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Abstract

Cohabitation has grown strongly in Ireland over the last decade. We use large-scale surveys to characterise its extent and nature. We find it has almost tripled in incidence between 1994 and 2002. It is associated with being young, urban and in the labour market. Most cohabitations are short, and a high proportion end in marriage. Over 40% of new marriages are now preceded by cohabitation, making it close to a majority practice rather than the deviant behaviour it would have been a generation ago. In this respect it seems to be developing as an adaptation of marriage rather than an alternative to it.

1 Cohabitation: a normative change

Cohabitation has swept through most western countries over the past half century, but with differing pace and timing. As in many other domains, Ireland has lagged behind, but along with convergence in many other normative, behavioural and economic areas, rates of cohabitation have risen sharply in recent decades. What was once the preserve of only the most bohemian and the least respectable is now commonplace, indeed normal behaviour, for the younger cohorts.

In this paper we attempt to outline something of the extent and nature of the phenomenon, using large-scale survey data. Our intention is mostly documentary, to report on the growth in the phenomenon, but we also wish to examine some of the characteristics of cohabitation in Ireland.

Our key questions can be summarised as follows:

- How much cohabitation is there?
- How has it grown?
- Who cohabits?
- What happens to cohabitors?
  - how long do they stay in the state?
  - where do they end up?
- What is it doing to marriage?

We find approaching 6% of people to be cohabitating. Cohabitation is associated with the young, the urban, and those in the labour market. Cohabitors may well have children, but less likely more than one. Cohabitations are usually short, and a high proportion end in marriage. This, along with the fact that a high proportion of new marriages are preceded by cohabitation, prompts us to suggest that cohabitation is developing as an adaptation of marriage, rather than a true alternative.

2 The data sets

We utilise two main data sources, both part of the enormously important growth in the amount of micro-data freely accessible to researchers.[1]

The Labour Force Survey (evolved latterly into the Quarterly National Household Survey) is an EU-originated quarterly survey with a very large sample size, collecting household level information largely relevant to the labour market (questions on labour market activity, qualifications, household structure, and so on, constitute the core). It has particularly good claims to representativity, because of the elaborate sampling strategy, and its regular repetition provides very good information on trends over time.

The European Community Household Panel survey (ECHP) is also an (almost) EU-wide survey, but differs in that, as a *panel* survey, it interviews the same people on an annual cycle. This has the enormous advantage of providing information on change at the individual level, and on trajectories.

3 A growing phenomenon

Table 1 outlines the basic story: cohabitation has grown about two and a half to three times between 1994 and 2002. In 1994, according to our two data sources, just under 2% of women were cohabiting, but by 2001/2 the rate was closer to 5 or 6%. Considering the facts that cohabitation is a feature of younger cohorts, and has a much shorter duration than marriage, these figures represent a very significant phenomenon.

As Table 2, which uses Irish ECHP data only, shows, the proportions in cohabitation are much lower than those in marital relationships, because of these factors. The proportion married tends to drop over time, eaten into partly by cohabitation, but also by the never-married. That is, some,

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[1]The Irish Social Science Data Archive is the immediate source of Labour Force Survey/Quarterly National Household Survey, and is a very welcome development for Irish Social Science. Access to the ECHP is generally on a project-by-project basis.

Table 1: Percent women cohabiting, ECHP and LFS

Year	ECHP	LFS/QNHS
1994	1.9	1.8
1995	2.8	2.2
1996	3.6	2.8
1997	4.8	3.2
1998	4.2	3.5
1999	3.7	4.0
2000	3.9	4.5
2001	4.7	4.8
2002	-	5.8

Table 2: Marital status by year, ECHP, percentages

Year	Marital Status				Total
	Married	Cohabiting	Ex-married	Never married	
1994	55.0	1.9	9.3	33.8	100
1995	54.7	2.8	9.3	33.1	100
1996	53.7	3.7	9.3	33.4	100
1997	52.9	4.9	9.3	32.9	100
1998	52.3	4.4	9.7	33.7	100
1999	51.4	4.2	9.5	34.9	100
2000	50.5	3.9	9.5	36.0	100
2001	51.0	4.5	9.4	35.1	100

Source: ECHP, weighted

but not all, of the decline in marriage is made up by cohabitation.

3.1 Who cohabits?

What are the characteristics of cohabitants? Young? Urban? Educated? Employed? Table 3 breaks our samples down by gender and age group, and demonstrates that cohabitation is predominantly a phenomenon of the 20–34 age groups, with the male distribution, as usual, slightly older.[2] There are two likely explanations for this pattern – cohort and lifecourse: Many social changes come in cohort-wise, but also cohabitation is often a feature of the earlier part of the lifecycle, and (as we will see below) of relatively short duration.

3.2 Cross-national comparison

How high is the rate of cohabitation in Ireland? By recourse to the British Household Panel Study we can compare the Republic of Ireland with the four main regions of the United Kingdom. The BHPS is also a panel study, like the ECHP, with a large Great Britain sample since 1991, and large new samples in Scotland and Wales (from 1999) and Northern Ireland (from 2001). Table 4 shows the age breakdown for these four areas, plus Ireland, for 2001. Broadly, we see the similar, high, rates in the three Great Britain regions, with Northern Ireland being much lower. The Republic falls somewhere in the middle, with rates generally lower than Great Britain, and particularly lower for older age groups. The latter detail is plausibly due to the timing in the growth in cohabitation, with near absence in the older cohorts who have predominantly formed their partnerships before cohabitation become relative acceptable (short duration of cohabitation also has an effect, but this also holds for GB; cohabitation has been acceptable longer in Britain). Why Northern Ireland stands out so much is an interesting question. We could speculate that it might have to do with religious conservatism (in both traditions), or with patterns of migration (out-migration of young and less conventional, relatively little in-migration from Great Britain), but have no evidence to bring to bear on the issue.

3.3 Education

Education can be considered an index of culture and class, and will plausibly have an effect on values and behaviour relating to cohabitation, though it must be borne in mind that education has expanded rapidly, leading to strong cross-cohort differences which complicate analysis. Table 5 presents the educational distributions of married and cohabiting individuals, drawing on the ECHP and the LFS. The ECHP figures are restricted to the age range 20–49, to partly compensate for the effect of cohort change in both domains. Generally speaking, it seems that people with higher qualifications are somewhat more likely to cohabit than others,

[2] The LFS/QNHS shows a slightly different pattern, particularly for younger age groups. This is probably to slightly different methods of collecting the marital status information, but needs to be investigated.

Table 3: Cohabitation by age group, LFS and ECHP

	LFS		ECHP	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
16–19	2.8	3.5	0.6	1.1
20–24	9.7	9.8	6.8	8.4
25–34	7.3	5.7	8.8	9.8
35–44	2.6	2.0	4.1	3.4
45–54	1.4	0.9	2.5	0.6
55–59	0.9	0.4	0.8	0.3
60–64	0.4	0.4	0.6	0.3
65 plus	0.4	0.4	0.1	0.1
All ages	2.9	2.5	3.9	3.7

Source: LFS and ECHP, 1994–2001/2 pooled and weighted.

Table 4: Cohabitation in Britain, NI and the Republic

Age	England	Wales	Scotland	NI	RoI
15–19	3.0	2.7	2.0	0.5	1.3
20–24	16.9	16.5	20.1	9.9	9.6
25–34	21.6	21.2	22.7	8.1	11.1
35–44	11.3	10.6	10.5	2.0	3.7
45–54	5.7	4.9	5.2	2.3	1.2
55–59	5.4	3.6	2.0	0.5	0.8
60–64	2.9	0.4	2.2	0.3	0.7
65 plus	1.3	1.3	1.0	0.2	0.5
All ages	8.2	7.8	8.7	2.9	4.5

Source: UK, BHPS (2001); Republic of Ireland: ECHP (2001)

but the pattern is not entirely straightforward. For instance, the ECHP data suggests that males with post-second-level qualifications are slightly less likely to cohabit, though for females the picture is clearly the reverse. As both education and cohabitation differ very strongly across cohort, this two-way relationship is at risk of disappearing when further variables are taken into account, below.

3.4 A city thing?

It may be that new norms diffuse outwards from cities, or it may be that social structures in rural areas are necessarily more conservative because less anonymous, but it seems to be the case that cohabitation is more an urban phenomenon than a rural one. Using the ECHP for the age range 20–49, we see (Table 6) that this is indeed the case: for both males and females the ratio of urban cohabitants to rural ones is about 7.5:4.

3.5 Cohabitation and children

The relationship between partnership formation and children is of special interest with respect to cohabitation. Traditionally, one marries and then has children, but real experiences are more variable, and become even more so when cohabitation becomes common. Two mechanisms are of particular interest: cohabitations may result from extra-marital pregnancies (where in some cases in earlier generations the father may have disappeared), and the birth (or anticipated birth) of a child may prompt a cohabiting couple to "regularise" their situation. Table 7 throws some light on this issue by relating marital status to the presence of dependent children in the household. A number of interesting features emerge. First, cohabiting couples are far more likely than married couples to be childless, though more likely than the never-married. However, the proportion with one dependent child is very similar to that for married couples: clearly cohabitation does admit parenthood. But corresponding to the higher rate of childlessness in cohabitation is a much lower rate of larger families: cohabiting couples are less than half as likely to have two or more children. Cohort and lifecycle are again likely parallel explanations here: couples with more children are likely to be older and therefore less likely to cohabit, but cohabitation is also of short duration, often turning into marriage, particularly when children show up.

3.6 Social class

Social class may be thought to affect cohabitation rates by a number of mechanisms. Classes based on ownership of (small-scale) capital can be expected to put more weight on marriage. Other classes (professional–managerial in particular) may be quicker to incorporate normative change. Finally, cohabitation may be a response to deprivation, where

Table 5: Education and marital status: ECHP

CASMIN Educational Categories (ECHP, age 20–49)	Married			Cohabiting		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1abc Primary	7.9	7.8	7.8	7.8	4.2	6.0
2ab Inc/Int 2nd	42.0	29.6	35.4	40.6	26.5	33.5
2c Leaving Cert	26.2	42.0	34.6	32.8	39.2	36.0
3a Lower 3rd	9.8	9.5	9.6	6.8	13.3	10.0
3b Higher 3rd	14.1	11.2	12.6	12.0	16.8	14.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
LFS Educational Categories	**Married**			**Cohabiting**		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Not Stated	0.3	0.3	0.3	1.1	0.6	0.8
Primary	32.6	27.8	30.2	16.8	14.2	15.5
Lower Secondary	27.1	25.5	26.3	29.5	22.7	26.1
Upper Secondary	21.0	30.1	25.6	25.3	35.2	30.2
3rd, no degree	8.8	9.9	9.4	14.4	14.6	14.5
3rd, degree	10.1	6.4	8.2	12.8	12.8	12.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: LFS

Table 6: Rural-urban and marital statuses

	Male				
Rural/urban	Married	Cohabiting	Ex-married	Never married	*N*
Rural	54.1	4.0	0.8	41.2	6,216
Urban	48.6	7.5	2.1	41.8	9,834
Total	50.7	6.1	1.6	41.5	16,050
	Female				
Rural/urban	Married	Cohabiting	Ex-married	Never married	*N*
Rural	65.5	4.0	2.4	28.0	5,882
Urban	49.7	7.3	5.5	37.5	10,246
Total	55.5	6.1	4.4	34.0	16,128

Source: ECHP, weighted, age range 20–49

Table 7: Presence of children

	Number of children	Marital status				
Male		Mar	Coh	SDW	N-mar	Total
	0	25.4	51.1	80.0	85.2	53.1
	1	26.6	25.4	15.0	10.2	19.4
	2 plus	48.0	23.5	5.1	4.7	27.5
Female	0	27.1	51.2	45.2	71.5	44.7
	1	27.2	28.5	29.3	18.5	24.4
	2 plus	45.7	20.2	25.5	10.1	30.9
Total	0	26.3	51.2	54.4	79.0	48.9
	1	26.9	27.0	25.5	13.9	21.9
	2 plus	46.8	21.8	20.1	7.1	29.2

Source: ECHP, age 20–49

the economic barriers to cohabitation are lower than those to marriage (or where social welfare structures provide an incentive to cohabit rather than marry). Table 8 reports the percentages cohabiting by social class (Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarrero scheme, see *e.g.*, Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992). Of the hypotheses advanced above, only that relating to property seems to receive much support: small employers and farmers are disproportionately unlikely to cohabit. To a lesser extent, women in the salariat and supervisory/skilled-manual men are disproportionately likely to do so. But once again, cohort differences in cohabitation coincide with cohort differences in class structure, and this salariat/skilled-manual effect may be spurious.

3.7 Employment status

The influence of employment status on cohabitation may operate in somewhat similar ways to class. In particular, deprivation such as long-term unemployment may make one less likely to marry and therefore more likely to cohabit. The evidence in Table 9 is inconclusive in this respect, but we do see that the non-employed are disproportionately unlikely to cohabit.

4 A longitudinal perspective

The dominating advantage of panel studies such as the ECHP is the observation of the same individuals over time, so that change and trajectory can be analysed. This allows us to look at issues such as the duration of cohabitation (which cannot be done in cross-sectional surveys, even if duration in current relationship is asked). We can also look at what happens before and after cohabitation.

4.1 Cohabitation Duration

To get a proper picture of average duration, cross-sectional data is insufficient: first it can tell us only duration-to-date of ongoing spells, and second, current durations are affected as much by rate of starting as rate of terminating and it is the latter that we are usually interested in. Panel data, on the other hand, allows us to observe all spells that start within a certain period, and to track them until they, or the period of observation, end. The problem of incomplete durations can be dealt with using life-table or "survival" methodology, where the observed rate of completion is used to impute a profile of durations.

We therefore track individuals in the ECHP, and observe those entering cohabitations from one year to the next, and follow them until they leave the cohabitation (through breakup or marriage) or until they are no longer observed (that is, until 2001 or earlier if they drop out of the study). 175 individuals are observed to enter cohabitation during the panel period. Figure 1 shows the survival curve, which is an unbiased estimate of the proportion "surviving" to each time point, controlling for incomplete durations. We see that of all spells we observe to start, only about 70% are observed the following year, and little over half by the third. That is, the median duration of cohabitation spells observed to start in the Irish ECHP is a little over two years.[3] This is quite a short median duration, and is consistent with figures for Britain calculated by Ermisch and Francesconi (2000). We do observe longer durations, up to the maximum of seven years possible with this data set.

4.2 Entry to and exit from cohabitation

The second advantage of longitudinal data sets such as panel surveys is the possibility to track change at the individual level. Not only can we look at duration in a given state, but we can also examine entry to it, and exit from it. Indeed, we can also look at longer marital status histories to get even more perspective.

Looking at marital status "careers" gives us a good impression of the trajectories people take through this domain.

Looking at year-on-year "turnover-tables" allows us to ask questions such as:

- How unstable is cohabitation (relative to marriage)?
- Where do cohabitors end up?
- Is cohabitation a precursor to marriage?

4.2.1 Marital status "careers"

Observing people for up to eight successive years allows us to characterise their histories as a sequence of eight states. Simple inspection of these histories can be very informative, showing the variety of histories people experience in all its commonality and variation. If we allow four different marital statuses (married, cohabiting, separated/divorced/widowed, never married) this creates the logical possibility of over 65,000 possible histories. Many of these are extremely unlikely or even impossible in practice, so the observed number of different histories is much smaller. In fact, we observe 238 distinct histories in the Irish ECHP data, and it takes over 40 of the most common sequences to account for 95% of the cases. If we treat each year as an element in this way, there is therefore somewhat too much complexity for convenient overview. However, there is a case to be made that to treat sequences such as `NNNCMMM`, `NNCCM` and `NCMMMM` as distinct is not always necessary, and that a simplification into for instance `NCM` captures most of the essential detail, though at the cost of losing the representation of duration in each state. The ten most common of such reduced sequences account for more than 99.5% of cases, and are presented in Table 10. By far the most common sequence we observe is "married all the time". Almost half the sample is married for the whole period of observation – marriage tends to be a quite absorbing state, with quite high durations. Never-married the whole time is also very common, at 38%. Persons whose marriage has ended (through widowhood, separation or divorce) and who stay in this state represent the next most common trajectory, at 7%. Interestingly, persons whose marriage we observe to end are more common (1.6%) than those cohabiting

[3] By necessity, time is here treated in discrete units of one year, so "two years" really means "at least two and less than three".

Table 8: Percent cohabiting by social class

Social Class	Sex		
	Male	Female	Total
Higher salariat	6.1	7.3	6.5
Lower salariat	5.5	7.2	6.5
RNM	5.9	6.0	6.0
Employers	2.8	2.5	2.8
SE	6.2	4.7	6.1
Farmers	1.4	0.0	1.2
Superv/Skilled	8.3	6.8	7.9
Semi/unkskilled	5.3	4.7	5.1
Total	6.1	6.1	6.1

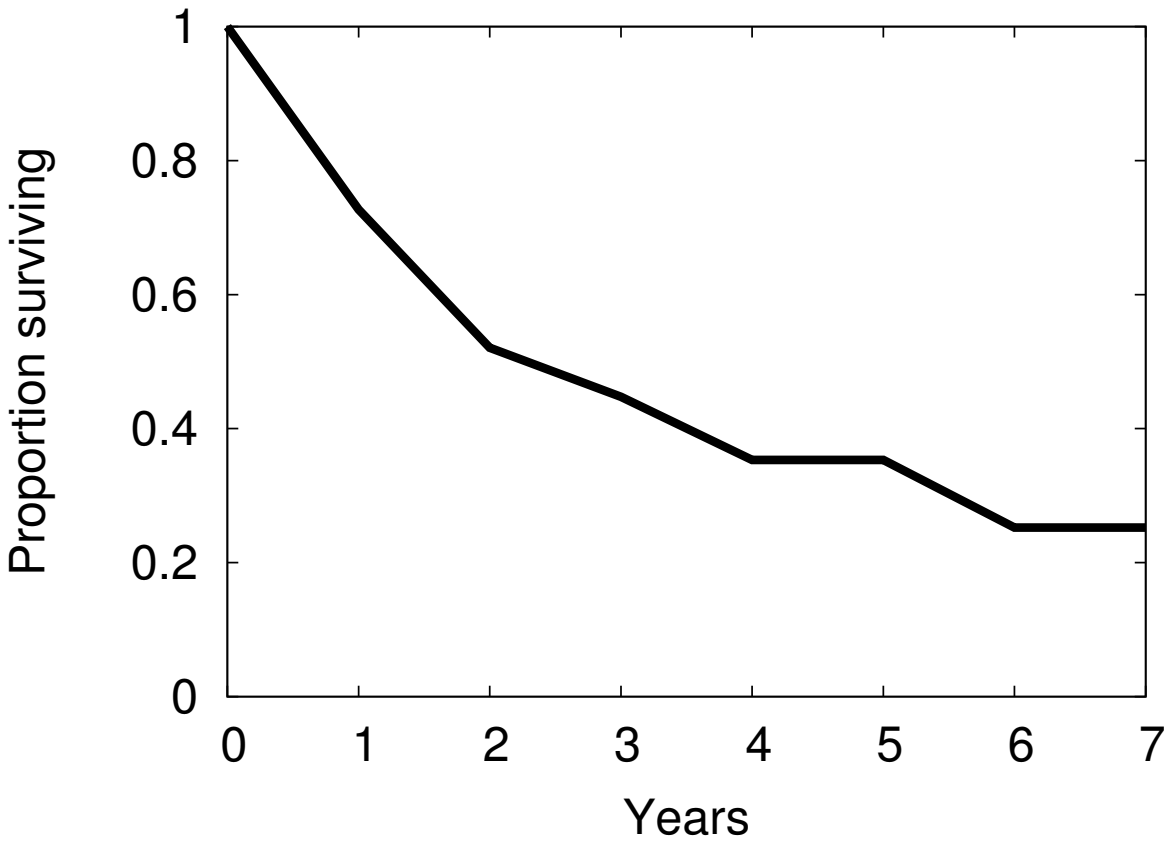
Source: ECHP, age 20–49

Table 9: Percent cohabiting by broad employment status

Employment Status	Sex		
	Male	Female	Total
Employed	6.4	7.8	6.9
Unemployed/scheme	7.7	5.7	7.0
Non-employed	2.7	4.3	4.0
Total	6.3	6.3	6.3

Source: ECHP, age 20–49

Figure 1: Cohabitation Duration



throughout (1.5%, this is largely because the pool of marriages is very much bigger than that of cohabitations, and because of the short median duration of cohabitations). We observe broadly similar numbers of people entering marriage "conventionally", that is, from "never-married" and without passing through cohabitation, at 1.2%.

The more detailed sequences are generally much less common, partly because the more detailed they are, the more scope there is for difference. The remaining four of the top ten, however, all feature cohabitation, three with entry to cohabitation from never-married, two with exits from cohabitation to marriage, and one with a return from cohabitation to never-married. What is perhaps most important to point out is that in these ten most common sequences, conventional entry to marriage (180 cases) is rivaled by entry from cohabitation (85 plus 38, or 123 cases). Cohabitation as a precursor to marriage is becoming commonplace.

4.2.2 Year-on-year turnover

While long trajectories give us an insight into development over time, we can get a sharper picture of the stability of the various marital statuses, their outcomes and antecedents by looking at year-on-year transition or turnover tables. That is, by tabulating "status last year" by "status this year" for all year-on-year pairs pooled. Table 11 presents this information in the form of outflow percentages (*e.g.*, for persons married in year $t-1$, what proportions are still married, cohabiting *etc.* in year t; that is, where people go) and inflow percentages (*e.g.*, for persons married in year t, what percentage were married, cohabiting *etc.* in year $t-1$; *i.e.*, where people come from).

Outflow percentages in the main diagonal summarise how retentive states are: how likely one is to be in the same state one year later. All four marital statuses are highly stable, though cohabitation is by far the lowest, at 80% – compared with marriage at 99.5% this is clearly low in relative terms. However, when we consider the 20% who leave cohabitation, we see that four out of five of them end up in marriage, with only one out of five terminations of cohabitation being dissolutions.[4]

Turning to inflow percentages, we see that of everyone married in year t, 1.7% were cohabiting the year before, and 2.3% were never-married. This means that over forty percent of new marriages come from cohabitation, and less than sixty percent from traditional singlehood. In some ways this is a more dramatic finding than the growth in absolute rates of cohabitation, because is suggests that cohabitation (as a prelude to marriage) is close to becoming a majority practice.

5 A multivariate approach

The foregoing analysis has been largely bivariate, looking at the relationship between marital status and other variables one at a time. Because the rate of cohabitation and many of these variables trend over time, the bivariate relationships are very likely to be spurious or at least misleading. Therefore we present a multivariate analysis, looking at the effects on the rate of entry to cohabitation (and alternatively marriage) of the various predictors of interest, simultaneously. The structure of the analysis takes all person–year observations up to the first entry to cohabitation (or marriage in the alternative analysis) or the end of observation, and uses a logistic regression predicting the odds of forming a partnership. This focus on entry to marriage or cohabitation is more discriminating that a simple modelling of the chance of *being* married or cohabiting, partly because of the long duration of marriage which will necessarily cause association with being older and also with characteristics that may post-date rather than pre-date the start of the relationship. In other words, modelling *being* in these states rather than *entering* them will confound characteristics associated with entry with those associated with staying in the state.

This approach can be considered a rough and ready form of discrete-time hazard rate modelling, and the parameter estimates interpreted as effects on the hazard of entering the destination state, with the parallel models implying an approximate "competing risks" perspective.[5]

Table 12 presents two models for each destination. The first model uses education, class, the presence of children (whether present at t, whether one arrives between t and $t+1$), employment status, and rural/urban residence. Because age is such an important effect (for both cohort and lifecycle reasons), it is left out of the first model, and then entered in the second model: we suspect that some of the other effects (such as education) are really simply proxies for age – younger people cohabit, and younger people are more likely to have higher qualifications.

Looking at the first model, for cohabitation as the destination, we see that education has a significant effect overall. All four of the estimated effects are significantly different from the reference category, low/no qualifications. That is, all higher groups are more likely to cohabit than those with low or no qualifications, though the effect is not ordinal – the group most likely to cohabit are those with complete second level.

The second block of parameter estimates represents social class. This had only a fairly weak effect in the bivariate analysis (with small proprietors least likely to cohabit). Similarly here few of the categories show significant effects, with only skilled/supervisory manual and unskilled manual showing borderline significant effects (both being

[4]This figure should be treated with a little circumspection: in panel studies, partnership dissolution, be it divorce or cohabitation breakup, is strongly associated with dropping out of the survey, particularly for males. In the case of household breakup, all parts are meant to be followed, but typically the male changes address and is lost to follow-up.

[5]This is "rough and ready" primarily because of its cavalier treatment of left-censoring and its associated ignoring of duration dependence. Moreover, the competing risks perspective is markedly imperfect, since entry to marriage is so often through cohabitation, so they are not truly independent outcomes.

Table 10: Ten most common "careers"

Sequence	Freq.	Percent	Cum %
M	7703	49.07	49.07
N	5951	37.91	86.98
X	1079	6.87	93.85
MX	254	1.62	95.47
C	230	1.47	96.94
NM	180	1.15	98.09
NC	85	0.54	98.63
CM	80	0.51	99.14
NCM	38	0.24	99.38
NCN	27	0.17	99.55

M: married; C: Cohabiting; X: Sep/Wid/Div; N: never married

Table 11: Annual turnover in marital status

	Status at $t+1$			
Status at t	Married	Cohabiting	Sep/Div/Wid	Never married
	Outflow percentages			
Mar	99.5	0.0	0.5	0.0
Coh	16.4	79.5	0.1	4.0
SDW	0.4	2.3	95.1	2.1
Nev	2.5	3.0	0.2	94.3
	Inflow percentages			
Mar	96.0	0.3	7.9	0.0
Coh	1.7	73.4	0.2	0.5
SDW	0.0	1.1	88.8	0.1
Nev	2.3	25.2	3.1	99.4

Source: ECHP, 1994–2001 pooled

more likely to cohabit than the reference category, the higher salariat).

The effect of children variables really partition individuals into three categories: those with children at t, those without children at t but with children at $t+1$, and those without children at both times (the implicit reference category). This use of information from the same timepoint as the outcome is contrary to the usual spirit of hazard modelling, but it can be useful. In particular, where the outcome is affected by changes that happen on a shorter timescale than the inter-wave period (*i.e.*, a year) it can help highlight these, and leaving them out may lead to misleading results. For instance, if having children raises the likelihood of marrying, but does so particularly strongly for a few months before and after the birth, then having a child and not being married a year ago may have a negative effect on marrying because you did not marry at the "typical" time (presumably for some unobserved reason which is likely to still be in operation).[6] When we partition the presence of children like this we see that those who already have children are less likely to enter cohabitation than those without (at both times), while having your first child (or first pregnancy, since the birth could precede the marriage) is strongly associated with entry to cohabitation (raising the odds by a factor of over 10).

The employment status parameter estimates suggest that there is little difference between the employed and unemployed, but that the non-employed are distinctly less likely to enter cohabitation. Our tentative *ad hoc* speculation centres around the idea that those either employed or unemployed are active in the labour market and therefore in the public sphere, and are thus more exposed to potential partners and to new norms.

Finally, we see that urban residence has a strong significant effect, raising the odds of entering cohabitation by almost 90%.

Marriage as a destination Comparing these results with those for marriage as the destination, we see similarities and differences. Education has a broadly similar effect, with those with low qualifications least likely to marry. Under social class, we see that compared to the higher salariat, the routine non-manual class, farmers and the two manual working classes are less likely to marry. Having children and getting children are both positive effects, and under employment status we see that compared with the employed, both the

[6] Halpin has used this strategy before in Ermisch and Halpin (2004).

unemployed and non-employed are distinctly less likely to marry. Rural/urban residence has no effect.

Bringing age in When age is added to the model, we would expect some change in other variables, like education, which are associated with age. This is borne out in the case of education, which loses all significance: its apparent effect on entry to cohabitation seems to be due to change in the distribution of qualifications across cohorts, and not to real differences across qualification groups. The effects of social class also become insignificant. The effects of children, employment status and rural/urban residence do not change substantially. The effects of age itself correspond well with the picture in Table 3, with those in their twenties by far the most likely to enter cohabitation, followed by those in their late teens.

The addition of age in the marriage model has a similar effect on education, but has less effect on class: the routine non-manual class, supervisory and skilled manual and semi- and unskilled manual classes retain their lower rates of entry to marriage. The effect of employment status is largely unchanged.

The age profile for entry to marriage is substantially different from that for entry to cohabitation, however, with a peak in the thirties and a higher rate for those forty plus than for those in their late teens.

6 "Homogamy": partner's characteristics

How do the characteristics of the (potential) partner affect the formation of cohabitation or marriage? It is known that in partnership formation "like attracts like" (for a discussion of the role of education in Irish and British marriages, see Halpin and Chan, 2003), but does this differ between cohabiting and married pairs? To investigate this we have created tables of couples classified by education or employment status, using ECHP data. We then fitted loglinear models which impose the assumption that the relationship between the male's and the female's characteristics are the same for both partnership types. We then examined residuals (the difference between the predicted value under this assumption, and the observed value, standardised to have an approximately standard normal distribution). The pattern of residuals in each sub-table (*i.e.*, male characteristics by female characteristics, for cohabitation or for marriage) indicate how well the assumption fits the data, and where precisely it fits badly. Residuals well outside the range ± 2 indicate categories where the assumption fits particularly badly.

Table 13 shows residuals for the table of educational characteristics (the categories are collapsed a little for reasons of stability). A positive residual indicates a combination of male's and female's characteristics where we see more people cohabiting than we would expect under our assumption. There are three residuals large enough to be of interest. If both partners have low to intermediate levels of education, we observe many fewer than expected cohabiting (and correspondingly many more married). On the other hand, if one partner has low/intermediate and the other has complete second level education, we are more likely than expected to see them cohabiting rather than married. This may be an artefact of cohort change, in that older people might be far more likely to have low education, and to marry rather than cohabit.

Table 14 reports analogous residuals for an employment status partner table. Here the pattern suggests that if both partners are unemployed, and to a lesser extent if both are employed, we are more likely to see them cohabiting than married, whereas if one is employed and the other unemployed, the opposite is true. Perhaps oddly, pairs where one or both partner is non-employed show no large residual. This may be an artefact of the relative duration of the two states, where married couples will have much longer durations on average, and their joint characteristics may have evolved together as a consequence of being married rather than a cause.

7 Conclusions

In this brief overview of survey data evidence on the topic, a number of features emerge clearly. Cohabitation is increasingly common. It is predominantly a feature of younger people and is more common in urban areas. We can reasonably expect that as the population ages, cohorts now cohabiting in their twenties and early thirties will increase the rate of cohabitation at older ages, and that younger cohorts again will find cohabitation even more acceptable.

For all the growth in the rate of cohabitation, it does not seem to be developing as a major "sticky" state. First, the average duration is quite low. Second, it is very likely to terminate in marriage. In this respect it certainly does not seem to be emerging as true lifelong alternative to marriage, but is functioning increasingly as a standard route into marriage. It is likely that in the near future, new marriages will be more likely than not to be preceded by cohabitation.

Overall, quoting Ermisch and Francesconi (2000) on cohabitation in Great Britain, it's "not for long, but here to stay".

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Table 12: Logistic regression, entry to cohabitation

	Cohabitation				Marriage			
	$\hat{\beta}$	sig.	$\hat{\beta}$	sig.	$\hat{\beta}$	sig.	$\hat{\beta}$	sig.
Educ (ref=Low)								
Intermediate	1.27	0.002	0.18	0.684	0.89	0.016	0.35	0.373
Complete 2nd	1.66	0.000	0.17	0.704	1.06	0.004	0.40	0.311
Lower 3rd	1.08	0.036	-0.42	0.443	1.30	0.001	0.53	0.215
Degree	1.25	0.015	-0.21	0.707	0.90	0.030	0.18	0.684
Class (ref=Higher salariat)								
Lower salariat	0.38	0.402	0.38	0.408	-0.12	0.635	-0.09	0.724
RNM	0.68	0.117	0.30	0.496	-0.69	0.005	-0.63	0.011
Employers	0.97	0.114	0.97	0.117	-0.07	0.871	-0.18	0.685
SE	-0.32	0.703	-0.29	0.728	0.04	0.924	-0.07	0.858
Farmers	0.36	0.569	0.55	0.393	-0.66	0.075	-0.49	0.195
Superv/Skilled	0.82	0.072	0.38	0.407	-0.45	0.078	-0.48	0.063
Semi/unkskilled	0.92	0.047	0.42	0.374	-0.81	0.004	-0.81	0.004
Kids at *t*	-0.40	0.026	-0.38	0.050	0.42	0.002	0.49	0.000
Get kids	2.38	0.000	2.03	0.000	2.24	0.000	2.17	0.000
Employment (ref=Employed)								
Unemployed	0.35	0.154	0.25	0.312	-0.85	0.001	-0.90	0.001
Non-employed	-1.09	0.000	-0.49	0.051	-1.58	0.000	-1.12	0.000
Urban	0.63	0.000	0.63	0.000	-0.11	0.371	-0.16	0.190
Age (ref=16–19)								
20–29			0.58	0.066			3.15	0.000
30–39			-0.28	0.428			3.56	0.000
40 plus			-2.06	0.000			1.81	0.017
Intercept	-7.77	0.000	-5.98	0.000	-4.38	0.000	-6.74	0.000

Table 13: Residuals for educational homogamy

Residuals for cohabitation vs marriage				
Husband	Wife			
	Interm	Complete	Lower 3rd	Degree
Intermediate	-3.42	3.63	0.45	-1.50
Complete 2nd	3.01	-1.68	0.40	-1.92
Lower 3rd	-0.12	-0.52	-1.09	2.12
Degree	1.50	-2.52	-0.08	1.81

Source: ECHP, standardised Pearson residuals

Table 14: Residuals for employment homogamy

Residuals for cohabitation vs marriage			
Husband	Wife		
	Employed	Unemployed	Non-employed
Employed	2.35	-3.69	-0.39
Unemployed	-3.34	3.55	1.36
Non-employed	1.59	0.72	-1.80

Source: ECHP, standardised Pearson residuals