

Back from the future: Deriving starting and ending of cohabitation relationships from register data

Study background, data and method

We cannot yet determine the moment two people fall in love from registers. However, at Statistics Netherlands, we finalized a register-based database with cohabiting couples including the start and end date of their cohabitation relationship. We use the fact that undetected cohabiting couples sooner or later show up as being such a couple. When two people marry, become parents, or partners for income taxes or social security benefits, or when they simultaneously move from one address to the other, this is noted in registers. By looking back from the future, we derive whether two people already had a cohabitation relationship from the moment they started living together at the same address. As a result, we are able to provide researchers and statisticians with better estimations of the number of starting and ending relationships and better information about the duration of cohabitation. For couples that recently started living together at the same address, less register information about their common future is available. As a result, less of them can be directly designated as a cohabiting couple. Therefore, an additional weighting procedure is applied to correct for missing couples.

Results

We will present some first results: What is the difference between the number of cohabiting partners over time and by age from our new database on the one hand and that number from the household database, on the other hand? What is the number of starting and ending relationships over time as calculated on the basis of the new database and as determined from marriage and divorce data? How long do cohabitation relationships last?

Objective and main conclusions

This way of deriving starting and ending cohabitation relationships is possibly interesting for countries that use register information for research and statistics. First results show that for research the method provides firm information on starting and ending relationships and thus duration of relationships. For use in statistics, estimations for the most recent reporting years are slightly less strong, because of lack of information about common futures. However, for t-2 and further back the results are very usable in statistics as well.

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