

Living apart together in Kinshasa

The impact of the economic crisis on cohabitation of couples

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Introduction

Being in couple and not living in the same dwelling - "living apart together" (LAT) - has been little studied in the African context. Some studies emphasize that this phenomenon is not uncommon and can have different types of causes. Findley (1997) suggests that – in rural sub-Saharan Africa - social and economic constraints explain the fact that couples do not always live under the same roof. On the one hand, men may be forced to leave their villages to work and diversify household resources while women and children stay in the village. On the other hand, when the union is not the result of free choice, when it is a polygamous union or when the age difference between spouses is large, the level of interaction between spouses is lower and may explain why some couples live apart (Findley 1997). This phenomenon is also found in African cities. For instance, in Dakar, young people are leaving the parental home later (Diagne and Lessault 2007). While they may be union, economic difficulties hinder their residential emancipation. Financial difficulties of cohabiting couples may also push young couples to return to their parents' home, or to find other – cheaper – living arrangements, while remaining in couple. International migration may also lead families to become transnational (Beauchemin et al. 2015), and live apart together across borders (LATAB).

Kinshasa is an interesting case study for this type of living arrangements. Its history has been marked by severe political and economic crises since the late 1980s, and the 1990s were one the darkest period in DR Congo's recent history. Unemployment among urban youth has exploded since the early 1990s (Trefon 2004), the purchasing power of the Congolese population has decreased drastically and the cost of housing has increased. More than in other African cities, the deterioration of living conditions should influence living arrangement of couples. While living together is often conceived as fundamental for couples in DR Congo (Ngondo 1996), anecdotal evidence indicate that living apart together is not uncommon, and that returning to the parents' home is one of the strategies used by couples facing economic hardship.

This paper aims to study the phenomenon of living apart together in Kinshasa, with three specific objectives. First, the frequency of this phenomenon will be documented. Secondly, retrospective data on living arrangement and unions will be used to study the dynamics of this phenomenon. We will describe *entry* into cohabitation among couples, as well as *exits* of cohabitation while remaining in couples. The living arrangements of non-cohabiting couples will also be described. Thirdly, we will analyze the factors that explain this phenomenon, and will distinguish the factors that *delay entry* into cohabitation from the factors that increase the probability of leaving cohabitation.

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Our main hypothesis is that economic difficulties both delay entry into cohabitation and increase the risk of breaking cohabitation while remaining in couple. As a result, we expect living apart together to be frequent particularly among recent generations and individuals who face the most severe financial difficulties.

Data & Methods

The data come from the MAFE-Congo survey. It was conducted in 2009 among a representative sample of 1,638 adults (684 men and 954 women 25 years and older) of the city of Kinshasa (Schoumaker et al., 2013). This biographical survey - although it is primarily concerned with international migration - also collected union histories, residential histories and employment histories (Beauchemin, 2015). Such data, which remain rare in the African context, are unique in the context of DR Congo. In the module on unions, the history of all unions that lasted at least one year (with or without marriage) is recorded. For each union, the dates of beginning and end of unions are recorded. Residential histories contain yearly information about the dwellings of people as well as on persons sharing the same dwelling. This information enables us to know at any time whether people were in union and whether they lived with their partner or not. Other modules provide information on the migration of members of the entourage of individuals (including partners), on the living conditions of households, and on the employment status of individuals.

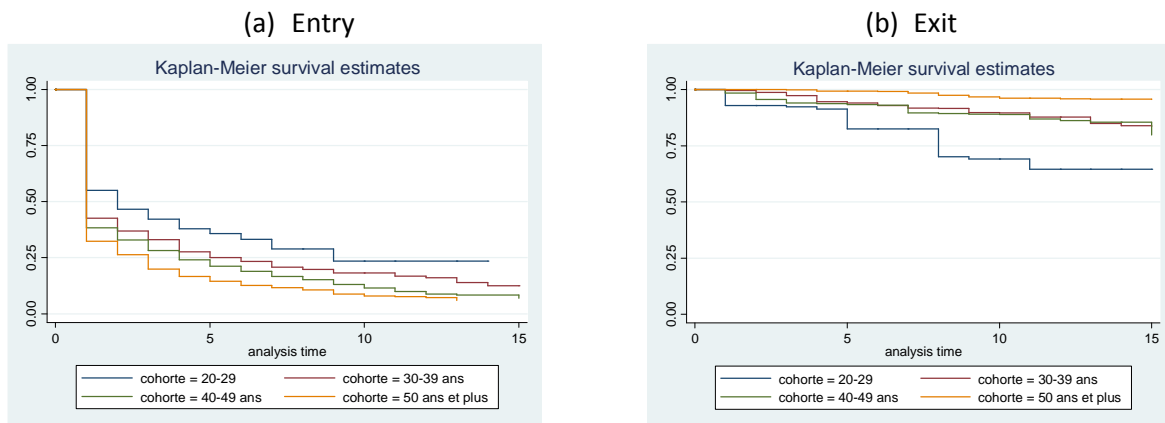
Both descriptive and multivariate methods for longitudinal data are used. Kaplan-Meier estimates are used to describe entry and exit of cohabitation. Discrete-time event history models are used to analyze the factors associated with these events.

Preliminary results

Descriptive analyses indicate that living apart together is not negligible in Kinshasa. Among the 1,367 unions recorded in the data set, 204 had not cohabited at the time of the survey. Among the 1,163 couples who had cohabited, 202 had stopped living together while remaining in couples.

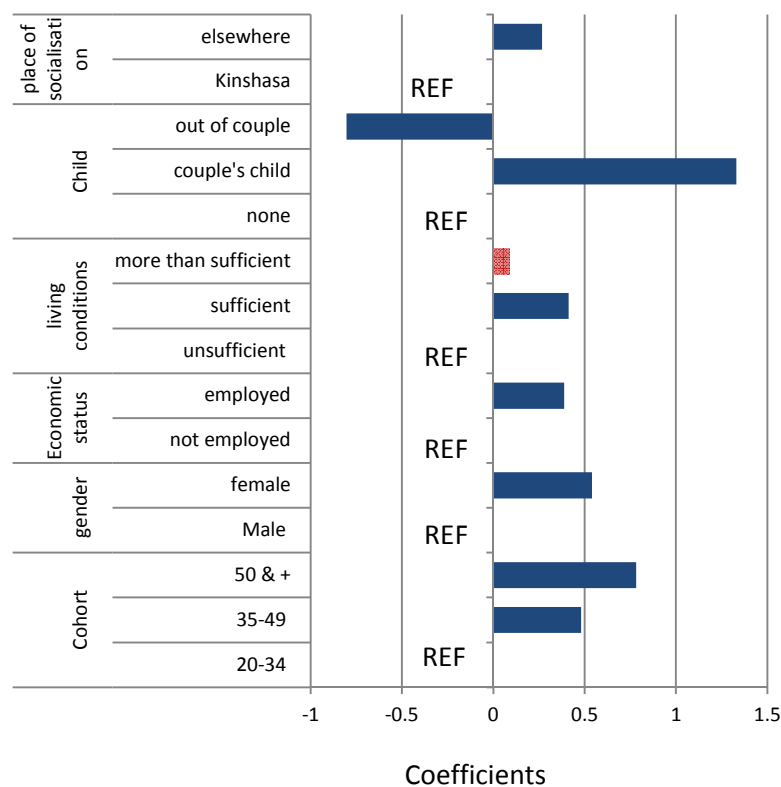
Comparisons of entry into and exits of cohabitation across cohorts further show that recent cohorts wait longer after the start of their union to start cohabiting and are less likely to start cohabiting. Ten years after the start of the union, a quarter of the couples have not yet lived together, against less than 10% in the oldest cohorts. The younger cohorts are also more likely to stop cohabiting: a quarter of the most recent cohorts stopped cohabiting after less than 10 years (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Kaplan-Meier estimates of entry and exit of cohabitation among people in union



Multivariate analyses (event history models) show a significant decrease of cohabitation across cohorts (Figure 2). Economic conditions are also significantly related to entry into cohabitation: employed people and people reporting sufficient living conditions start cohabiting before those who are unemployed and reporting insufficient living conditions.

Figure 2: Event history models of entry into cohabitation among people in union

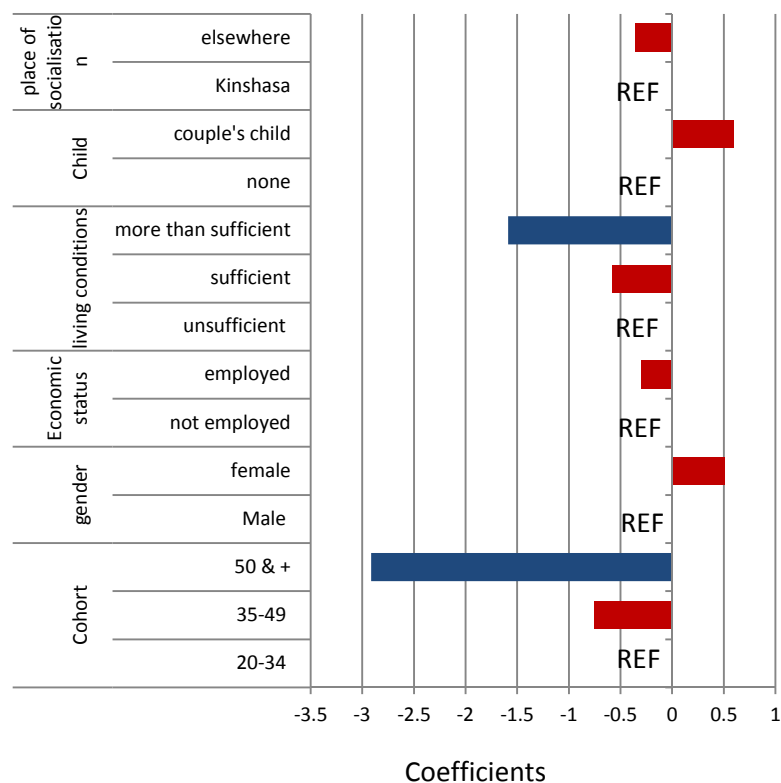


Legend : blue bars represent significant coefficients ($p < 0.10$); red bars indicate non significant effects ($p > 0.10$)

Living conditions also have a strong effects on quitting cohabitation; people reporting more than sufficient economic conditions are much less likely to stop cohabiting than those facing insufficient conditions. Cohorts effects are also strongly significant, indicating that this phenomenon has

increased over time, even controlling for economic factors. This change thus partly results from economic hardship, but also probably reflects broader social changes in Kinshasa.

Figure 3: Event history models of exit of cohabitation among people in union



Legend : blue bars represent significant coefficients ($p < 0.10$); red bars indicate non significant effects ($p > 0.10$)

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