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### Abstract

Sweden is among the countries with the highest share of single households in Europe, but not all are truly partnerless. We explore who are living-apart-together beyond ages of the late twenties and their potential vulnerability, analyzing data of the Swedish GGS. We apply multinomial logistic regression. The results show that vis-à-vis co-residence, LAT is more prevalent among: i) childless men than women, but the opposite is true for single parents; ii) the elderly (aged 70+); iii) those with long-term illness. Individuals engaged in LAT seem to be better off than singles, but are more likely to have economic difficulties than the co-residents. Neither growing up in a non-intact family, non-Swedish origin, metropolitan residence, nor educational attainment matter for living-apart-together rather than in any other living arrangement. The majority feels constrained to have separate households, rather than this being their choice, yet concerns of vulnerability in relation to LAT seem exaggerated.

**Keywords:** living-apart-together, LAT, vulnerability, GGS, Sweden

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## Introduction

With about one-fifth of the population living alone and ca 40% of all households consisting of only one person, Sweden is among the countries with the highest share of single households in Europe (Eurostat 2020). Living without a partner beyond young adulthood has often been associated with vulnerability regarding health (for review see Umberson & Montez, 2010), socioeconomic position (Sandström & Karlsson, 2019), and access to social support (de Jong Gierveld et al., 2012) among others, hence the phenomenon deserves attention from policymakers. As more recent research reveals, a non-negligible proportion of such “partnerless” individuals are in fact in committed relationships. They have a stable intimate partner with whom they do not share a household, as also highlighted in the name of such non-traditional arrangements: living-apart-together (LAT). Despite its low prevalence at a level of at most 10 per cent in the adult population across Europe, North America and Australia (Connidis et al., 2017; Pasteels et al., 2017), around one-quarter of individuals that are not married or co-residing with a partner are in a LAT relationship, although fewer in Eastern Europe where alternative living arrangements to formal marriage have emerged more recently (Liefbroer et al., 2015). The non-negligible incidence of LAT-unions in advanced societies is part of the de-standardization of family life courses, a process associated with postponed transitions regarding family commitments, declining relationship stability along with an upsurge of family reconstitutions, as well as parenthood and parenting becoming increasingly complex given growing numbers of separated-, step-, and blended families (see Oláh et al., 2018 for an overview). Research on LAT provides a valuable contribution to a more informed understanding of family diversity and its implications for individuals and societies as the complexity of family biographies and relationships increases.

There is no common definition of what constitutes a living-apart-together relationship, as recent overviews have pointed out (Connidis et al., 2017; Pasteels et al., 2017). In addition to the couple not sharing a home, various dimensions have been used in the literature for identifying a relationship as LAT. First, the life course stage, that allows for a broader but also a stricter definition, depending on whether to include non-residential unions with one or both partners still living in their parents' home (see e.g. Castro-Martín et al., 2008), or only relationships with both LAT partners having their own households (Haskey & Lewis, 2006; Levin & Trost, 1999). Second, the reasons for maintaining separate homes (Duncan & Phillips, 2010), and third, the duration of the relationship based on which the partners' commitment to each other can be assessed (Amato & Hayes, 2014), can provide insights in the heterogeneity of such living arrangements. LAT has also been categorized based on the partners' age and eventual presence of children from previous relationships (Régnier-Loilier, 2017), as well as by the age of the members of the couple in combination with the duration of their non-residential relationship (Pasteels et al., 2017).

Understanding that LAT is most likely to be a transitory stage in the family formation process in ages of young adulthood often imposed by circumstances and to be abandoned in a near future (Ayuso, 2019; Lewin, 2018; Upton-Davis, 2012), we focus in this paper on people in their thirties and beyond, who can be expected to consider such partnership arrangement as a more lasting state in their family career. Non-residential unions in more mature ages can be the result of choice or the outcome of constraints experienced by any member of the couple (Ayuso, 2019; Liefbroer et al., 2015). In any case, LAT relationships are less institutionalized than even non-marital cohabitation, considering the legal position of the partners, such as their rights and obligations towards each other with respect to care, break-up or death (Bowman, 2017; Connidis et al., 2017), to name a few important issues. Nevertheless, previous research shows that LAT is often a preferred option as it provides a high level of

autonomy, social and financial independence, and room for gender-egalitarian arrangements for the partners involved (Borell, 2003; Bowman, 2017; Duncan et al., 2013). Hence, concerns about the vulnerability of individuals in this type of partnership may be exaggerated. In this paper, we seek to shed more light on who are living-apart-together (the LATs) in the Swedish population, in order to have a better understanding of their eventual vulnerability, given the lack of relevant studies based on recent large-scale data for Sweden.

### **Previous research**

In previous research on LAT, five groups of factors have been identified to answer the question of who chooses or is constrained to this type of partnership. The first group includes the demographic characteristics, such as gender (e.g. women opting for LAT as to avoid an increase of domestic duties given gendered division of labor (Karlsson & Borell, 2002), age (the meaning of LAT may differ by life-course stage (Pasteels et al., 2017), childhood family type, region, own family experiences and health (Connidis et al., 2017; Lewin, 2017; Liefbroer et al., 2015). Socio-economic factors constitute the second group, including education, labor force attachment and economic situation (Coulter & Hu, 2017; Ermisch & Seidler, 2009). The third group contains cultural factors. It has been shown that people in living-apart-together arrangements often express more post-materialistic value orientation, are more individualistic, work-oriented and secularized than their married counterparts (Liefbroer et al., 2015). They value personal autonomy, independence and gender equality highly (Upton-Davis, 2012), and appreciate that LAT facilitates contacts with children and grandchildren (Connidis et al., 2017). Events constitute the fourth group, such as the members of the couple temporarily working at different locations may strengthen the preference for LAT (Levin, 2004). The same is true for policies and legal regulations on social benefits and in-kind support provided to single persons or lone parents but seldom to

co-resident couples (Coulter & Hu, 2017; Lewin, 2018), making up the fifth group.

Regarding the latter, it should be pointed out that the choice of LAT may also be motivated by an urge to protect property and/or inheritance for one's offspring from previous partnerships (de Jong Gierveld, 2002; Connidis et al., 2017).

Of the five groups of factors addressed in the literature, the first two, that is demographic characteristics and socio-economic position, are particularly suitable to reveal potential vulnerability if any, with respect to LAT arrangements, based on a large-scale data set.

Value-orientation and temporarily working at separate locations have less direct relevance for this angle, whereas motivations related to policies to live apart together can be indirectly detected from the demographic features and social position. Also, perception of preference for or being constrained to this particular living arrangement can be informative as constraints per se may indicate vulnerability from the point of view of agency and capabilities (see e.g. Hobson & Oláh, 2006 for an analogy to childbearing). The concept of agency in relation to feelings of vulnerability has previously been used studying living-apart-together in the UK, distinguishing between various types of vulnerability, such as physical, financial and emotional, based on in-depth interviews, prompting women to LAT (Carter & Duncan, 2018; Duncan, 2015). Not having access to such detailed interview accounts, we treat perception of constraint as an expression of limitations to individual agency that prevents people from pursuing a desired (co-residential) living arrangement, thereby indicating vulnerability.

As for other factors, a growing empirical literature has studied the phenomenon of living apart together in the past decades. A strain of research, dominated by small-scale, mainly qualitative explorations in Sweden, the Netherlands, the UK, the US and Australia have suggested the reasons for LAT to be gendered, in particular that women choose LAT to “undo gender” (see Benson & Coleman, 2016; de Jong Gierveld, 2002; Haskey & Lewis, 2006; Karlsson & Borell, 2002; Upton-Davis, 2015). Such claim has however been

challenged by Duncan and colleagues based on survey evidence complemented with in-depth interviews in the UK (see Duncan, 2015; Duncan et al., 2013, 2014). They have found no gender differences for reasons, attitudes and practices regarding LAT. Some of the interview accounts in their material have however indicated women purposefully opting for such non-residential arrangement because it makes a more egalitarian relationship possible, hence gender may matter after all (Bowman, 2017). Based on previous findings we do not expect to see a strong influence of gender per se, analyzing a large-scale data set, to live-apart-together compared to any other living arrangement.

Age is the other most important demographic variable with substantial empirical evidence showing it to matter for LAT, such partnership form dominating in ages of young adulthood, especially prior to stable labor market establishment, as well as in older ages, then mostly for autonomy-related reasons (see e.g. Duncan et al., 2013, 2014; Lewin, 2018; Liefbroer et al., 2015; Upton-Davis, 2012). Based on these findings, the literature has pointed out the relevance of the life-course approach to better understand living-apart-together, age relating to specific stages in the life-course (Connidis et al., 2017; Pasteels et al., 2017). Two principles of the theory, namely linked lives and earlier experiences influencing choices later in life (Elder, 1994; Settersten, 2015) are highly relevant for our topic, precisely because LAT is not a conventional form of partnerships. Previous family experiences of the members of LAT couples in childhood (e.g. parental break-up) and as adults (previous partnerships, children) can shape decisions for opting for such intermediary family arrangement. Growing up with a single parent may bring along feelings of vulnerability (Amato & Cheadle, 2005), which in turn may reduce willingness to establish a joint household with a partner (see e.g. Sthrom et al., 2009 for the US). LAT has been shown to be common also among people who experienced a break-up of their own relationship with or without children, or the death of a partner (see Connidis et al., 2017; Lewin, 2018; Liefbroer et al., 2015). Such experience can

also result in perceived vulnerability and need to protect resources for oneself and own children if any. Single mothers have been seen especially likely to live-apart-together (Coulter and Hu, 2017), which suggests a gendered effect with respect to previous family experiences. Taken the life-course related findings together, we expect to find association between LAT and i) ages above mid-life as we do not include young adults in the analyses, ii) having lived with a single parent in childhood, and iii) experience of previous family event (end of a relationship, children). As for the latter, we expect to find a gendered pattern.

A further aspect of possible relevance for LAT is the health status of the individuals involved. A wide range of research has established that single living is associated with various negative health outcomes, such as higher disease load (Carr & Springer, 2010), substance abuse and mental health issues (Simon, 2014), and disability (Sandström et al., 2020). The link between relationship status and health can partly be explained by a direct negative effect on health of being single, due to lack of emotional and economic support provided by conjugal reciprocities in co-residential relationships. Selection mechanisms on the partner market can also play a role as individuals with ill-health tend to have a lower probability to find a partner in the first place (Tumin, 2016), and have a higher probability of union disruption if they enter a relationship (Singleton, 2012) compared to healthy people. However, most of this research uses household composition or civil status as a proxy for the relationship status, not being able to distinguish between the truly partnerless and individuals in living-apart together arrangements. Therefore it is unclear if and to what extent individuals in LAT relationships exhibit poorer health than co-residents which would suggest vulnerability, while probably having fewer health problems than the truly partnerless (see Rapp & Stauder, 2020; Schneider et al., 2014 for some first clues).

Socio-economic status has a straightforward link with potential vulnerability, making related measures especially important to address in this study. A consistent finding in the literature is



the overrepresentation of highly educated individuals in non-residential partnerships, independently of country context (see Coulter & Hu, 2017 for the UK; Ermish & Seidler, 2009 for the UK and Germany; Liefbroer et al., 2015 for Eastern Europe; Reimondos et al., 2011 for Australia; Strohm et al., 2009 for the US). This may be related to their liberal value orientation, but may also question vulnerability concerns with respect to such arrangements given the greater earning power of those with more education. As for labor-market attachment, research findings are ambiguous, possibly because of the different age-ranges and welfare systems analyzed in the various studies. Economic inactivity has been linked to both higher (see Régnier-Loilier et al., 2009 for France) and lower propensity to LAT (see Coulter & Hu, 2017 for the UK), with no association found in a US study between being employed and various partnership statuses (Strohm et al., 2009). As pointed out in the literature, non-residential partnership allows for incomes to remain below benefit eligibility thresholds (Coulter & Hu, 2017) making such arrangements especially appealing to those less well-off, hence the more vulnerable. At the same time, people with few socio-economic resources have been found more likely to be single than live-apart-together (see Liefbroer et al., 2015 for cross-national analysis). The latter finding, along with the frequently mentioned reason in qualitative studies for LAT protecting from asset depletion (Bowman, 2017; Connidis et al., 2017; Upton-Davis, 2012) suggest that individuals in comfortable economic situation, who clearly not see themselves as vulnerable, may be as likely to appreciate LAT as are disadvantaged people. We do not expect living-apart-together to be associated with education or labor-force participation in Sweden, given a generous welfare system, limited social inequalities and widely accepted post-materialistic values (Oláh & Bernhardt, 2008), but are somewhat uncertain with respect to potential links to personal economic situation.

## **Data and methods**

In our analyses we rely on data extracted from the Swedish Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) first wave, conducted in 2012-2013, with Statistics Sweden in charge of the fieldwork. Given a starting sample of 18,000 individuals and a response rate of 53.8%, a total of 9,688 respondents, both women and men aged 18-79 years are included in the Swedish GGS in which phone interviews have been complemented with register data. In our analytical sample we include women and men aged 30 and older, as challenges of labor-market establishment interfering with partnership formation are likely to have been overcome by then, notwithstanding patterns of delayed family formation. We have excluded from the analysis respondents younger than 30 years, and those with missing information on: i) partnership status at the time of the interview, ii) partnership- or childbearing histories, iii) long-term illness, iv) educational attainment, and v) labor force attachment at the time of interview. Our working sample thus consists of 7,727 individuals, 3,736 men and 3,991 women (Table 1). We apply multinomial logistic regression as our analytical tool. The results are presented in the form of relative risk ratios of living as LAT compared to “co-residence with partner” and “living alone not as LAT” (i.e. not even having a non-resident partner). We follow a stepwise model-fitting procedure. Variables that show no significant association with the union status are excluded from our final model. The final model is chosen by means of Akaike information criterion from a number of candidate models and passing standard diagnostics for model specification (Pregibon, 1980). We also estimate a binomial logistic regression model for respondents in non-residential partnership only, to see who are the ones constrained to such living arrangements, rather than LAT being their preferred option.

### **Variables**

Partnership status at the time of the interview is our dependent variable. For that, we combine information on whether having an intimate partner while not sharing a home together (“yes”

versus “no”) and on the household type (“living alone”, “single parent”, “living with parents”, “single parent living with parents”, “couple with no children”, “couple with children”, “couple with parents”, “couple with parents and children”, and “other”). Based on these, we distinguish between respondents living in a co-residential partnership notwithstanding marital status (5,899), in a LAT-relationship (517), and “alone”, that is not having a partner but possibly co-residing with other family members (1,311). With respect to LAT we do not differentiate between respondents, reporting different-sex or same-sex partnerships. Unfortunately it is not possible to see from the data whether the respondents classified as LAT in our analyses are married to, or if they were married earlier to their LAT-partner at interview.

As this is an exploratory study, the analyses include a number of independent variables based on the literature. With respect to the demographic profile of LATs, in addition to gender and age, we study the associations if any with childhood family characteristics, own family experience and health status. Age is categorized in 10-year age groups starting with 30-39 years up to ages of 70 or older. The childhood family variable accounts for whether a respondent grew up in an intact family, i.e. raised by their two biological parents at least up to age 15, or not. As an indicator of eventual family living prior to the current situation, a family experience variable is created with three categories: “childless union” (previous co-residential partnership but no children), “full family” (previous co-residential partnership and children from such union), and “no experience” (neither any co-residence with a partner, nor children from previous union). Regarding health status, the respondent’s subjective perception of having long-term illness is used (“yes” versus “no”). We control also for the effect of factors which may be considered partly demographic, partly cultural, namely country of birth and region of living at the interview. As for the former we distinguish between being born in “Sweden” versus “other” country (see e.g. Régnier-Loilier et al., 2009, for addressing similar

aspect). With respect to region some studies have suggested LAT being more prevalent in big cities (see Ermish & Siedler, 2009 for Germany), hence we have created a variable with categories “metropolitan” versus “non-metropolitan” areas, defining a third category for respondents for whom such information was not available in the dataset in order to sustain the size of the analytical sample.

To map socio-economic characteristics associated with LAT, we rely on information about educational attainment, labor-force attachment, and perceived economic situation at the time of the interview. The International Standard Classification of Education has been used to define the highest level of education attained, distinguishing between those with “less than tertiary” (ISCED 1-4), and those with “tertiary” (ISCED 5-6) education. Regarding labor market engagement, we differentiate between being “employed”, “unemployed”, and “not in paid work” (students, retired, etc.) at the time of the interview. In order to assess whether the subjective ability to make ends meet influences living-apart-together, we use the variable economic situation categorized as “difficult” “comfortable” and “unknown”. See Table 1 in the next section for a descriptive overview of the analytical sample.

Focusing only on respondents in non-residential partnerships, we also study if the living arrangement relates to preference or constraints, based on the question “Are you living apart because you (both) do not want to live together or are other circumstances preventing you from living together?”. We define responses as indicating preference when either the respondent, or both the respondent and the LAT-partner wish to keep their own households. Any other answers on that question are considered referring to constraints.

## Results

### Descriptive overview

The descriptive statistics (Table 1) reveal some interesting differences across partnership statuses. We find an overrepresentation of women among the singles in line with previous studies (Esteve et al., 2020; Sandström & Karlsson, 2019), which is explained primarily by women's lower rates of repartnering after a break-up or the death of a partner (Bernhardt & Goldscheider, 2002). With respect to previous family experience, respondents who live-apart-together stand out as nearly 60 percent of them had a co-residential union with children before their current relationship, compared to less than half of the singles and around one-fifth of those in co-residential unions. The LATs also show the smallest share without any previous family experience, with about one-sixth of them in that category. Nearly 40 percent of LATs and slightly more among singles report having a long-term illness compared to less than one-third of the co-resident group. We see hardly any differences by childhood family, region and country of birth between partnership statuses.

With respect to socio-economic characteristics, the share of tertiary educated are over one-third in the co-resident group and the LATs, but less than 30 percent among the singles. The share of respondents not in paid work is highest among the truly partnerless, above 40 percent, but around 30 percent among those who co-reside with a partner and in the LAT-group. One-fifth of LAT couples and slightly above that figure among the singles assess their economic situation to be difficult, compared to one-tenth of co-resident couples. The largest share of respondents with a comfortable economic situation is found among the co-residents (66 percent), and slightly more than half of LAT-couples perceive to be able to meet ends easily, while this applies to only 46 percent of the singles. Based on this descriptive overview, people who live-apart-together seem to have some kind of intermediary position,

being more disadvantaged than the co-resident group, but somewhat better-off than the singles.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics**

	Cohabiting with partner (N = 5899)	Living alone not LAT (N = 1311)	LAT (N = 517)	Total (N = 7727)
<b>Sex of respondent</b>				
male	2922 (49.5%)	567 (43.2%)	247 (47.8%)	3736 (48.3%)
female	2977 (50.5%)	744 (56.8%)	270 (52.2%)	3991 (51.7%)
<b>Age-group</b>				
30-39	1210 (20.5%)	211 (16.1%)	82 (15.9%)	1503 (19.5%)
40-49	1424 (24.1%)	262 (20.0%)	131 (25.3%)	1817 (23.5%)
50-59	1258 (21.3%)	259 (19.8%)	127 (24.6%)	1644 (21.3%)
60-69	1322 (22.4%)	327 (24.9%)	108 (20.9%)	1757 (22.7%)
70+	685 (11.6%)	252 (19.2%)	69 (13.3%)	1006 (13.0%)
<b>Family experience</b>				
Childless union	1266 (21.5%)	394 (30.1%)	130 (25.1%)	1790 (23.2%)
Full family	1014 (17.2%)	632 (48.2%)	308 (59.6%)	1954 (25.3%)
No experience	3619 (61.3%)	285 (21.7%)	79 (15.3%)	3983 (51.5%)
<b>Long-term illness</b>				
No	4040 (68.5%)	741 (56.5%)	313 (60.5%)	5094 (65.9%)
Yes	1859 (31.5%)	570 (43.5%)	204 (39.5%)	2633 (34.1%)
<b>Educational attainment</b>				
Less than tertiary	3657 (62.1%)	919 (70.4%)	340 (66.0%)	4916 (63.8%)
Tertiary	2230 (37.9%)	387 (29.6%)	175 (34.0%)	2792 (36.2%)
<b>Labor market attachment</b>				
Employed	4065 (68.9%)	709 (54.1%)	349 (67.5%)	5123 (66.3%)
Unemployed	98 (1.7%)	51 (3.9%)	13 (2.5%)	162 (2.1%)
Not in paid work	1736 (29.4%)	551 (42.0%)	155 (30.0%)	2442 (31.6%)
<b>Economic situation</b>				
Difficult	588 (10.0%)	308 (23.5%)	104 (20.1%)	1000 (12.9%)
Easy	3919 (66.4%)	602 (45.9%)	278 (53.8%)	4799 (62.1%)
Unknown	1392 (23.6%)	401 (30.6%)	135 (26.1%)	1928 (25.0%)

**Country of birth**

Sweden	5219 (88.5%)	1127 (86.0%)	446 (86.3%)	6792 (87.9%)
Other	680 (11.5%)	184 (14.0%)	71 (13.7%)	935 (12.1%)

**Region of residence**

Non-metropolitan	3769 (63.9%)	786 (60.0%)	321 (62.1%)	4876 (63.1%)
Metropolitan	1385 (23.5%)	332 (25.3%)	116 (22.4%)	1833 (23.7%)
Unknown	745 (12.6%)	193 (14.7%)	80 (15.5%)	1018 (13.2%)

**Childhood family composition**

Two biological parents	5189 (88.0%)	1117 (85.2%)	436 (84.3%)	6742 (87.3%)
Single parent	647 (11.0%)	179 (13.7%)	72 (13.9%)	898 (11.6%)
Unknown	63 (1.1%)	15 (1.1%)	9 (1.7%)	87 (1.1%)

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**Source:** Gender and Generations Survey, Sweden, Wave 1, authors' calculations.

**Multinomial analysis**

Next we present the final models for our multinomial analysis (Table 2). We display relative risk ratios for living-apart-together rather than to be in a co-residential union or being truly partnerless. Neither childhood family composition, country of birth, region of residence, nor educational attainment have significant influence on living-apart-together compared to other living arrangement. Hence these factors are not included in the model presented here.

The results indicate no clear age-pattern for LAT compared to the single group. Vis-à-vis co-resident respondents, only the oldest age-group, that is people in their seventies, stand out as being significantly more likely to be in a LAT-relationship than are those in their thirties, controlling for other factors in our model.

A far more influential determinant than age regarding the probability to be in a LAT relationship, both in comparison to co-residing with a partner and being single, is previous family experience. As pointed out above, approximately 60 percent of those living-apart-together had a previous union with children compared to less than half of the singles and only

17 percent of the married and cohabitants, and the share of those with previous childless union varies from one-fifth to nearly one-third across union statuses (see Table 1).

**Table 2. Living arrangements of individuals aged 30 and above in Sweden. Multinomial logit models, relative risk ratios.**

	LAT vs co-residence	LAT vs single
<b>Age-group (ref.cat.: 30-39)</b>		
40-49	0.89	1.11
50-59	0.94	0.99
60-69	0.85	0.76
70 and above	1.59*	0.80
<b>Family experience (ref. no previous unions)</b>		
childless union	4.13***	1.18
full family [previous union and child]	8.44***	1.63*
<b>Sex of respondent (ref.cat.: male)</b>		
female	0.45**	0.63
<b>Sex * Family experience</b>		
female & childless union	1.59	1.03
female & full family [previous union and child]	3.12***	1.37
<b>Long-term illness (ref.cat.: no)</b>		
yes	1.23*	0.97
<b>Labor market attachment (ref.cat.: employed)</b>		
unemployed	1.39	0.58
not in paid work	0.95	0.70*
<b>Economic situation (ref.cat.: difficult)</b>		
comfortable	0.51***	1.40*
unknown	0.64**	0.90
<b>Constant</b>	0.05***	0.37***
<b>N</b>	7727	7727

\*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p ≤ .05

When we control for compositional differences, the estimates in Table 2 show that LAT-individuals vis-à-vis singles have a 63 percent higher relative risk to have experienced a

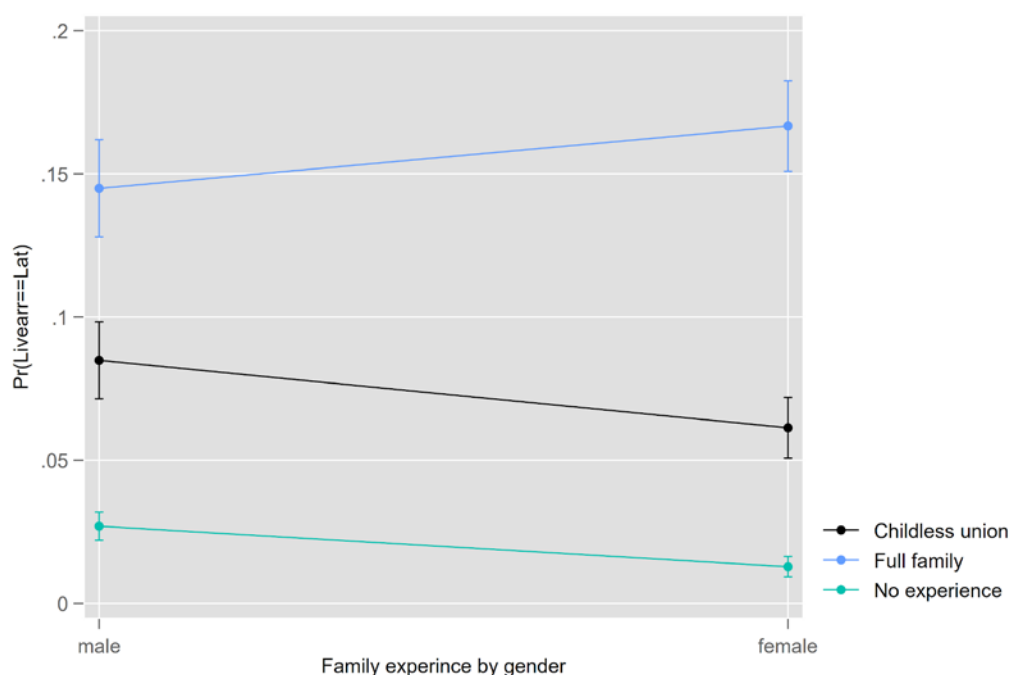


previous union with children than lacking any family experience. Compared to the co-residents, the LATs are more than 8 times as likely to have full previous family experience, and 4 times as likely to have had a union but no children than to have no family experience. Taken these findings together, children seem to reduce the probability for a parent forming a new co-residential union after a break-up as also previous research on repartnering in Sweden has suggested (see Bernhardt & Goldscheider, 2002), but they do not hinder parents from entering a non-residential intimate relationship.

Based on the literature indicating male advantage in repartnering (see Brown et al., 2019; Ivanova et al., 2013 also for overview), we have also tested for interaction between respondent's sex and previous family experience. The results show that single mothers are significantly more likely to be in a LAT relationship than single fathers, whereas women having no previous family experience or a union without children are significantly less likely than men to live-apart-together. This pattern also stands out when we look at the relationship on the probability scale in terms of the average marginal effect of family experience for men and women shown in Figure 1.

It is clear that children are strongly associated with being in a LAT-relationship for both men and women, and that this effect is somewhat more pronounced for single mothers than for single fathers. Regarding the gender differences across various family experiences it is important to note that although we find significant differences between men and women, the practical implications are modest. Single mothers are approximately 2% more likely to be in a LAT relationship than single fathers, while men with no family experience or having been in a childless union are about 2% more likely to be in a LAT relationship than women with the same family experience. The most important difference is between parents and non-parents as both men and women in a LAT relationship are more likely to have children from previous unions when we compare them both to co-residents and to singles.

**Figure 1. Adjusted probabilities of being in a LAT-relationship by family experience and gender for individuals aged over 30 in Sweden 2012-13**



Turning to the indicators in our model that relate to health and to socioeconomic characteristics, we find that individuals living-apart-together tend to occupy an intermediate position between singles and co-residents, being better off than the truly partnerless but more vulnerable than individuals living with a partner. Vis-à-vis co-residents the LATs are somewhat more likely to have long-term illness, with no difference between them and the singles regarding health status. However, individuals living-apart-together have a 40% higher relative risk of experiencing a comfortable economic situation and a 30% lower relative risk of not being in paid work compared to those without a partner. With respect to co-residents the opposite pattern is true, as individuals in LAT-relationships are 49% less likely to report having a comfortable economic situation, with no significant difference for labor market attachment between these partnership statuses.

### **LAT - due to preference or constraints**

An advantage of using GGS-data is that we have information on the subjective reasons for living-apart-together and thus on whether the respondents consider their LAT-status as the result of a choice or of constraints. Out of the 517 respondents in a LAT-relationship, 509 answered the question if this was a preferred living arrangement or specific circumstances prevented them from moving in with their partner. 56 percent of them reported that they were “constrained to live apart by circumstances”, while 44 percent claimed the non-residential union being their choice. This difference in the proportions is statistically significant ( $P > .0001$ ) and although a substantial minority seems to live apart together due to preferences it indicates that constraints towards co-residence matter more for living-apart-together arrangements in Sweden, raising concerns regarding vulnerability.

To assess how individual level characteristics are associated with the probability of circumstances preventing co-residence, rather than LAT being the preferred option, we estimate a logistic regression model against an indicator dummy, set to 1 if the respondent reports to live apart “due to circumstances” and 0 if they “want to live apart”, against the same independent variables as in the models for union status in Table 2 above. We find that gender, age and economic situation are significantly associated with the probability of reporting constraints as the reason for living-apart-together. None of the other variables included in Table 2 have significant effect, and are therefore discarded from the model presented in Table 3.

Women have a 43 percent lower odds ratio than men to refer to constraints rather than preferences regarding LAT keeping age and economic situation constant. Older individuals are much less likely to live-apart-together due to constraints, with an odds-ratio of around one-third at ages 60-69, and one-fifth for ages of seventies compared to ages of thirties. In the survey, all respondents with a partner have been asked when their relationship had started.

**Table 3. Probability that respondents report constraints as reason for living apart together among individuals aged 30 and above in Sweden. Logistic regression models, odds ratios.**

	<b>Constraints vs Preference</b>
<b>Sex of respondent (ref.cat.: male)</b>	
female	0.57**
<b>Age-group (ref.cat.: 30-39)</b>	
40-49	1.45
50-59	1.67
60-69	0.34***
70+	0.21***
<b>Economic situation (ref.cat.: difficult)</b>	
Comfortable	0.57*
Unknown	0.49*
<b>Constant</b>	5.52***
<b>N</b>	509

\*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p ≤ .05

Out of 517 respondents living-apart-together 496 have answered this question making it possible to calculate a mean union duration of 6.2 years for all LAT-relationships in our sample. However, the duration is strongly dependent on the age of the individual. Those aged 60-69 have reported a mean duration of 9.4 years and those 70-79 have reported 13.2 years compared to only 3.8 years among the respondents aged 30-59. Although these differences in relationship duration are mainly an effect of longer exposure to be in a relationship of any kind among older respondents, the sharp contrast between individuals younger than 60 and older may also be seen as indication of a difference in preferences and constraints between younger and older respondents engaging in LAT-relationship. Those aged 60 and more have on average engaged in LAT for a much longer time than younger respondents. They are

likely to view their LAT-relationship as a permanent arrangement that they may have grown to appreciate rather than feeling constrained to it due to circumstances.

Lastly, we find that respondents in LAT-relationships with a comfortable economic situation have a 43 percent lower odds ratio to express constraints as the main reason for not sharing a household with their partner compared to those who find it difficult to make ends meet.

Respondents with favorable economic conditions are not incentivised to value the potential for resource and risk pooling that co-residence might offer unlike individuals in a more difficult economic situation.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Seeking to shed more light on whether people in living-apart-together relationships in Sweden are vulnerable, we have studied their demographic and socio-economic characteristics comparing them to individuals in other living arrangements. In comparison to co-resident couples we find that being in a LAT-arrangement is more likely among the elderly (ages of seventies), people with previous family events (partnership, children from previous relationship), single mothers, childless men, those with long-term illness and individuals reporting difficulties to make ends meet. Vis-à-vis the truly partnerless, the LATs are more likely to have previous union and children, to enjoy a comfortable economic situation, and are less likely not working for pay.

There are several reasons for older individuals to opt for a LAT-arrangement instead of co-residence. Economic, psychological, and even physical barriers for establishing a joint household or transforming an existing LAT-relationship into a co-residential one are substantial at advanced ages. As physical limitations and health problems are more prevalent among the elderly, LAT may be preferred to avoid the various strains that moving in with someone entails, including increased expectations to provide care to a partner with ill health.

Previous research suggests limited willingness to care for an infirm partner among LATs, especially for an extended period (Duncan et al., 2014; Karlsson & Borell, 2002; Upton-Davis, 2012). Regarding economic issues, many older retirees with low pensions receive a pension supplement for housing costs in Sweden (Pensionsmyndigheten, 2016), which may be reduced or lost in case of co-residence. Although the potential mechanisms related to a higher propensity to live-apart-together among the elderly primarily can be seen as constraints, individuals in more advanced ages do not report being forced by circumstances to such living arrangements to a greater extent than do younger people, rather the opposite. Expressed as an average marginal effect, the probability to stress preferences as the reason for LAT is 30 percent in the age group 30-39 compared to 54 percent in the age group 60-69 and 66 percent among those aged 70+. The finding that elderly individuals are more likely than younger ones to appreciate and enjoy the residential autonomy provided by LAT is in line with previous research (see Benson & Coleman, 2016; Connidis et al., 2017; Upton-Davis, 2012). Except for the housing supplement being possibly reduced or lost otherwise, this age pattern seen for LAT does not indicate vulnerability per se.

The life course approach being useful for studying living-apart together shows also with respect to the effect of previous family events on recent living arrangements. While we find no association with growing up with a single parent, individuals who have experienced a break-up, or death of a co-resident partner are most likely to opt for LAT, especially if they have children, in line with previous research (Liefbroer et al., 2015). This may be linked to them feeling more vulnerable emotionally or economically, hence wanting to protect their independence. Establishing a joint household may impact negatively also on the future inheritance of children from previous unions (as their rights may be limited by the inheritance rights of a surviving spouse according to the Marriage Code 1987:230; whereas partition of joint property applies to the joint home if a non-marital cohabitation ends, in line with the

Cohabitation Act 2003:376). Keeping residential autonomy helps to avoid such legal complications, while not being forced to refrain from intimate relationships altogether as suggested by the higher probability to LAT than being single among lone parents. Single mothers being especially likely to live-apart-together, also seen in the UK (Coulter & Hu, 2017), may be related to the desire to protect the children from having to adapt to a new partner, and in some cases also to an anxiety to preserve own assets (Connidis et al., 2017; Upton-Davis, 2012). LAT as a best option to avoid depletion of own resources may however apply mainly to childless men, given male advantage in the gender income gap (Boye et al., 2017; Fortin et al., 2017). Our finding that women feel less constrained to live-apart-together does not necessarily contradict feelings of vulnerability shaping preference for a non-residential union that allows for more gender-egalitarian arrangements. The latter aspect is especially appreciated by women (Duncan et al., 2013; Borell, 2003) who shoulder a lion's share of unpaid work in co-residential relationships even in the relatively gender equal Swedish context (Oláh & Bernhardt, 2008).

The findings of impaired health among individuals living-apart-together and them being less likely to make ends meet easily, compared to co-residents, indicate a selection of disadvantage into LAT. Such a selection is likely to be related to most of the LATs having experience of previous union dissolution, often associated with negative health and socioeconomic outcomes, though not necessarily long-lasting (Härkönen, 2014). Given the cross-sectional nature of our data, we do not know whether the health- and financial problems emerged before the start of the LAT-arrangement compelling people to that, or if not benefiting of shared support and resources co-residential couples usually enjoy, resulted in negative outcomes with respect to health status and living standard. Vis-à-vis the truly partnerless, the LATs are, however, more likely to enjoy comfortable economic situation and less likely not to be in paid work, which suggests a positive selection into non-residential

partnerships. Individuals living-apart-together who make ends meet easily are also less likely to refer to constraints as the reason for such living-arrangements. Based on these results, LAT-individuals indeed appear more vulnerable than co-resident couples, but less so than the singles.

Taken our findings together, concerns about vulnerability for LATs in Sweden appear to be exaggerated. However, lack of longitudinal data as well as of detailed interview accounts prevent us to give a conclusive answer if limited resilience or their commitment to independence are prompting these individuals to live-apart-together.

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