Repartnering in Australia and the UK: the impact of children and relationship histories

Alexandra Skew, Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex, Colchester, Essex, CO4 3SQ, United Kingdom, e-mail: ajskew@essex.ac.uk

Ann Evans, The Australian Demographic and Social Research Institute, The Australian National University

Edith Gray, The Australian Demographic and Social Research Institute, The Australian National University

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ABSTRACT

As a result of a rise in divorce rates coupled with an increased prevalence of cohabitation, a growing percentage of the population has experienced or will experience the breakdown of a relationship and also the possibility of forming another new relationship. This paper explores the impact of previous relationship and fertility histories on repartnering. Using a longitudinal approach we compare the nature of repartnering behaviour in the United Kingdom and Australia, countries with similar policy and legislative frameworks. Using prospective panels surveys (British Household Panel Survey and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamic in Australia), we find that within five years of becoming single, an estimated 49 per cent of the United Kingdom sample and 43 per cent of the Australian sample had entered a new relationship, most commonly cohabitation. Event history analysis reveals strong repartnering patterns by age, and residency of children. The effect of previous relationship type suggests that people who have previously cohabited are more likely to repartner that those who did not.

INTRODUCTION

Repartnering has become increasingly important in recent years as a result of relatively high divorce rates and increases in the percentage of cohabiting relationships that break-up rather than convert to marriage (de Vaus 2004; ONS 2004). This paper seeks to address the issue of repartnering in comparative perspective. Using a longitudinal approach we conduct parallel analyses to compare the United Kingdom and Australia, two countries with similar legislative frameworks coupled with similar patterns of cohabitation, marriage and divorce.

Relationship indicators from the two countries are comparable. Nine per cent of both populations are cohabiting and close to 50 per cent of the adult population are married in both countries (OECD 2008). The median age at marriage for the United Kingdom is 31.1 for women and 33.7 for men (ONS 2009a). For Australia the median age is slightly younger at 29.3 for women and 31.6 for men (ABS 2008a). The majority of marriages in both countries are currently preceded by cohabitation: 80 per cent in the United Kingdom (ONS 2009a); and 77 per cent in Australia (ABS 2008a). Divorce rates are also remarkably similar in the two countries, remaining relatively stable at between 12 to 14 divorces per 1,000 married persons in the United Kingdom since the mid-1980s (ONS 2009b), while in Australia they have fluctuated between 12 to 13.5 divorces per 1,000 married persons (2008b).

The United Kingdom and Australia also have a number of other similarities; Australia was a colony of the United Kingdom and there has been considerable migration from the United Kingdom to Australia (in 2001 about six per cent of the Australian population was born in the United Kingdom, (DIMIA 2003)). It is also argued that the United Kingdom and Australia fit the same model of welfare state regime particularly in terms of family policies, that of a 'liberal regime'. The liberal regime is characterized by welfare support for people with greater needs and a market-based approach for service provision (Gauthier 2002).

Repartnering is an event that occurs throughout the life course and individual experiences will vary depending on their stage of the life course. A life course approach is extremely

useful for understanding family change, such as repartnering, and for making comparative assessments. Life course theory (Elder, 1974; 1983; Harevan, 1982) emphasizes the importance of understanding individual and historical time in measuring life course events. Individual time refers to the cumulative experiences, or 'histories', that have occurred to an individual over their lifetime: it stresses the importance of understanding individual trajectories. Historical time refers to the time and place in which individuals are situated.

The individual histories that are important in understanding repartnering relate to a person's past relationship formation and childbearing. The first of these histories considers past relationships. Although a large body of literature exists on the study of repartnering following the breakdown of a marriage, relatively little attention has been paid to repartnering after the breakdown of a cohabiting relationship (Wu and Schimmele, 2005). Furthermore, much previous research focuses on remarriage, with far less research that has investigated repartnering in the form of a cohabiting union. With a decline in first marriage rates and rising rates of cohabitation for the never-married and for those who have been previously married, it has become important to account for the type of union that was dissolved when analysing partnership formation after the breakdown of a union.

Relationship histories are related to childbearing histories. Childbearing and child residency vary across individuals and represent different life course stages. Children add a further dimension to repartnering decisions and both residency and age of children are important factors (Goldscheider and Sassler 2006). After separation children will impact an individuals decision differently if they are resident in the household or not. Young non-resident children may be a financial drain, older children may have little impact. This paper contributes to our understanding of repartnering by examining the impact of children and previous relationships on the timing and rate of repartnering.

In this paper the meaning of historical time focuses on the comparison of two similar social settings. While the data from both the United Kingdom and Australia are from similar time periods, we are comparing whether there are differences in repartnering

patterns in these two countries. While there are several studies that have used a comparative perspective to examine first union formation or and/or dissolution patterns between two or more countries (Domínguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martín, 2008; Kiernan, 2000), to our knowledge there are no studies that specifically compare repartnering behaviour in the United Kingdom and Australia. Given similar levels of development and legislature we might expect little difference. By using data for both countries we aim to highlight the stability, or otherwise, of our results.

BACKGROUND

There is a large body of research on remarriage, but little on cohabitation as an alternative to remarriage. Much of this research has been concerned with understanding socio-economic factors, such as employment, education, and financial situation. This paper integrates the life course with these socio-economic characteristics given the importance of life stage and personal histories in union formation. There are two major ways that life course stage and socio-economic background may influence repartnering. Firstly, they may affect a person's own behaviour or attitudes towards forming a new union. Secondly, they may affect their attractiveness as a potential partner to others.

Age and gender

Life course sociologists rely on age as a central component of the analytical focus. Age reflects timing, that is, 'the age at which something occurs has a lot to do with how it is experienced' (Settersten 2009: 75). In terms of repartnering, age is associated with different marriage markets (or pool of potential partners) and probably generational differences in attitudes to repartnering. With regard to the pool of possible partners, people at younger ages have a larger pool of potential partners than at older ages where many people are already in partnerships.

Age has been identified to be negatively associated with lower repartnering rates for both men and women. However, the effect of age may be particularly strong for women. Men tend to partner with women younger than themselves, so as they grow older, women's

pool of potential available partners diminishes fasters than men's (Dean and Gurak, 1978).

Gender is a key determinant of repartnering behaviour, with women being less likely to repartner after relationship dissolution than men (Poortman, 2007; Wu and Schimele, 2005). The reasons behind this gender difference are complex, and a number of propositions have been put forward. These propositions include: that women receive fewer benefits from being in a partnership compared with men (Bernard, 1972; Poortman, 2007); that women take a longer time to recover from negative mental health consequences of separation (Willits *et al.* 2004); and that there are gender differences in how other individual characteristics such as age, prior fertility and previous relationship history relate to repartnering.

Previous unions

There is little research that focuses on individuals previous 'relationship career' and how this affects their repartnering prospects (Poortman, 2007). Prior union duration has been the most commonly used measure of relationship history and while studies conducted in the eighties found no significant effects of duration (Bumpass *et al.* 1990; Koo *et al.* 1984; Mott and Moore, 1983), more recent studies point to a positive effect of longer durations on repartnering (De Graaf and Kalmijn, 2003; Poortman, 2007; Wu and Schimmele, 2005). Bumpass *et al*. (1990) speculated that long unions may work to increase or decrease the incidence of repartnering. On the one hand, people who are separating from a long union may take longer to repartner because of being out of the marriage market. On the other hand, those who are used to living with someone may be reluctant to stay single after separation as they do not want to live alone.

The number of previous unions could have a considerable effect on the chance of repartnering given the fact that these previous relationships are likely to shape an individuals attitude to entering into future unions. The number of previous unions may also be associated with their social networks or affect the networks to which they belong, and may also be used by potential partners in their partnership selection (Poortman, 2007). However, the number of past relationships was not associated with the chance of

repartnering in research conducted by Poortman (2007). She found no significant difference between those who had one prior union compared to those who had several prior unions. However a significant difference in the odds of partnering was found between those with one prior union compared to those with none, reflecting that the 'first cut is the deepest' (Poortman, 2007). Furthermore, results indicate that those who have ever married have lower odds of repartnering than those who have only cohabited (Poortman 2007; Wu and Schimmele 2005).

Children from previous unions

The role of children in repartnering has been examined in many studies, although it is the specific focus of only a few studies (e.g. Bernhardt and Goldscheider, 2002; Koo *et al.,* 1984; Lampard and Peggs, 1999; Stewart *et al.,* 2003; Teachman and Heckert, 1985). The experiences of women is central to these papers, however there is evidence of a growing interest in men's experiences (Bernhardt and Goldscheider, 2002; Goldscheider and Sassler, 2006; Stewart *et al*., 2003). Overall findings indicate that the presence of children from a prior relationship has a negative effect on the chance of remarriage or repartnering. The chance of re-forming a union decreases as the number of children increases. Having children from a previous partnership may decrease one's attractiveness as a partner due to its association with various costs, both direct financial costs and indirect costs associated with the complexities of step-families (Bumpass *et al*., 1990). The presence of children has also been hypothesized to lessen the need to repartner, as children may provide company and be a source of emotional support for the parent (Hughes, 2000). Finally the presence of children may act as a barrier to repartnering by decreasing the chance for social interaction and the possibility of finding a new partner (Ermish *et al.,* 1990; Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1989).

The effect of prior fertility is also likely to differ by the gender of an individual. Whereas the presence of children is consistently found to be associated with lowering repartnering rates for women, for men the effect is more mixed and not always significant (De Graaf and Kalmijn, 2003). However, there is a strong interrelationship between the gender of an individual and the presence of children in the household, with dependent children more

often residing with their mother. Whether or not the gender difference is largely a result of the higher proportions of women with children present in the household has not been fully determined due to different analytical approaches yielding different results.

Few studies have considered the age of youngest child (Bumpass *et al.,* 1990; Koo *et al.,* 1984; Poortman, 2007), and results from these are mixed. Both Bumpass *et al.* (1990) and Koo *et al.,* (1984) find no effect of the age of youngest child on repartnering in the US. However Poortman (2007) finds that having children aged 12 or under has a highly significant negative effect on the likelihood of repartnering for women. Moreover, the effect is not confined to women, with children aged between zero and six or between 13 and 18 significantly reducing the chance of repartnering for men.

An important factor, particularly in relation to repartnering for men, is whether or not the children are resident in the household (De Graaf and Kalmijn, 2003; Stewart *et al.,* 2003). Only two studies have been able to control for this, since information on the residence of children is not always available, and findings are again mixed. De Graaf and Kalmijn (2003) find a negative effect for both resident and non-resident children for men, however with respect to women this negative effect is only found for those with resident children. In contrast, while Stewart *et al.,* (2003) find no difference for men in the odds of forming a marriage or a cohabitation relative to staying single (regardless of whether they have resident children or no children at all); they find a positive effect of non-resident children on the chance of forming a cohabiting union.

Socio-economic characteristics

While the life course factors outlined above are likely to be important determinants of repartnering behaviour, theory suggests that various socio-economic variables such as employment and income might also be important. Remarriage has been shown to be affected by socio-economic background. However, there is little empirical evidence that repartnering is similarly influenced.

Economic theory suggests that factors such as employment that are associated with economic independence would have a negative effect on repartnering for women, but not

men. Based on a traditional view of relationships where the man is the breadwinner and the woman the homemaker, it is argued that the more economically independent the woman is, the less need she has to partner (Becker *et al.,* 1977). For men the situation is thought to be more straightforward with employed men on high incomes being more attractive as potential partners and therefore having higher repartnering rates.

Others have argued that in current times changing gender roles and changing labour markets mean that two incomes are increasingly seen as necessary to maintain a good standard of living (Hughes, 2000), and that women with a higher earning potential might be more attractive in the partner market (Mott and Moore, 1983; Payne and Range, 1998; Sweeney and Cancian, 2004). Furthermore there may also be a positive effect of employment as being employed provides a good opportunity for social interaction and the potential to meet partners through the work environment (De Graaf and Kalmijn, 2003; Hughes, 2000).

The arguments with regard to related socio-economic indicators such as education are closely related to the arguments outlined above relating to employment. Whereas more highly educated women have higher earnings potential making them more suitable partners, the more highly educated a woman is the more restricted will be her potential pool of men with similar education levels (Goldman *et al.,* 1984)

Repartnering necessitates decisions about housing location and living arrangements. Housing tenure may be associated with the timing of repartnering as those who rent are in a more flexible position than those who own when it comes to relocating into a new relationship. Geography may also affect repartnering because where one lives may affect the size of the available partner market and also the possibility of meeting a new partner. For example, in large cities the higher density and mobility of the population makes it easier to meet people (Payne and Range, 1998). The territorial context could also be associated with repartnering because different areas may have different levels of modernization, social norms and attitudes towards repartnering (Meggiolaro and Ongaro, 2008; Payne and Range, 1998; Wu and Balakrishnan, 1994).

Another socio-economic factor that has been found to be associated with repartnering behaviour is religion. Most religions tend to have specific prescriptions regarding appropriate partnering behaviour for example discouraging pre-marital sex and cohabitation (Thornton *et al.,*1992). Pearce and Thornton (2007) find that religion is associated with family ideology such as anti-cohabitation, pro-marriage, and anti-divorce. The social acceptance of repartnering is therefore likely to be lower among those who are religious. On the other hand, religious people who repartner may be more likely to marry than cohabit. Data limitations prevent us from exploring the effect of religion in this paper.

DATA AND METHOD

Data

The data used in this study is based on waves one to six (2001–2006) of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (HILDA) and waves 9 to 15 (1999–2006) of the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS). Both surveys are large scale nationally representative surveys that are conducted annually and interview every adult member. The sample is around 7,000 households for HILDA and 5,000 households for BHPS. This equates to around 13,000 and 10,000 individual interviews respectively.

These data offer specific advantages for the study of repartnering because of their prospective longitudinal nature. This allows individuals to be selected at the point of separation from a co-residential partner and subsequently followed over the waves of the panel. Details on the type of previous relationship are also available: we know whether people were legally married to their partner or whether they were in a cohabiting relationship.

Individuals are selected by merging successive waves of each panel dataset and transitions into being single and 'at risk' of repartnering are determined by observing a change in partnered status between two consecutive waves. Those included in the sample dataset include any individuals that are observed as married in the first of the two waves and separated, divorced or widowed in the next, or cohabiting in the first wave and never-

married, separated, divorced or widowed in the subsequent wave. To maximise the sample size of the HILDA sample dataset, those individuals who separated from a partner in the year prior to the first wave (i.e. either 2000 or 2001) are also identified and included in the sample. Only the first observed spell of becoming single is included, but this may not necessarily be the first ever spell of this type. Individuals that return to their former partner after only one year of separation are not considered since it is not clear if these are real or spurious periods of separation. A person-period file was constructed by appending the subsequent waves of data for those identified as becoming single until they either repartner or for those that did not repartner, are lost from the study. This led to a file that contains 924 individuals (2,342 person-years) from HILDA and 768 (1,720 person-years) from the BHPS.[1] The maximum number of years at risk of repartnering that can be observed is five years.

Item non-response or missing data generated by partial wave response (i.e. instances where only a proxy or telephone interview was achieved for a particular year at risk) is dealt with through listwise deletion for variables where the percentage of missing data is small (<2%). For more substantial amounts a missing category was created for the variable concerned. The final analytic sample includes 907 individuals (2,308 person-years) taken from HILDA and 759 individuals (1,703 person-years) taken from the BHPS.

Description of variables

A dependent variable is created to indicate whether or not an individual had repartnered in each of the time periods for which they are at risk. Having 'repartnered' is defined as living in a cohabiting relationship with a new partner, or having married a new partner.

In order to understand the life course effect of repartnering we include variables that measure an individual's relationship and childbearing history. Specifically, we measure the length of the most recent co-residential partnership, the number of previous partnerships and the type of previous partnership. We expect past relationships to play an important role in an individuals decisions about forming a new relationship. The

[1] Sample sizes before deletions due to item non-response.

distinction between past cohabiting and marital relationships allows us to test whether divorce as a process has an impact on future repartnering, over and above the effect of relationship breakdown. It is possible that the legal process associated with divorce, over cohabitation breakdown, might make entering a new relationship less desirable. Past relationships may also inhibit repartnering as people with multiple past relationships may be less attractive as potential partners.

We find the two samples very similar in terms of relationship histories except in terms of the duration of the last relationship (Table 1). Close to 55 per cent of individuals were married in their last relationship in both countries. The number of past relationships is also similar: 68.5 per cent of the United Kingdom sample had experienced one live-in relationship, while in Australia around 63 per cent have had only one live-in relationship. The main difference in the relationship histories between the United Kingdom and Australia is in the duration of the most recent partnership. Individuals in the United Kingdom sample have much shorter durations than those measured for the Australian sample. Fifty-seven per cent had a duration of less than five years, 25 per cent of five to 14 years, and 18 per cent of 15 years or more in the United Kingdom.[2] In Australia, these figures were 39 per cent for less than five years, 35 per cent for five to 14 years, and 26 per cent for a duration of 15 or more years.

Where past relationship status has been considered it has generally been treated as a dichotomous variable, that is, whether someone was married or whether they were cohabiting without marriage. However, some studies have extended this, by adapting and adding to these categories. As described in the national statistics, relationship formation has changed dramatically, and a very large percentage of individuals cohabit before marriage. Reflecting this, recent research into relationship formation, and relationship dissolution compares the experiences of three groups: individuals who marry without prior cohabitation, individuals who marry after cohabiting with their partner, and individuals who cohabit but have not married. There has been limited research on how

[2] For the United Kingdom sample around 13% of cases were left censored in terms of relationship start date. This is because we do not know the period of cohabitation prior to marrying for all respondents. If these cases are excluded, 50% have a duration of less than five years, 28% have a duration between 5 and 14 years, and 22% have a duration of 15 or more years.

these categories are associated with repartnering. It has been found that following relationship dissolution, people who previously cohabited were more likely to repartner than those who were married but did not cohabit. Further, those who cohabited prior to marriage were more likely to repartner than those who cohabited without marriage (Stewart *et al.* 2003; Wu and Schimmele, 2005).

It is possible to distinguish these three previous relationship types using the HILDA data but not using the BHPS. For BHPS it is not known whether people who are married on entering the sample cohabited prior to marriage. However, given the importance of cohabitation prior to marriage, we use HILDA to demonstrate the extra detail which is available from using the expanded measure of previous relationship type for Australia. The summary statistics indicate that of the 56 per cent of individuals classified as 'married' in their previous partnership, 22 per cent married without prior cohabitation (direct marriage) and 34 per cent cohabited prior to marriage.

Table 1 about here.

We also measure the impact of past childbearing by accounting for the presence and age of own-children. We distinguish between residential and non-residential children as we consider that this will be important when considering the effect of past childbearing. We expect that having a young child in the household is negatively associated with repartnering because people at this stage of the life course may have limited opportunities to meet potential partners or may choose not to form a new relationship while their child is young. Older children and non-resident children are likely to have little or no impact on repartnering.

The distribution of children across ages and residence is similar in the two samples. In both the United Kingdom and Australia just over half the samples have no dependent children. Close to 15 per cent of both samples have a resident child aged less than five years, and in the United Kingdom a slightly greater percentage (21 per cent) have a resident child aged five years or older than in Australia (15 per cent).

Related to the age and residence of children is the gender of the parent, as young children tend to be resident with their mothers. Further, there is considerable evidence that gender is associated with remarriage rates in these two countries: women have much lower remarriage rates than men (de Vaus 2004; ONS 2009a).

The final life course variable which is included in the models is age, which is measured on a categorical scale to represent different generations of individuals. Age is an important measure of the timing of the relationship dissolution. Individuals who become single at age 25 are very different to those who become single at 50, and their experiences in meeting a new partner will be very different. As found in previous research, we hypothesise that age will have a strong negative effect on repartnering.

There are a number of socio-economic variables which are also included as controls, as they have been found to be associated with repartnering but are not of central interest to this research. These include employment status, education, income, home ownership, geographical region and health status. These factors are associated with the potential pool of partners available to people, as people generally partner with people in their own socio-economic groups. Due to inconsistencies in the measurement of religion and religiosity in the BHPS and HILDA we do not account for religion in our models.

The dataset includes a number of time-varying variables as well as standard fixed-time explanatory covariates (see Table 1). Fixed-time covariates are measured at the time of becoming single. Time-varying covariates are lagged by one year in order that they reflect an individual's circumstances prior to repartnering.

Method

A life table approach is used to provide descriptive statistics of the median duration spent single after the breakdown of a union in each country. This analysis also allows investigation of the baseline hazard of repartnering, the results of which are used to determine the treatment of time in the multivariate model. For the multivariate analysis a discrete time proportional hazard model is employed to investigate the impact of the key

variables on the likelihood of repartnering in the two countries. This type of model is particularly appropriate for this study given that it allows the inclusion of censored cases (i.e. those who are not observed to repartner) and can easily incorporate time-varying covariates. Censoring is assumed to be unrelated to the timing of the event. Under this assumption the risk-set at each time interval is representative of all individuals who would have been at risk had there not been any censoring (Singer and Willett, 2003). The discrete-time hazard for a time interval *t* refers to the conditional probability of the event (in this case repartnering) occurring in the interval *t*, given that it has not already occurred in a previous time period. A logistic hazard model is fitted to estimate the response probability. Two models are estimated using a block modelling approach, the first one contains life course variables, and the second controls for socio-economic characteristics.

RESULTS

Life table survival curves

The life-table analysis reveals that nearly half (49 per cent) of the United Kingdom sample have repartnered within five years of becoming single (see Figure 1). The corresponding rates for the Australian sample are slightly lower, with only 43 per cent repartnered after five years. For both the United Kingdom and Australia the majority of these repartnerships (over 80%) are in the form of a cohabitation rather than a remarriage.

Examining the rates of repartnering in each country by the type of most recent previous partnership indicates that in both countries the rate of repartnering is slower for those whose previous partnership was a marriage compared to those separating from a cohabitating union. Again, there are slight differences between the two countries, with 36 per cent of previously married Australians repartnering within five years compared with 43 per cent in the United Kingdom. The median duration[3] to repartnering for those separating from a cohabitation is slightly longer in Australia: between four and five years compared with three to four years in the United Kingdom. However, five years after becoming single the proportion of those separated from a cohabiting union who have

[3] The time by which half of the sample has repartnered.

found a new partner is remarkably similar in both countries (55 per cent in Australia and 56 per cent in the United Kingdom).

Figure 1 about here.

For both countries the hazard of repartnering appears to decline as length of time spent single increases, however the shape of the hazard is different in each country (see Appendix 1). To fully capture the variation in the hazard over time dummy variables are created for each spell year at risk for inclusion in the discrete-time hazard model for each country.

Multivariate event history analysis

United Kingdom

Table 2 presents the results of the odds of repartnering from the survival analysis of the United Kingdom. Model 1 contains the life course variables. We find mixed effects of the life course as represented by relationship and fertility histories. Prior fertility is related to repartnering to some degree. Those with resident children under age five are less likely to repartner than are those with no dependent children (after controlling for socio-economic factors). Children aged over five and non-resident children appear to have no effect on repartnering. In terms of the relationship history, the duration of the previous relationship and the number of previous partners are also not significant predictors of repartnering. We find the type of previous partnership, whether marriage or cohabitation, is also not a significant predictor.

Using age as an indicator of life course stage we find that the probability of repartnering is strongly related to an individual's age. Compared to the reference category of those aged 25 to 34, the odds of repartnering are considerably lower for those aged over 35, 45 or 55. It is somewhat surprising in that there does not appear to be any significant gender differences in repartnering in the United Kingdom.

The results of the life course variables outlined above remain very similar in Model 2 where socio-economic characteristics are included as controls. The socio-economic

variables are not strong predictors. Those living in Northern Ireland or Scotland are less likely to repartner than those living in England. Furthermore, those who rate their health as good are slightly less likely to repartner compared to those who rate their health as excellent.

Table 2. Odds ratios of repartnering, United Kingdom & Australia ABOUT HERE

Australia

In Australia, as with the United Kingdom, we find that increasing age has a negative effect on the probability of repartnering. Those aged 35 and over have considerably lower odds of repartnering in any one year compared to those aged under 35. Unlike the United Kingdom, the effect of gender on repartnering in Australia is in line with much of the previous literature with men being more likely to repartner than women. Prior fertility and the living circumstances of any existing children is also a predictor of new union formations in Australia. Compared with the reference category of those without dependent children those with resident children aged less than five are less likely to enter a new relationship. However, this result is not statistically significant in Model 2 when controlling for socio-economic variables.

The type of relationship individuals had previously was not a predictor of new union formation. Those whose previous relationship was a cohabitation are not significantly different from those whose previous relationship was a marriage.

In terms of socio-economic variables housing tenure and health show a significant relationship with repartnering. Those who rent are more likely to repartner than are those who are owner occupiers and people who rated their health as fair are less likely to repartner compared to those whose health was rated as excellent.

Comparison: United Kingdom and Australia

The analysis reported above has highlighted some similarities and differences in the repartnering behaviour of Britons and Australians. The most striking difference is the differential effect of gender. Gender plays an important role in repartnering in Australia

but not in the United Kingdom with Australian men being more likely to form a new union than Australian women.

In both countries there is a negative relationship between age and the probability of repartnering with the chance of repartnering becoming lower after age 35. This result is supported by other studies (Poortman 2007; Wu and Schimmele 2005) and is likely to be associated two aspects of relationship formation. On the one hand, older people may hold more traditional attitudes towards relationships and may be more reluctant to enter into a new union. On the other hand, the 'relationship market' may inhibit relationship formation for older people if they have less access to a pool of potential partners[4] and may not themselves be as suitable to potential partners.

The effect of age and residence of any children also appears to be related to repartnering similarly in the United Kingdom and in Australia. In both countries we find some evidence that those with a resident child aged less than five had lower odds of repartnering than did those with no dependent children. We also find no evidence in either country that older children or non resident children have an effect on repartnering. Koo *et al.* (1984) did not find that age of the youngest child was related to remarriage in a U.S. based study. This contrasts with the work of Poortman (2007) who finds that older children have an impact on the repartnering behaviour of men.

Gender and the presence of children are inextricably linked and the explanation of our finding lies in untangling these relationships. We would expect that resident children would have a greater impact on repartnering than non-resident children, and children under five years of age have a greater impact on repartnering than older children. In both countries the majority of children under five years of age reside with their mothers thus acting to decrease the chance of repartnering for women. We attempted to explore this complex relationship by modelling an interaction between gender and children. However, the numbers of men with young resident children, and women with non resident young children were too small to be modelled with confidence. Our results did indicate that

[4] At older ages the majority of people are in marriages leading to a smaller pool than at younger ages (de Vaus 2004; ONS 2009a).

children may diminish the chances repartnering for both men and women, even when they are not resident in the same home.

We find that in both the United Kingdom and Australia relationship history has no impact on repartnering. We model the effect of type of previous relationship, length of the previous union and the number of previous partners. None are significant predictors of repartnering in either the United Kingdom or Australia. This contrasts with a number of studies find that cohabitants are more likely to repartner than those who were married (Wu and Schimmele 2005; Poortman 2007), and that longer relationship durations are positively associated with repartnering (De Graaf and Kalmijn, 2003; Poortman, 2007; Wu and Schimmele, 2005).

With respect to the socio-economic characteristics the results were less conclusive. The key employment and education variables appeared not to have any significant effect on the probability of forming a higher order union. With respect to the socio-economic characteristics, like employment and education, the results were not as striking as previous research on the socio-economic effects of remarriage. Remarriage, like first marriage, faces an economic bar: people who do not feel financially ready will cohabit rather than marry (Cherlin 2004; Smock, Manning & Porter 2005). As our research looks at all repartnerships, it may be that the socio-economic effects are washed out.

In United Kingdom there were some differences by geography, with those living in Northern Ireland and Scotland having lower odds of repartnering compared to those living in England. It is possible that these geographical differences are related to socio-economic differences between these regions that have not been controlled for in the model. One explanation may be that religion or religiosity, not included in the models, is being picked up by location in the United Kingdom model.

We hypothesised that housing tenure may be related to the timing of repartnering as those who rent are in a more flexible position than those who own when it comes to relocating into a new relationship. We found this to be the case in Australia but there is no evidence of this relationship in the United Kingdom. The differences in this result are likely to be related to different housing markets in the two countries.

Health is related to repartnering in both countries. Those with good or fair health are less likely to repartner compared to those with excellent health in the United Kingdom and Australia respectively. Health may be one criterion for choosing a new partner so poor health may make someone less attractive as a partner, and being in less than excellent health may also limit opportunities for social interaction and meeting a new partner.

In the introduction to this paper we argued that repartnering behaviour would be different for people at different stages of the life course. We have shown that age is related to repartnering. Fertility history may also have an impact. However, we have failed to find an effect of past relationship history on repartnering. We hypothesised that relationship histories would play an important role in repartnering and we were able to measure the number of previous relationships as well as the duration and the type of the most recent union. We argued that people whose previous union was a cohabitation would have different repartnering behaviour than those who were married. This was not the case and we were surprised to find that none of our measures of relationship histories were related to repartnering. There is a further distinction that can be made to repartnering type. In our models we classified previous relationship as cohabiting or married. But in both the United Kingdom and Australia the majority of current marriages are now preceded by cohabitation. We were unable to distinguish these relationships in the BHPS data but are able to do so using HILDA. The following section explores the effect of this expansion of previous relationship type on repartnering in Australia only.

Previous partnership type: Australia

When we model the effect of previous partnership type with three categories—direct marriage, marriage preceded by cohabitation, cohabitation—we find that the type of previous partnership does have an impact on repartnering behaviour. Where the previous relationship was a cohabitation or a cohabitation followed by marriage the odds of repartnering are higher than where the previous relationship was a direct marriage. Previous research has found that cohabitation prior to marriage leads to different repartnering behaviour than direct marriage (Stewart *et al.* 2003; Wu and Schimmele, 2005).

This suggests that the difference in behaviour is not due to marriage itself (as seen in Table 2), but is more likely to be related to cohabitation (as seen in Table 3). It seems likely that those who cohabit prior to marriage have different attitudes towards relationship formation than do those who enter a union directly into marriage, making them more like cohabitors who do not marry when re-entering the relationship market. Understanding this difference would be improved by the inclusion of a control for religion as there is a high probability that those with stronger religious values are more likely to marry directly, and are less likely to repartner. Pearce and Thornton (2007) find that religious values are associated with family ideology measures such as anti-cohabitation, anti-divorce and pro-marriage.

CONCLUSION

Our aim in this paper was to examine the effect of life course experiences on the likelihood of repartnering following relationship dissolution. At the centre of this investigation was the proposition that a substantial amount of repartnering research focuses only on repartnering following marriage. We extend this research by exploring repartnering behaviour from the perspective of three different lifecourse experiences represented by: people who have been married, people who have been married but cohabited with their partner first, and people who were in a cohabiting relationship. The results demonstrated that previous relationship status does matter, but it is not the difference between those who marry or cohabit that is important. Differences in repartnering behaviour are between those who were married directly compared to everyone else.

We expected that the number and length of past relationship would also distinguish between those who formed new unions and those who did not. In both countries relationship histories showed no impact on the propensity to repartner. We hypothesised that multiple past relationships would be a deterrent to repartnering. However we did not find this to be the case. One explanation for this lack of difference is that people may be choosing to repartner with people with similar histories. Poortman (2007) also found that

the number of past relationships was not important. Future research might focus on the homogeneity of repartnered couples' past relationship histories.

The effect of children on repartnering can differ depending on the life course stage. Age and residence of children can have a profound effect on the ability to repartner. Many past studies have found that living with children reduces the likelihood of repartnering but few studies have differentiated the life course stage by age of children. We find that young resident children reduce repartnering in both The United Kingdom and Australia. We suggest that there is added complexity with gender and children's living arrangements. Men are not likely to live with young children and therefore have a greater chance to repartner. Women are more likely to have primary responsibility for young children limiting their chances, and perhaps desire, for a new partnership. Gender was certainly important in Australia but not in the United Kingdom.

Age, as the crudest measure of life course stage, shows that as we move through the life course the likelihood of repartnering declines. This is consistent with past research on the patterns of relationship formation.

We used the life course as a framework for understanding repartnering behaviour as it allows us to model the effect of personal histories. In terms of individual histories, there were dramatic differences by age: perhaps this reflects generational attitudes to repartnering; it likely reflects different marriage markets. The context of past relationships was found to affect the likelihood of repartnering. However, we found that duration and number of past relationships did not, despite past research finding the contrary. Children's age and residency also played a role in predicting repartnering. The effect of all three histories combined provides compelling evidence that the life course is a useful framework within which to understand repartnering behaviour.

This research has highlighted the complex relationships between past family formation and repartnering. However, we find consistent results between The United Kingdom and Australia. These two countries have similar patterns of relationship formation behaviour as well as similar legislative and policy frameworks so this similarity lends weight to our findings. Our results highlight the need for further investigation into the differential effect

of children on men and women. Something we cannot explore fully with the data used in this paper. Past research on remarriage highlights that relationship duration, number of past relationships and socio-economic factors help explain who remarries. We suggest that inclusion of cohabitation has a dampening effect on these relationships. The research as conducted here does not explore who people are repartnering with or the experience of separating couples. A greater focus on repartnering homogamy may help explain why duration and number of previous partnerships, and socio-economic factors are not influential in understanding repartnering.

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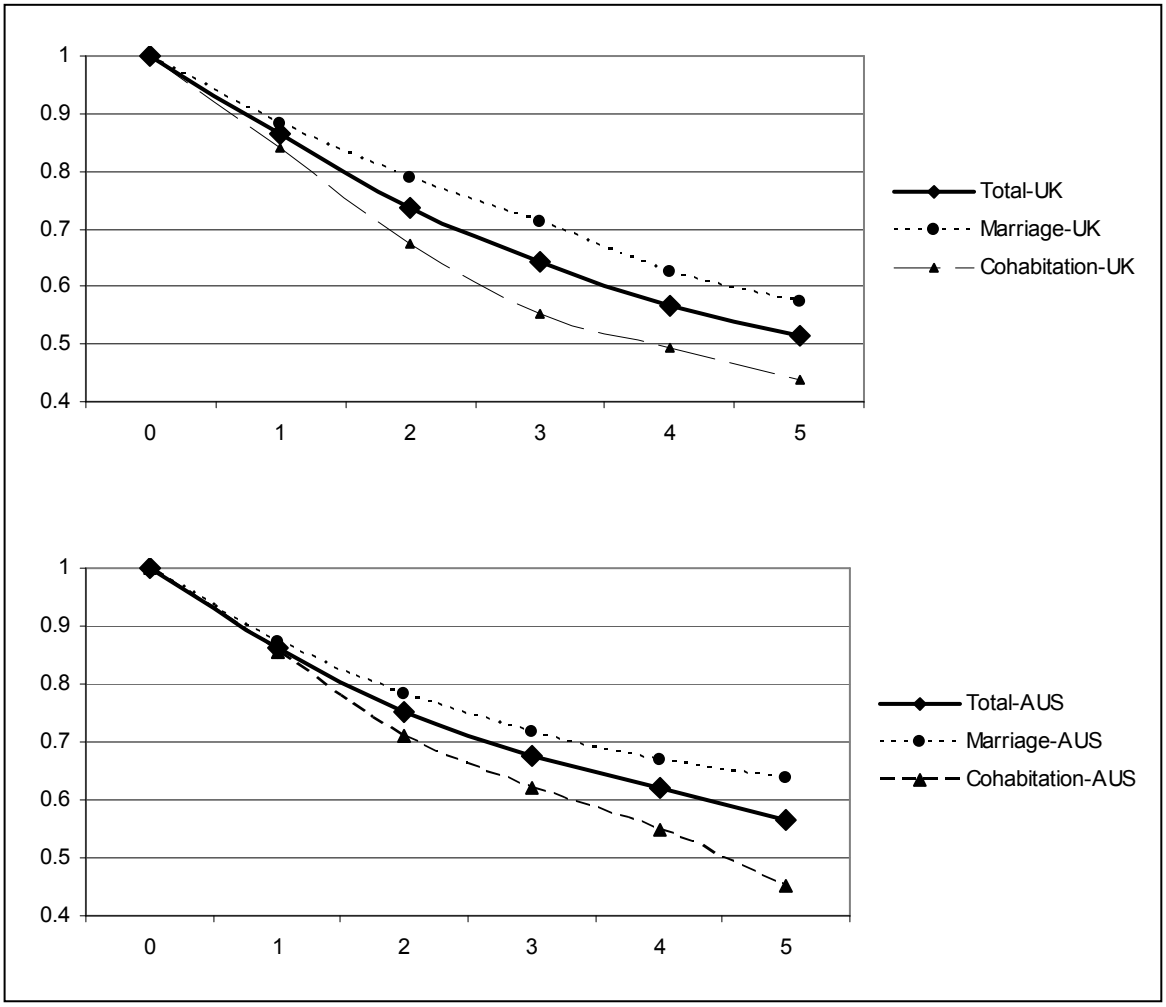
Figure 1: Survival time to repartnering, United Kingdom & Australia



Source: BHPS 1999–2006; HILDA 2001–2006.

Table 1. Summary statistics, United Kingdom & Australia

	United Kingdom				Australia			
	N		% Distribution		N		% Distribution	
Explanatory variables	Original[a]	Person-period	Original	Person-period	Original	Person-period	Original	Person-period
Age								
17-24 years	121	236	15.9	13.9	148	325	16.3	14.1
25-34 years	228	505	30.0	29.7	250	613	27.6	26.6
35-44 years	210	482	27.7	28.3	231	593	25.5	25.7
45-54 years	111	251	14.6	14.7	168	463	18.5	20.1
55+ years	89	229	11.7	13.5	110	314	12.1	13.6
Gender								
Female	474	1,081	62.5	63.5	515	1,374	56.8	59.5
Male	285	622	37.6	36.5	392	934	43.2	40.5
Children								
Resident children age <5 years	108	250	14.2	14.7	131	365	14.4	15.8
Resident children age 5+ years	156	359	20.6	21.1	132	352	14.6	15.3
Non resident children <16 years (Aus: <18 years)	69	174	9.1	10.2	171	419	18.9	18.2
No dependent children	409	882	53.9	51.8	473	1,172	52.2	50.8
Missing	17	38	2.2	2.2				
Previous partnership duration								
Less than 5 years	432	865	56.9	50.8	355	823	39.1	35.7
5-15 years	187	443	24.6	26.0	316	829	34.8	35.9
15+ years	140	395	18.5	23.2	236	656	26.0	28.4
Number of partners								
1 partner	520	1,137	68.5	66.8	571	1,476	63.0	64.0
2 or more partners	239	566	31.5	33.2	336	832	37.0	36.0
Previous partnership status								
Married	417	993	54.9	58.3	511	1,386	56.3	60.0
Cohabiting	342	710	45.1	41.7	396	922	43.7	40.0
Previous partnership type								
Direct marriage	-	-	-	-	202	554	22.3	24.0
Marriage preceded by cohabitation	-	-	-	-	309	832	34.1	36.0
Cohabitation	-	-	-	-	396	922	43.7	40.0
Year								
2000 (Aus: 2001)	172	558	22.7	32.8	286	947	31.53	41.03
2001 (Aus: 2002)	100	286	13.2	16.8	204	620	22.49	26.86
2002 (Aus: 2003)	166	415	21.9	24.4	148	366	16.32	15.86
2003 (Aus: 2004)	152	275	20.0	16.2	134	240	14.77	10.4
2004 (Aus: 2005)	169	169	22.3	9.9	135	135	14.88	5.85
Employment[b]								
Employed		1,181		69.4		1,604		70.0
Unemployed		111		6.5		107		4.6
Family care		133		7.8				
Out of labour force		278		16.3		597		25.9

Table 1 continues…

Table 1. Summary statistics, United Kingdom & Australia (continued)

	United Kingdom				Australia			
	N		% Distribution		N		% Distribution	
Explanatory variables	Original[a]	Person-period	Original	Person-period	Original	Person-period	Original	Person-period
Education								
Degree/teaching qual	115	244	15.2	14.3	163	428	18.0	18.5
Other qual (including diplomas and certificates)	274	616	36.1	36.2	299	759	33.0	32.9
A-level (Aus: Yr 12)	77	182	10.1	10.7	169	391	18.6	16.9
O-level or below (Aus: Yr 11)	256	598	33.7	35.1	276	730	30.4	31.6
Missing	37	63	4.9	3.7				
Benefit receipt[b]								
Receives a benefit		593		34.8		911		39.5
Does not receive a benefit[c]		1,100		65.2		1,397		60.5
Income quintile[b]								
Bottom		505		29.7		600		26.0
2nd		346		20.3		496		21.5
3rd		275		16.2		439		19.0
4th		255		15.0		399		17.3
Top		279		16.4		374		16.2
Missing		43		2.5				
Housing tenure								
Owner occupier	406	951	53.5	55.8	427	1,135	47.1	49.2
Renting	319	695	42.0	40.8	480	1,173	52.9	50.8
Missing	34	57	4.5	3.4				
Region								
England (Aus: NSW & ACT)	421	927	55.5	54.4	279	686	30.8	29.7
Wales (Aus: VIC)	123	307	16.2	18.0	209	559	23.0	24.2
Scotland (Aus: QLD)	137	325	18.1	19.1	212	526	23.4	22.8
Northern Ireland (Aus: SA & NT)	56	101	7.4	5.9	95	258	10.5	11.2
Missing (Aus: WA)	22	43	2.9	2.5	79	200	8.7	8.7
(Aus: TAS)					33	79	3.6	3.4
Health[b]								
Excellent		354		20.8		1,013		43.9
Good		767		45.0		675		29.3
Fair		372		21.8		287		12.4
Poor/very poor		210		12.3		71		3.1
Missing						262		11.4

Source: BHPS 1999–2006; HILDA 2001–2006.
Notes:
[a] The original dataset contains one row per individual. The person-period file is an expanded dataset that includes as many rows as periods at risk. [b] Time varying covariates. [c] Includes 44 missing periods where benefit receipt is not known.
- Previous partnership type not available for the United Kingdom.

Table 2. Odds ratios of repartnering, United Kingdom & Australia

	United Kingdom		Australia	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
	Life course	Life course & Socio-economic	Life course	Life course & Socio-economic
Time				
0-1	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
1-2	1.10	1.13	0.93	0.94
2-3	1.02	1.05	0.73	0.75
3-4	0.95	1.02	0.65*	0.68
4-5	0.70	0.75	0.66	0.67
Age				
17-24 years	1.23	1.27	1.11	1.14
25-34 years	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
35-44 years	0.65**	0.62**	0.66**	0.68**
45-54 years	0.49**	0.44**	0.39**	0.42**
55+ years	0.15**	0.16**	0.25**	0.27**
Gender				
Female	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Male	1.04	1.00	1.30*	1.35*
Children				
Resident children age <5 years	0.71	0.59*	0.71*	0.70
Resident children age 5+ years	0.82	0.82	1.00	1.01
Non resident children <16 years (Aus: <18 years)	1.32	1.33	0.98	0.92
No dependent children	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Missing	0.74	0.65		
Previous partnership duration				
Less than 5 years	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
5-14 years	1.01	1.03	1.21	1.21
15+ years	0.86	0.87	1.12	1.13
Number of partners				
1 partner	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
2 or more partners	1.18	1.18	1.12	1.14
Previous partnership type				
Marriage	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Cohabitation	0.98	0.93	1.11	1.07
Year				
2000 (Aus: 2001)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
2001 (Aus: 2002)	0.79	0.80	1.03	1.07
2002 (Aus: 2003)	1.01	1.12	1.10	1.12
2003 (Aus: 2004)	1.03	1.11	1.15	1.19
2004 (Aus: 2005)	0.86	1.02	0.75	0.76
Employment				
Employed		1.00		1.00
Unemployed		0.70		1.04
Family care		1.18		1.12
Out of labour force		0.63		

Note: ** p<0.05,* p<0.1. Table 2 continues…

Table 2. Odds ratios of repartnering, United Kingdom & Australia (continued)

	United Kingdom		Australia	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
	Life course	Life course & Socio-economic	Life course	Life course & Socio-economic
Education				
Degree/teaching qual		1.00		1.00
Other qual (including diplomas and certificates)		0.78		0.98
A-level (Aus: Yr 12)		0.76		1.23
O-level or below (Aus: Yr 11)		0.97		1.11
Missing		0.91		
Benefit receipt[a]				
Receives a benefit		1.20		1.06
Does not receive a benefit		1.00		1.00
Income quintile				
Bottom		0.83		0.73
2nd		0.94		0.78
3rd		0.74		0.99
4th		1.10		0.72
Top		1.00		1.00
Missing		0.93		
Housing tenure				
Owner occupier		1.00		1.00
Renter		1.16		1.28*
Missing		1.18		
Region				
England (Aus: NSW & ACT)		1.00		1.00
Wales (Aus: VIC)		1.12		0.75
Scotland (Aus: QLD)		0.66**		0.77
Northern Ireland (Aus: SA & NT)		0.47**		0.73
Missing (Aus: WA)		0.56		0.73
(Aus: TAS)				0.86
Health[b]				
Excellent		1.00		1.00
Good		0.73*		0.81
Fair		0.90		0.65*
Poor/very poor		0.77		0.67
Missing				1.19

Source: BHPS 1999–2006; HILDA 2001–2006.
Note: ** $p<0.05$,* $p<0.1$. [a] Includes 44 missing periods where benefit receipt is not known.

Table 3. Odds ratios of repartnering, Australia

	Australia
Time	
0-1	1.00
1-2	0.94
2-3	0.75
3-4	0.69
4-5	0.67
Age	
17-24 years	1.11
25-34 years	1.00
35-44 years	0.67**
45-54 years	0.43**
55+ years	0.30**
Gender	
Female	1.00
Male	1.35*
Children	
Resident children age <5 years	0.69*
Resident children age 5+ years	1.01
Non resident children < 18 years	0.91
No dependent children	1.00
Missing	
Previous partnership duration	
Less than 5 years	1.00
5-14 years	1.18
15+ years	1.13
Number of partners	
1 partner	1.00
2 or more partners	1.06
Previous partnership type	
Direct marriage	1.00
Marriage preceded by cohabitation	1.57*
Cohabitation	1.48
Year	
2001	1.00
2002	1.08
2003	1.13
2004	1.21
2005	0.78
Employment	
Employed	1.00
Unemployed	1.04
Out of labour force	1.15

Note: ** p<0.05,* p<0.1. Table 3 continues…

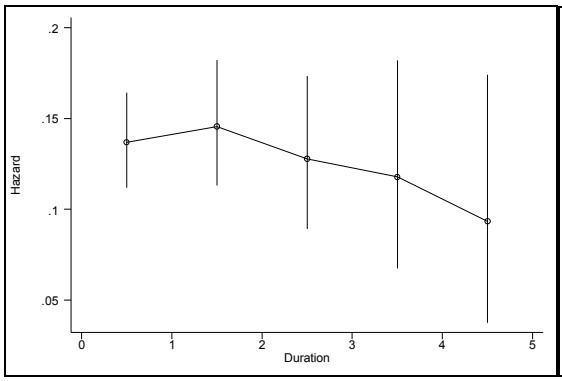
Table 3. Odd ratios of repartnering, Australia (continued)

	Australia
Education	
Degree/Teaching qual	1.00
Other qual (including diplomas & certificates)	0.97
Year 12	1.22
Year 11	1.10
Benefit receipt	
Receives a benefit	1.04
Does not receive a benefit	1.00
Income quintile	
Bottom	0.74
2nd	0.80
3rd	1.00
4th	0.72
Top	1.00
Housing tenure	
Owner occupier	1.00
Renter	1.26*
Region	
NSW & ACT	1.00
Victoria	0.74*
Queensland	0.74*
SA & NT	0.72
WA	0.72
Tasmania	0.85
Health	
Excellent	1.00
Good	0.81
Fair	0.64*
Poor/very poor	0.65
Missing	1.19

Source: HILDA 2001–2006.
Note: ** p<0.05,* p<0.1

Appendix 1: Hazard rates

United Kingdom



Australia