristics</b> |                      |                      |                                  |                     |                      |
|--|---|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
|  | Early life stage (ages 20 to 34)                    |                      |                      | Later life stage (ages 35 to 55) |                     |                      |
|  | LAT vs.<br>Cohabitation                             | LAT vs.<br>Marriage  | LAT vs.<br>any union | LAT vs.<br>Cohabitation          | LAT vs.<br>Marriage | LAT vs.<br>any union |
| <b>Respondents' gender (ref. Women)</b>                        |   |                      |                      |                                  |                     |                      |
| Men  | 0.503<br>(0.311)                                    | 0.629<br>(0.464)     | 0.536<br>(0.324)     | 0.817<br>(0.477)                 | 0.626<br>(0.332)    | 0.729<br>(0.378)     |
| <b>Work status (ref. Permanent job)</b>                        |   |                      |                      |                                  |                     |                      |
| Temporary job  | 1.276<br>(0.216)                                    | 1.655**<br>(0.313)   | 1.412*<br>(0.218)    | 0.949<br>(0.201)                 | 1.327<br>(0.254)    | 1.201<br>(0.228)     |
| Unemployed   | 1.524*<br>(0.307)                                   | 1.543*<br>(0.337)    | 1.524*<br>(0.277)    | 1.067<br>(0.225)                 | 1.290<br>(0.242)    | 1.241<br>(0.230)     |
| Student  | 2.323***<br>(0.568)                                 | 7.176***<br>(3.376)  | 2.997***<br>(0.699)  | 1.490<br>(1.109)                 | 2.885<br>(1.928)    | 2.405<br>(1.591)     |
| Inactive   | 0.626<br>(0.189)                                    | 0.253***<br>(0.0763) | 0.416**<br>(0.112)   | 0.804<br>(0.217)                 | 0.489**<br>(0.116)  | 0.524**<br>(0.123)   |
| Other  | 2.613*<br>(1.230)                                   | 1.278<br>(0.551)     | 1.839+<br>(0.671)    | 0.879<br>(0.357)                 | 1.243<br>(0.462)    | 1.112<br>(0.407)     |
| <b>Educational attainment (ref. Lower secondary)</b>           |   |                      |                      |                                  |                     |                      |
| Primary  | 0.768<br>(0.295)                                    | 0.861<br>(0.370)     | 0.822<br>(0.303)     | 0.665<br>(0.219)                 | 0.800<br>(0.241)    | 0.783<br>(0.233)     |
| Upper secondary  | 1.514<br>(0.437)                                    | 1.015<br>(0.325)     | 1.300<br>(0.353)     | 1.585+<br>(0.443)                | 1.442<br>(0.358)    | 1.493<br>(0.365)     |
| University   | 2.401**<br>(0.663)                                  | 2.427**<br>(0.744)   | 2.453***<br>(0.641)  | 1.472<br>(0.384)                 | 1.778*<br>(0.417)   | 1.736*<br>(0.401)    |
| <b>Co-residential history (ref. No)</b>                        |   |                      |                      |                                  |                     |                      |
| Yes  | 0.524*<br>(0.143)                                   | 0.961<br>(0.296)     | 0.659<br>(0.174)     | 1.692**<br>(0.326)               | 8.290***<br>(1.445) | 5.867***<br>(0.989)  |
| <b>Has child(ren) from previous relations (ref. No)</b>        |   |                      |                      |                                  |                     |                      |
| Yes  | 3.447*<br>(1.889)                                   | 14.54***<br>(11.27)  | 5.732**<br>(3.081)   | 1.508+<br>(0.348)                | 2.979***<br>(0.631) | 2.447***<br>(0.486)  |
| <i>Partner's characteristics</i>                               |   |                      |                      |                                  |                     |                      |
| <b>Partner's work status (ref. Permanent job)</b>              |   |                      |                      |                                  |                     |                      |
| Temporary job  | 1.243<br>(0.184)                                    | 1.698**<br>(0.282)   | 1.406*<br>(0.192)    | 1.064<br>(0.196)                 | 1.764***<br>(0.295) | 1.563**<br>(0.259)   |
| Unemployed   | 1.628*<br>(0.331)                                   | 3.051***<br>(0.747)  | 2.064***<br>(0.394)  | 0.819<br>(0.181)                 | 1.753**<br>(0.358)  | 1.397+<br>(0.283)    |
| Student  | 4.027***<br>(1.229)                                 | 11.69***<br>(7.321)  | 5.169***<br>(1.499)  | 2.910<br>(3.004)                 | 1.495<br>(1.243)    | 1.831<br>(1.470)     |
| Inactive   | 1.413<br>(0.638)                                    | 1.139<br>(0.535)     | 1.304<br>(0.533)     | 0.790<br>(0.243)                 | 0.913<br>(0.248)    | 0.886<br>(0.237)     |
| Other  | 0.126<br>(0.160)                                    | 0.110<br>(0.168)     | 0.125+<br>(0.156)    | 1.062<br>(0.950)                 | 1.284<br>(1.019)    | 1.261<br>(0.983)     |
| <b>Partner's educational attainment (ref. Lower secondary)</b> |   |                      |                      |                                  |                     |                      |
| Primary  | 0.935<br>(0.252)                                    | 1.804*<br>(0.539)    | 1.201<br>(0.304)     | 0.883<br>(0.213)                 | 0.758<br>(0.163)    | 0.784<br>(0.167)     |
| Upper secondary  | 1.490+<br>(0.337)                                   | 2.308***<br>(0.564)  | 1.757**<br>(0.365)   | 0.790<br>(0.172)                 | 0.789<br>(0.153)    | 0.795<br>(0.152)     |
| University   | 1.654*<br>(0.367)                                   | 2.191**<br>(0.523)   | 1.835**<br>(0.373)   | 0.874<br>(0.178)                 | 0.832<br>(0.150)    | 0.858<br>(0.152)     |
| Both Spanish   | 1.642<br>(0.586)                                    | 2.530*<br>(0.950)    | 1.890+<br>(0.616)    | 1.814<br>(0.695)                 | 0.908<br>(0.341)    | 1.179<br>(0.429)     |
| Log likelihood   | -1796.407   |                      | -1014.700            | -3479.526                        |                     | -1267.565            |
| R <sup>2</sup>   | 0.234   |                      | 0.294                | 0.162                            |                     | 0.153                |
| N  | 2151  |                      | 2151                 | 8036                             |                     | 8036                 |

Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses

+ p &lt; 0.10, \* p &lt; 0.05, \*\* p &lt; 0.01, \*\*\* p &lt; 0.001

*Notes:* (1) All control and interaction variables in Model 2 are included, but only estimates for variables related to partner's characteristics are shown here. (2) LAT refers to non-coresidential partnerships with a duration of at least two years. Shorter, 'dating' relationships are included in the category of 'no stable partner.'

*Source:* 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey.

## 4 TRENDS IN REPARTNERING BY BIRTH COHORT AND EDUCATION IN SPAIN

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### INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, family formation processes have become more complex and diverse (Billari and Liefbroer 2010). High-income, Western societies have observed an increase in the prevalence and societal acceptance of cohabitation, divorce and separation (Liefbroer and Dourleijn 2006) – also termed the ‘separation surge’ by Kalmijn and Leopold (2021). This has led researchers to examine how these trends may have influenced repartnering behavior (Gałęzewska 2016, Gałęzewska et al. 2017). In Spain, the diffusion of non-marital cohabitation lagged behind other surrounding European societies. Only in recent decades is the phenomenon no longer considered a marginal pathway to family formation. Its prevalence had intensified from 6% of Spanish women who had ever cohabited by age 35 among those born in the 1950s, to nearly 40% among those born in the 1970s (Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martín 2013). Union instability in Spain has also increased in the last two decades. For instance, more Spaniards experience divorce now than they did before – particularly, following the divorce law reform in 2005 which allowed for an easier, quicker separation process (Bernardi and Martínez-Pastor 2011, Garriga and Cortina 2017). The divorce rate increased from 1.7 divorces per 1000 individuals in 2005 to 2.9 in 2006. It has since been wavering around 2.0 and remains above the EU average (Eurostat 2021a).

During the same period, the country also experienced various other changes in family formation processes. For example, less Spaniards marry. Spain’s crude marriage rate declined from 5.1 marriages per 1000 individuals in 2000 to 3.5 in nearly two decades later (Eurostat 2021b). Marriage remains the most prominent pathway to family formation in Spain – although, direct marriages have been on the decline since the 1980s (Castro-Martín et al. 2013) –, and the country has one of the latest average ages at first marriage, age 34 for women and 36 for men (Eurostat 2022a). Furthermore, the association between divorce and educational attainment, which was once positive, has disappeared in Spain (Bernardi and Martínez-Pastor 2011). In high-income societies, it is common that this association eventually becomes negative (Härkönen and Dronkers 2006). Previous studies suggest women who marry directly – which had been customary in the Spanish context until about two decades ago (Baizán, et al. 2002, del Rey et al. 2022) – may experience a higher risk of

divorce (Gałęzewska et al. 2016). Highly educated Spanish women, on the other hand, have been found to have increasingly stable marriages relative to their lower-educated counterparts (Garriga and Cortina 2017).

Despite Spain's rapid changes in family formation processes, little is known about the country's repartnering dynamics. To our knowledge there have been no studies on the prevalence of repartnering with a focus on Spain. This has largely been due to data unavailability, together with the fact that repartnering is a relatively new phenomenon in this context. By utilizing the most recent Spanish Fertility Survey, we are able to explore repartnering processes in contemporary Spain. Therefore, we explore repartnering dynamics among Spanish women and ask the following questions: how common is repartnering in Spain following the spread of cohabitation and rise in union instability? What are the pathways to repartnering? And who repartners? We focus on women who experienced a massive increase in labor force participation in the 1980s, accompanied by rapid changes in gender roles, and consequently, changes in family dynamics (León and Migliavacca 2013). Repartnering among women has also been found to increase the likelihood of parity progression (Ivanova et al. 2014), which makes it an important phenomenon to examine in a setting with very low fertility such as Spain. The country's late timing of leaving the parental home (del Rey, Stanek, and García-Gómez 2022), forming stable unions (Nishikido et al. 2021), and childbearing (Esteve et al. 2021); late legalization and eased accessibility of divorce (Bernardi and Martínez-Pastor 2011); three decades of lowest-low fertility (Esteve et al. 2021); and only recent developments in the rising levels of non-marital cohabitation and non-marital childbearing (Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martín 2013), make Spain a valuable case study.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### *Changes in repartnering behavior over time*

Western societies have witnessed an increase in the levels of union dissolution and repartnering (Cherlin 2017, Gałęzewska 2016, Smock and Schwartz 2020). In the United States, for example, the more recent cohort of Millennials was found to repartner more often than their counterparts born in preceding generations (Eickmeyer and Manning 2018). While three-quarters of Millennials who dissolved their first cohabiting union formed a second cohabiting, nearly 10% of Millennials who had ever co-resided with a partner also experienced two or more union dissolutions. Not only did Millennials form second

cohabiting unions more often, but they did so in a shorter period of time between their first and second union.

Several mechanisms can lead us to expect either stability or an increase in the prevalence of repartnering in Spain. One reason we could expect an increase in repartnering is the rise in non-marital cohabitations and its contribution to – what Kalmijn and Leopold (2021) have termed – the ‘separation surge’. Although the growing union instability of both marriages and cohabitations has led to this surge, most studies find cohabiting unions to be less stable than marital ones (Heuveline et al. 2003, Gałęzewska 2016, Ni Bhrolchain and Beaujouan 2013, Poortman and Lyngstad 2007). Subsequently, more union dissolutions may imply more individuals are re-entering the partner market and an increased availability of potential partners (de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003). In this way, the spread of non-marital cohabitations and union instability is likely to have had a large influence on the rise in repartnering (Gałęzewska 2016). We expect this to be the case for Spain, as individuals now cohabit and divorce more. The country’s deeply-rooted religious history may be a factor that could slow down the increase of repartnering. In Italy, another Mediterranean context with a particularly predominant Catholic background, divorce was still stigmatized within the country (Meggiolaro and Ongaro 2008). This may deter individuals from forming partnerships with divorcees due to the social costs stemming from this stigma. Spain was slow to adopt non-marital cohabitation compared to other Western societies, and this may also apply to more general changes in family formation processes, such as repartnering.

Repartnering can occur through several pathways, including remarriage and serial cohabitation. While the retreat from marriage has been around for some time now (Lesthaeghe 2010), divorcees are less likely to repartner compared to cohabiters – specifically, divorcees are less likely to remarry (Wu and Schimmele 2005). Most high-income societies, such as the United States, continue to observe these declining trends in remarriage rates (Payne 2018, Schweizer 2019). The decline may represent how cohabitation is replacing remarriage as a second union (Brown and Wright 2017, Poortman 2007, Wu and Schimmele 2005). Cohabitation becomes an appealing alternative to remarriage since non-marital unions often involve weaker economic consequences (Lyngstad et al. 2011) and less risk and commitment (e.g., requiring lower emotional investments (Wiik et al. 2009). Perhaps this pathway to repartnering – marriage first, cohabitation second – may be the most common among older, more traditional cohorts who

were in the advanced stages of their family formation process during the societal diffusion of non-marital cohabitation. The ‘flexibility’ associated with non-marital cohabitation may also allow individuals to cohabit sooner after union dissolution than to remarry (McNamee and Raley 2011). In some instances, such as in West Germany, however, cohabiting – or serially cohabiting – couples end up marrying at some point (Hiekel and Fulda 2018). In addition, living-apart-together relationships are also a popular alternative, especially among older adults and individuals with children from a previous relationship (Liefbroer et al. 2015; Pasteels et al. 2017).

Serial cohabitation is being in a non-marital cohabiting union for both the first and second unions. Existing studies on serial cohabitation in Western societies have consistently found an increase in its prevalence over time (Bukodi 2012, Dommermuth and Wiik 2014, Eickmeyer and Manning 2018, Hiekel and Fulda 2018, Lichter and Qian 2008, Lichter et al. 2010), although the phenomenon remains relatively marginal. Cohabitors, in particular, have a higher risk of union dissolution in countries where cohabitation is indistinguishable from marriage, such as in Scandinavian countries (Poortman and Lyngstad 2007). Individuals whose first partnership is a cohabitation also tend to repartner more quickly than divorcees (Poortman 2007, Skew et al. 2009). Since non-marital cohabitation is now societally accepted and commonplace in Spain, it may be replacing remarriage as the second union after separation. Therefore, we expect a decline in remarriages and an increase in serial cohabitation in the Spanish context.

#### *Educational variation in repartnering behavior*

Repartnering behavior not only varies over time (Gałęzewska 2016) but also based on individual-level characteristics such as age (Beaujouan 2012, Skew et al. 2009, Wu and Schimmele 2005), gender (Ivanova et al. 2013, Jalovaara and Fasang 2017, Poortman 2007, Skew et al. 2009, Wu and Schimmele 2005), and parenthood status (Ivanova et al. 2013, Skew et al. 2009). However, findings on repartnering dynamics by educational attainment are mixed (e.g., negative association: Bukodi 2012, Eickmeyer and Manning 2018, Lichter and Qian 2008, Lichter et al. 2010 / positive association: Dommermuth and Wiik 2014, Pasteels and Mortelmans 2017, Payne 2018/ no association: de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003, Dewilde and Uunk 2008, Hiekel and Fulda 2018). While the highly educated were found to repartner more often in some contexts, such as in the Nordic countries (Dommermuth and Wiik 2014), the socioeconomically disadvantaged were found to repartner more in others,

such as in Britain (Bukodi 2012). Similar to the British context, individuals with less financial resources were more likely to repartner in the United States (Lichter and Qian 2008, Lichter et al. 2010).

In the (re-)partner market, highly educated individuals are considered more attractive relative to their lower educated counterparts (Härkönen and Dronkers 2006, Kalmijn 2013, Matysiak, et al. 2014). Therefore, we can expect that the former are more likely to repartner, and perhaps quicker to repartner after their first union dissolution. The highly educated typically have more stable and advantaged economic situations, less influenced by potential financial consequences of union dissolution, which may allow them to repartner when they'd like and as often as they'd like (Dewilde and Uunk 2008, Jansen et al. 2009). In the Spanish context, the initial rise in non-marital cohabitation and divorce was led by the highly educated population (Bernardi and Martínez-Pastor 2011, Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martín 2013), coinciding with ideas from the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) (Lesthaeghe 2010). That is, the highly educated hold more progressive norms and attitudes and have more resources to engage in 'innovative' family formation behaviors. We anticipate this may be the case for repartnering in Spain, as well.

On the other hand, disadvantaged subpopulations (e.g., the low educated) may also repartner based on the Pattern of Disadvantage theory (POD) (Perelli-Harris and Gerber 2011) and the economic needs hypothesis (Dewilde and Uunk 2008). Both theories emphasize how repartnering can be used to improve one's poor economic position and emotional state following separation. Based on this perspective, we expect low educated individuals to repartner more, and more quickly, to benefit from the partnership. The sharing of tangible and intangible resources within the couple may improve the situation of those in this subgroup, who experience more strain in multiple aspects of life (Hogendoorn et al. 2022). Therefore, repartnering can be a strategic choice as the lower educated are typically less able to support themselves, particularly after union dissolution.

While educational attainment has been found to be a weak indicator of remarriage among women (Meggiolaro and Ongaro 2008, Shafer and James 2013), there is some evidence of an association between socioeconomic status and serial cohabitation. Most existing studies – heavily based on the United States – have found a negative association between socioeconomic status (e.g., low educational attainment, financial instability) and serial cohabitation (Eickmeyer and Manning 2018, Lichter and Qian 2008, Lichter et al. 2010).

This contrasts our expectations based on the SDT perspective, in which we expect highly educated individuals to serially cohabit more than their lower educated counterparts.

Findings for the association between socioeconomic status and repartnering behavior differ across European societies. Bukodi (2012) found British men who serially cohabit to be a selected group with unstable work histories, though higher-order cohabiting unions were associated with highly educated individuals in Scandinavian countries – where cohabitation is the most widely spread and socially accepted (Dommermuth and Wiik 2014). In addition, a recent study on West Germany found no association between educational attainment and serial cohabitation among individuals born in the early 1970s (Hiekel and Fulda 2018).

The economic context of Spain might lead to the expectation that lower educated individuals will be most likely to re-partner. Spain suffered severely from the 2008-2009 economic crisis. The country experienced – and continues to experience – high levels of wealth inequality (Amuedo-Dorantes and Borra 2018, Martínez-Toledano 2020), a high share of employees with temporary contracts (Eurostat 2022c), and persistently low wages (Bonhomme and Hospido 2017). While living-apart-together relationships are becoming more common among older individuals who are single parents or ever-separated (Liefbroer et al. 2015, Pasteels et al. 2017), maintaining separate households may be a luxury in the Spanish context. The economic precariousness in Spain, given the POD perspective, suggests we may observe an increase in repartnering rates, and especially among the lower educated. However, we may also expect highly educated individuals to repartner more than their lower educated counterparts in Spain. The increase in serial cohabitation among the former group may possibly be driving these differences. Since the highly educated were the first ones to cohabit and divorce, they may also be the first to pick up repartnering behaviors – especially, the more innovative serial cohabitation.

## **DATA AND ANALYTICAL METHOD**

We utilize the recent 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey from the Spanish National Statistics Institute to explore the phenomenon of repartnering in modern-day Spain. The sample is nationally representative with a total of 14,556 women ages 18-55. The survey provides basic demographic characteristics as well as retrospective information on cohabitation histories. Currently, the focus remains on the perspective of Spanish women as only a relatively small sample of men was included in the survey. For our initial descriptive



analysis, we establish the prevalence of repartnering by birth cohort and educational attainment level. The sample is restricted to those born between 1962-1984 – who are at least 34 years old at the time of survey ( $N=10,296$ ). The second part of our analysis involves applying event history techniques. For these analyses, we further restrict our sample to ever-separated women ( $N=1,753$ ).

### *Variables*

The dependent variable for our event history models is repartnering, and it is defined as having had at least two co-residential unions. We construct this variable taking advantage of the available information on retrospective partnership histories in the Spanish Fertility Survey. All co-residential unions are included regardless of the length of the union and no distinction is made between marital and non-marital partnerships. Moreover, there are two independent variables of interest – birth cohort and educational attainment level. Birth cohorts are categorized into 5-year groups from 1962-1984. Those born between 1962-1963 are grouped together with the 1964-1969 group to avoid small sample sizes. We focus on repartnering behaviors across cohorts as a way to observe changes over time. The variable for educational attainment refers to the highest level achieved by the time of survey and is organized into three categories: *low* consists of up to a lower secondary education (ISCED 1-2), *medium* consists of upper secondary and non-university education (ISCED 3-4), and *high* consists of at least a university education (ISCED 5-6). Educational attainment is often used in studies as a proxy for socioeconomic status. We use the educational attainment of Spanish women as not only a proxy for this, but also as a proxy for change in norms and attitudes (Perelli-Harris and Gerber 2011).

Several control variables are included based on what we know from previous literature: demographic characteristics (i.e., work status, urbanization of residence, religiosity) and features of the first union (i.e., type of first union, divorce of parents, any children from the first union, age at first union, duration of the first union). All variables on demographic characteristics are categorical. The variable for type of work status represents one's employment situation at the time of survey and includes having a permanent work contract, having a temporary contract, being unemployed, being a student, being inactive from the labor market, or other. Residence refers to the urbanization of their area of residence and consists of three classifications: urban, intermediate, or rural. Religiosity is defined as whether one practices a religion or not; therefore, the variable is categorized as non-

practicing, practicing, and prefer not to answer. In regards to the union characteristics, the type of first union is a binary variable and can either be a non-marital cohabitation or marriage. Having any children from the first union is also a binary variable. In contrast, age at first union and duration of the first union are both continuous variables.

### *Analysis*

Our analytical strategy consists of two parts and are analyzed separately by birth cohort and educational attainment level. The first part is descriptive. We report the prevalence of repartnering behavior in contemporary Spain using our main sample. Subsequently, to illustrate the timing and proportion of women who have repartnered within 120 months since separation, we present Kaplan-Meier survival estimates for women who have dissolved their first union. Lastly, we explore the repartnering pathways of women who have experienced both first union dissolution and repartnering. These pathways are serial cohabitation, remarriage, divorce followed by non-marital cohabitation, and non-marital separation followed by marriage.

Event history analyses are employed for the second part of our analysis. Specifically, we use piecewise constant exponential models to supplement our descriptive analyses and estimate the hazard of repartnering after first union dissolution. This model assumes a constant hazard over specified time intervals. Time is measured in months following the first union dissolution, and censoring occurs if repartnering does not take place by the survey date. In our case, we have seven time periods in our analysis (in months, up to 11; 12-23; 24-47; 48-71; 72-95; 96-119; 120+). We specify shorter periods in the beginning as evidence suggests the highest likelihood of repartnering may be soon after union dissolution, particularly in later life (Schimmele and Wu 2016). Initial piecewise constant models only include our two covariates of interest, birth cohort and educational attainment level. We further add control variables into the model in a stepwise manner to observe potential explanations of the repartnering hazard. Ideally, we would interact birth cohorts with educational attainment to account for the changing dynamics of educational attainment over time on repartnering behaviors. However, we are unable to analyze this due to our limited sample size.

## RESULTS

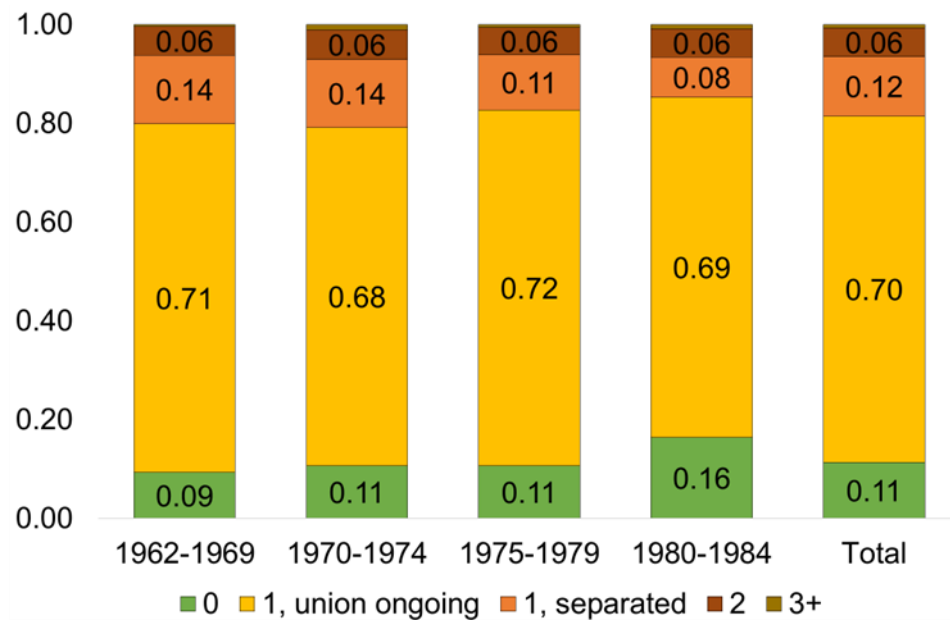
Results for our descriptive analysis are presented separately – first, based on birth cohorts and next, by level of educational attainment. The former will help us better understand the potential changes in the prevalence of repartnering in Spain, while the latter will help us understand who repartners.

### Descriptive analysis

#### *Repartnering dynamics by birth cohort*

We begin by exploring the entire sample of Spanish women born between 1962-1984 for an overarching picture on partnership formation and dissolution over the life course. Based on birth cohorts, Figure 4.1 shows the total number of co-residential unions women have experienced by the time of survey. 6% of our sample has repartnered, and this proportion remains constant across birth cohorts. Considering the most recent cohort is still relatively young (ages 34-38), this finding suggests some evidence of an increase in the occurrence of repartnering over time. Due to their younger age, there is a larger share of women who have never been in a co-residential relationship among the most recent cohort (16%) compared to earlier cohorts. On the other hand, there are more women from earlier cohorts who are separated but have not repartnered. This is as expected since older adults would have had more time to experience union formation and dissolution by the time of survey. Furthermore, Figure 4.2 shows Kaplan-Meier survival estimates for repartnering by age and birth cohort. We observe a clear, but minor, increase in the prevalence of repartnering across birth cohorts – especially when comparing the earliest (born 1962-1969) with the most recent group. Although we observe the earliest cohort until age 55, the same segment (6%) of young Spanish adults (born 1980-1984) have already dissolved their first union and repartnered by age 38.

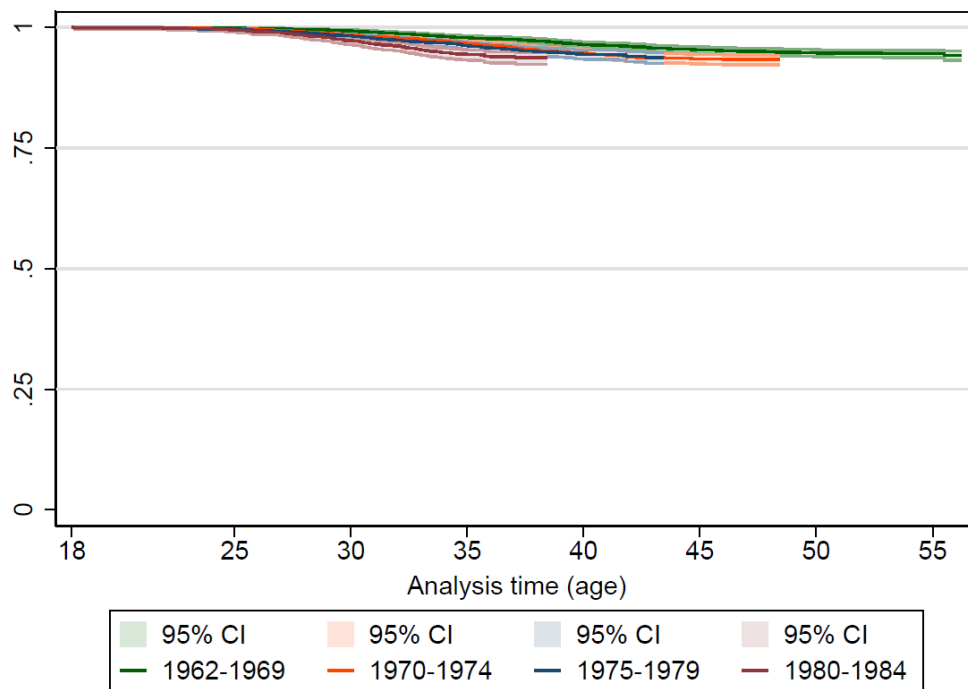
**Figure 4.1.** Total number of unions individuals have experienced by birth cohort (N=10,296).



*Notes:* (1) Proportions weighted to represent population level.

*Source:* 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey.

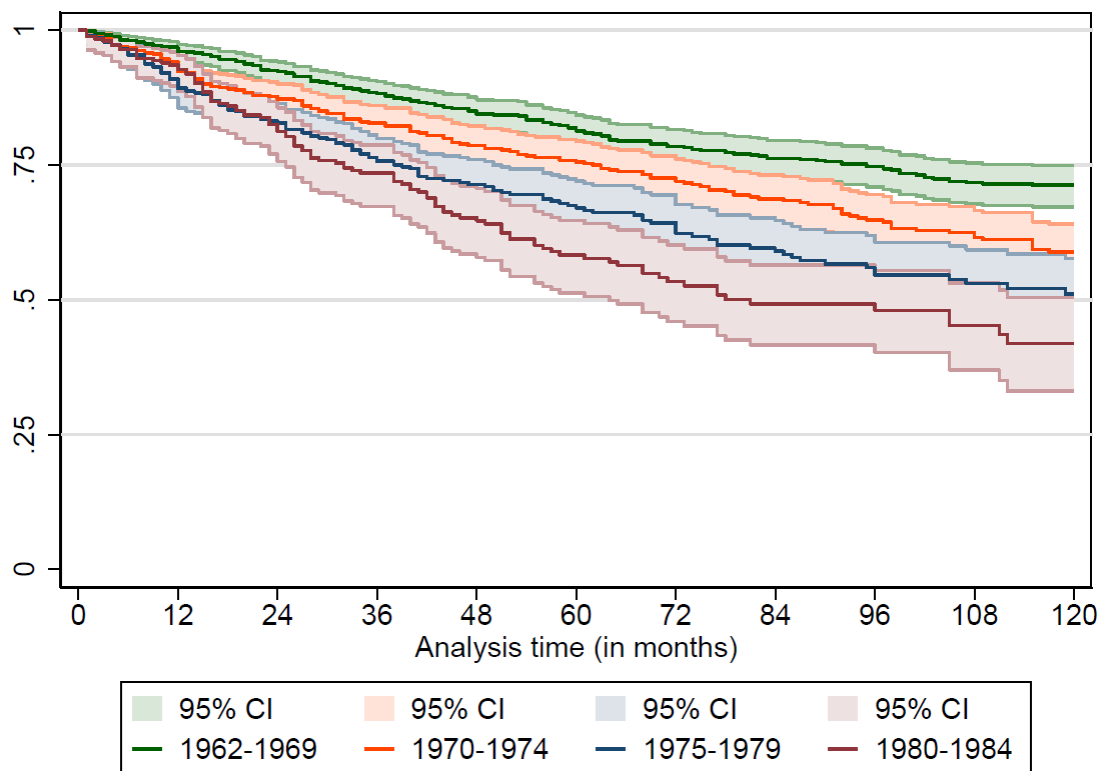
**Figure 4.2.** Kaplan-Meier survival estimates for the transition to repartnering by age and birth cohort.



*Source:* 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey.

In the next step of our descriptive analysis, we focus on the subgroup at-risk of repartnering – ever-separated women. Figure 4.3 presents Kaplan-Meier survival curves by birth cohort, which shows the pace at which repartnering occurred and the proportion that did not repartner within 10 years following union dissolution. A gradient is observed across cohorts in the proportion of women who have repartnered. Specifically, ever-separated women born earlier tend to repartner less, while their counterparts born later tend to repartner more. Over half of ever-separated women born in the early 1980s repartner within 10 years following union dissolution. In contrast, only about a third of women born in the 1960s repartner. We also observe the same gradient across cohorts regarding the pace of entry into a second union after first union dissolution. Namely, women born more recently are quicker to repartner than their counterparts born earlier.

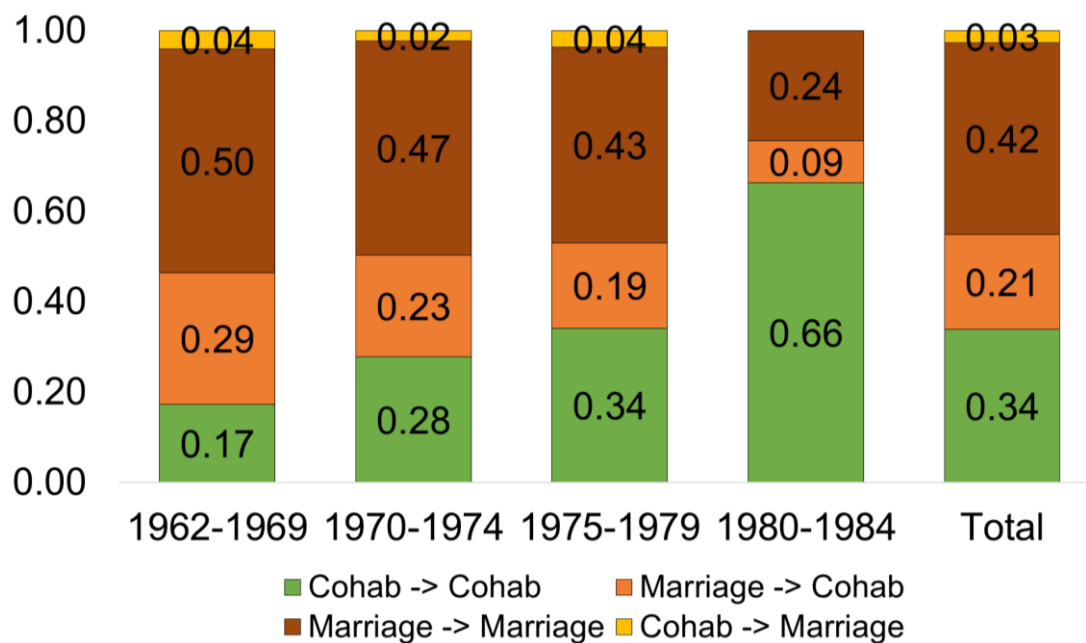
**Figure 4.3.** Kaplan-Meier survival estimates for the transition to repartnering after union dissolution by birth cohort.



Source: 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey.

In the last step of our exploratory exercise, we focus on individuals who have repartnered to observe and compare their repartnering pathways across birth cohorts. Studying repartnering pathways across cohorts may capture changing partnership formation dynamics within a society by providing information on the attitudes surrounding certain partnership types over time. Figure 4.4 illustrates these changes in the Spanish context.

**Figure 4.4.** Repartnering pathways by birth cohort (N=600).



*Notes:* (1) Proportions weighted to represent population level. (2) *Marriage* here includes both direct marriages and cohabitations that end in a marriage. *Cohab* represents co-residential unions that do not end in a marriage.

*Source:* 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey.

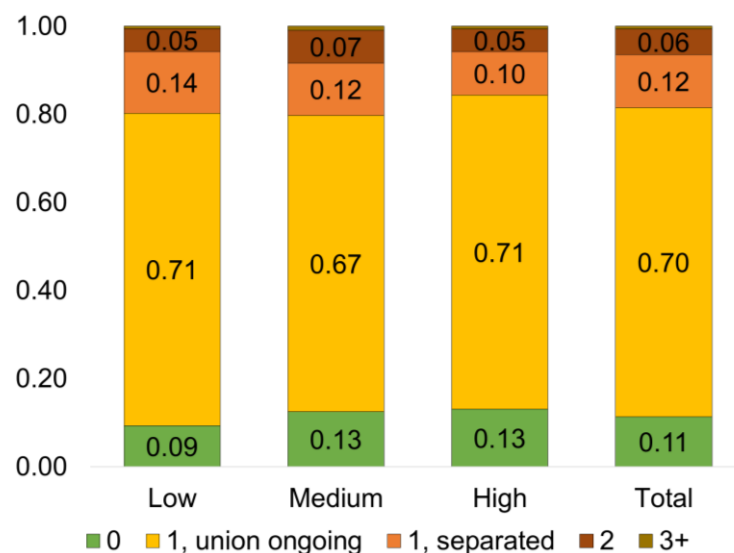
We observe a decline in marriages as the first co-residential union formed over time among ever-repartnered women in Spain. Combined, repartnering pathways where the first union is a marriage – remarriages and divorces followed by non-marital cohabitations – have declined by more than half, from 79% (1962-1969) to 33% (1980-1984). Perhaps even more significant, however, is the increase in serial cohabitation observed over birth cohorts. While 17% of women who repartner from the earliest birth cohort are serial cohabitators, this proportion grew to 66% among women who repartner born in the recent cohort. Across all birth cohorts, the most uncommon repartnering pathway is separating from a non-marital

cohabitation and marrying in the second union. This observation may suggest the role cohabitation plays in contemporary Spanish society. Namely, that cohabitation and serial cohabitation may gradually be becoming part of the family formation process.

*Repartnering dynamics by educational attainment level*

In addition to the variation in repartnering dynamics across birth cohorts, we explore repartnering dynamics by educational attainment level to investigate who is leading the phenomenon in Spain. Figure 4.5 presents the total number of co-residential unions experienced across educational attainment levels. Most women are in their first co-residential union at the time of the survey, although around 13% of medium and highly educated women and 9% of low educated women have never experienced a co-residential partnership. The proportion of women who have repartnered are moderately comparable across educational attainment levels. Despite 5% of both low- and highly educated women having repartnered, the proportion of ever-separated women that have not repartnered is highest among the low educated (14%). This finding rejects the POD perspective and the economic need hypothesis but may instead provide some evidence towards the idea that the low educated are less attractive in the (re-)partner market.

**Figure 4.5.** Total number of unions individuals have experienced by highest level of educational attainment (N=10,296).



*Notes:* Proportions weighted to represent population level.

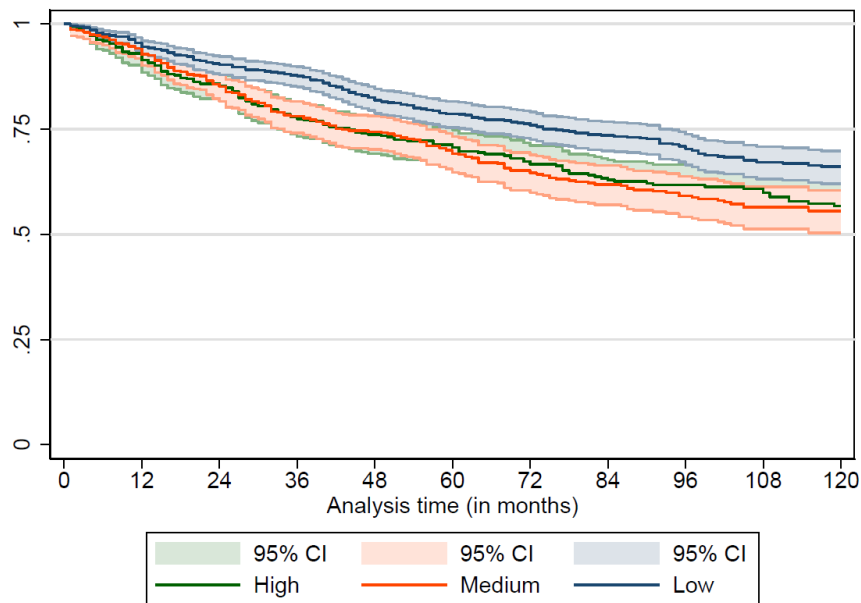
*Source:* 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey.

To understand the frequency and timing of repartnering by the educational attainment level of those at-risk, we limit our next descriptive analysis to ever-separated women. Figure 4.6 shows Kaplan-Meier survival estimates based on educational attainment level. This analysis follows ever-separated women from the time of first union dissolution until repartnering, with the survival time in months. We observe that less than half of the women in these groups repartner within 10 years after union dissolution, and that there may be two clear patterns. First, low educated, ever-separated women are not only slower to repartner but are also less likely to repartner even after 10 years. This result goes against the economic hypothesis and also provides additional support towards the idea that lower educated individuals may be considered less attractive relative to highly educated individuals in the (re-)partner market. Second, medium and highly educated women repartner quicker and more frequently over the same timeframe.

We further explore which repartnering pathways are most common based on educational attainment level and among those who have repartnered. Figure 4.7 shows the repartnering pathways taken based on educational attainment. Low and medium educated women show similar repartnering pathways.

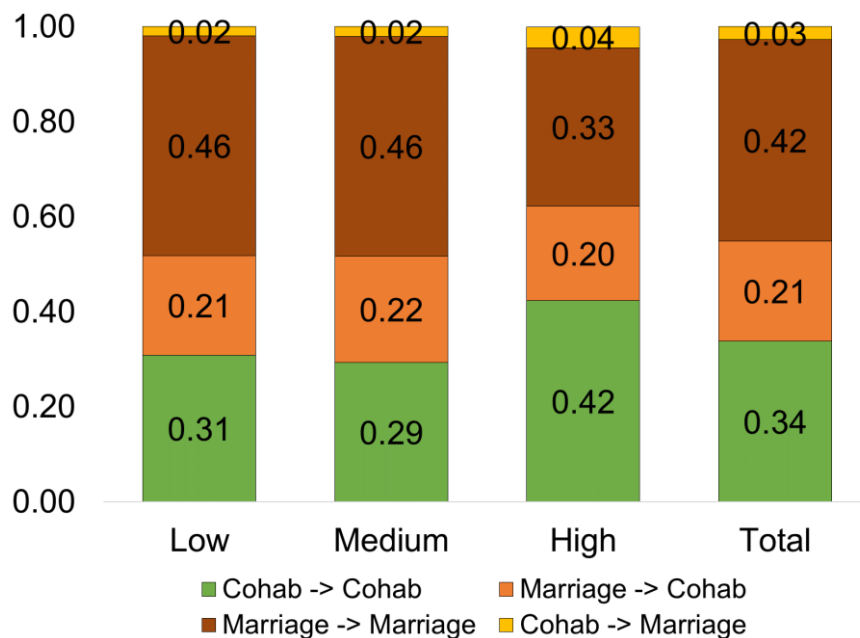


**Figure 4.6.** Kaplan-Meier survival estimates for the transition to repartnering by highest level of educational attainment.



Source: 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey.

**Figure 4.7.** Repartnering pathways by highest level of educational attainment (N=600).



Notes: (1) Proportions weighted to represent population level. (2) *Marriage* here includes both direct marriages and cohabitations that end in a marriage. *Cohab* represents co-residential unions that do not end in a marriage.

Source: 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey.

Nearly 70% have divorced and repartnered, mostly through remarriage, while about 30% have serially cohabited. On the other hand, we find serial cohabitation is the most common pathway to repartnering among highly educated women (42%). They also remarry less often. Similar incidences of repartnering pathways are observed across educational attainment levels. For example, around one in five women enter a non-marital cohabitation following a divorce, and the most uncommon pathway among all groups is marrying after having separated from a non-marital cohabitation (i.e., Cohab -> Marriage).

### **Piecewise constant exponential analysis**

Table 4.1 presents the results of our piecewise constant exponential analysis. Models 1 and 2 show the initial effect of our main independent variables, birth cohort and educational attainment, on the hazard of repartnering. Additional covariates are included step-wise to examine the effects of demographic and union characteristics on repartnering behavior.

Model 2 supports the findings from our descriptive analysis. It suggests that recent birth cohorts have a higher hazard of repartnering relative to the 1960s birth cohort – the more recent the cohort, the higher the hazard. This means that the youngest cohort appears the most likely to repartner. Furthermore, low educated women repartner less than the highly educated. Medium educated women show no difference in repartnering behavior when compared to the highly educated. The inclusion of educational attainment level did not change the statistical significance of the birth cohort effects.

**Table 4.1.** Risk of repartnering among separated women from piecewise constant exponential models.

|  | Model 1             | Model 2             | Model 3             | Model 4                 | Model 5             |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
|  |                     |                     | + demographic       | + union characteristics | Full                |
| <b>Birth cohort (ref. 1962-1969)</b>           |                     |                     |                     |                         |                     |
| 1970-1974                                      | 1.420**<br>(0.152)  | 1.406**<br>(0.151)  | 1.387**<br>(0.149)  | 1.314*<br>(0.143)       | 1.289*<br>(0.140)   |
| 1975-1979                                      | 1.901***<br>(0.215) | 1.855***<br>(0.211) | 1.848***<br>(0.211) | 1.549***<br>(0.183)     | 1.537***<br>(0.183) |
| 1980-1984                                      | 2.418***<br>(0.295) | 2.340***<br>(0.286) | 2.369***<br>(0.292) | 1.648***<br>(0.223)     | 1.671***<br>(0.228) |
| <b>Educational attainment (ref. High)</b>      |                     |                     |                     |                         |                     |
| Medium   |                     | 1.025<br>(0.108)    | 1.034<br>(0.110)    | 0.909<br>(0.0982)       | 0.922<br>(0.0998)   |
| Low  |                     | 0.743**<br>(0.076)  | 0.737**<br>(0.078)  | 0.665***<br>(0.073)     | 0.680***<br>(0.076) |
| <b>Work status (ref. Permanent contract)</b>   |                     |                     |                     |                         |                     |
| Temporary contract                             |                     |                     | 0.968<br>(0.122)    |                         | 0.964<br>(0.122)    |
| Unemployed                                     |                     |                     | 0.902<br>(0.109)    |                         | 0.894<br>(0.109)    |
| Student  |                     |                     | 0.000<br>(0.000)    |                         | 0.000<br>(0.001)    |
| Inactive                                       |                     |                     | 1.077<br>(0.146)    |                         | 0.870<br>(0.120)    |
| Other  |                     |                     | 0.958<br>(0.217)    |                         | 0.893<br>(0.203)    |
| <b>Religiosity (ref. Non-practicing)</b>       |                     |                     |                     |                         |                     |
| Practicing                                     |                     |                     | 0.843*<br>(0.073)   |                         | 0.837*<br>(0.073)   |
| Prefer not to answer                           |                     |                     | 0.633**<br>(0.102)  |                         | 0.629**<br>(0.102)  |
| <b>Residence (ref. Urban)</b>                  |                     |                     |                     |                         |                     |
| Intermediate                                   |                     |                     | 1.138<br>(0.106)    |                         | 1.172+<br>(0.109)   |
| Rural  |                     |                     | 1.201<br>(0.149)    |                         | 1.178<br>(0.146)    |
| <b>First union type (ref. Marriage)</b>        |                     |                     |                     |                         |                     |
| Non-marital cohabitation                       |                     |                     |                     | 1.364**<br>(0.135)      | 1.394***<br>(0.139) |
| <b>First union duration</b>                    |                     |                     |                     | 0.995***<br>(0.001)     | 0.995***<br>(0.001) |
| <b>Age at first union</b>                      |                     |                     |                     | 0.933***<br>(0.009)     | 0.932***<br>(0.009) |
| <b>Children from previous unions (ref. No)</b> |                     |                     |                     |                         |                     |
| Yes  |                     |                     |                     | 0.523***<br>(0.050)     | 0.525***<br>(0.051) |
| <b>Time</b>                                    |                     |                     |                     |                         |                     |
| 12 months                                      | 0.925<br>(0.128)    | 0.927<br>(0.128)    | 0.930<br>(0.129)    | 0.928<br>(0.128)        | 0.933<br>(0.129)    |
| 24 months                                      | 0.895<br>(0.111)    | 0.901<br>(0.111)    | 0.907<br>(0.112)    | 0.879<br>(0.109)        | 0.887<br>(0.110)    |
| 48 months                                      | 0.755*<br>(0.105)   | 0.762*<br>(0.106)   | 0.771+<br>(0.107)   | 0.714*<br>(0.099)       | 0.725*<br>(0.101)   |
| 72 months                                      | 0.633**<br>(0.102)  | 0.644**<br>(0.104)  | 0.659**<br>(0.106)  | 0.583***<br>(0.094)     | 0.598**<br>(0.097)  |
| 96 months                                      | 0.566**<br>(0.107)  | 0.580**<br>(0.110)  | 0.597**<br>(0.114)  | 0.498***<br>(0.095)     | 0.515***<br>(0.098) |
| 120 months                                     | 0.317***<br>(0.055) | 0.330***<br>(0.057) | 0.339***<br>(0.059) | 0.218***<br>(0.039)     | 0.226***<br>(0.040) |
| Person-months                                  | 7679                | 7679                | 7679                | 7679                    | 7679                |

Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses

+ p&lt;0.10 \* p&lt;0.05 \*\* p&lt;0.01 \*\*\* p&lt;0.001

Source: 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey.

Including demographic variables in Model 3 also did not notably change the magnitude or statistical significance of the birth cohort and educational attainment effects. The Model presents other interesting observations, such as the effect of religiosity on repartnering behavior. We include a variable on religiosity since the Spanish society has long been rooted in Catholicism. Unsurprisingly, we find that women who practice a religion repartner less than those who do not practice any religion. In Model 4, we include union characteristic variables, many of which seem to influence repartnering behavior. For instance, there is a higher hazard of repartnering among ever-separated women who cohabited, but did not marry, in their first union. Having children impacts the hazard of repartnering, as expected. Parents repartner less than those without children. One's likelihood to repartner also decreases as entry into the first union formation occurs at later ages. The most noteworthy change in this Model is the weakening of the birth cohort effect among women born in the most recent cohort relative to the coefficients of previous models. The change is mainly driven by the inclusion of the union duration variable, which suggests that the length of one's first union can potentially explain some of the birth cohort effect.

Lastly, all variables are included in the full model (Model 5). The effect size and statistical significance of the birth cohort and educational attainment variables remain relatively more comparable to Model 4 than the previous. Meaning, the effects of birth cohort and educational attainment level on repartnering remain even after controlling for relevant covariates.

## CONCLUSIONS

Together with a 'separation surge,' many developed societies have observed a growing prevalence in repartnering with cross-national variation in the association between socioeconomic status and repartnering behavior. Yet we know little about repartnering dynamics in a contemporary Southern European context. This study aimed to provide new insights on the prevalence of repartnering and repartnering pathways in contemporary Spain. Namely, how repartnering behaviors have changed across birth cohorts and by level of educational attainment.

Previous research has found notable cross-national differences in the levels of repartnering (Gałęzewska 2016, Gałęzewska et al. 2017, Prskawetz et al. 2003). For example, in the early 2000s, 15-21% of women born between 1955-1964 in France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and the United Kingdom had ever repartnered by age 40 (Gałęzewska 2016). This share was 29%

in Norway and the highest at 31% in the United States. In comparison, repartnering rates have always been significantly lower in Southern European contexts. Among Italian and Spanish women born between 1955-1964, less than 5% had ever repartnered by age 40 (Gałęzewska 2016). Even in 2018, we find that only 6% of women born between 1975-1979 had ever repartnered by age 39 in Spain. The rapid rise in non-marital cohabitation and union instability has not led to a similar increase in repartnering, despite more ever-separated individuals now entering the (re-)partner market. Attitudes and norms may be major contributing factors to the low share of repartnering observed in Spain. For instance, women who have cohabited previously may want to repartner and avoid co-residential unions due to previous experiences with gender inequality in domestic tasks (Ghazanfareon Karlsson and Borell 2005) or increased care responsibilities (Upton-Davis 2012). Stigma around divorce may also still persist (Meggiolaro and Ongaro 2008), although to a lesser degree than before and particularly among older Spanish adults – who we have found tend to marry more than cohabit and seldom repartner. An additional reason for the low percentage of repartnering among Spanish adults could be due to their late home-leaving age. They may spend their dating phase during this prolonged period of living at home with their parents and move directly into more committed relationships when they finally leave the parental home. When studying the trend of repartnering over time, however, we observed a possible increase. Entry into a second union has also been occurring more quickly after union dissolution among recent cohorts. Although the incidence of repartnering remains marginal overall, our findings are still likely driven by the rise in the prevalence and societal acceptance of non-marital cohabitation and, most importantly, the recent emergence of serial cohabitation.

Similar to Western contexts (Brown and Wright 2017, Poortman 2007, Wu and Schimmele 2005), we find support for the decline in remarriages (Payne 2018; Schweizer 2019) and the replacement of remarriage with serial cohabitation as the most common form of repartnering in Spain. In line with existing studies of other societies (Heuveline et al. 2003, Gałęzewska 2016, Ni Bhrolchain and Beaujouan 2011, Poortman and Lyngstad 2007), we also find some evidence of an increasingly higher union instability among cohabiting unions relative to marital ones in modern-day Spain.

In terms of who repartners, there have been mixed results regarding the association between socioeconomic status and repartnering behavior (Bukodi 2012, de Graaf and Kalmijn 2003, Dewilde and Uunk 2008, Dommermuth and Wiik 2014, Eickmeyer and Manning 2018, Hiekel and Fulda 2018, Lichter and Qian 2008, Lichter et al. 2010, Pasteels and Mortelmans 2017,

Payne 2018). Studies from Britain and the United States considered the influence of employment status, instead of educational attainment as we did, and found the financially disadvantaged individuals were more like to repartner than their advantaged counterparts (Bukodi 2012, Lichter and Qian 2008, Lichter et al. 2010). A study on West Germany found no significant impact of educational attainment on repartnering behavior, specifically serial cohabitation (Hiekel and Fulda 2018). Our results on Spain suggest that the highly educated repartner more often than their lowest educated counterparts. This outcome is also observed in the Nordic countries (Dommermuth and Wiik 2014), and overall, supports our expectations based on the SDT perspective. In addition, highly educated women are also more likely to be serial cohabitators, while low and medium educated women are more likely to remarry.

Our findings do not align with predictions from the POD theory and the economic needs hypothesis, despite Spain having suffered severely from the 2008-2009 economic crisis and continues to experience high levels of wealth inequality (Amuedo-Dorantes and Borra 2018, Martínez-Toledano 2020), a relatively high share of employees with temporary contracts (Eurostat 2022c), and persistent low wages (Bonhomme and Hospido 2017). Therefore, this suggests that lower educated Spanish individuals may not feel the financial or emotional necessity to repartner in order to offset their losses after separation. A possible explanation may be the strong connection Spanish adults have with their parental home, based on the societal acceptance of delayed home-leaving. While we know that individuals may need temporary accommodation after separation (Mulder 2013), the option to return to their parental home can act as a protective effect for ever-separated individuals from having to repartner out of necessity. Instead, we observe that lower educated individuals in Spain may have a harder time repartnering. They form a second union less frequently and later after union dissolution than their higher educated counterparts. Since the higher educated individuals are typically more attractive in the (re-)partner market (de Graaf and Kalmijn 2005, Härkönen and Dronkers 2006, Kalmijn 2013, Matysiak et al. 2014), this may make the lower educated appear the less attractive option. On the other hand, the role of repartnering may be changing from a traditional version of the phenomenon (i.e., through remarriage) to a more modern one (i.e., through serial cohabitation). Remarriage was the predominant repartnering pathway among earlier cohorts, though it has now been replaced by serial cohabitation among the younger Spanish adults. This may indicate how repartnering is becoming part of the contemporary family formation process, with individuals experiencing multiple relationships before settling down. However, non-marital repartnering has been found to be a strong predictor for low fertility (Andersson et al.

2022). Spain has already experienced three decades of very low fertility, and the modest rise in serial cohabitation we may be observing over time could imply a negative association with total fertility. Although we found repartnering rates to be negligible, the progression of this phenomenon and its association to fertility should be monitored over time in Spain.

Our study offers new insights on repartnering dynamics in Spain, but it is not without its shortcomings. The sample of ever-separated and -repartnered Spanish individuals was limited and impeded us from directly analyzing how the intersectionality between birth cohort and educational attainment level influences repartnering behavior. Therefore, we practice caution when drawing conclusions from our descriptive findings, as further research with a larger sample is needed to draw stronger inferences. The sample of men was also limited, which led us to exclude them from this study. Further research on women's and men's norms and attitudes on repartnering are also necessary to complement existing repartnering research. Specifically, information is missing on how individuals view repartnering and whether those who do not repartner – in our case, the low educated – do not do so by choice or have trouble repartnering.

Although we find evidence of a potential increasing trend over time, repartnering remains a marginal phenomenon in Spain. The ongoing rise in non-marital cohabitation and union instability has not resulted in a similar increase in repartnering. Our study highlights the importance of exploring the increasingly complex and diverse partnership dynamics in various contexts, as it improves our understanding of the ongoing changes in a society – and its potential consequences – and allows for cross-national comparisons of family formation trajectories.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

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In this thesis, I explored the trends of partnership dynamics in the contemporary Spanish context. Across high-income societies, partnership dynamics have become more complex and diverse within the last two decades. Spain and other neighboring Southern European countries have typically been categorized as a late-comer in adopting changes in family formation processes. However, previous studies on Spain have documented that once these changes were adopted, they diffused rapidly (i.e., non-marital cohabitation, divorce). Therefore, to extend our understanding on how partnership dynamics have changed in Spain after a period of rapid structural and institutional transformation, an overarching question addressed in this dissertation was: How do partnership dynamics look in contemporary Spain? This is an important contribution as it provided an updated picture of the Spanish context and its potential implications on broader family formation processes. For example, how the increasing prevalence of certain partnership types, or lack of stable partnerships, may have influenced childbearing behaviors – where Spain had already experienced lowest-low levels of fertility for three decades. Understanding what demographic and socioeconomic characteristics were associated with what partnership types also helped to highlight how structural or institutional factors influenced the family formation processes of Spanish adults. The second overarching question explored in the dissertation was: How does Spain's current situation fit in the broader European context? This question allowed us to assess whether there were aspects particular to the Spanish case that may have influenced the observed family changes.

Partnership dynamics are important to study as they may have further implications for other parts of society. For instance, partnership dynamics are closely intertwined with family formation processes such as childbearing. Most countries have low levels of fertility and the changes in partnership dynamics are likely to have influenced this observation. Partnership dynamics are also likely to continue to shape future fertility levels. In the later life stage, partnership dynamics are becoming increasingly critical to explore as societies are ageing and individuals are living longer. Forming partnerships may be used as a way to counteract loneliness among the elderly. Changes in partnership dynamics may also represent changes in gender equality. For example, the normalization of different partnership types and family formation trajectories may illustrate how women, who still tend to be the primary caretaker of the family, are able to practice more flexibility and autonomy in how they prefer to live their lives. Overall, partnership dynamics and family formation processes continue to change within



and across societies over time. Therefore, it is essential to keep up with the trends of partnership dynamics in order to have a better understanding of how and why societies may be changing and consider what the implications may be.

The following subsections do three things. First, section 5.1 summarizes and presents the main takeaway points from each empirical Chapter. Next, the Discussion (section 5.2) ties together the findings from the three Chapters with the main research questions from the Introduction. This section also incorporates these findings from the contemporary Spanish context to the broader literature that exists on partnership dynamics. Lastly, section 5.3 reports the limitations of each Chapter and considers possible directions for future research.

## **5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

### *Chapter 2: Partnership dynamics and the fertility gap between Sweden and Spain*

While there has been a significant increase in childbearing among single mothers without partners, the majority of childbearing still occurs within a partnership. We compared partnership dynamics of two high-income societies with below-replacement levels of fertility, Sweden and Spain, and assessed to what extent differences in the quantum and timing of stable partnership formation contribute to the fertility gap between the countries. We found that more young adults form stable partnerships in Sweden than in Spain, and Swedes also began forming partnerships earlier than the Spanish. This may be due to the delayed exit from the parental home among Spanish adults which may postpone other adulthood transition events, including stable partnership formation. Among Spanish adults, we observed that an earlier exit from the parental home could result in earlier and more partnership formation, and more importantly, higher levels of fertility than what has been observed. There were no notable differences by gender.

Overall, we found that a notable segment of differences in the fertility levels between the two countries is attributable to their differences in partnership dynamics – especially between ages 25-35 when having a stable partner is the most crucial for entering parenthood. This study contributes to existing literature on cross-national variation in fertility but may also have significant implications for understanding the role of partnership dynamics in explaining the observed differences in the level of fertility among high-income societies with below-replacement levels.

*Chapter 3: Living apart together in contemporary Spain: Diversity of meanings by life stage*

Transitions to adulthood are becoming more complex and diverse in high-income societies, with studies finding an increasing share of single young adults. However, singlehood does not necessarily mean that one is without an intimate partner. A notable proportion of ‘singles,’ in fact, are typically in living-apart-together (LAT relationships) meaning that they have an intimate partner that resides in a separate household. We found LAT relationships to remain prevalent among young adults in Spain, acting as a transition phase to co-residence with an intimate partner and a result of economic constraints among both men and women. Among older Spanish adults, LAT relationships are an emerging – yet marginal – partnership type that is based on choice and the desire for independence and individual autonomy. Overall, there were no substantial gender differences.

*Chapter 4: Trends in repartnering by birth cohort and education in Spain*

Following the rise in non-marital cohabitation and union separations, repartnering levels have increased among most high-income societies in recent decades. In Spain, however, repartnering remains a significantly marginal phenomenon and only a minor increase is observed over time. Among those at risk of repartnering, we found highly educated women repartner more frequently and more quickly after union dissolution than their lower educated counterparts. Theoretically speaking, this suggests that our results are more in line with the idea of the SDT, than that of the economic needs and Pattern of Disadvantage (POD) hypotheses. Features that are unique to the case of Spain, such as their prolonged attachment to the parental home, may protect Spanish individuals from having to repartner out of (economic) necessity. In addition, we observed changes in repartnering pathways by birth cohort. Older Spanish adults were more likely to remarry, whereas younger Spanish adults are more likely to serially cohabit. This chapter stresses that although repartnering in general has not taken off in Spain, we were still able to notice that serial cohabitation is becoming more common like in other high-income European societies. Future research should incorporate the perspective of Spanish men, as we excluded them from the analysis due to limited sample size of those who have ever separated or ever repartnered. Furthermore, qualitative studies on whether individuals have difficulty repartnering or choose not to repartner – and if not, why – would contribute greatly to our overall understanding of repartnering dynamics.

## 5.2 DISCUSSION

### *Stable partnership formation and fertility*

The importance of considering differences in partnership dynamics when analyzing cross-national differences in fertility levels are highlighted in Chapter 2. Variation in stable partnership formation behavior can explain up to 74% of differences in fertility before age 30 – specifically between Sweden and Spain. This finding suggests that having a stable relationship is closely related to fertility.

One contribution to these differences may be based on how advanced countries are in the Second Demographic Transition (SDT). Sweden is often considered a leader of the SDT, while Southern European societies such as Spain have been considered the laggards. Meaning, that the features associated to their respective stages in the SDT could contribute to the observed family formation behaviors. Non-marital cohabitation and childbearing out-of-wedlock have been normalized in Sweden long before they had diffused in Spain. Therefore, countries at more similar stages of the SDT may observe fewer differences in partnership dynamics and a smaller gap in fertility. We also found that earlier stable partnership formation among the Spanish could assist in the rise of individuals who would also have a first birth. Given that Spain is notorious for individuals leaving the parental home at older ages, our finding implicitly suggests that it is essential for young adults in Spain to be able to leave the parental home earlier in order to form stable partnerships earlier. Reflecting on the Swedish context relative to that of the Spanish, Chapter 2 demonstrated that differences in partnership dynamics may be shaped by the initial support received by young adults from their respective governments to establish residential and financial independence. Our conclusion is supported by Vitali (2010) who had documented that economic independence is indeed a necessity for Spanish young adults to nest-leave and have other living arrangements outside of the parental home.

Although we did not test this further, findings from both Chapters 2 and 3 call attention to one of the potential explanations of why these trends are observed in Spain – the growing difficulties faced by young adults to leave the parental home and co-reside with an intimate partner (Moreno and Almudena 2012). However, there are also many Spanish young adults that are unable to find the ‘right partner’ to form a stable relationship and family with (Esteve et al. 2021). High proportions of young Spanish adults ages 20 to 35 who, in 2018, were single and without a partner (Chapter 3). These proportions are higher in 2018 than they were in 1999 (only for women, see Castro-Martín et al. 2008). A recent study which documents the

increasing prevalence of singlehood across selected European countries (i.e., van den Berg and Verbakel 2022) corroborates the rise in singlehood we observed in Spain.

Recent studies have documented a rise in childbearing among single women without partners (Harkness et al. 2020). The majority of childbearing still occurs within stable couples, however, and stable partnership formation remains an integral part of the family formation process. In particular, co-residential partnership formation can be considered a prerequisite – or a type of social determinant (Esteve et al. 2020) – of fertility. There may be concerns regarding the increasing diversity of partnership types, including living-apart-together relationships and repartnering, impact family formation processes, such as childbearing, over time. On one hand, recent studies on repartnering – forming a second or higher-order union – and fertility have found that repartnered individuals tend to have a(nother) child in their new relationship (Thomson et al. 2020). This suggests that repartnering may positively influence childbearing behavior. Although, as will be discussed more in-depth later, repartnering in Spain remains a marginal phenomenon. As Spain rapidly advances through the stages of the SDT, it is possible that it may not take long before the country witnesses a significant growth in repartnering and childbearing within second- and higher-order unions. Repartnering, however, may only be a positive influence on fertility in Spain when partnership formation, union dissolution, and repartnering, all occur within one's reproductive career. On the other hand, the persistent delay in leaving the parental home, rise in singlehood among young adults, and increase in diversity of partnership types may negatively influence the future fertility level of Spain – given that it has already observed three continuous decades of lowest-low fertility (Esteve et al. 2021). Prolonged singlehood delays stable partnership formation and could be disadvantageous for childbearing, particularly among women, as they must also consider their fecundity. Childbearing at older ages does not make up for the decline in completed fertility levels, which suggests that delayed stable union formation and childbearing are notable factors for the decline in fertility (Beaujouan et al. 2023).

#### *Increasingly diverse and complex partnership dynamics*

Across high-income Western countries, partnership dynamics have become increasingly complex and diverse in recent decades (Billari and Liefbroer 2010, Van Winkle 2018). Similar to what we found in this dissertation for Spain, recent studies on European societies have documented the emergence and increase of newer partnership types such as living-apart-together relationships (Liefbroer et al. 2015, Pasteels et al. 2017) and repartnering (Gałęzewska

2016). To add to the complexity of partnerships, the meanings attached certain union types can vary throughout the life course. For instance, the meanings attached to LAT relationships differ by life stage, with many young adults in LAT relationships as a transition phase prior to co-residing with a stable partner (Castro-Martín et al. 2008) and older adults in LAT relationships due to individual preferences and desires (e.g., maintaining independence) (Liefbroer et al. 2015, Pasteels et al. 2017).

In the West, the rise in repartnering has most likely accompanied the normalization of non-marital cohabitation and the development of the ‘separation surge’ (Kalmijn and Leopold 2021, Gałężewska 2016). Repartnering can take various pathways. For example, remarriage was once the most common repartnering pathway. However, countries such as the United States have observed a decline in repartnering rates particularly remarriage (Payne 2018). Another pathway that is gaining more traction in the modern-day is serial cohabitation or entering a second non-marital cohabitation after separating from a first non-marital cohabitation. Although literature on this phenomenon is still limited thus far, studies have found an increase in serial cohabitation in several Western societies (Bukodi 2012, Dommermuth and Wiik 2014, Eickmeyer and Manning 2018, Hiekel and Fulda 2018).

In Chapters 3 and 4, we document an increasing prevalence of a newer partnership type (i.e., LAT relationships – an emerging phenomenon among older adults in the later life stage) and find potential evidence of a modest increase in repartnering. The growing complexity and diversity of partnership dynamics in the contemporary Spanish context and the steady alignment of these trends with Western European societies may largely be attributed to the Spain’s advancements within the SDT. The SDT posited changes in family formation dynamics, including more complex partnership trajectories, to be driven by shifts in individual values and attitudes. In particular, the framework emphasized the emergence of ‘higher order’ needs such as individual autonomy and self-actualization (van de Kaa and Lesthaeghe 1986, Lesthaeghe 2010). Compared to other European countries, Spain has been a Late-comer in adopting changes in family formation such as non-marital cohabitation, childbearing within non-marital cohabitation, and divorce. The country only began observing significant developments in these phenomena around the turn of the century. However, changes have progressed rapidly in the last two decades. Literature on family formation processes in Spain during this period has documented cohabitation is no longer a non-marginal phenomenon (Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martín 2013), non-marital childbearing makes up 40% of all births (Eurostat 2022a), and divorce rates have become higher than the EU average since the mid-2000s (Eurostat

2021a). While the percentage of ever-repartnered Spanish adults in 2018 were notably lower compared to other developed societies (Chapter 4), we could expect that the country will witness a rapid increase in repartnering rates in the coming years given its previous trajectory. However, the strong ties young adults have to the parental home is a distinct Southern European feature that may stall repartnering. For example, Spanish adults may more easily be able to move back into their parental home after union dissolution – whether it be due to the sociocultural attachment mentioned and/or the close physical proximity – instead of having to repartner to recover their losses from separation (e.g., residence, financial resources, etc.). Another example relates to an additionally Mediterranean feature – delayed home-leaving. The prolonged period of Spanish adults living in the parental home may mean that most of one's dating phase occurs during this time. This may potentially increase the likelihood that they directly enter a stable relationship upon leaving the parental home.

This dissertation documents the development of newer partnership types and partnership formation behaviors in Spain compared to before. In the long run, these changes may have implications on other aspects of society. This dissertation calls attention to the importance of understanding and keeping track of emerging partnership types and the diversity in meanings they may hold across the life course – especially in a country such as Spain with a high life expectancy and significant ageing population.

#### *Individual-level determinants and partnership dynamics*

Relevant demographic and socioeconomic determinants were included in the empirical analyses throughout this thesis, particularly Chapters 3 and 4. In these studies, we found that demographic and socioeconomic determinants at the individual-level certainly influence an individual's partnering behaviors. Factors such as age, gender, economic status, educational attainment level, and previous family formation experiences can have an effect on what types of partnerships are formed by an individual, whether it be due to constraints or preferences shaped by one's circumstances.

We found in Chapter 2 that having a stable partner is the most crucial for entering parenthood between the ages 25 to 35. However, we also observed that certain partnership types, such as LAT relationships, are the most common among Spanish young adults up to age 35 (Chapter 3). This means that a notable segment of young adults in Spain are not in stable a stable partnership, and this may negatively impact first birth rates. Most young adults have cited that constraints are the main reason they are not co-residing with their LAT partner. In the later life

stage, more complex relationship types (i.e., LAT relationships) are emerging as an alternative to long-term unions such as cohabitation and marriage, most often driven by individual preference. Experiences associated with the later life stage can also influence one's preference when it comes to partnership type. For example, Chapter 3 reveals that adults with any previous experience in cohabiting relationships or adults with children tend to opt for maintaining separate households with their intimate partner.

In regards to educational attainment level, we found that the highly educated have a higher likelihood of experiencing 'newer' partnership formation behaviors (i.e., forming LAT relationships and repartnering) relative to their lower-educated counterparts. In Chapter 3 we also observed that the economic stability of both Spanish men and women contribute to the likelihood of co-residing with their intimate partner. Among those in a LAT relationship in 1999 (Castro-Martín et al. 2008), only the stable work status of men, and not women, mattered for co-residing with an intimate partner. In addition, we found in Chapter 3 that the economic stability of both Spanish men and women contribute to the likelihood of co-residing with their intimate partner. Among those in a LAT relationship in 1999 (Castro-Martín et al. 2008), only the stable work status of men, and not women, mattered for co-residing with an intimate partner. While a favorable work-life balance can positively influence partnership and family formation, differences in opportunities available to have such a balance can vary based on one's employment sector or field of education (Martín-García 2009, Martín-García and Baizán 2006, Martín-García and Castro-Martín 2013, Martín-García et al. 2017).

Furthermore, this dissertation highlights the changes in partnership dynamics that have occurred across birth cohorts. In Chapter 3, we found evidence for an increasing proportion of women below the age of 35 are in LAT relationships from more recent cohorts compared women from earlier birth cohorts in a previous study (i.e., Castro-Martín et al. 2008). In addition, results from Chapter 4 suggests a marginal increase in repartnering prevalence when contrasting the earliest cohort in the analysis to the most recent (1962-1969 vs. 1980-1984).

Overall, the contemporary trends in partnership dynamics of Spain are similar to that of Northwestern European societies, however, one notable difference is that more complex partnership types have begun to develop only recently in Spain – especially in the later life stage. The changes in partnership dynamics over the last decades seem to coincide with the country's progress in the SDT. Across birth cohorts, we observed an increasing prevalence of individuals who have experienced complex and diverse trajectories in family formation

processes. Furthermore, the general lack of gender differences found in the analyses of the dissertation (Chapter 2 and 3) may indicate Spain's developments toward more gender egalitarianism in partnership dynamics. A large segment of the partnership dynamics we observed in this collection of essays is likely influenced by the structural changes which occurred in Spain several decades ago. Specifically, women in Spain were massively entering the labor market from the 1980s after the end of the Franco dictatorship (León and Migliavacca 2013). More women were also starting to achieve higher levels of education, and there has been a higher proportion of women with a tertiary education than men (Esteve et al. 2016, Van Bavel et al. 2018). As a result, the changing role of women has most likely contributed to the changes in norms, attitudes, and behaviors associated with family formation dynamics among adults in Spain – also shaping the contemporary trends in partnership dynamics documented in this thesis.

Another example of Spain's advancements in the SDT is the growing importance of women's socioeconomic status in family formation that has been documented in Chapters 2 and 3. This finding is in line with existing studies from other Western societies (De Hauw et al. 2017, van Wijk et al. 2021) and is also corroborated by qualitative research done by Brinton and colleagues (2018) in which young Spanish couples remarked on the economic stability of both partners as an important factor for family formation. However, we also found some evidence of POD framework in the Spanish context. Namely, individuals who are economically unstable (i.e., unstable work contract or unemployed) are more likely to maintain a 'non-traditional' partnership type, such as a LAT relationship. This implies that this subgroup may be facing (financial) difficulties to begin co-residing with their intimate partner.

Spanish individuals with a higher socioeconomic status may be driving the initial increase in LAT partnerships and second or higher-order unions, but we could expect this association to weaken or even reverse as these behaviors spread across socioeconomic strata over time. Childbearing in non-marital cohabitations is one such phenomenon which studies have found to be more in line with the ideas of the POD than the SDT (Perelli-Harris et al. 2010). Meaning that individuals with low educational attainment are more likely to have children outside of a marital union. In addition, the association between socioeconomic status and divorce has changed from positive to negative in many high-income countries in Europe (Härkönen and Dronkers 2006, Matysiak et al. 2014) – a sign that changes in family formation may begin to coincide more with features of the POD framework as the new phenomenon diffuses within societies. There is evidence that suggests this trend is starting to take place with divorce in



Spain, where Bernardi and Martinez-Pastor (2011) had found that socioeconomic differences no longer exist among those who divorce. This could very well become the case for Spain with the emergence of new partnership types which may continue to change and shape family formation processes.

### **5.3 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

The complexity of partnership dynamics in contemporary Spain goes beyond the essays presented in this dissertation. Although these works predominantly relied on the recent dissemination of the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey, limitations based on nature of the data, the unavailability of information, and the restricted sample size (especially for men) shaped what could and could not be done.

The 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey is a cross-sectional dataset with valuable retrospective information. This means that the data utilized in the three essays is not longitudinal, and we were unable to comprehensively follow individuals over time or perform more complex statistical analyses. The nature of the dataset also implied that retrospective information relied on the respondent's memory of when personal demographic events occurred and, therefore, is susceptible to recall bias.

Accounting for the impact of socioeconomic characteristics, such as educational attainment, was problematic given that the analyses of the Chapter 2 were already conditioned on multiple aspects (i.e., stable partnership status and parenthood status by age) and limited the sample size of men and women. Incorporating socioeconomic status to the analyses of this Chapter is an ideal next step as we would expect differences in stable partnership formation and entry into parenthood across socioeconomic strata. Researchers could also perform the three exercises on additional high-income countries with differing levels of below-replacement fertility and test the idea that countries at more similar stages of the SDT may observe fewer differences in partnership dynamics and a smaller gap in fertility.

In the Chapter 3, data on LAT relationships were only available at the time of survey. This limited our analysis to existing unions in 2018 instead of also being able to consider their complete partnership histories, which may have included other instances of being in a LAT relationship. Future research accounting for previous instances of LAT relationships may improve our understanding on the role LAT relationships play within larger family formation trajectories. With this information on complete partnership histories (i.e., including LAT

relationships), future research could also consider the influence of non-coresidential partnership formation on entering parenthood (Chapter 2).

Similar to the limitations of Chapter 2, the sample for our analysis in Chapter 4 became too restricted to examine repartnering dynamics in contemporary Spain more extensively. Since repartnering remains a marginal phenomenon in the Spanish context, the small sample size meant accounting for both respondents' birth cohort and educational attainment in our analysis would produce an even smaller sample size and unreliable results. Given this, considering the intersection between birth cohort and education level in future research would add to the understanding of the socioeconomic gradient in repartnering behavior among the Spanish and partially account for the massive increase in educational attainment among Spanish women across birth cohorts. One of the reasons this Chapter only analyzed women was due to the small sample size of men. This means that we only understand half of the picture when it comes to repartnering dynamics in contemporary Spain. Since existing literature cites gender differences in repartnering behavior, researchers may seek to also analyze repartnering behaviors and pathways for Spanish men if data permits.

Additional qualitative research could help us understand why the changes in partnership dynamics were observed in Spain and what Spanish individuals consider important when making partnership and family formation decisions. Specifically, asking about (1) the intentions, desires, and obstacles of individuals to form – or not to form – stable partnerships (whether first- or higher-order), (2) the reasons why individuals are partnerless or in certain types of partnerships, and (3) the opinions individuals have in regard to diverse and complex partnership types. These insights would improve our understanding on why individuals form a specific partnership type over others. Qualitative research on how different partnership types is perceived across various subpopulations (e.g., based on age, socioeconomic status, parenthood status, marital status, etc.) would also be beneficial to improve our understanding of why particular groups may form certain partnerships.

In sum, researchers should continue to follow the diffusion of new partnership types in Spain over time and focus on changes in the socioeconomic gradient (or the lack thereof). While the dissertation has found evidence of Spain's progression in the SDT over the last few decades, certain findings have been more in line with the POD framework. The negative relationship between socioeconomic status and non-marital childbearing within Europe – where non-marital cohabitation has typically been led by the highly educated – and, moreover, the

reversing association between divorce and socioeconomic status in European societies highlight the complex and changing dynamics of partnership and family formation. Researchers could also then focus on what is driving the changes in the socioeconomic gradient of partnership dynamics in Spain and what the implications may be for future family formation trajectories.

## **5.4 FINAL REMARKS**

This dissertation presented a photograph of how partnership dynamics look in contemporary Spain following the country's rapid social, economic, and cultural change in recent decades. The three papers specifically touched upon the extent to which the quantum and timing of stable partnership formation can explain differences in levels of first births between two below-replacement level countries – Sweden and Spain –, documented the prevalence of relatively newer partnership types in the Spanish context – such as LAT relationships and higher-order unions –, and examined how individual-level determinants, life circumstance, one's life stage shape the formation of different partnership types. When it comes to the increasing complexity of partnership dynamics, this dissertation found evidence suggesting the partnership dynamics in the contemporary Spanish context has become more diverse and complex. Findings also suggested Spain has advanced in the Second Demographic Transition and has become more in line with the patterns of its Northwestern counterparts compared to two decades ago. However, the social and cultural norms particular to Spain – for example, having a strong attachment to the parental home or having lagged behind in the diffusion of non-marital cohabitation – still influence the country's partnership dynamics to remain distinct when compared to other high-income Western societies today. Spain may keep advancing in the SDT and continue to observe a gradual surge in diverse and complex partnership types over time. Given Spain's sociocultural characteristics and its trajectory through the SDT so far, changes in partnership dynamics will likely continue to occur on Spain's own timetable.

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