

Stockholm Research Reports in Demography | no 2019:02



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Ann-Zofie Duvander and Linda Kridahl



Stockholm
University

Demography Unit

ISSN 2002-617X | Department of Sociology

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Couple's decisions on union transition in Sweden

Ann-Zofie Duvander and Linda Kridahl

Department of Sociology, Stockholm University

Abstract: The current generation who has been adults during a period of less normative and more open attitudes toward various forms of unions, is likely to view marriage from a new perspective. This study investigates marriage behavior in Sweden based on couples' intentions to have children, education level, marital attitudes, and intentions to marry. We use Young Adult Panel Study conducted in 2009 with augmented register data for 2009-2014. Logistic regression analysis is employed to study marriage within the follow-up period. The study finds that the most central factors for couples to marry are their marital intentions and attitudes. Women and men' intentions have similar influences, indicating that both partners have veto power and that one partner is not more decisive than the other.

Keywords: Sweden, marriage, cohabitation intentions, union transition, life course



Introduction

Why do partners still marry in a context such as that of Sweden, where the differences between cohabitation and marriage are minimized? The generation that is now experiencing partner and family dynamics has not experienced a time when marriage was normative before childbearing or pressure to marry to form a union. The current generation of women and men, who have been adults during a period of less normative and more open attitudes toward various forms of unions, will view marriage from a new perspective. This is not to say that marriage has disappeared as an important type of union; in fact, marriage rates have recently increased (Ohlsson-Wijk, 2011). It has been suggested that increased gender equality and the absence of traditional pressures related to marriage have changed the idea of this particular type of union and made it more attractive again (Ohlsson-Wijk et al., 2018). In this study, we aim to investigate how decisions about marriage formation are made and by whom.

We investigate marriage intentions and behavior in Sweden, a country often noted as a forerunner in the second demographic transition away from tradition and toward more secular and individualistic norms and behavior (Lesthaeghe, 2010). Since the 1960s, marriage has been on the decline as a prerequisite to family building, a trend initiated by women and men with low education and less economic means to protect (Bernhardt & Hoem, 1985, Andersson 1998; Ohlsson-Wijk, 2011). Nevertheless, it has not disappeared as an important form of union and is still related to childbearing (Bracher & Santow, 1998). In many Western countries, the normative expectation among young adults to marry is declining (Duncan, Barlow, James 2005; Hiekel & Keizer, 2015; Jamieson, Anderson, McCrone, Bechhofer, Stewart & Li, 2002; Ohlsson-Wijk et al., 2018). Qualitative studies provide insights into the meaning of marriage today, indicating that cohabitation is the default situation and that boundaries are blurred between cohabitation and marriage (Jamieson et al., 2002). This phenomenon might be considered “Do-It-Yourself Marriage”, in which it is possible for individuals to include a variety of meanings in the concept (Duncan et al., 2005). Nevertheless, the security and stability of marriage are still emphasized, particularly with regard to children and the event of separation (Hiekel & Keizer, 2015). There may also be resistance to marry because of criticism of the institution itself and because it may change the union in negative ways (Hatch, 2017). Understanding how decisions about marriage are made will teach us more about the development of types of unions in present-day societies.

The main determinant of marriage behavior is the intention to marry, but whether this intention is carried out may depend on the stage of the life course. In addition, some individuals have more to gain from the economic security of marriage, and some have a more positive attitude toward marriage. Obviously, it takes two to marry, and one partner’s intentions may weigh

more heavily than those of the other depending on power relations in the union. We used the Young Adult Panel Study (YAPS), which provides information about both partners' characteristics, attitudes and marriage intentions in 2009. We followed these couples for five years with register data to investigate which couples ultimately married.

Swedish marriages

Marriage rates started to decline in the 1960s in Sweden and were quickly replaced by cohabitation as the first union. For several decades, cohabitation has been the start to almost all marriages (Duvander, 1999) and, over time, has become longer in duration. Marriage today does not always precede children; more than half of all children are born out of wedlock, although, in most cases, to a stable union (Thomson & Eriksson, 2013). Similar trends are observed worldwide, although they start somewhat later (see, for example, Kuperberg, 2018, Manning, Longmore & Giordano 2007; Perelli-Harris & Lyons-Amons, 2015).

Like in most countries, in Sweden, marriage is still more stable than cohabitation and fewer couples divorce than separate, even in unions with children (Hoem & Hoem, 1998). There are few formal reasons to marry, but some regulations regarding inheritance and the division of resources after the end of a union differ between marriage and cohabitation. In essence, cohabitants do not inherit from each other and do not share resources they brought with them to the union in the case of separation (Ohlsson-Wijk et al., 2018; see also Perelli-Harris & Sanchez-Gassen, 2012). Since the end of the 1990s, the declining marriage rate has instead turned into an increase in marriage in Sweden and the rest of the Nordic countries, which is still somewhat puzzling. In part, the trend can be explained by compositional changes because there are more young women and men of marriage-prone ages, but this only partly explains the development (Ohlsson-Wijk, 2011).

In addition to the process of the deinstitutionalization of marriage (Cherlin, 2004), there are reasons to believe that the meaning of marriage is changing over time. Such changes in meaning may relate to the recent upswing in marriage rates. Over time, marriage has become more like cohabitation, and it has become easier to exit and enter. One example of this is the marriage boom in 1989 caused by the change in the widow's pension (Hoem, 1991). Women who married before 1990 had the right to the widow's pension in case of the death of the partner, a law that was changed to a gender-neutral conditional pension. The change resulted in a large increase of marriages among long-term cohabiting couples who obviously saw no obstacles to changing their union into a marriage (Holland et al., 2017), even if the change was only for practical purposes. Another indicator that marriage may be easier to enter is the temporary upswing of marriage around the turn of the century, and in relations to anniversaries

such as a 50th anniversary etc. (Ohlsson-Wijk, 2014).

However, one should not get the impression that marriage is trivial in Sweden. One example of the importance of marriage is the sometimes fierce struggle for equal rights to marry among same-sex couples. Since 2009, Sweden has had a completely gender-neutral marriage law (Andersson & Noack, 2010), which may signal a new meaning of marriage. A further indication that marriage may have new meaning is that couples with gender-equal attitudes see no problem with marriage (Ohlsson-Wijk et al., 2018). In fact, it seems that it is the gender-equal couples that more often end up married. This phenomenon may be interpreted to mean that individual values and commitment to a union may not stand in conflict once gender equality within partnerships is achieved (Goldscheider et al., 2015).

Why would a couple marry in Sweden?

The question of why couples marry is certainly a valid one in contemporary Sweden. The normative pressure to marry is negligible for most couples, and if we relate Sweden to the idea of the second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe, 2010), values of individuality, secularization, and non-authoritarian ideas more or less dominate the discourse and are rarely challenged. Other than some resistance to same-sex marriage from the Christian Democratic party (The committee of civil affairs, 2008/9), marriage is mainly a non-existent political question, unlike, for example, the US (see, for example, Lichter & Qian, 2008). Furthermore, religious motives are downplayed in the secular Swedish context, where the dominant Swedish Lutheran Church does not condemn divorce and even suggests a ritual for facilitating divorce (Swedish church 2017). Nonetheless, there may still be reasons to marry. In addition to the obvious reasons of love and commitment, the main factors leading to marriage may be a specific life course stage, potential economic benefits of marriage and positive attitudes toward this type of union.

Life course stage of marriage

Even if marriages are almost always a consequence of successful cohabitation, they are more likely to occur at certain ages, after a period of cohabitation and in relation to childbearing. Previous studies clearly show that childbearing increase the likelihood of marriage, in Sweden as elsewhere (Bracher & Santow, 1998; Duvander, 1999; Manning & Smock 1995; Vergauwen et al., 2017). This finding is likely related to the still valid fact that marriages are more stable than cohabiting unions and that stability is sought in the case of childbearing. Commitment to the union is a major reason to enter a marriage (Ohlsson Wijk et al., 2018), and it seems that selection into marriage by union quality (rather than the idea that marriage per se changes the quality) is a major reason for differences between types of unions (Brown, 2004; Holland et al.,

2017).

Economic benefit of marriage

There are various benefits of coresidential living compared to single living, including the sharing of collective goods, economic gains from specialization, extending credit and coordinating investments as well as risk pooling (Weiss, 1993). Because of the long-term and stable nature of marriage, most of these benefits may be even more efficient in a marriage than in a cohabitation. Formally, there is still more protection of resources in marriage (Duvander 1999; Perelli-Harris & Sanchez-Gassen, 2012). On the whole, the formal differences are slight in Sweden but still exist.

It is often claimed that people with higher education have more to gain in marriage because they have more economic resources to protect, now and in the future. It is also found that higher-educated women and men are more likely to marry or have intentions to marry (Duvander, 2001; Wiik et al., 2010). The same educational gradient is not found in the process of entering cohabitation (Thomson & Bernhardt, 2010), which indicates that decisions on different types of unions are made on different grounds. In the US literature, the same pattern of low-educated partners not intending to marry is sometimes interpreted as the inability of these groups to accumulate sufficient economic resources for marriage (see, for example, Kuo & Raley, 2016).

Nevertheless, it is also claimed that the highly educated are the forerunners to new and freer behavior and may oppose earlier and more restrictive norms, such as those regarding marriage behavior (Hiekel & Keizer, 2015). It is thus expected that because the highly educated are more in favor of progressive forms of family life and individual values, they will be hesitant to marry compared to women and men with lower education, who may follow more traditional paths. In testing this idea, however, Vergauwen et al. (2017) find that there are no educational differences in marriage intentions in a variety of Western European countries. They find that in Eastern European countries, the less educated choose cohabitation over marriage, which can be explained by the pattern of disadvantage, indicating that economic strains are incompatible with marriage formation. Indeed, in Sweden, it was the women and men with low education who began to cohabit and to have children in cohabiting unions (Etzler, 1984). Currently, however, the pattern of marriage and childbearing has evolved differently for different educational groups (Carlson, 2019).

Attitudes toward marriage

It has been suggested that increased gender equality in a society may make marriage more

attractive because it can signify commitment and stability without the unequal dimensions of specialization, economic dependence, and traditional gender roles. Goldscheider et al. (2015) foresee balanced fertility as an outcome of such stable, committed and equal unions. In gender-equal societies, the meaning of marriage may change to indicate commitment that does not hinder an individual's life project (Ohlsson-Wijk et al., 2018). Perhaps marriage will change meaning worldwide to include a variety of life plans (see, for example, Deutsch et al., 2007). However, parallel to different meanings and attitudes toward marriage, social and structural constraints lead to different family formation patterns for different groups (Mc Lanahan, 2004).

Attitudes and intentions are both determinants of marriage, but it may be questioned how much influence attitudes have in addition to their indirect influence through intentions. Zilincikova and Hiekel (2018) find that attitudes have a direct effect on the outcome of marriage in a wide number of European countries to different degrees. They conclude that it is necessary to scrutinize attitudes toward marriage to better understand cohabitants' marital trajectories.

Who decides on marriage?

In most cases, partners agree in their intentions to marry, but when they do not agree, the question is which partner's plans are most important. Traditionally, women were more protected in marriage because they were economically more dependent. However, in a society in which both partners are or will be active in the labor market and there is no alimony after a separation, there are virtually no obvious gendered reasons for women to be most eager to carry out marriage plans. Additionally, US research indicates that women's marriage intentions are declining over time and cohorts (Vespa, 2014). Nevertheless, Wiik et al. (2010) find that for women, it is the commitment to the union that matters for marriage intentions, whereas for men, commitment in combination with their own and their partner's socioeconomic characteristics (education and income) matter for intentions to marry. Thus, the socioeconomic resources of each partner may be decisive, perhaps particularly for men. Additionally, US research indicates an interaction between gender and socioeconomic background (Guzzo, 2009). The educational level of both partners may matter for how the decision is made, and the intentions of the partner with the highest resources may be more important because this partner has more to protect.

Cho et al. (2018) used US data from the Fragile Family and Child Wellbeing study to test whether mothers' or fathers' intentions to marry mattered most and found that mothers' intentions were more important. However, the literature is not consistent on whose intentions are most important. In other studies, it is not clear that women have a stronger say than men

in carrying out marriage intentions. For example, Duvander (2001) suggested that intentions certainly influence actual marriage, but there is no significant difference between couples where only the man or only the woman intends to marry. One reason for the inconsistent results is that the results may vary by context and time.

Hypotheses

This study aims to answer the following questions. Is marriage still connected to the life course stage when couples become parents? Do present and potential economic resources determine who will enter marriage? Are individual attitudes toward marriage important for who marries? Whose intentions to marry really matter for a wedding to happen? The context is one in which marriage is not considered normative or highly esteemed and divorce is generally not condemned. In addition, the societal discourse as well as the political ambition is that all individuals should be regarded as independent, both economically and otherwise. Our brief review of the literature on marriage behavior leads us to the following hypotheses for the contemporary Swedish case.

1. If partners plan to have children, it is more likely that they will marry compared to partners who already have children or those who are not planning children. If marriage takes place, this is the life course stage in which this occurs.
2. When both partners have tertiary education, they are more likely to marry compared to situations in which both partners or at least one partner has a maximum of secondary education. Highly educated couples have more to protect in marriage.
3. When both partners have positive attitudes toward marriage, they are more likely to marry compared to couples in which only one partner or neither partner has positive attitudes toward marriage. Initial attitudes indicate how prone one is to marry.
4. Only one partner's intention to marry is not sufficient for marriage to happen. It does not matter whether it is the woman or the man who intends to marry. We find no reason to expect that the woman's or the man's intentions are more important today.
5. The intentions of a partner with high education are more determining than the intentions of a partner with low education. We expect that individuals with more resources to protect will have a stronger say.

Data and methods

The study uses the Young Adult Panel Study (www.suda.su.se/YAPS), which includes a nationally representative sample of men and women born in 1968, 1972, 1976 and 1980. There were panels in 1999, 2002 and 2009 in which respondents received postal questionnaires. This study uses the 2009 wave and additionally includes information on the coresidential partner of the main respondent. The response rate was 56 percent. Of the respondents who

claimed to have a coresident partner, 71 percent of partners responded to a questionnaire with very similar content as the main respondents. The questionnaire included major demographic events, such as children's births, work and partner histories, as well as retrospective questions on childhood circumstances and parental characteristics. The questionnaire also contained a large set of questions on values, attitudes and intentions, such as marriage and divorce/separation intentions. In total, 1079 cohabiting or marital couples participated in the 2009 wave, making it possible to execute couple-level analyses on a wide range of topics.

Because this study focused on opposite-sex couples' marital behavior, we derived a subsample consisting of 521 cohabiting couples from the 2009 wave. We excluded all cohabiting same-sex couples (n: 14); hence, the analytical subsample includes 507 non-married cohabiting opposite-sex couples. The data are further augmented with register data on vital demographic events of the main respondent, i.e., date of marriages, divorces, and dates of birth of children up to December 31, 2014. This approach enabled analyses of marriage propensities after survey participation during the follow-up period. We followed cohabiting couples over time to analyze their marriage intentions by using register data records of the date of marriage over the 2009-2014 period by employing logistic regression analysis in which the outcome was *marriage* (yes/no). The models estimate the coefficients of getting married by couples' parental status and child intentions, educational level, marriage attitudes, and marital intentions over the 2009-2014 period. In total, 201 couples married over this period.

Because we cannot be certain that the main respondents married their cohabiting partner from 2009, we additionally conducted sensitivity analyses in which we only included marriages up to two years after survey participation¹. Some associations found were somewhat stronger, but the overall patterns were similar to the results presented below, which gives credence to the study's main findings (see Table 4 in Appendix).

The variable *Couple's child intentions* was categorized into the following: 1) Both partners plan to have children, 2) Either the man or the woman plans children, 3) No partner plans to have children, 4) Have children aged 0-3, and 4) Have children older than 3. Couples who have children and plan additional children are coded as having children, and we disregard their plans to have additional children (if any). We assume that cohabiting couples who already have children are in another life phase, and if these couples have not already married, they may be less likely to do so.

¹ Similar sensitivity analyses have been conducted by Ohlsson-Wijk (2018) using the YAPS 2003 wave.

Couples' education level was a combined variable in which both partners' highest achieved education level was taken into consideration. The variable is categorized into the following: 1) Both partners have less than tertiary education, 2) The woman has less than tertiary education and the man has tertiary education, 3) The woman has tertiary education and the man has less than tertiary education, and 4) Both have tertiary education. In 12 couples, both partners had no information on education and thus were coded as "Both less than tertiary".

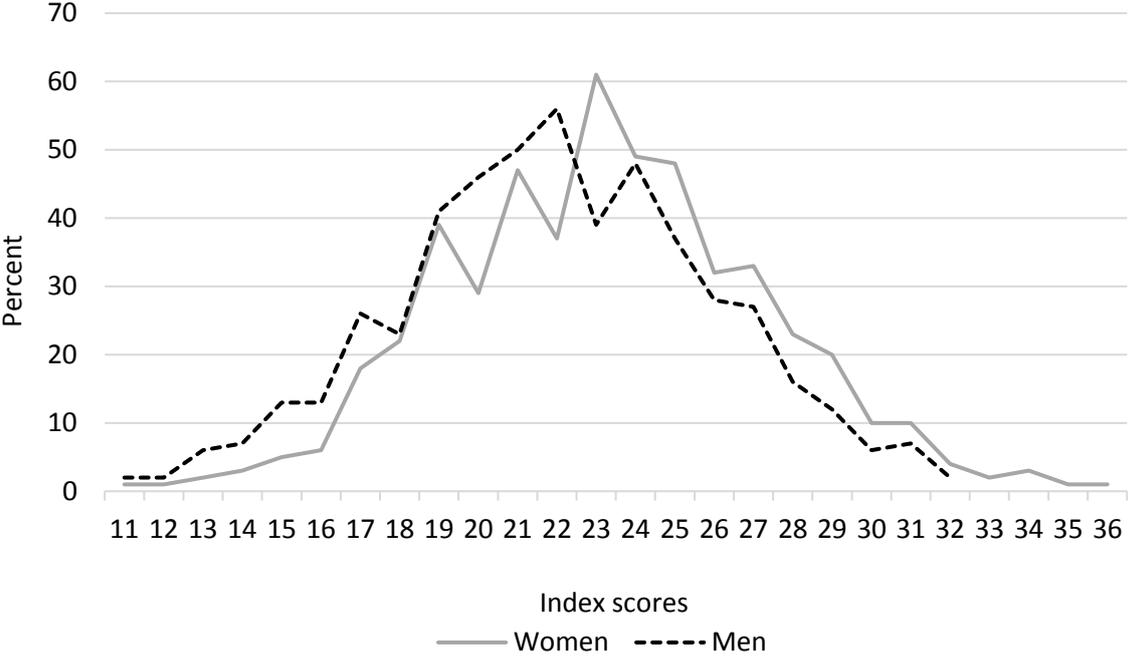
The variable *Couple's marital attitudes* is based on a gender-specific index including the responses to eight statements to which respondents could answer on a five-level scale, from Agree completely to Do not agree. The statements are as follows:

1. People ought to get married for the sake of the children
2. People ought to get married for economic reasons
3. Married persons are under greater pressure to conform
4. It is more difficult to break up when married
5. The wedding ceremony is too expensive
6. It is tradition to get married
7. It is romantic to get married
8. Marriage shows you are serious about the relationship

To assess the reliability of the battery of marital attitudes, Cronbach's alpha was tested and indicated an alpha of 0.75, which can be considered relatively high internal consistency (the alpha coefficient varies from 0 to 1). Statements 3, 4 and 5 were rescaled because the original scale indicated that the higher the number, the less positive the respondent was toward marriage. Individuals who answered that they did not know or had missing answers on one or a few statements were recoded as the middle category "3". We performed analyses when these imputations were not included, and the results did not change. The distributions of the gender-specific indexes are displayed in Figure 1. Subsequently, the indexes were dichotomized based on the means (mean women: 23.25, mean men: 21.99).² Respondents who had an index lower than the mean were categorized as "Not positive toward marriage", and respondents who had an index equal to or higher than the mean were categorized as "Positive toward marriage". *Couple's marital attitudes* had four categories: 1) Both partners positive toward marriage, 2) Woman positive toward marriage but man not positive, 3) Man positive toward marriage but woman not positive, and 4) Both partners not positive toward marriage.

² Means without imputations: women 23.47, men 22.31.

Figure 1. Distribution of the scores of the indexes on attitudes toward marriage by gender



To evaluate which of the statements may have had the greatest explanatory power before including the index variable in the final models, we initially conducted bivariate logistic regression models for each of the statements as well as the models with stepwise inclusions of the statements (models not displayed). Overall, none of the statements alone explained the association between marital attitudes and marital transition, and they all added something unique to the index variable. Additionally, we found that the direction of results across the statements varied by gender. For instance, the results show that the woman’s attitudes matter more for marriage when she (but not the man) thinks that one should marry for the sake of the children and that marriage shows that a person is serious about the relationship. Similarly, marriage is more likely when the woman thinks it is more difficult to break up a marriage. The results also show that marriage is more likely in couples where the man (but not the woman) thinks it is traditional and romantic to get married and when he does not think the wedding ceremony is too expensive. Marriage is more likely when the man does not think it is more difficult to break up when married. Additionally, couples in which the man thinks that married partners are under greater pressure to conform are more likely to marry. Couples in which the man thinks that one should marry due to economic reasons have a higher tendency to marry.

The variable measuring *Couples’ marital intentions* was based on two identical questions, one to the main respondent and one to the partner: *Do you and your partner plan to get married?* The answer alternatives were 1) Yes, within the next two years, 2) Yes, but later, 3) I would like it, but my partner would not, 4) My partner would like it, but I would not, 5) No, we do not

have intentions to get married, and 6) Do not know. The created variable had four categories: 1) Both partners want to get married, 2) Woman wants to get married but man does not, 3) Man wants to get married but woman does not, and 4) Both partners do not want to get married (including “Do not know”/“Missing”). Table 1 displays the cross-tabulation of women’s and men’s marital intentions and indicates that the vast majority of the couples had harmonized answers. A total of 45 percent of the couples agreed to marry within two years or later (228 couples), and 15 percent agreed that they did not intend to get married. Only 5 percent agreed on only one partner wanting to marry. Hence, for most couples, coding the combination variable was not problematic because the partners’ answers were not conflicting. To categorize the 136 couples who reported conflicting answers, we had to make some additional considerations. As an overruling principle, the ego’s answer ruled out the partner’s answer, meaning that what a person stated about him- or herself was considered more true than the partner’s statement. For instance, if one partner stated that they intended to get married within the next two years but the other partner stated that she/he would like to get married but her/his partner would not, this couple was categorized as both partners wanting to get married. As another example, if one partner stated that he/she did not plan to get married and the other had a missing value or stated that he/she did not know, the couple was categorized as both not wanting to get married.

Table 1. Women’s and men’s marital intentions (number of couples=507).

Do you and your partner plan to get married?								
Woman’s marital intentions	Man’s marital intentions						Missing	Total
	Yes, within 2 years	Yes, but later	I would like it, my partner would not	My partner would like it, I do not	No, we would not	Don't know		
Yes, within 2 years	85	15	0	1	2	0	1	104
Yes, but later	28	100	0	7	13	7	4	159
I would like it, my partner would not	3	7	0	25	6	3	0	44
My partner would like it I would not	0	3	1	0	3	1	0	8
No, we do not	5	11	1	12	53	14	1	97
Don't know	5	23	2	4	22	23	2	81
Missing	5	5	0	1	3	0	0	14
Total	131	164	4	50	102	48	8	507

Furthermore, since individuals' intentions and attitudes may be highly correlated and may potentially be proxies for each other, we performed a Pearson's chi-square test for independence between marital intentions and attitudes. The test showed that intentions and attitudes were not completely consistent and correlated. Hence, we can conclude that it is appropriate to include both variables in the analyses. Overall, more than half of the couples who had positive attitudes to marriage also wanted to get married. At the same time, one-fifth of the couples who were positive toward marriage did not want to get married. In couples in which the man was positive toward marriage but the woman was not, 54 percent wanted to get married. In couples with the opposite situation, 45 percent of the couples wanted to get married. Interestingly, in a relatively small share of couples, the woman or the man was positive toward marriage and the same respondent was the only partner that wanted to get married (22 percent and 13 percent, respectively). Again, this finding suggests that intentions and attitudes are not always synchronized. A potential explanation is that an individual may be positive overall toward marriage but the current partner is not "the one" or is in another stage of life.

Table 2. Crosstabulation between marital intentions and marriage attitudes (index)

Marital attitudes	Marital intentions			
	Both partners want to get married	Woman wants to get married but man does not	Man wants to get married but woman does not	Both partners do not want to get married
Both partners positive toward marriage				
Number of couples	114	23	19	39
Column %	45	36	37	28
Woman positive but man not positive				
Number of couples	46	22	8	26
Column %	18	34	16	19
Man positive but woman not positive				
Number of couples	72	10	18	33
Column %	28	16	35	24
Both partners not positive toward				
Number of couples	21	9	6	41
Column %	8	14	12	30
Total				
Number of couples	253	64	51	139
Column %	100	100	100	100

Note: Pearson $\chi^2(9) = 46.7$ P-value = 0.000

In the models, we also controlled for employment and age difference in couples. *Couple's employment status* was categorized into 1) Both are permanently employed, 2) Woman is in other activity and man is permanently employed, 3) Woman is permanently employed and man is in other activity, and 4) Both partners are in other activity. "Permanently employed" included Ph.D. studies, owning a business and free-lancing, and "Other activity" included parental leave, housekeeping, studies, limited employment, sick leave, unemployment or retirement. Age was categorized into 1) Man older, 2) Same age, and 3) Woman older, where an age difference of more than two years indicated that one partner was older. Sensitivity analyses were conducted with an alternative variable with more categorizations, and the variable did not significantly moderate the main relationship or have any statistically significant association with the marriage transition.³ Descriptive statistics of all variables are presented in Table 3.

Results

Descriptive findings

Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics of the cohabiting couples in the year of the survey in 2009. The vast majority had children or planned to have children, but in 5 percent of the couples, only one of the partners planned to have children. Regarding the couple's education level, approximately two-fifths of the couples had tertiary education. In one-fifth of the couples, only the woman had tertiary education, and in less than half of the couples, only the man had tertiary education. In approximately two-fifths of the couples, both were positive toward marriage, and in one-fifth of the couples, the man was positive and the woman was not. In somewhat more couples, the woman was positive toward marriage and the man was not. In addition, we found that in half of all couples, both partners intended to get married. It is somewhat more common for only the woman to intend to get married than the opposite. In more than a quarter of the couples, neither of the partners intended to get married.

³ The alternative variable consisted of the following categories: 1) Both are in permanent employment (incl. Ph.D. studies, owning a business and free-lancing), 2) Both are on sick leave, unemployment or retirement, 3) Both are on parental leave, housekeeping, studies or limited employment, 4) Woman is in permanent employment and man is on sick-leave, unemployment or retirement, 5) Woman is in permanent employment and man is on parental leave, housekeeping, studies or limited employment, 6) Woman is on sick leave, unemployment or retirement and man is in permanent employment, 7) Woman is on sick leave, unemployment or retirement and man is on parental leave, housekeeping, studies or limited employment, 8) Woman is on parental leave, housekeeping, studies or limited employment and man is in permanent employment, and 9) Woman is on parental leave, housekeeping, studies or limited employment and man is on sick leave, unemployment or retirement.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the couples in 2009 (%)

	All couples, %	Married during observation time, %
<i>Couples' child intentions</i>		
Both partners plan children	23	28
Either the man or the woman plans children	5	5
Both partners do not plan children	5	3
Have children aged 0-3	38	40
Have children older than 3	30	23
<i>Couples' highest education level</i>		
Both partners tertiary	40	42
Both partners less than tertiary (incl. both do not	30	27
Woman less than tertiary and man tertiary	8	8
Woman tertiary and man less than tertiary	22	22
<i>Couple's marital attitudes</i>		
Both partners positive toward marriage	38	28
Woman positive but man not positive	20	13
Man positive but woman not positive	26	49
Both partners not positive toward marriage	15	10
<i>Couples' marital intentions</i>		
Both partners want to get married	50	68
Woman wants to get married but man does not	13	9
Man wants to get married but woman does not	10	8
Both partners do not want to get married	27	13
<i>Couples' employment status</i>		
Both partners permanently employed	48	46
Woman in other activity and man permanently employed	27	28
Woman permanently employed and man in other activity	14	17
Both partners in other activity	9	9
<i>Couple's age composition</i>		
Man older	66	69
Same age	13	14
Woman older	21	17
<i>Total number of couples</i>	507	201

Logistic regression analyses

Table 4 presents five logistic regression models, of which four are bivariate models and one is a multivariate model. The outcome in all models is marriage occurrence (yes/no) after survey participation in 2009 during the five-year follow-up period. The results are presented as odds together with corresponding p-values. We organize the analytical presentation by addressing the study's five hypotheses in the same order as postulated earlier in the study. Hence, we start with the childbearing stage of the couple, which is a likely determinant of marriage. Because marriage and child intentions may be linked, our first hypothesis is as follows: *if partners are planning to have children, it is more likely that they will marry compared to if they*

have children or are not planning children. We find that couples who already have somewhat older children and couples who are not planning children have a lower probability of marriage compared to couples who plan to have children or still have very young children. We interpret these findings to mean that couples who plan children and those who have just become parents are in a similar life phase of which marriage may also be a part, particularly compared to couples with older children or couples who do not plan to have children at all. However, when all other factors are controlled in model 5, the significant results disappear.

Second, we investigate the educational level of the couples with the idea that higher education indicates more resources to protect and therefore a higher incentive for marriage. The second hypothesis, *when both partners have tertiary education, it is more likely that they will marry compared to when both partners or at least one partner has up to secondary education*, is not supported in any of the models, and we find no difference in marriage propensity between couples with different educational levels. The results for couples' education level are not statistically significant for all categories and hence do not support the hypothesis.

Third, we examined the impact of the couple's attitudes toward marriage on the propensity to marry, and we derived the following hypothesis: *when both partners are positive toward marriage, it is more likely they will marry compared to when only one or neither partner has a positive attitude toward marriage.* The results of the bivariate logistic regression support the idea that two partners who are positive toward marriage have a higher marriage propensity compared to two partners who are negative, and a higher propensity than couples in which the woman is negative toward marriage. It seems that the man's positive attitudes are important; in couples in which only the man has a positive attitude toward marriage, the propensity to marry is not significantly different than when both partners are positive toward marriage. This pattern holds in the model where all variables are added.

Our fourth hypothesis refers to the marriage intentions of the woman and the man where we rely on the idea of a veto rule for both partners: *if only one partner intends to marry, marriage will not happen.* The results of both the binary and the full model support the hypothesis and show that couples in which both partners have intentions to marry within a few years are more likely to do so compared to couples in which only one of the partners has intentions to marry. We do not find any statistically significant gender differences; that is, it does not matter whether the woman or the man is the partner who intends to get married. We further display these results by changing the reference categories in Table 1 in Appendix. Obviously, couples in which both partners do not intend to marry are least likely to get married, but it seems that there is a slight tendency for marriage to occur more often if only the man intends to marry

than if no one intends to marry (significant at 10 percent).

We additionally ran a model with all the key explanatory variables above presented and two control variables, the couple's age difference and employment status. Overall, we did not find a large divergence from the bivariate models, with the exception of the variable measuring the stage of life with children, which became insignificant. Regarding the control variables, neither the couple's age difference nor employment status seems to impact the propensity to get married, and there seems to be no difference whether it is the woman or the man who is permanently employed.

To test our last hypothesis, *the intentions of a partner with low education are less determining regardless of the gender of the intending partner*, we analyzed a combination variable based on the couple's marital intentions and education level. The results are presented in bar charts in Figure 2 (and in Table 3 in the Appendix). The reference category is both partners having intentions to marry within each educational group. For example, among couples in which both partners have tertiary education, the reference category is "Both tertiary, both want (to get married)". The striped bars indicate statistically non-significant estimates. The results show that among couples in which both partners have tertiary education, there is no statistically significant difference between couples in which both partners intend to get married and those in which only the woman intends to get married. This may be interpreted as the woman having a stronger say in these couples. If the man is the only partner who intends to get married or both do not intend to get married, the propensity to marry is lower. Moreover, we find that in couples in which only the man has tertiary education, both the woman's and the man's sole intention to marry indicate a lower marriage propensity than if both intend marriage. Among couples in which only the woman has tertiary education, there seems to be no statistically significant differences by couples' marital intentions. Here, we also have one category missing because it is very uncommon for the man to intend marriage in this category. We should thus be very cautious in interpreting the findings. However, the results indicate that the intentions of both, one, or neither partner are not a strong determinant in cases where the woman only has tertiary education. Among low-educated couples, we find that if the man is the only partner who intends to get married, the marriage propensity is as high as if both intend marriage. If only the woman or neither partner intends marriage, the likelihood is significantly lower. The findings of high- and low-educated couples are thus mirror images. We find that in highly educated couples, the woman has a stronger say, while in couples with lower education, the man has a stronger say. We hypothesized that the differences would be in cases in which one party has higher education, which we do not find.

Additional sensitivity analyses

To check the robustness of our findings, we performed several additional analyses. First, we tried another operationalization of marital intentions and separated those who stated they did not intend to marry from those who stated “do not know”. The logistic regression analyses produced similar results as presented here, except that individuals who answered “do not know” had a very small likelihood of marrying. Second, we included the couple’s income levels, which did not produce any statistically significant results. Third, we performed complementary log-log functions and allowed the risk of the marriage event to vary by time. The models did not show any patterns other than those we present here produced by logistic regression.

Summary and conclusion

This study found that the most central factors for couples to marry were their marital intentions and attitudes, even after controlling for several additional explanatory factors. We did not find any differences depending on which of the partners intended to get married if only one did, indicating that women and men have a similar influence in regard to the transition to marriage. Both partners may act out a veto, and one partner does not seem more decisive than the other.

The study further found that couples who planned to have children had the highest propensity to marry within the next five years. In couples where only one of the partners planned to have children, the propensity to marry was lower compared to couples in which both partners planned children but higher compared to couples who already had older children or did not plan children. This pattern diminished when marriage intentions and attitudes were considered, which may indicate that other factors are more important than the life course stage factors that plans for children indicate.

Moreover, the study did not find support for the idea that the couple’s education level influences marriage transition. The measure may be too crude, the sample may be too small, or the finding may actually be a sign that the meaning of marriage is changing in that it is no longer an institution for the protection of resources. However, we did find that the education level in interaction with marriage intentions is important for marriage propensity. The intentions of the woman matter more in highly educated couples, while the intentions of the man matter more in low-educated couples. Because women have a stronger say in highly educated couples and men have a stronger say in lower-educated couples, it may be that marriage has different meaning for different groups. Often, these two groups are seen as forerunners (highly educated women) and laggards (low-educated men), and it may be that these two polarities are those who consider marriage most important. These two groups may, however, attach very different meanings to marriage.

In addition, the study found that couples with positive marital attitudes were more likely to end up married but also that couples in which only the man was positive toward marriage had a higher propensity to marry compared to couples in which only the woman had a positive attitude toward marriage. A potential reason for this finding may be the changing institution of marriage in Sweden. It may be that if marriage is no longer important to protect resources and the obligations to an ex-partner after a potential divorce are non-existent, then this union is easier to enter for men. Another factor in this case is the widespread, encouraged and somewhat normative shared residential custody for children after divorce. Thus, for a man, a divorce may often mean half the time with the children and not having to share income with another parent who earns less (as women mostly do). For women, a divorce may mean that they will lose half the time with the child and will have to carry a heavier economic burden. Our measure of positive attitudes toward marriage may thus indicate a stronger desire to marry for men and slightly more skepticism for women.

The results of this study indicate that the meaning of marriage is indeed changing. Even if we cannot say in which ways and what the new meaning is, “old indicators” of the life course stage or the protection of resources seem to matter less today, at least in Sweden. It may be, as Duncan et al. (2005) conclude, that marriage is currently a variation of cohabitation. The blurred boundaries between marriage and cohabitation are further emphasized by the non-correlation with the employment status of either partner. Additionally, the index that this study used included a variety of questions regarding marriage, and less than 40 percent of the couples were positive toward marriage (both partners). However, the questions that were included in the index may not correspond to the contemporary reasons and motivations to marry. Thus, future research may use other questions or open-ended questions to determine why people marry today. Qualitative studies may also shed light on this issue.

We want to conclude by noting that the vast majority of partners are aware of the intentions of their partners. Even if they do not always agree, they have a good idea of their partner’s opinion on the matter. This may be interpreted to mean that marriage is still a relevant option or discussion and not something that has been forgotten or an irrelevant part of the relationship.

Acknowledgements:

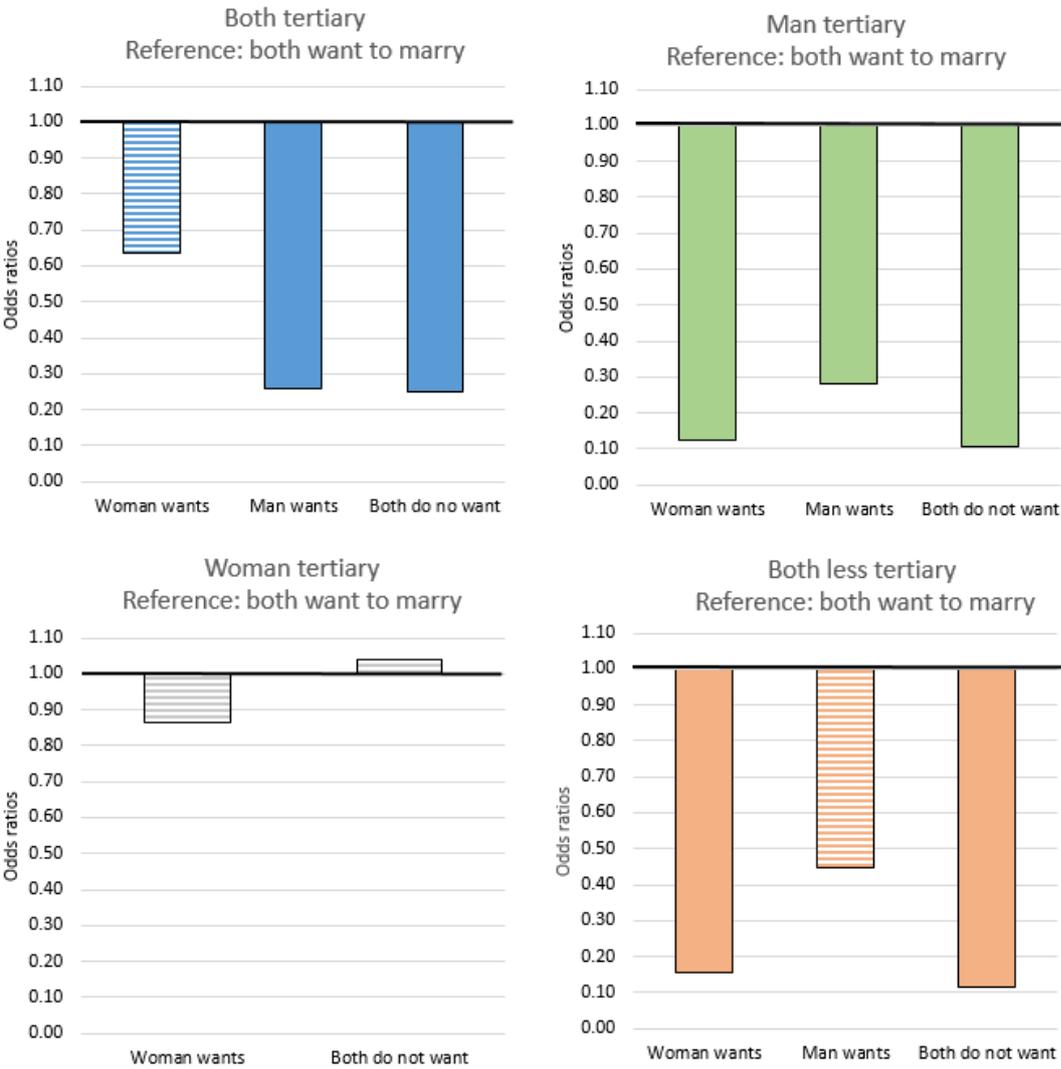
The authors are grateful for financial support from Forte (the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare), grant number 2012-0646.

Table 4. Odds of marriage by couple's child intentions, education level, marital attitudes and intentions among cohabiting couples (logistic regressions)

		Model 1 ¹⁾		Model 2 ¹⁾		Model 3 ¹⁾		Model 4 ¹⁾		Model 5 ²⁾	
		OR	p								
Couples' child intentions	Both partners plan children	1								1	
	Either the man or the woman plans children	0.84	0.700							1.12	0.825
	Both partners do not plan children	0.42	0.075							0.98	0.971
	Have children aged 0-3	0.79	0.330							0.89	0.641
	Have children older than 3	0.50	0.006							0.68	0.194
Couples' education level	Both partners have tertiary (<i>ref</i>)			1						1	
	Woman tertiary and man less than tertiary			0.91	0.680					0.91	0.739
	Man tertiary and woman less than tertiary			1.13	0.725					1.12	0.779
	Both less than tertiary			0.79	0.274					1.03	0.905
Couple's marital attitudes	Both partners positive toward marriage (<i>ref</i>)					1				1	
	Woman positive but man not positive					0.34	0.000			0.35	0.000
	Man positive but woman not positive					0.72	0.147			0.72	0.175
	Both partners not positive toward marriage					0.37	0.001			0.55	0.066
Couples' marital intentions	Both partners want to get married (<i>ref</i>)							1	1	1	
	Woman wants to get married but man does not							0.32	0.000	0.35	0.001
	Man wants to get married but woman does not							0.37	0.002	0.37	0.003
	Both partners do not want to get married							0.19	0.000	0.21	0.000
Couple's age difference	Man older (<i>ref</i>)									1	
	Same age									1.21	0.505
	Woman older									0.76	0.444
Couples' employment	Both partners permanently employed (<i>ref</i>)									1	
	Woman permanently employed and man in									1.23	0.483
	Man permanently employed and woman in									0.79	0.341
	Both partners in other activity									0.87	0.707
Sample size			507		507		507		507		507
Log likelihood			-335		-339		-328		-312		-301

Note: ¹⁾ Bivariate models. ²⁾ Model with all variables included.

Figure 2. Odds of marriage by couple's marital intentions and education



Note: Striped bars represent statistically non-significant estimates

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Appendix

Table 1. Coding schema: Couples' marital intentions in 2009

Question: <i>Do you and your partner plan to get married?</i>				
1. Yes, within the next two years				
2. Yes, but later				
3. I would like it, but my partner would not				
4. My partner would like it, but I would not				
5. No, we do not have plans to get married				
6. Do not know				
Woman's intentions	Man's intentions	n couples	%	Couple's marital intentions
Yes, within two years	Yes, within two years	85	16.8	Both want
Yes, within two years	Yes, but later	15	3.0	Both want
Yes, within two years	My partner would like it, I would not	1	0.2	Woman wants, man does not
Yes, within two years	No, we don't	2	0.4	Woman wants, man does not
Yes, within two years	Missing	1	0.2	Both want
Yes, but later	Yes, within two years	28	5.5	Both want
Yes, but later	Yes, but later	100	19.7	Both want
Yes, but later	My partner would like it, I would not	7	1.4	Woman wants, man does not
Yes, but later	No, we don't	13	2.6	Woman wants, man does not
Yes, but later	Don't know	7	1.4	Woman wants, man does not
Yes, but later	Missing	4	0.8	Both want
I would like it, my partner would not	Yes, within two years	3	0.6	Both want
I would like it, my partner would not	Yes, but later	7	1.4	Both want
I would like it, my partner would not	My partner would like it, I would not	25	4.9	Woman wants, man does not
I would like it, my partner would not	No, we don't	6	1.2	Woman wants, man does not
I would like it, my partner would not	Don't know	3	0.6	Woman wants, man does not
My partner would like it, I would not	Yes, but later	3	0.6	Man wants, woman does not
My partner would like it, I would not	I would like it, my partner would not	1	0.2	Man wants, woman does not
My partner would like it, I would not	No, we don't	3	0.6	Both don't want
My partner would like it, I would not	Don't know	1	0.2	Both don't want
No, we don't	Yes, within two years	5	1.0	Man wants, woman does not
No, we don't	Yes, but later	11	2.2	Man wants, woman does not
No, we don't	I would like it, my partner would not	1	0.2	Man wants, woman does not
No, we don't	My partner would like it, I would not	12	2.4	Both don't want
No, we don't	No, we don't	53	10.5	Both don't want
No, we don't	Don't know	14	2.8	Both don't want
No, we don't	Missing	1	0.2	Both don't want
Don't know	Yes, within two years	5	1.0	Man wants, woman does not
Don't know	Yes, but later	23	4.5	Man wants, woman does not
Don't know	I would like it, my partner would not	2	0.4	Man wants, woman does not
Don't know	My partner would like it, I would not	4	0.8	Both don't want
Don't know	No, we don't	22	4.3	Both don't want
Don't know	Don't know	23	4.5	Both don't want
Don't know	Missing	2	0.4	Both don't want
Missing	Yes, within two years	5	1.0	Both want
Missing	Yes, but later	5	1.0	Both want
Missing	My partner would like it, I would not	1	0.2	Both don't want
Missing	No, we don't	3	0.6	Both don't want
	Total	507	100	

Table 2. Odds of marriage by marital intentions among cohabiting couples, bivariate models (n: 507)

	Reference both want		Reference woman wants		Reference man wants		Reference both do not want	
	OR	<i>p</i>	OR	<i>p</i>	OR	<i>p</i>	OR	<i>p</i>
Both, yes	1		3.17	0.000	2.71	0.002	5.14	0.000
Woman yes, man no	0.32	0.000	1		0.86	0.705	1.62	0.168
Man yes, woman no	0.37	0.002	1.17	0.705	1		1.89	0.084
Both no	0.19	0.000	0.62	0.168	0.53	0.084	1	

Table 3. Odds of marriage by interaction between marital intentions and education level (n: 507)

	OR	<i>p</i>
Both tertiary, both want to get married	1.00	
Both tertiary, woman wants to get married	0.63	0.327
Both tertiary, man wants to get married	0.26	0.013
Both tertiary, both do not want to get married	0.25	0.000
Man tertiary/woman less than tertiary, both want to get married	1.10	0.768
Man tertiary/woman less than tertiary, woman wants to get married	0.14	0.012
Man tertiary/woman less than tertiary, man wants to get married	0.31	0.096
Man tertiary/woman less than tertiary, both do not want to get married	0.12	0.001
Woman tertiary/man less than tertiary, both want to get married	0.63	0.327
Woman tertiary/man less than tertiary, woman wants to get married	0.55	0.522
Woman tertiary/man less than tertiary, man wants to get married ¹⁾		
Woman tertiary/man less than tertiary, both do not want to get married	0.66	0.552
Both less tertiary, both want to get married	1.17	0.620
Both less tertiary, woman wants to get married	0.18	0.004
Both less tertiary, man wants to get married	0.52	0.217
Both less tertiary, both do not want to get married	0.13	0.000
Sample size	506	¹⁾
Log likelihood	-304	

¹⁾ One couple excluded due to small number of cells in the category "Woman tertiary/man less than tertiary, man wants to get married"

Table 4. Odds of marriage by couple's child intentions, education level, marital attitudes and intentions in 2009-2011, restricted models¹⁾

		Model 1 ¹⁾		Model 2 ¹⁾		Model 3 ¹⁾		Model 4 ¹⁾		Model 5 ²⁾	
		Coef	p	Coe	p	Coef	p	Coef	p	Coef	p
Couples' child intentions	Both partners plan children	1								1	
	Either the man or the woman plans children	0.84	0.700							1.21	0.710
	Both partners do not plan children	0.42	0.075							0.95	0.920
	Have children aged 0-3	0.79	0.330							0.89	0.675
	Have children older than 3	0.50	0.006							0.69	0.218
Couples' education level	Both partners have tertiary (<i>ref</i>)			1						1	
	Woman tertiary and man less than tertiary			0.91	0.680					0.95	0.852
	Man tertiary and woman less than tertiary			1.13	0.725					1.16	0.715
	Both less than tertiary			0.79	0.274					1.06	0.825
Couple's marital attitudes	Both partners positive toward marriage (<i>ref</i>)					1				1	
	Woman positive but man not positive					0.34	0.000			0.37	0.000
	Man positive but woman not positive					0.72	0.147			0.73	0.202
	Both partners not positive toward marriage					0.37	0.001			0.56	0.073
Couples' marital intentions	Both partners want to get married (<i>ref</i>)							1		1	
	Woman wants to get married but man does not							0.32	0.000	0.36	0.001
	Man wants to get married but woman does not							0.37	0.002	0.38	0.005
	Both partners do not want to get married							0.19	0.000	0.21	0.000
Couple's age difference	Man older (<i>ref</i>)										
	Same age										
	Woman older										
Couples' employment	Both partners permanently employed (<i>ref</i>)									1	
	Woman permanently employed and man in									1.24	0.467
	Man permanently employed and woman in									0.82	0.424
	Both partners in other activity									0.89	0.738
Sample size	507		507		507		507		507		
Log likelihood	-312		-329		-339		-335		-302		

Note: ¹⁾Restricted models: only marriage within two years after survey in 2009.

Stockholm Research Reports in Demography
Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm, Sweden
www.su.se | info@su.se | ISSN 2002-617X



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