

Living apart together: comparing older adults in different relationship types

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Abstract

Recent research on people in 'living-apart-together' (LAT) relationships shows that older adults are more likely to be in these relationships by 'choice'. In comparison with young adults and those in middle adulthood, older adults were more likely to state that they made a definite decision to live apart, that they did not intend to live together within the next three years, and that they were unlikely to get married. They also had the longest duration times of LAT (Reimondos et al. 2011). Some researchers have recently suggested that people who opt for a LAT relationship do so because they value independence. Further, people who opt for LAT because they value independence tend to have more liberal views than people in other types of relationships and they tend to be higher educated and less religious. However, while many people lived apart for ideological reasons, it was also clear that others lived in these arrangements because of necessity (Liefbroer et al. 2011).

This paper investigates the situation of people in LAT relationships compared with other relationships (or absence of). While it is clear from previous research that there are substantial numbers of people who live apart from their partner in Australia, little is known about their characteristics. This paper will contribute to understanding the types of people who live apart. Using HILDA data this paper compares older Australians who are in a LAT relationship with people who are married, cohabiting, and single in the following domains: (1) relationship histories; (2) attitudes; (3) socio-economic background; and (4) health and wellbeing. The findings have implications for the treatment of those in a LAT relationship as 'single' in models where relationship type is associated with outcomes.

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Introduction

In Australia, like other Western countries, there is diverse number of ways that people can share their lives with significant others. The dominant forms that are commonly distinguished are still those who are single (which includes people who have never been married, and those who are separated, divorced or widowed), those who are cohabiting, and those who are married (Roseneil 2006). This remains the dominant way that relationship information is collected in official statistics and in sample surveys. This typology reflects the dominant view that important relationships are live-in relationships (Roseneil 2006), and is also due to the survey tradition of collecting data about individuals within households, leaving aside significant others who live elsewhere (Asendorpf 2008; Strohm, *et al.* 2010).

However, recent estimates show that a substantial proportion of the adult population are living in a form of partnership known as 'living-apart-together' (LAT) relationships. Broadly, people who are in a LAT relationship identify themselves as being in a relationship with someone that they do not live with (Trost 1998). Reimondos *et al.* (2011) found that the percentage of Australians that were in a non-cohabiting union was about nine per cent (about 1.1 million people), which represents 24 per cent of those who are generally classified as 'single'. This estimate of nine per cent of the adult population is consistent with research available from other countries. Strohm, *et al.* (2010) found around 6-7 per cent in the US, while Milan and Peters (2003) estimated about 8 per cent in Canada, as did Beaujouan, *et al.* (2009) for France. We note that it is difficult to make international comparisons of the prevalence of LAT relationships as individuals in these unions are 'hidden populations' who not registered in any official statistics (Borell & Ghazanfaraeon Karlsson 2003). The estimates provided are made from sample surveys, but these comparisons are often based on different data because (1) there is no set definition of LAT; and (2) the sample frame often varies between surveys. However, it seems that those in LAT relationships make up a fairly substantial minority in the countries where information is available. It is worth noting that being in a LAT relationship is more common in the younger ages than older ages: this suggests that for older people it is not a normative relationship experience.

As interest in LAT relationships has only emerged in recent years, little is known about this form of partnership. Haskey and Lewis (2006, p.38) note that many of the same kinds of questions that were raised about cohabitation when it first came to be widely recognized as a distinct form of partnership apply to LAT relationships. These questions include understanding both who is involved, as well as what effects being in this type of relationship has on peoples lives. In this paper we examine the case of LAT relationships for Australians aged 45-64. Specifically we look at relationship histories, socioeconomic differentials, attitudes and health and wellbeing. We compare those in LAT relationships with those who are married, cohabiting, or single. As noted by Coleman, *et al.* (2000), empirical research on older people should investigate non-traditional living arrangements.

Background

De Jong Gierveld (2002; 2004; Gierveld et al. 2000) has been a frontrunner in investigating living arrangements of older people, and of partner relationships following relationship dissolution. Her research argues that new cohorts of older people have 'dramatically different marital and partner histories that set them apart from previous generations' (Gierveld, et al. 2000, p.1). Diversity of relationship types is certainly commonplace in many Western-industrialized countries including Australia. Accompanying these different behavioural patterns are also shifts in attitudes and values. These attitudinal shifts reflect more accepting and liberal views, a concept known as the second demographic transition (van de Kaa 1987, 1994; Lesthaeghe & Surkyn, 1988). In the case of LAT relationships, ideational changes have made alternative forms of partnerships more acceptable in society, and couples who find themselves in a relationship with a new partner who lives elsewhere may not feel as great a social pressure to settle down together in a common residence as they would have in the past (Levin, 2004).

Of course, because of the lack of historical data on LAT relationships there is little evidence to state definitively that there has been growth in the proportion of LAT relationships. In fact, it is difficult to know if there has been a real rise in the prevalence of non-residential unions or whether it simply attracts more attention than before (Ermisch & Siedler, 2008). The empirical evidence that does exist is mixed: in Sweden there was an increase in the prevalence of non-residential relationships over the periods 1993, 1998 and 2001 (Levin, 2004) and an increase was also found in Japan between 1982–1997 (Iwasawa, 2004). Ermisch & Siedler (2008) found no evidence of an increase between 1991 and 2005 Germany. However, it is likely that LAT relationships are a growing proportion, simple because there is an increase in people whose marital status is 'single'.

Research which has investigated the permanency of LAT relationships finds that there appears to be two dominant forms of LAT partnerships. The first type is a 'transitory' type arrangement, where people engage in a relationship which is short-lived or which ultimately transforms into a live-in relationship. The second type is a more permanent type of arrangement, where people continue in a LAT relationship without intentions to live together, although it should be noted that the reasons for choosing not to live together can be through either personal choice or because they have constraining circumstances.

It has been found that the meaning of LAT relationships depends on what stage of the life course an individual is at (Beaujouan et al., 2009; Strohm et al., 2010). LAT relationships appear to be more provisional and involuntary among younger cohorts. The geographic location of places of work or study, as well as financial and housing factors may prevent young people from moving into a joint residence with their partner. Involuntary relationships may also be the result of caring responsibilities for children or elderly parents (Levin, 2004). While these circumstances prevent individuals from moving in together, the possibility to cohabit is there if and when circumstances change.

Alternatively, LAT relationships can be more permanent arrangements that allow for intimacy but also autonomy and independence, and this appears to be particularly the case for older individuals (Levin, 2004). Other reasons for actively wanting to live apart include the feeling of not being ready to live with someone, and concern about children (Beaujouan et al., 2009). Qualitative evidence suggests that those who are voluntarily living apart include individuals who have gone through a divorce or a relationship breakdown, experiences which have left them particularly 'risk averse' (de Jong Gierveld, 2004; Levin, 2004; Roseneil, 2006).

This difference between the different styles of LAT relationships between younger and older cohorts is evident in Australia. Reimondos et al. (2011) found that those who were aged 45+ were distinct from other age groups in a number of areas. Firstly, they were more likely to have been in the relationship for a longer time than other age groups: nearly half of the people in this age group were in a relationship that had lasted 3 years or more, compared to less than a third of respondents in all the other younger age groups. Secondly, they tended to meet their partner less frequently than other age groups.

Analysis which investigated the main 'typologies' of LATs (Reimondos et al. 2011: based on the method used by Beaujouan et al. 2009 for France), found four groups: (1) 'Under 25s' mainly people aged 18–24, a relatively homogenous group with no children, no previous history of marriage, and few cases of cohabitation; (2) 'Young adults, previously defacto', which consisted of adults between the ages of 25–34, mainly childless people who had cohabited; (3) 'Single parents' which consisted mainly of people over 30, many of whom had been married and had at least one resident in the household child; (4) 'Older, previously married', which was a fairly homogeneous group, consisting mainly those aged 45 and over who had been previously married.

Using this typology, those cohorts with older respondents were clearly distinguished from those in the younger ages (Reimondos et al. 2011). The 'older, previously married' were much less likely to have an intention to live with their partner than the other groups (32% intended to live together). They were also more likely to state that it was a definite decision to live apart (72%), and 68% said that they were unlikely to marry.

These results closely resemble other international studies. Older respondents, most of who were widowed or divorced, were the most likely to be 'voluntarily' living-apart-together and to have little intention to transition into a cohabitation. While the reasons behind the choice are not known, the wish to maintain a degree of independence and autonomy is likely to be an important consideration (Beaujouan et al., 2009). Qualitative research of LAT relationships in later life in other countries highlight that for the elderly concerns about the practicalities of sharing living quarters with someone else and having to adjust to another person's habits, the wish to remain autonomous and to maintain or continue relationships with children and grandchildren are important factors (de Jong Gierveld, 2002). More research is needed to see how older individuals living in LAT relationships compare to those in other relationship settings.

Data & Method

Data

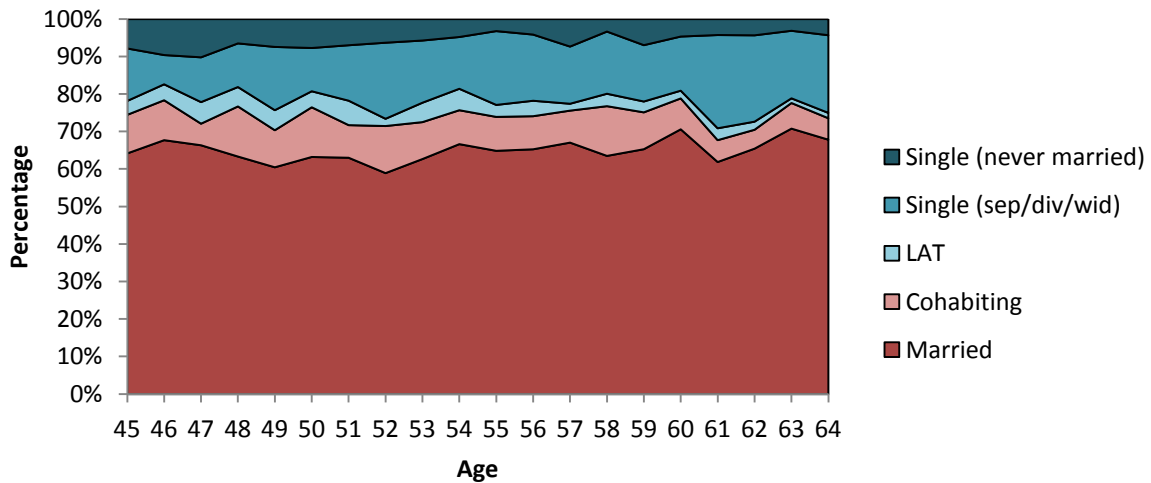
This paper uses wave 8 of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey (2008). HILDA is a large-scale nationally representative longitudinal panel study that is conducted on an annual basis and interviews all members of a household aged 15 and over. In the fifth and eighth waves of data collection several questions were included as part of Australia's participation in the international Gender and Generations Survey (GGS); a cross-national longitudinal survey coordinated by the Population Activities Unit of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

The question in HILDA asked respondents who were not married and not living with a partner, whether they were in an intimate ongoing relationship with someone they were not living with. It is important to note that the questions on non-residential partnerships are restricted to those who are not married, unlike in the standard GGS questionnaire where the possibility that a respondent is married and in a relationship with their spouse but not living with them is included.

Analytical sample

After age 65 very few people were found to be in a LAT relationship. The sample was restricted to people aged 45-64 in HILDA Wave 8. As shown in Fig. 1 below, the LAT relationship type was the smallest in these age groups. Most people were married or single with a past relationship.

Fig. 1 Percentage distribution of sample by relationship status



The sample descriptives by relationships type show that women are more likely to identify as being in a LAT relationship, and are also more likely to be represented in both the single, previously married category, and the single, never married category (Table 1). Those in a LAT relationship are also much more likely to be aged 45-54 than 55-64, and around 30% have no children.

Table. 1 Sample descriptives by relationship type

	Married	Cohabiting	LAT	Single- previously married	Single- never married	Total
	%	%	%	%		%
Sex						
Male	50	52	47	34	47	47
Female	50	48	53	66	53	53
Age group						
45-54	57	63	71	50	69	58
55-64	43	37	29	50	31	42
Children						
No	7	23	30	6	77	14
Yes: at least 1 resident	54	22	30	38	10	45
Yes: all non-resident	39	55	40	56	13	42
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	2,592	378	154	628	247	3,999

source: HILDA Wave 8

Method

This paper compares people in a LAT relationship with those in other relationship types in the following areas:

Relationship history

- Number of previous marriages
- Number of previous cohabitations

Socioeconomic differentials

- Education differentials
- self perceived prosperity
- ability to pay bills

Attitudes

- Family values scale
- Generalized trust

Health and wellbeing

- general health
- mental health
- social isolation and loneliness

Bivariate analysis is used to provide a descriptive of the relationship types in each area. This is followed by multivariate models which compare relationship types controlling for other factors.

Results

Part 1: Relationship history

In terms of their marital history, individuals in LAT relationships are very similar to their cohabiting peers with about three quarters of them having been previously married at least once (Table 2). Among those LATs that had been married the majority had seen their most recent marriage end through separation or divorce. Again this is very similar to the pattern among cohabiting individuals. In contrast a substantial percentage (15%) of the most recent marriage of the single-previously married, had ended in widowhood.

Table 2: Number of times married, how most recent married ended, and whether ever cohabited by current relationship state.

Number of times married	Married	Cohabiting	LAT	Single-previously married	Single-never married	Total
Never married	--	26	27	--	100	10
1	79	60	53	77	--	71
2	18	12	17	20	--	17
3+	3	1	3	3	--	2
Total %	100	100	100		100	100
Total N	2,592	378	154	628	247	3,999

How recent marriage ended	Married	Cohabiting	LAT	Single-previously married	Single-never married	Total
Separated	--	12	17	21	--	19
Divorced	--	84	83	63	--	71
Widowed	--	4	0	15	--	10
Total %	--	100	100	100	--	100
Total N	--	274	110	628	--	1,004

Ever cohabited	Married	Cohabiting	LAT	Single-previously married	Single-never married	Total
Yes	11	--	50	31	46	26
No	89	--	50	69	54	74
Total %	100	--	100	100	100	100
Total N	2,592	--	154	628	247	3,999

Source: HILDA Wave 8

With regards to cohabitations histories, among the groups compared, LATs were the most likely to have ever cohabited. Around half of the LATs had ever been in a cohabitation, which was comparable to the singles that had never been married but substantially higher than the percentage for currently married people.

Part 2: Socio-economic differences

A comparison of the socio-economic characteristics across the different relationship groups reveals that older LATs generally have a high socio-economic status compared to the other relationship categories, and particularly compared to the two types of single people (Table 3).

Of all the relationship groups, LATs have the highest level of education in that they have the lowest percentage only educated up to Year 11 or below. It is possible that some of the differences in education across the relationship groups can be attributed to cohort effects, since the LATs have a relatively young age profile.

Table 3: Descriptive measures of socio-economic measures by relationship type.

	Married	Cohabiting	LAT	Single- previously married	Single- never married	Total
Highest education level**						
University	25	26	28	19	26	24
Certificate/Diploma	36	37	41	37	28	34
Year 12	9	8	8	9	8	9
Year 11 or below	30	28	23	35	38	31
Self-assessed prosperity**						
Prosperous/very comfortable	17	13	9	8	9	14
Reasonably comfortable	55	51	59	39	40	52
Just getting along	25	30	28	44	43	30
Poor/very poor	2	6	4	9	8	4
Difficulty in raising \$2,000 (would have to do something drastic/could not raise it)**						
	8	18	11	30	22	13
Problem paying bills on time**						
	6	13	12	18	19	9

Note: ** p<0.05 using chi-square test
Source: HILDA Wave 8

In terms of self-assessed prosperity, people living with their partner (married or cohabiting) are the most likely to classify themselves as being either prosperous or very comfortable. Looking only at those not living with a partner however, the LATs stand out as having considerably higher self-assessed prosperity compared to the two single groups.

Finally in terms of the two other measures indirect measures of poverty, degree of difficulty in raising \$2,000 and problems paying bills on time, it is evident that married people are the least likely to experience difficulties, followed by the LATs.

To further investigate the socio-economic differentials across individuals in different types of relationships three separate logistic regression were run modelling low self-asses prosperity, difficulty in raising \$2,000 and problems paying bills on time respectively.

The definition of the dependent variable is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Coding of socio-economic measures.

Dependent variable #1: Low self-assessed prosperity

Dependent variable	Categories	N	%
0	Prosperous	2,388	66.2
	Very comfortable		
	Reasonably comfortable		
1	Just getting along	1,217	33.8
	Poor		
	Very poor		
Total		3,605	100

Dependent variable #2: Difficulty raising \$2,000

Dependent variable	Categories	N	%
0	Could easily raise \$2000	3,114	86.9
	Could raise \$2000, but it would involve some sacrifices		
1	Would have to do something drastic to raise \$2000	470	13.1
	Couldn't raise \$2000		
Total		3,584	100

Dependent variable #3: Problems paying bills on time

Dependent variable	Categories	N	%
0	Problem paying bills on time: NO	3,052	90.7
1	Problem paying bills on time: YES	314	9.3
Total		3,366	100

Compared to married people the odds of having low self-assessed prosperity, difficulty in raising \$2,000 and problems paying bills on time were higher among all the other relationship categories (Table 5). However the odds ratios were of a considerably higher magnitude among the two single categories, and generally lower among those in LAT or cohabiting unions.

Table 5: Logistic regression of :(1) low self-assessed prosperity, (2) difficulty raising \$2,000 and (3) inability to pay bills on time (odds ratios)

	Low self-assessed prosperity	Difficulty raising \$2,000	Unable to pay bills on time
Relationship			
Married (ref)	--	--	--
Cohabiting	1.67***	2.99***	2.57***
LAT	1.54**	1.97**	2.53***
Single-previously married	3.04***	4.39***	3.42***
Single-never married	3.85***	4.43***	6.15***
Sex			
Male (ref)	--	--	--
Female	0.85**	1.29**	1.11
Age group			
45-54	1.53***	1.99***	2.12***
55-64 (ref)	--	--	--
Country of birth			
Australia (ref)	--	--	--
Other English-speaking	1.06	0.95	1.13
Other non-English speaking	1.39***	1.57***	1.24
Number of children			
0 (ref)	--	--	--
1	1.46**	2.02***	1.80**
2	1.38**	1.35	1.95***
3+	1.77***	2.01***	2.44***
Highest education			
University (ref)	--	--	--
Diploma/Certificate	2.28***	2.20***	1.63***
Year 12	2.19***	1.52*	1.54*
<Year 12	2.91***	3.11***	1.58**
Section of state			
Major urban (ref)	--	--	--
Other urban	1.08	1.36**	1.2
Bounded Locality	1.27	1.71**	1.59
Rural Balance	1.24**	0.91	1.34*
Working status			
Working (ref)	--	--	--
Not working	1.84***	3.68***	1.78***
Number of observations	3,605	3,584	3,366
Prob>chi2	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01

Part 3: Attitudes

In examining the pattern of attitudinal differences across the different relationship categories, two sets of attitudes were analysed: family value attitudes and gender role attitudes. These sets of questions were asked as part of the self-completion questionnaire and asked respondents to rate on a seven-point scale where 1 equaled 'strongly disagree' and 7 equaled 'strongly agree' their level of agreement to specific statement.

Family value attitudes

1. It is alright for an unmarried couple to live together even if they have no intention of marrying
2. Marriage is a lifetime relationship and should never be ended
3. It is alright for a couple with an unhappy marriage to get a divorce even if they have children
4. A woman has to have children in order to be fulfilled
5. A man has to have children in order to be fulfilled
6. Children will usually grow up happier if they have a home with both a father and a mother
7. It is alright for a woman to have a child as a single parent even if she doesn't want to have a stable relationship with a man
8. Homosexual couples should have the same rights as heterosexual couples do

Gender role attitudes

1. If both partners in a couple work, they should share equally in the housework and care of children
2. Mothers who don't really need the money shouldn't work
3. Children do just as well if the mother earns the money and the father cares for the home and children
4. It is better for everyone involved if the man earns the money and the woman takes care of the home and children
5. A working mother can establish just as good a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work for pay
6. A father should be as heavily involved in the care of his children as the mother
7. It is not good for a relationship if the woman earns more than the man
8. On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do

Table 6: Mean level of agreement to family value and gender role items, by relationship status

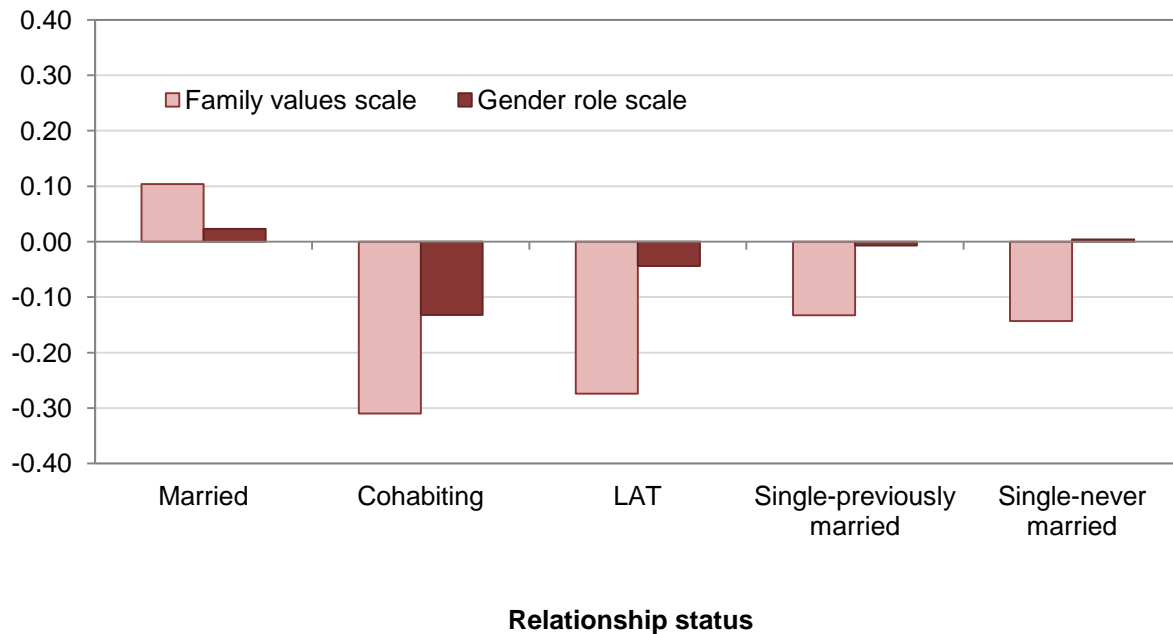
Family values attitudes		Married	Cohabiting	LAT	Single- previously married	Single- never married	Total N
It is alright for an unmarried couple to live together even if they have no intention of marrying	**	5.1	6.4	6.2	5.6	5.5	3,586
Marriage is a lifetime relationship and should never be ended	**	4.3	2.8	3.1	3.5	3.8	3,585
It is alright for a couple with an unhappy marriage to get a divorce even if they have children	**	5.2	5.8	5.8	5.6	5.3	3,579
A woman has to have children in order to be fulfilled	*	2.4	2.3	2.2	2.3	2.1	3,583
A man has to have children in order to be fulfilled	**	2.3	2.2	2.1	2.2	2.0	3,576
Children will usually grow up happier if they have a home with both a father and a mother	**	5.6	4.8	4.6	4.8	4.8	3,585
It is alright for a woman to have a child as a single parent even if she doesn't want to have a stable relationship with a man	**	3.6	4.3	4.3	4.0	4.0	3,582
Homosexual couples should have the same rights as heterosexual couples do	**	3.8	4.9	4.5	4.3	4.3	3,580
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Gender role attitudes		Married	Cohabiting	LAT	Single- previously married	Single- never married	Total N
If both partners in a couple work, they should share equally in the housework and care of children	**	5.9	6.0	6.0	6.1	6.0	3,572
Mothers who don't really need the money shouldn't work	**	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.9	3.7	3,569
Children do just as well if the mother earns the money and the father cares for the home and children	**	5.1	5.5	5.3	5.3	5.2	3,571
It is better for everyone involved if the man earns the money and the woman takes care of the home and children	**	3.5	3.1	3.1	3.6	3.3	3,568
A working mother can establish just as good a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work for pay	**	4.3	4.7	4.5	4.5	4.4	3,568
A father should be as heavily involved in the care of his children as the mother	**	5.6	5.8	5.5	5.8	5.6	3,569
It is not good for a relationship if the woman earns more than the man	**	2.6	2.4	2.7	2.8	2.7	3,569
On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do		2.7	2.6	2.6	2.8	2.7	3,565

Note: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$ tested using analysis of variance. Although the variances were not equal between the groups, the robustness of the results to the violation of homogeneity was tested using simanova and wtest commands in STATA 11.2

To further analyse possible differences in attitudes towards family values and gender roles among the individuals in different types of relationship categories two scales were created. The scales were derived by summing the answers given to the two sets of questions, reverse coding the answers where necessary. The scores were standardized to have a mean of zero and a variance of 1.

Figure 2 shows the mean score on the family values scale and the gender role scale by relationship status. Particularly for the family values scale, individuals in cohabiting and LAT relationship stand out as having the least traditional attitudes.

Fig. 2: Mean score on family values scale and gender role scale, by relationship status



Notes: Family values scale is standardized with mean of zero, alpha value of 0.73 (high score=more traditional values); Gender role scale is standardized with mean of zero, alpha value of 0.70 (high score=more traditional values)

Taking each scale as the dependent variable, attitudinal differences were investigated using multiple linear regression (Table 7). Controlling for the other variables in the model, all the relationship categories except for the single-never married were less likely to have traditional family values attitudes compared to married people.

For the gender role regression, the difference between LATs, singles and the married people was not significant. In this case, only the cohabiting individuals were significantly less traditional than their married counterparts.

Table 7: Multiple linear regression of family values and gender role scale

	Family values scale	Gender roles scale
Relationship		
Married (ref)	--	--
Cohabiting	-0.35***	-0.13***
LAT	-0.26***	0.00
Single-previously married	-0.21***	0.00
Single-never married	-0.06	0.01
Sex		
Male (ref)	--	--
Female	-0.24***	-0.27***
Age group		
45-54	-0.07***	0.00
55-64 (ref)	--	--
Country of birth		
Australia (ref)	--	--
Other English-speaking	-0.09***	-0.04
Other non-English speaking	0.40***	0.18***
Number of children		
0 (ref)	--	--
1	0.10**	-0.03
2	0.17***	-0.02
3+	0.23***	0.08**
Highest education		
University (ref)	--	--
Diploma/Certificate	0.17***	0.20***
Year 12	0.13***	0.18***
<Year 12	0.21***	0.25***
Section of state		
Major urban (ref)	--	--
Other urban	0.03	-0.01
Bounded Locality	-0.02	0.04
Rural Balance	0.03	0.02
Working status		
Working (ref)	--	--
Not working	0.08***	0.11***
Respondent's mother worked at age 14		
No (ref)		
Yes		-0.06***
Constant		
N	-0.12***	0.05
Prob > F	3,590	3,577
Adjusted R-squared	<0.01	<0.01
	0.17	0.11

Note: (negative coefficient= less traditional / more egalitarian)

Part 4: Health and wellbeing

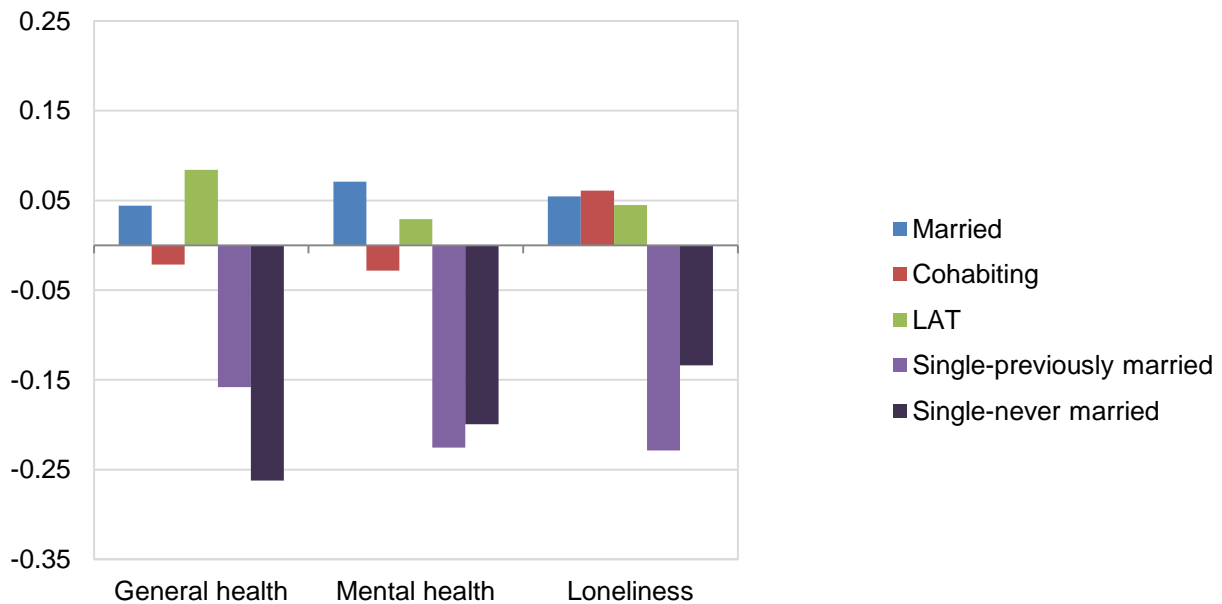
We investigate three dimensions of health and wellbeing across the different relationship categories: general health, mental health and loneliness. In all cases the questions were summarized using a scale, which was standardized to have a mean of zero and a variance of 1 before summing the answers.

An overview of the items included in each scale is given in the table below.

	General health	Mental health	Loneliness
Questions	I seem to get sick a little easier than other people I am as healthy as anybody I know I expect my health to get worse My health is excellent	<i>During the past 4 weeks...</i> Have you been a nervous person? Have you felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up? Have you felt calm and peaceful? Have you felt down? Have you been a happy person?	I don't have anyone that I can confide in I have no one to lean on in times of trouble There is someone who can always cheer me up when I am down I often feel very lonely
Answer categories	1. Definitely true 2. Mostly true 3. Don't know 4. Mostly false 5. Definitely false	1. All of the time 2. Most of the time 3. A good bit of the time 4. Some of the time 5. A little of the time 6. None of the time	1= Strongly disagree 2 3 4 5 6 7= Strongly agree
Cronbach's alpha	0.80	0.85	0.83
Interpretation	Higher score=better general health	Higher score= better mental health	Higher score=lower feelings of loneliness

The mean score on the general health, mental health, and loneliness scales for each relationship status is shown in Figure 3. It is evident that for each scale the two types of single people score considerably worse compared to those that have a partner.

Fig. 3: Mean score on general health, mental health and loneliness, by relationship status



Taking each score as the dependent variable, three multiple linear regression models were run.

In modeling mental health and loneliness, a variable which measured differentiated whether single people were living alone or with others was included, as research has shown that living alone can be an important risk factor for poor mental health and feelings of loneliness. Unfortunately the relatively small number of cases in LAT relationships did not allow us to split this group into those that were living alone and those that were living with others.

For the general health model, only single never married people had significantly worse self-rated health compared to the reference group of married people (Table 8). For the mental health score, individuals with a partner including people in a cohabiting or LAT union were did not differ significantly from married people. In contrast, single previously married people and single never married people living alone had scored significantly lower in terms of their mental health, and were significantly more likely to indicate feelings of loneliness and social isolation. These findings are in line with other research that has found that the lack of an intimate partner can be a significant risk factor for increased loneliness (Greenfield et al 2011).

Table 8: Linear regression of general health, mental health and loneliness scale

	General health scale	Mental health scale	Loneliness scale
Relationship status			
Married (ref)			
Cohabiting	-0.02		
LAT	0.05		
Single-previously married	-0.04		
Single-never married	-0.16**		
Relationship & living arrangement			
Married (ref)		--	--
Cohabiting		-0.06	0.04
LAT		-0.04	0.00
Single (prev married)- lives alone		-0.10**	-0.23***
Single (prev married)- lives with others		-0.16***	-0.20***
Single (never married)- lives alone		-0.14*	-0.18**
Single (never married)- lives with others		-0.12	0.03
Sex			
Male	--	--	--
Female	0.09***	-0.05**	0.13***
Age group			
45-54	-0.04	-0.19***	-0.12***
55-64 (ref)	--	--	--
Country of birth			
Australia (ref)	--	--	--
Other English-speaking	0.01	0.04	-0.04
Other non-English speaking	-0.02	-0.10***	-0.08**
Number of children			
0 (ref)	--	--	--
1	-0.06	-0.06	-0.04
2	0.02	-0.04	-0.04
3+	-0.01	-0.03	-0.05
Working status			
Working (ref)	--	--	--
Not working	-0.44***	-0.31***	-0.13***
Highest education			
University (ref)	--	--	--
Diploma/Certificate	0.03	0.01	-0.07**
Year 12	0.05	0.09*	-0.04
<Year 12	-0.02	0.00	-0.06

	General health scale	Mental health scale	Loneliness scale
Self-assessed prosperity			
Prosperous/very comfortable	0.18***	0.11***	0.07*
Reasonably comfortable	--	--	--
Just getting along	-0.32***	-0.34***	-0.23***
Poor/very poor	-0.68***	-0.76***	-0.56***
Section of state			
Major urban (ref)	--	--	--
Other urban	0.00	0.00	-0.02
Bounded Locality	-0.12*	-0.04	-0.01
Rural Balance	0.05	0.06*	-0.02
Constant			
	0.18***	0.38***	0.26***
Number of observations	3,577	3,575	3,568
Adjusted R-squared	0.15	0.14	0.08

Discussion

This paper demonstrates that people in a LAT relationship are quite distinct from other 'single' people. Although in official statistics those who do not live with their partners are classified as single, the findings show that they are different in many respects, and in some ways look much more like a person in a marital or cohabiting relationship. In terms of relationship histories, those who are in LAT relationships are similar to those in cohabiting relationships; around a quarter have never been married, and around half have been married once. In terms of socio-economic measures, they appear to be in a better position than people who are single, which may be related to the intimate relationship that they are in: they may feel that they have someone they can rely on in times of difficulty.

In terms of family values, i.e. attitudinal questions about the importance of marriage and family, those in a LAT relationship are quite similar to those who cohabit. They are much less traditional than other relationship groups. Of course, we do not attribute causality to this result: this may be an effect of being in a LAT relationship, or alternatively, a reason for entering into this type of relationship. However, those in LAT relationships are more traditional in terms of gender equity.

Importantly in terms of health, those in a LAT relationship are significantly different from singles. In all health measures, LATs do not differ from those who are married, but single people have considerably worse general and mental health, as well as loneliness scores.

Given these differences on a range of measures between LATs and other 'single' people, we argue that including LATs in models as single people would have an effect on the real measures for single people. Further consideration should be given to the situation of LATs in other populations to see if this pattern holds.

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