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* A COMPARISON OF MARRIAGE AND COHABITATION IN NCDS4 *
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Prepared by: Dorothy Henderson
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The National Children's Bureau
8 Wakley Street
Islington
LONDON EC1V 7QE

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National Child Development Study
User Support Group
City University
Northampton Square
LONDON EC1V 0HB

ABSTRACT

The prevalence of marriage compared with cohabitation among 6,371 members of the NCDS IV living with a partner when interviewed at age 23 is examined. Married and cohabiting respondents are then compared in terms of age at the start of the current partnership, family size, prevalence of pregnancy among those with and without children, social position, and economic activity at the time of interview. The relationship between the nature of the first partnership and the current partnership of the 291 individuals who had a current partner and at least one previous partnership is also examined. Finally, the prevalence of marital breakdown is compared with the prevalence of cohabitations which had ended among 7,141 individuals who had had at least one partner, and the current partnership status of 1,055 individuals who had experienced the breakdown of a partnership is established.

Overall, the nature of the current partnership is associated with all the above factors. However, differences between cohabiting and married respondents are not as great as differences between cohabitantes who had never been married and those that had been married, and for the latter groups the contrasts are greater for women than for men.

Introduction.

1. This paper presents comparisons between cohabitation and marriage among members of the NCDS IV Cohort, and suggests further analyses arising from this preliminary examination.
2. Information on all partnerships (marriages or cohabitations) is available for 12,513 individuals, 7141 of whom had either married, cohabited, or both, by the time they were interviewed.
3. The paper will address the following questions:
 - I. What is the prevalence of marriage and cohabitation?
 - II. Do the characteristics of individuals who have been married differ from those who have only cohabited?
 - III. Does the nature of the first partnership (a marriage or a cohabitation) have any bearing on the nature of subsequent partnerships, if any?
 - IV. Does the prevalence of partnership breakdown vary with the nature of the partnership?
4. In this paper we concentrate on the characteristics of the individual cohort member. Clearly, the characteristics of the partner are also likely to be of importance, and should be the subject of future analysis.
5. The characteristics of individuals living with a spouse or cohabitee when interviewed will be discussed before examining the relationship between first and subsequent partnerships, and partnership breakdown.

The prevalence of marriage and cohabitation.

- 6 Cohabitation, as defined in this study, involved normally living as if married. It excludes situations where the partners shared bed and board intermittently whilst maintaining separate households. Cohabitations which did not result in marriage and which ended before the interview had to have lasted at least six months, in order to exclude short-term casual relationships. No constraint on duration was placed on cohabitations still in existence at the time of interview.

7. Marriage, as defined here, entails normally living with the husband or wife at the time of interview as well as legal status. Thus, individuals who were separated from the spouse because of marital breakdown are not included among the currently married.
8. By the time they were interviewed at aged 23, 48 per cent of the respondents had been married and 10 per cent had lived with a partner but never married. Predictably, the prevalence of marriage varied by sex. Fifty-nine per cent of the women had been married but only 36 per cent of the men (Table 1). Correspondingly, more men than women had never had a partner - over half the men and less than a third of the women. Similar proportions of each sex had cohabited.

TABLE 1. Prevalence of marriage and cohabitation by sex.
(12,513 individuals for whom information on all partnerships is available).

<u>Type of partnership(s):</u>		<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Total</u>
Marriage(s) only	% (N)	57 (3586)	36 (2267)	47 (5853)
Marriage(s) & cohabitation	% (N)	2 (132)		1 (186)
Cohabitation(s) only	% (N)	9 (582)	8 (520)	9 (1102)
No partnerships	% (N)	31 (1956)	55 (3416)	43 (5372)
N = 100%		6256	6257	12513

9. At the time of the interview, 61 per cent of the women and 40 per cent of the men were either married or cohabiting, but as Table 2 shows, six per cent of the respondents were no longer living with a partner.

TABLE 2. Nature of current partnership, and previous partnership of individuals without a partner at interview, by sex.
(12,513 individuals for whom information on current and previous partnerships is available)

<u>Nature of current partnership:</u>		<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Total</u>
Marriage	% (N)	54 (3410)	35 (2177)	45 (5587)
Cohabitation*	% (N)	7 (451)	5 (333)	6 (784)
<u>Nature of previous partnership if currently without a partner:</u>				
Marriage	% (N)	3 (222)	2 (117)	3 (339)
Cohabitation	% (N)	3 (217)	3 (214)	3 (431)
No partnerships	% (N)	31 (1956)	55 (3416)	43 (5372)
N = 100%		6256	6257	12513

* 86 women and 27 men cohabiting when interviewed had previously been married.

Age at start of current marriage or cohabitation

10. Age at the start of the current partnership varied with sex and with the nature of the partnership. As expected, women were on average younger than men when they started the current partnership, but currently cohabiting men and women tended to be older than currently married individuals when they entered the partnership (Table 3).
11. The married were two and a half times as likely as cohabitees to have entered the partnership before they were 20. Similarly, 60 per cent of the cohabitees started living together when they were 22 or older compared with 36 per cent of the married.

14. However, the overall difference in family size between cohabitees and married individuals disguises the fact that the number of children in the family varied with the marital status of cohabitees (Table 5). In fact, previously married cohabitees tended to have larger families than currently married people, irrespective of sex, and considerably larger families than cohabitees who had never been married. Seventy-eight per cent of those who had never married were childless, compared with 49 per cent of the separated, divorced and widowed cohabitees. And over three times as many previously married cohabitees as never married cohabitees were bringing up two or more children.

TABLE 5. Number of children in respondent's care by marital status of current cohabitees by sex.
(784 currently cohabiting individuals)

	<u>No children.</u>	<u>One child.</u>	<u>Two or more.</u>	<u>N = 100%</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	
<u>Women:</u> Never married	80	14	6	365
Separated, divorced or widowed	47	27	26	86
<u>Men:</u> Never married	75	15	9	306
Separated, divorced or widowed	57	28	14	27
<u>Total:</u> Never married	78	14	7	671
Separated, divorced or widowed	49	27	23	113

15. Of course, at the age of 23 family size is not necessarily complete. Indeed, some people had yet to start their families. Individuals who were living with a partner when interviewed and who had said that they wanted a child, or more children, were asked when they wanted to have their first (or next) child. Twelve per cent of these people were, in fact, expecting a child when interviewed.

TABLE 3. Age of respondent at start of current marriage or current cohabitation, by sex.
(6371 currently partnered individuals)

	<u>Under 20</u>	<u>20-21</u>	<u>22-23</u>	<u>N = 100%</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Women:</u> Married	33	38	29	3410
Cohabiting	12	34	54	451
<u>Men:</u> Married	14	40	46	2177
Cohabiting	7	25	68	333
<u>Total:</u> Married	25	39	36	5587
cohabiting	10	30	60	784.

Cohabitation, marriage and family size.

12. Family size refers to all the children in the respondent's care, whether natural or adopted, partner's children, or foster children.
13. Family size varied with the nature of the partnership and, to a lesser extent, with sex. A higher proportion of cohabitees (73 per cent) than married couples (53 per cent) was childless, and cohabitees who did have children tended to have fewer, as Table 4 shows. This was particularly marked among women; over twice the proportion of married women were caring for two or more children.

TABLE 4. Number of children in respondent's care by nature of current partnership, by sex.
(6371 currently partnered individuals).

	<u>No children.</u>	<u>One child.</u>	<u>Two or more.</u>	<u>N = 100%</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Women:</u> Married	51	28	21	3410
Cohabiting	73	16	10	451
<u>Men:</u> Married	57	30	13	2177
Cohabiting	73	16	10	333
<u>Total:</u> Married	53	29	18	5587
Cohabiting	73	16	10	784

Partnered individuals who said that they did not want any (more) children have been included in Table 6, and it has been assumed, for the purpose of this analysis, that they were not expecting a child. It is possible, therefore, that the number of pregnancies may be an underestimate.

16. Among those who already had children, the cohabitees differed very little from the married couples in the proportion who were expecting a child. However, there were differences between the married and the cohabiting in the proportions expecting their first child. Table 6 shows that, at the time of the interview, four times as many married couples as cohabiting couples were expecting their first child.

TABLE 6. Married and cohabiting couples expecting a child by children already in family by sex.
(6371 currently partnered individuals)

	<u>Expecting</u> <u>a child.</u>	<u>Not expecting</u> <u>a child.</u>	<u>N = 100%</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	
<u>Married women:</u> with child(ren)	11	89	1661
without child(ren)	13	87	1749
<u>Married men:</u> with child(ren)	14	86	944
without child(ren)	12	88	1233
<u>Total married:</u> with child(ren)	12	88	2605
without child(ren)	12	88	2982
<u>Cohabiting women:</u> with child(ren)	7	93	119
without child(ren)	4	96	332
<u>Cohabiting men:</u> with child(ren)	14	86	88
without child(ren)	3	97	245
<u>Total cohabiting:</u> with child(ren)	10	90	207
without child(ren)	3	97	577

Cohabitation, marriage and social position.

17. The social position of cohort members at the time of interview is based upon the Registrar General's 1980 Classification of Occupations, and is derived from the classification of the current or last job held by the respondent. Consequently, current social position is not available for individuals who had never had a job. Furthermore, the relatively high proportion of women employed in non-manual occupations makes a straightforward comparison between the sexes difficult. For this reason, the presentation of differences in social position will concentrate on comparisons within each sex.
18. Social position varied with the nature of the partnership, particularly among women (Table 7). Twenty-four per cent of cohabiting women and 21 per cent of cohabiting men were or had been employed in professional or intermediate non-manual jobs compared with 14 per cent of married women and 15 per cent of married men. The proportion of married men employed in manual work was higher (70 per cent) than the proportion of cohabiting men (62 per cent).

TABLE 7. Current social position by nature of current partnership, by sex.
(6182* currently partnered individuals who have had a job).

		Professional & intermediate	Other non- manual	Skilled Manual.	Other Manual	N = 100%
		%	%	%	%	
<u>Women:</u>	Married	14	53	10	22	3331
	Cohabiting	24	42	11	22	450
<u>Men:</u>	Married	15	15	49	21	2080
	Cohabiting	21	16	42	20	321

* Current social position is not available for 197 individuals, or 3 per cent of those living with a partner at interview.

19. The overall differences in the relative social position of married and cohabiting respondents masks the fact that social position also varied with the marital status of cohabitees. Indeed, the social position of previously married cohabitees tended to be even lower than that of currently married respondents, as Table 8 demonstrates.

Among those who had previously been married, none of the men and only 10 per cent of the women were in the professional and intermediate group, compared with almost three times as many women and 23 per cent of the men who had never married. The proportion of men and women in the manual group was considerably higher among the previously married.

TABLE 8. Current social position by marital status of current
cohabitees by sex.
(770* currently cohabiting individuals)

	<u>Professional & intermediate</u> %	<u>Other non- manual</u> %	<u>Skilled Manual</u> %	<u>Other Manual.</u> %	<u>N = 100%</u>
<u>Women:</u> Never married	28	42	10	20	363
Separated, divorced or widowed	10	41	17	31	86
<u>Men:</u> Never married	23	17	40	19	294
Separated, divorced or widowed	-	7	63	30	27

* Current social position is not available for 14 individuals, or 2 per cent of those cohabiting when interviewed.

20. All married cohort members were asked at twenty-three whether they had lived with their spouse prior to the marriage. Men and women in professional and intermediate occupations were more likely to have lived with their current spouse before marriage than those in other occupations (Table 9). This was particularly marked among women.

TABLE 9. Current social position by whether cohabited with
current spouse before marriage by sex.
 (5411 currently married individuals who had had a job)

	<u>Cohabited.</u>	<u>Did not</u>	<u>N = 100%</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>cohabit</u>	
		<u>%</u>	
<u>Women:</u> Professional and intermediate	30	70	471
Other non-manual	17	83	1782
Skilled manual	19	81	317
Other manual	24	76	739
<u>Men:</u> Professional and intermediate	23	77	320
Other non-manual	16	84	312
Skilled manual	18	82	1011
Other manual	21	79	437

Cohabitation, marriage and current economic activity.

21. Current economic activity describes whether or not cohort members were economically active or economically inactive when interviewed. The economically active were engaged in full or part-time paid employment, or unemployed and seeking work. The economically inactive were engaged in full-time housework or education, on extended holiday, in prison or borstal, or prevented from seeking work because of long-term illness or disability. For the purpose of this analysis, only those economically inactive individuals engaged in full-time housework or education have been distinguished separately. A relatively high proportion of women were engaged in full-time housework, and a relatively high proportion of men were in full-time employment. Because of this, comparisons of economic activity between cohabiting and married respondents are presented separately for men and women.

22. Current economic activity varied with the nature of the partnership in both sexes, but the relationship also varied with the sex of the cohort member. As can be seen from Table 10, the proportion of cohabiting women who were economically active was higher (75 per cent) than the proportion of married women (57 per cent, whereas there was very little difference in the proportions of economically active men.

However, the details of economic activity show a different pattern within each sex. More cohabiting women (63 per cent) than married women (45 per cent) were in full-time paid employment, whereas a higher proportion of married men (88 per cent) than cohabiting men (77 per cent) were in full-time work. Cohabitees were also more likely than married respondents to be unemployed and seeking work.

TABLE 10. Current economic activity by nature of current partnership by sex.
(6311* currently partnered individuals)

	<u>Economically active.</u>			<u>Economically inactive.</u>			<u>N=100%</u>
	<u>Full-time work</u> %	<u>Part-time work</u> %	<u>Unemp.</u> %	<u>House-work</u> %	<u>Full-time educ.</u> %	<u>Other.</u> %	
<u>Women:</u> Married	45	9	3	38	(19)	5	3365
Cohabiting	63	4	8	19	3	2	449
<u>Men:</u> Married	88	(19)	10	(2)	1	(9)	2165
Cohabiting	77	(3)	17	-	4	(3)	332

* Current economic activity is not available for 68 individuals, or 1 per cent of those living with a partner when interviewed.

23. The high proportion of economically active cohabiting women, particularly those in full-time work, may be explained by the prevalence of childlessness (para.11) and professional or intermediate employment (para.16) among this group. Nevertheless, we would expect to find that economic activity varied with the marital status of cohabitees, since family size and social position varied with their marital status, and this is indeed the case.
24. Table 11 shows that, among cohabiting women, more of those who had never married (80 per cent) than those who had (56 per cent) were economically active. And men and women who had never married were more likely to be in full-time employment than those who were married previously. The numbers involved are very small, but the proportion of previously married men who were unemployed and seeking work was higher (29 per cent) than the proportion of never-married men in

that situation (16 per cent). Overall, cohabiting respondents who were separated, divorced or widowed were less likely to be in full-time work than currently married respondents irrespective of sex.

TABLE 11. Current economic activity by marital status of current cohabitees by sex.
780* currently cohabiting individuals).

	<u>Economically active.</u>			<u>Economically inactive.</u>			<u>N=100%</u>
	<u>Full-time work</u>	<u>Part-time work</u>	<u>Unemp.</u>	<u>House-work</u>	<u>Full-time Educ.</u>	<u>Other.</u>	
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	
<u>Women:</u> Never married	68	3	9	14	4	2	362
Separated, divorced or widowed	41	8	7	41	-	2	86
<u>Men:</u> Never married	78	(2)	16	-	5	(2)	305
Separated, divorced or widowed	64	3	29	-	-	3	27

* Current economic activity is not available for 4 individuals.

Nature of first and current partnership.

25. The majority of individuals who had married or cohabited had had only one partner, and very few people had experienced more than two partnerships. However, 291 individuals had had more than one partnership, and Table 12 examines the relationship between their first and current partnership.

26. The nature of the current partnership varied with the nature of the first partnership, particularly among women. Individuals who had married their first partner were considerably more likely to be cohabiting with (65 per cent) than married to (35 per cent) their current partner. (Some of them may have been waiting for a divorce, of course). Women who did not marry their first partner were more likely to be married to (61 per cent) than cohabiting with (39 per cent) their current partner.

TABLE 12. Nature of first partnership by nature of current partnership by sex.
(291 currently partnered individuals who had had a previous partner).

<u>First partnership:</u>	<u>Current partnership.</u>		<u>N = 100%</u>
	<u>Marriage.</u>	<u>Cohabitation.</u>	
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	
<u>Women:</u> Marriage	39	61	142
Cohabitation	61	39	70
<u>Men:</u> Marriage	16	84	32
Cohabitation	47	53	47
<u>Total:</u> Marriage	35	65	174
Cohabitation	56	44	117

Partnership breakdown.

27. Twelve per cent of people who had had at least one partner had experienced the breakdown of a partnership. Very few individuals had been widowed.
28. Table 13 reveals that the prevalence of partnership breakdown varied with the nature of the partnership, irrespective of the sex of the respondent. Cohabitations were five times as likely as marriages to break down. Forty-three per cent of the individuals who had ever cohabited had experienced the breakdown of a cohabitation, whereas only 8 per cent of those who had ever married had experienced marital breakdown. Marriages, then, were more stable than cohabitations, despite the fact that marriages tend to occur at earlier ages than cohabitations (para.10).
29. Among those who had been married, rather more women than men had experienced marital breakdown. Conversely, among those who had ever cohabited, rather more men than women had experienced the breakdown of a cohabitation.

TABLE 13. Experience of partnership breakdown among individuals who ever married or ever cohabited by sex..
(7141* individuals who had ever married or cohabited)

	<u>Experience of marital breakdown</u>		
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>N = 100%</u>
Ever-married women	10	90	3718
Ever-married men	6	94	2321
Total ever married	8	92	6039

	<u>Experience of cohabitation breakdown</u>		
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>N = 100%</u>
Ever-cohabited women	40	60	714
Ever-cohabited men	45	55	574
Total ever cohabited	43	57	1288

* 186 individuals had been married and had cohabited, therefore the total ever married and ever cohabited is greater than 7141 ever with a partner.

30. As we know, 291 individuals who had experienced a breakdown of a partnership were living with a new partner when interviewed (para 23). However, 11 per cent of those who had had at least one partner were living without a partner at the time of the interview. Table 14 shows that people who had experienced the breakdown of a cohabitation were more likely (79 per cent) to be without a partner than those whose marriage had ended (66 per cent). The proportion of women who had acquired a new partner was higher than the proportion of men, particularly if they had been married previously. Of course, men were older than women when they started their first partnership, and therefore had had less time to experience more than one partnership.

TABLE 14. Current partnership status by nature of partnership breakdown by sex.
(1055* individuals who had experienced the breakdown of a marriage or a cohabitation)

<u>Current partnership status.</u>				
<u>Marital breakdown:</u>	<u>Now married.</u>	<u>Now cohabiting.</u>	<u>Without a partner.</u>	<u>N=100%</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	
Women	15	24	61	364
Men	3	18	79	149
Total	12	22	66	513
<hr/>				
<u>Cohabitation breakdown:</u>				
Women	15	9	76	287
Men	9	9	82	261
Total	12	9	79	548

* 6 individuals had experienced the breakdown of a marriage and a cohabitation, therefore the total of marital and cohabitation breakdowns is greater than 1055.

SUMMARY.

31. Over half the cohort had experienced living with a partner by the time they were interviewed, but marriage was five times as common as cohabitation.
32. The prevalence of cohabitation did not vary with the sex of the respondent, but over half the women had been married compared with just over a third of the men.
33. When interviewed, three out of every five women and two out of every five men were either married or cohabiting.
34. Cohabiting respondents were more likely than married respondents to be older at the start of their current partnership, to be childless or have fewer children, to have been engaged in professional or intermediate occupations, and to have been previously married if they had had more than one partner. They were less likely than married respondents to be expecting their first child; and cohabiting women were more likely than married women to be economically active and in full-time paid employment.
35. However, the overall association between these characteristics and the nature of the current partnership masks variation within the group of cohabiters. For example, cohabiters who had never been married had the smallest families, the highest overall social position, and the highest proportion in full-time paid employment of all individuals who were living with a partner. On the other hand, previously married cohabiters (the separated, divorced and widowed) had the largest families, the lowest overall social position and the least likelihood of being in full-time work. Furthermore, these differences were especially marked among women.
36. The nature of the first partnership was associated with the nature of the current partnership, particularly among women. Irrespective of the sex of the respondent, individuals who had married their first partner were less likely to be married to their current partner than those who had not married their first partner. Conversely, women

who did not marry their first partner were more likely to be married than cohabiting when interviewed.

37. The prevalence of partnership breakdown also varied with the nature of the partnership. Cohabitations were five times as likely as marriages to have broken down, and individuals who had experienced the breakdown of a cohabitation were more likely than those who had suffered a marital breakdown to be living without a partner when interviewed, particularly if they were men.

Proposals for further analysis.

38. It is proposed that further analysis should examine:
- (a) The social position, educational qualifications and age at completion of formal education, and economic activity and age at the start of the first partnership for people who married and did not marry their first partners. This will enable us to explore factors which may affect the nature of the first partnership.
 - (b) The effect of the above factors on the duration of the first partnership for people who married or did not marry their first partners. Life table methods will enable us to examine the extent to which the likelihood of different types of first partnership ending depends on these factors.
 - (c) The effect of changes in family size and economic activity during different types of first partnership on the duration of the partnership. This will enable us to examine the effect of change during the partnership on the duration of the partnership.
 - (d) The current partner's age at the start of the partnership, age at the end of full-time continuous education, current economic activity and prior marital and parental status, for different types of partnership. We will then be able to examine differences in the characteristics of cohabiting partners and married partners which may predispose towards marriage or cohabitation. In addition, similarities and differences between partners in different types of

partnership can be examined in order to explore the effect on the stability of partnerships.

(e) The current housing and financial circumstances of married couples compared with cohabiting couples.

(f) There is scope for some simple longitudinal analysis, examining the relationship between family and social circumstances during childhood and partnership stability and breakdown in early adulthood.

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