Transitions into first partnerships in the United Kingdom: Comparing across cohorts and time

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Background

• Concerns about lone parenthood and relationship instability
• Relatively little academic interest in marriage, as a particular relationship status
• Retreat of young away from marriage – cohabitation filling that gap?
  • Why? Class factors, attitudes, views about marriage.
• Social stratification of marriage
Single men marrying single women (number)
Median age at marriage [1851-2014]
## Women’s age distribution at marriage (single)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Under 20</th>
<th>20-24</th>
<th>25-29</th>
<th>30-34</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2,134</td>
<td>27,874</td>
<td>72,782</td>
<td>49,713</td>
<td>189,683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per 1,000 single</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>6,573</td>
<td>45,085</td>
<td>68,544</td>
<td>45,197</td>
<td>193,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>10,784</td>
<td>79,699</td>
<td>76,621</td>
<td>27,326</td>
<td>206,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>46,476</td>
<td>144,313</td>
<td>49,598</td>
<td>12,303</td>
<td>260,359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>98,066</td>
<td>147,277</td>
<td>39,501</td>
<td>9,207</td>
<td>304,626</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Proportion/1000 of women ever-married by age and birth cohort
Data

• The UK Household Longitudinal Survey (UKHLS) “Understanding Society”.
  • 2009/10-> large household panel survey (about 50,000 people)
  • Details of life histories from first wave (2009/2010) retrospectively
  • Main population survey – plus ethnic minority booster sample
  • (today, analysis for women)

• Attitudinal data – British Social Attitudes Survey 1983-
  • Sampling 3,000 – 4,500 people most years
  • Relatively consistent questions over time
  • Face to face survey
Analysing sequences

16-29s (10 first sequences)

50-59s (10 first sequences)
Possible analytical approaches

• Event history analysis (survival analysis) of time until a transition made, or data ends
• Social sequence analysis looking at particular time period and all states
  • Somewhat derived from DNA analysis
Cohabitation – new state, but not enough to replace marriage
Education matters

1 = College degree
2 = ~18y quals
3 = ~16y quals or less
(rates of change of status)
Native population rather than newer arrivals
Believe that extra-marital sex is “always wrong”
“People who want children ought to get married” [agree + strongly agree]
Other relevant attitudes

• Pre-marital sex rarely a problem (only 70+s holding out – with ¼ thinking it always or usually wrong).

• Marriage not about having children, and not about financial security (true for all, especially younger people).

• Oddly (?) around ¾ of all ages think there is little difference between being married and staying together.

• Large proportions (~½) incorrect about ‘rights’ accruing to the unmarried in the UK.
Findings

- Cohabitation filling some of the reduction of married numbers, but more out of relationships
- Marriage (along with other evidence) becoming more concentrated among better-education (and likely enhancing advantage, assortative links)
- Attitudinal evidence – idealized view of marriage, special on some dimensions (fidelity) though not others (raising children); however, also seen as the same as cohabitation and (wrongly) as conveying rights.
Research tools

• R – free access to advanced visualization, works well with Stata and SPSS files.
  • Sequence plots with traMineR [life Trajectory Miner in R]
• RMarkdown – (relatively) easy integration of text and analysis.
ENDS ... Questions