
2. MODELLING THE DYNAMICS OF LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Nico KEILMAN and Christopher PRINZ

2.1 | Options for living arrangements

A particular living arrangement can be operationalized in several quite distinct ways. We discuss three options here. Living arrangements will be defined as either marital status, family type, or household type. The choice to be made between these three forms of arrangements in the context of a particular case study depends on various theoretical and practical factors, including data availability and model complexity. The key question, however, is to what extent the option chosen is a good predictor of the relevant behaviour of the individuals under consideration. For instance, in some countries, the number of divorced females aged 20-50, say, will be a key variable to assess the amount of welfare to be spent to support single mothers. Hence, in this example marital status would be an appropriate choice for living arrangement. But in some other countries, including Sweden and the Netherlands, marital status is a much less accurate description of living arrangement. Therefore, in the case study for the Netherlands reported by Van Imhoff in Chapter 6, household status was included in the living arrangement dimension, using the one-parent family and consensual union as two possible household types.

An illustration of the bias caused by merely regarding formal marital status is provided by comparing the results of a recent study carried out by one of the authors of this volume on the basis of Swedish data (Prinz, forthcoming), with those of Chapter 3. A model distinguishing between single persons (not

living as a couple), cohabiting persons (living in consensual unions), and married persons (living together or separated) projects a decline in the number of married men aged 15+ of around 15 per cent together with an increase in the number of cohabiting men of around 42 per cent for the period 1985-2020. Taken the two opposite trends together this implies that the proportion of singles would only increase by some six per cent. However, the legal marital status projection model used in Chapter 3 projects for Sweden a much stronger decline in the number of married men, namely around 25 per cent. At the same time, the proportion of never married men is projected to rise by about 24 per cent. The conclusion of this comparison is that not only the number of couples, but even the number of married couples is underestimated in the model which only considers formal marital status, and which disregards *de facto* living arrangement. The underestimation is caused by the fact that marriage rates are around three times higher among cohabitants as compared with singles, together with a rising share of cohabitants in the Swedish population.

The trichotomy marital status, family type, and household type runs parallel to Ryder's distinction between the conjugal dimension, the consanguineous dimension, and the co-residence dimension of family demography (see for instance Ryder, 1985, 1987). In this order, these alternative operationalizations describe living arrangements from a less to a more complex type of structure. Firstly, the conjugal and the marital status perspective explore the formation and dissolution of marital unions. Secondly, the consanguineous and the family relationship explore links between parents and children. Finally, we consider the household, that is a group of individuals, familial and nonfamilial, which is at least identified by a co-residence criterion ('household-dwelling' concept), and possibly by other criteria as well (for instance common food provision, which is the case for the 'housekeeping-unit' concept. (More formal definitions of the household concept may be found in UN, 1989, p. 4.)

Households are the most complex type of primary units, embracing all the aspects of the less complex dimensions of the above classification. A nuclear family with children living as an isolated co-resident group can be viewed as one of the subsets of households. This would agree with our household dimension. Such a family is also of interest as such, and this perspective agrees with the family approach to living arrangements. Other subsets of households, for instance isolated co-resident conjugal units (childless couples), may also be included in more than one of three operationalizations of living arrangements.