Transitional and Long-term Living Apart and Together Relationships among Mid-Life and Older Adults

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Outline:

- The concept Living Apart Together

- Outcomes of *quantitative* research:
  - some characteristics of lat relationships

- Outcomes of *qualitative* research:
  - Quality of the partner relationship, commitment
1970 →
many changes
in demographic attitudes and behavior
of Northern and Western European adults:

• increase in divorce
• repartnering in many forms: ‘destandardization’
• marriage is no longer the exclusive standard
Sharp increase in living alone

- among mid life divorcees
- among mid life and older widowed adults
  women and men!

But, *not all people living alone are without a partner*
Living Apart Together =

- define themselves as a couple/ partners
- each partner lives in own home
  (alone or with dependent children)
- part of the week they are under one roof

“a marriage-like relationship” (Levin, 2004)
Two types of LAT:

- A partner relationship at the start of the adult life course: ‘engaged’/ not yet married: TRANSITIONAL

- After widowhood or divorce: living in a household without partner & an informal partner relationship
Research into LAT relationships:

- Sweden: Karlsson & Borell, 2005
- Canada: Milan & Peters, 2003
- Germany: Schneider & Ruckdeschel, 2003
- Netherlands: De Graaf & Loozen, 2006; De Jong Gierveld, 2004; De Jong Gierveld & Latten, 2008

In this presentation I want to make a step forward in investigating more in-depth the characteristics of Lat relationships.
To understand the ins and outs of lat relationships more in-depth, I start from the well-known theoretical point of view:

**Married** people have more resources than not married people

(Weiss, 1974; Hobfoll, 1989; Waite and Gallagher, 2000)
**Married life** as key to life satisfaction, social wellbeing & alleviation of loneliness

- Attachment theoretical perspective (Weiss, 1974)
- Providing material resources, economies of sharing household costs (Waite & Gallagher, 2000)
- Exchanges of support (Korporaal, Broese van Groenou, Van Tilburg, 2008)
- Encourage to live healthier & less risky behavior
- Explicit commitment to stay together:
  - ‘relationship-specific capital’ (Waite & Joyner, 2001)
There is empirical evidence that marriage is related to wellbeing and less loneliness, but…

the benefits of marriage are not uniform for all individuals

in many cases the costs of marriage are higher than the benefits
Research questions:

(1) What are the characteristics of those who opt for long-term LAT?

(2) How are the positive aspects of partnership and marriage weighted against the costs and the restrictions?
Data set used to answer the current research questions (1):

*Netherlands Kinship Panel Survey*

  wave 1  2002/3
  wave 2  2006/7

-- to investigate differences between short- term and long-term LAT relationships
NKPS: 395 LAT in wave 1, who are re-interviewed in wave 2

395 LAT

- 140 married/cohabit
- 134 ‘separation’
- **121** LAT (same partner)

(NKPS, age 18-79 at baseline)
Duration LAT in years by age (both at baseline) (NKPS, wave 1--> 2)
Outcomes of hiërarchical loglineair regression analysis predicting long-term LAT showed:

• Of those living alone, around 15% is involved in LAT, or is interested in LAT
• LAT is especially favored by mid-life and young-old adults
• More specifically by women (after divorce or widowhood)
• LAT among mid-life and young-old adults is a really long-term partner relationship commitment
Data set used to answer research question (2):

In-depth interviews with a selection of the 121 Lat partners identified in the *Netherlands Kinship Panel Survey*

By now, we have interviewed 26 of the 30 Lat individuals we intend to interview, and in addition we will interview the same number of remarried older adults, matching characteristics of both groups.
In this session information about two adults involved in a Lat relationship will be shown:

Both respondents feel **satisfied** & answers on the emotional and social loneliness scale indicate **no loneliness**
Respondent (1), female divorced
69 years, two grown up children,
living alone,
involved in a Lat relationship for more than 17 years.
Respondent (1), female divorced 69 years, two grown up children, living alone, involved in a Lat relationship for more than 17 years.

_in conclusion:_

• She did not want to accept the costs of remarriage in loosing her financial (and broader) independence. So, a lat relationship proved to be the solution…
Respondent (2), male divorced, 56 years, two teen-age children, parenting for half the week, no partner in the household involved in a Lat relationship for more than 17 years.
Respondent (2), male divorced, 56 years, two teen-age children, parenting for half the week, no partner in the household involved in a Lat relationship for more than 17 years.

In conclusion, he could not accept the costs of remarriage.

- He wanted the partner relationship with Myra, but not on a 24 hours per day arrangement. A Lat relationship is a solution for this dilemma. In the weekends, when the children are in the house of his ex, he is with Myra…
Examples of LAT relationships, as long-term commitment are shown; with differing motives to opt for a Lat relationship.

But, Lat relationships need further investigation in which Lat characteristics are compared to the remarried situation.

Questions we hope to answer in the near future:

→ Is the exchange of emotional and instrumental support between LAT partners comparable to the situation between remarried couples?

→ To what extent are LAT partners integrated in their families and in the ‘family-in-law’ and is this comparable to the situation of remarried couples?
Thank you