

## Living apart together

Most of us are aware of couples who have a steady relationship, but do not live together. Despite living at different addresses, they are regarded by themselves and others as a couple. This phenomenon has come to be called 'living apart together' or LAT for short. In a chapter in *Changing Relationships*, John Ermisch and Thomas Siedler take a look at some of the evidence from the British Household Panel Study and the German Socio-Economic Panel on living apart together.

In Britain, live-in partnerships, be they formal marriage or not, have been forming later in people's lives. In the new millennium the vast majority of partnerships begin with couples moving in together. These two changes lie behind the large postponement of marriage and motherhood in women's lives. About one half of people living together split up while the rest get married. Another factor of note is how soon couples find someone else after a break-up. In the case of those who were living together, one half find a new partner within about two years, but it takes over seven years for one half of those who were married to find a new partner.

These developments not only mean that more people are spending time without a live-in partner, but also that increasing numbers are living apart together (LAT). So what or who is a LAT, how long do these relationships last and what might this phenomenon mean in the wide-ranging analysis and debate about the changing nature of relationships?

It mainly involves young, never married people aged under 25, and is particularly common among students. But LAT also occurs after separation or divorce, with one fifth of LATs coming from this group. Overall, between one fifth and a quarter of 16-35 year-olds report being in a 'LAT relationship', compared with 18 per cent who are living together. LAT is a more common lifestyle for the better educated, irrespective of age.

In both Britain and Germany about one third of people in a LAT relationship in one year are also in a LAT relationship 5 years later, although their partners may have changed. The German evidence allows a more detailed analysis of the duration of LATs. It suggests that the 'average' LAT lasts about 4 years, with about 45 per cent splitting up, 35 per cent moving in together and 10 per cent getting married within 10 years. The British evidence on LATs is more limited but suggests they may be shorter in duration: about two-fifths of the relationships in progress in a given year had been going on for two or more years. At the other extreme, about one fifth started less than six months ago. It also appears that the LAT partner usually lives nearby (there is not similar evidence for Germany).

As far as trends are concerned, evidence from Germany indicates that it has been around to a similar extent back to at least the early 1990s. Thus, it may not be a new phenomenon, but rather one that has been overlooked. In any case, it is now the most common form of partnership until people reach their mid-20s, when people begin to live together. As such, it certainly deserves more attention and study.