

## Family arrangements in France: Toward which trends for the near future?

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### ***Abstract***

Using the continuous multi-state tool elaborated within the European Project MicMac (<http://www.nidi.knaw.nl/en/micmac/>), we address three questions in that paper.

First, how will the family situations change in the near future in France? More precisely, will the proportion of people living as a couple go on decreasing? Will the share of unmarried couples and births out of marriage stabilize?

Second, taking a micro-perspective will allow us describing the proportion of people experiencing different transitions, the mean ages at beginning and ending of different episodes, as well as their mean duration.

The third aim of the paper is to check the robustness of MicMac estimates, based on age-specific transition rates, through a comparison with duration-specific life table estimates, taking the example of lone parenthood.

Data come from a large one-percent survey which took place within the last census in France, and includes a set of questions on family history.

## ***Background***

There is a substantial diversity in family and partnership behaviours across modern low-fertility societies (Sobotka et Toulemon, 2008). Individual trajectories are getting more and more complex. In the demographic literature, “the second demographic transition” theory associates the path to below-replacement-level fertility with innovative family behaviours, including historically high levels of non-marital childbearing, partnership instability, and long-term cohabitation. With more frequent divorces, separations, and second unions, partnership histories include more and more episodes, and birth histories involve frequently more than one other parent. In France like in many other European countries, marriage is getting optional, couples remain more often in unmarried relationships for a long time, so that more than one birth out of two now occurs outside of marriage.

## ***Forecasting family lives***

The aim of the proposed study is to give some clues about the evolution of partnership trajectories and family arrangements. This allows anticipating on some future individual and country needs, and contributes to understanding the link between individual behaviours and macro outcomes in term of family and fertility.

Two periods of life are of special interest for economists and policies, because people are financially especially weak or dependant at that time. First, lone-parent families, often composed of a mother with at least one child. Second, elderly or disabled people, whose partner can take care of when they are in a couple but not anymore when the couple is dissolved. Which duration can we expect people to spend in each of these situations? During the baby boom period, people were unused to loneliness periods, since young women often moved directly from parental to conjugal home, and union disruptions were rare; young men more often lived by their own before their first union, but this period was not seen as a long-lasting way of living for adults. Today, women as well as men experience more and more episodes of life out of a couple, and the society has to adapt to this new ways of life and to answer to needs that emerge, for example in terms of housing.

Trends in partnership behaviours and family arrangements may be described at the micro level, through individual life-course histories, and at the macro level by the changing distribution of people among different family types.

## ***Aim of the paper***

The paper will deal with the following questions:

(1) Given the transformations of behaviours within the last years, and the expected possibilities of changes – or continuity – in the last decades, which family perspectives can we expect for people entering adulthood today? The projected macro-level trend in the distribution of people among the family will be described.

(2) Which part of the population does live various trajectories? At which ages do people enter into different situations? What is the mean duration in each step of these trajectories? We will more specifically focus on the mean duration of married and unmarried relationships, and on the mean duration of episodes out of a couple (before any union or after a union disruption, as a lone parent).

(3) The third aim of the paper is more methodological. We will compare the estimated mean duration of some episodes based on age-specific transition rates with the one deduced from duration-specific life tables, taking the example of lone parenthood, in order to check the robustness of a model based primarily on age-specific rates.

### ***Data and methods***

Data come from the Study of Family History Survey, a one-percent survey that was conducted within the 1999 General Population Census. For the first time, this large-scale survey (380,000 respondents) included men as well as women, aged 18 and over, without any upper age limit. The forms included questions about own children, and also on stepchildren (children from a spouse/partner that the person has brought up).

A sample of individuals received specific survey forms, in addition to the census forms. For a matter of simplicity, some census enumerators gave specific forms to all the women, others to the men. The form included several questions about present and past family situation: children, stepchildren, and partners. French data are thus subject to memory errors or more widely, reluctance to give information about past episodes. Some respondents may have preferred not to give any information about previous unions (Toulemon, Mazuy 2003). Men and women were given “gendered” forms, but the questions were the same in both forms (Cassan, Héran, Toulemon 2000, Lefèvre and Filhon 2005).

The primary tool of analysis will be MicMac, a tool joining a continuous multi-state micro-simulation model of individual biographies (Mic) with a multistate cohort-component model (Mac). The MicMac micro-simulation program is based on age-specific transition rates, and allows producing individual simulated biographies based on a series of age-specific transition rates, completed by relative risks taking into account population heterogeneity (Willekens 2005, MicMac 2008). The transitions have already been estimated (Impicciatore et al. 2008) and synthetic estimates such as the mean duration as a lone parent will be compared with estimates based on duration-specific rates.

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