

“Let’s live together first”: A longitudinal investigation into whether cohabitation is a precursor to marriage among young South Africans.

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Introduction

A traditional pattern of courtship observed in most societies suggests clearly defined stages that eventually culminate in marriage (Manning et al, 2004). However today a new phenomenon, cohabitation has emerged and this has greatly affected the traditional pathway to marriage noted above. Partners can now transect from dating, straight to living together without formalized marriage, a living arrangement between couples which traditionally was only reserved for the married.

A research gap that has not been given enough attention is whether a direct progression from dating to cohabitation is a precursor of marriage, as engagement was in the past and to some extent is still in some societies. As noted by Bumpass and Lu (2000) increasingly, couples advance from dating straight to living together which may or may not lead to marriage. This study therefore investigates the association between cohabitation and marriage among youths in Western Cape. Our hypothesis is that cohabitation is a precursor of marriage. Is the practice of cohabitation in South Africa acting as a precursor to later marriage? Or do young couples who cohabit remain this way and have no intention to marry later?

Methodology

The Cape Area Panel Study (CAPS) is a longitudinal study of the lives of youths and young adults in metropolitan Cape Town, South Africa. The first wave of the study collected interviews from about 4800 randomly selected young people age 14-22 in August-December, 2002. Wave 1 also collected information on all members of these young people’s households, as well as a random sample of households that did not have members age 14-22. A third of the youth sample was re-interviewed in 2003 (Wave 2a) and the remaining two-thirds were re-visited in 2004 (Wave 2b). The full youth sample

was then re-interviewed in both 2005 (Wave 3) and 2006 (Wave 4). Wave 3 also includes interviews with approximately 2000 co-resident parents of young adults. Wave 4 also includes interviews with a sample of older adults (all individuals from the original 2002 households who were born on or before 1 January 1956) and all children born to the female young adults. The study covers a wide range of outcomes, including schooling, employment, health, family formation, and intergenerational support systems. (Lam et al., 2008).

Youth between the ages of 14 and 22 years old who were in cohabiting relationships in 2002. Both males and females are included in the study. The definition of youth in South Africa is broader than the international definition. In South Africa, youth are considered any person between the age of 15 and 35 years old. The South African National Youth Policy 2009- 2014, defines 'youth' as young people whose age falls between 15 and 34 years old (Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, 2009). In 2002, there were 39,942 youth in cohabiting relationships. In 2006, the number of previously cohabiting who were successfully followed- up, was now married is 4,755.

The outcome of interest in this study is cohabitation and if this leads to marriage. The study sample is selected from the first Wave of interviews in 2002. Persons who responded that they were in a cohabiting relationship, that is, those who said they had a partner and were living with them were selected as the cohort to follow through to the latest available Wave – 2006.

In the last Wave the marital status of the cohabiting persons is the outcome of interest to this study. Of the cohabiting persons who were followed up since 2002, those who have remained in cohabiting relationships and those who are married will be analysed.

Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of persons in the cohabiting cohort are included in this study. Variables pertaining to the age, sex and population group of the youth are analysed. Further the highest level of education, work status and type of place of birth are selected as proxy measures for socioeconomic status.

Further for the last Wave, variables pertaining to particular life experiences have been selected to determine if these events in any way have affected the outcome of marriage within the cohort. These variables included experiences of domestic violence; educational attainment; employment status; religious affiliation; fertility; parent survival; parental investment; current health status on later marriage.

This study begins with describing the cohort of youth who were in cohabiting relationships in 2002. Thereafter, bivariate logistic regression is used to establish the association between cohabiting and independent or predictor variables. Finally multivariate logistic regression is used to establish the association between marriage and other predictor variables (at a later stage) and cohabiting at the first Wave. The formula for logistic regression is as follows:

$$L_i = \alpha + \beta_1 X_{1i} + \beta_2 X_{2i} + \dots + \beta_k X_{ki}$$

Where: L_i = dependent variables, α = constant, β_k = regression coefficients, X = independent variables.

Preliminary Results

Preliminary results of the study are shown in the tables below. This section starts by describing the initial cohort in 2002, followed by the test of association between cohabiting and demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Thereafter the section shows the multivariate association between those who were married in 2006 and select characteristics.

A weighted sample of 39, 942 youth between the ages of 17 and 35 years old were in cohabiting relationships in 2002. Table 1 (see appendices) also shows that most of these youth (35.6%) were between the ages of 26 and 30 years old at the time. More than half of the cohort, 53.27% were female and 42.43% were African/ Black. Further, the results show that most of the youth, almost 76% had obtained a secondary education at the time. Few of these individuals (0.45%) refused to answer questions as their type of place of birth and the majority (64.83%) reported being born in urban areas.

Finally, just over half of the cohort (50.94%) was full-time employed at the time of the interview, with 30.91% reporting to be unemployed or not working.

Table 2 shows the results of the multivariate logistic regression establishing if an association exists between cohabiting and various demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the cohort in 2002. The table shows that youth of all ages have a likelihood of being in cohabiting relationships with the highest likelihood being among 26- 30 year olds (4.26). The sex variable was found to be insignificant (p -value >0.05) but shows that females are more likely to enter cohabiting relationships during youth than males. For population group, Whites are more likely to cohabit (2.40), while those who are unemployed or not working (0.66) are less likely to do so.

Table 3 shows the results of the multivariate logistic regression establishing if those of the same cohort who are now married is associated with select demographic and socioeconomic characteristics in 2006. The table shows an extended age- group, so as to account for the age of the cohort four years on. Persons who are in the age- group 36- 40 years old (1.10), Coloured (2.18) and have a primary education (9.20) show an increased likelihood to be married. While females are less likely to be married with an odds ratio of 0.34.

References

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Appendices:

Table 1: Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of cohabiting persons in 2002 (Wave 1)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Total	39,942	100
Age		
17-20	2,926	7.33
21-25	11,394	28.53
26-30	14,218	35.6
31-35	11,403	28.55
Sex		
Male	18665	46.73
Female	21277	53.27
Population Group		
Black/African	16946	42.43
Coloured	15885	39.77
Indian	99	0.25
White	7011	17.55
Highest level of Education		
None	289	0.72
Primary	8284	20.74

Secondary	30293	75.84
Refused to answer	1075	2.69
Place of birth		
Urban	25,815	64.83
Rural	13,823	34.72
Refused	179	0.45
Work Status		
Working full-time	19,912	50.94
Working part-time	6,731	17.22
Not working	12,082	30.91
Refused	179	0.46
Don't know	183	0.47

Table 2: Multivariate logistic regression showing the association between cohabiting and individual and socioeconomic variables in 2002

Characteristics	Odds Ratio	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
Age Groups				
17-20	RC			
21-25	2.81	0.000	1.978862	3.976059
26-30	4.26	0.000	2.97806	6.089912
31-35	3.73	0.000	2.573114	5.393678
Sex				
Male	RC			
Female	1.18	0.107	0.965037	1.440641
Population Group				
Black/African	RC			
Coloured	0.97	0.836	0.741346	1.27413
Indian	1.05	0.946	0.238936	4.633083
White	2.40	0.0	1.687035	3.421517
Highest Level of Education				
None	RC			
Primary	1.27	0.617	0.493391	3.287379
Secondary	0.65	0.367	0.255382	1.655881
Refused to answer	2.55	0.094	0.85248	7.650086
Place of birth				
Urban	RC			
Rural	1.19	0.184	0.919006	1.55247
Work Status				
Working full-time	RC			
Working part-time	1.13	0.038	0.856761	1.499371

Not working	0.66	0.001	0.517592	0.838248
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RC= Reference Category

Table 3: Multivariate logistic regression showing the association between being married in Wave 4, with other predictor variables.

Characteristics	Odds Ratio	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
Age Groups				
21-25	RC			
26-30	0.31	0.104	0.073342	1.273881
31-35	0.65	0.573	0.146191	2.898341
36-40	1.10	0.015	0.012768	4.598454
Sex				
Male				
Female	0.34	0.029	0.010479	1.042733
Population Group				
Black/African	RC			
Coloured	2.18	0.0091	0.008494	13.01559
Indian	Omitted			
White	Omitted			
Highest level of Education				
None	RC			
Primary	9.20	0.01	1.712341	49.44893
Secondary	Omitted			

RC= Reference Category