

Disagreements among cohabiting and married couples in 23 European countries

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Pairfam Conference

22-23 September 2011

Introduction

- Why study cohabitation?
 - More and more common, more children born to unmarried cohabiting parents
 - Negative outcomes (i.e. well-being, relationship stability)

- Increasing variety in types of cohabitation (Seltzer, 2004)
 - A prelude to marriage
 - A variety or alternative to marriage
 - An alternative to being single

Introduction

- Why study disagreement as an outcome?
 - Insight in consequences
 - So far focus mostly on relationship stability and wellbeing (Soons & Kalmijn, 2009)

- Explore differences between types of disagreement:
 - Disagreement about money
 - Disagreement about housework
 - Disagreement about paid work

Cohabitation and conflict

- Previous findings from the US:
 - Cohabiting couples have more conflicts than married couples (Brown and Booth, 1996; Kamp Dush, Cohan and Amato 2003)
 - This is not found for long-term cohabitating couples (Willets, 2006)
 - Married couples who ever cohabited have more conflicts than those who did not (Kamp Dush, Cohan and Amato 2003)
 - Level of conflict decreases after cohabiting couples marry, but explained by duration and marriage plans (Brown, 2004)

Introduction

- But: differences in cohabitation in US and Europe
 - High incidence but short duration in US
 - Stronger relationship with socio-economic characteristics

- Cross-national approach
 - Varying levels of institutionalization in Europe
 - Different types of cohabitation prevail in different European countries

Research questions

1. Do cohabiting couples differ from married couples in levels of disagreement (about money, paid work and housework) and do differences exist between European countries in this respect?
2. To what extent can differences in disagreement between married and cohabiting couples be explained by differences in background characteristics, life course, values and country-level characteristics?
3. Are there differences between men and women in this respect?

General expectation:

- Cohabiting couples have more disagreements compared to married couples

How to explain differences in disagreements between cohabiting and married couples?

- Different background characteristics:
 - Socio-economic resources: income, education, work arrangements
 - Higher income and education: fewer disagreements
 - Breadwinner model > fewer disagreements

- Different phase of the life course:
 - Relationship duration, presence of children, experience of divorce
 - Longer duration > less disagreements
 - Presence of children > more disagreements
 - Experienced divorce > more disagreements

- Different values and attitudes
 - Cohabitation: less fixed gender roles and more autonomy
 - More traditional values > less disagreements

Gender differences

- Disagree about money/paid work:
 - Cohabiting women may report more disagreements as cohabiting couples are more likely have separate purses and both be in employment. Women earn less and work less > more disagreement

- Disagree about housework:
 - Cohabiting women may report more disagreements as cohabiting couples are less traditional in gender roles, which does not always translate into behaviour

Country differences

- The context in which couples find themselves matters:
 - Economic development (GDP)
 - More welfare leads to smaller differences
 - Institutionalization of cohabitation (cohabitation rate)
 - More common > smaller differences
 - Gender equality (Gender Empowerment Index)
 - More equality > smaller differences

Data: European Social Survey

- European Social Survey (2004)
 - Module on family, work and well-being

- Selection of respondents
 - Living in a couple
 - 18-45 years old
 - Countries with lacking info on key variables were dropped

- 23 countries, N = 10'875
- (Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovakia)

- Context variables from IMF, UN, OECD

Dependent variable: disagreements

Mean scores for disagreements by relationship status, total country sample

	Married (n = 8'581)	Cohabiting (n = 2'294)	All
How often do you disagree with your partner about...	Mean (SD)/%	Mean (SD)/%	Mean (SD)/%
Money (1=never to 7=everyday)	2.10 (1.5)	2.24 (1.5)	2.13 (1.5)
Housework (1=never to 7=everyday)	2.40 (1.7)	2.79 (1.7)	2.48 (1.7)
Paid work (1=yes)	42%	42%	42%

Individual- and couple-level variables

	Range	M	SD
Woman	0-1	.56	-
Age	18-45	35.51	6.32
Household income	75-15000	2904	2381
Household income missing	0-1	.20	-
Level of education	1-5	3.32	1.21
Both partners paid job	0-1	.63	-
Neither partner paid job	0-1	.05	-
Experienced divorce	0-1	.07	-
Relationship duration	0-34	10.26	6.77

Attitudes

	M	SD
A woman should be prepared to cut down on paid work for the sake of family	2.92	1.14
Men should take as much responsibility as women for home and children	1.82	.79
Men should have more right to a job than women when jobs are scarce	3.60	1.18
When there are children in the home, parents should stay together, even if they don't get along	3.55	1.08
A person's family should be the main priority in life	1.85	.78

Country-level variables

	Range	Mean	SD
GEM	.523-.908	.711	.113
Cohabitation rate	9.1-59.1	29.483	16.094
GDP/1000	12.7-65.7	29.263	11.006

Analysis

- Multilevel (random intercept) models:
 - Individuals nested within countries
 - Logistic regression for disagreement about paid work (yes/no)

- **Model 1:** Cohabitation/marriage and gender
- **Model 2:** + resources and life course
- **Model 3:** + gender equality and family centrality attitudes

- **Model 4:** + cohabitation rate
- **Model 5:** + GEM
- **Model 6:** + GDP

DISAGREEMENTS OVER MONEY BOTH MEN AND WOMEN (B)

	M1				
Cohabitation	0.15***				
Gender	0				
Income					
Education					
Both Paid job					
No paid job					
Duration					
Experienced divorce					
Children < 12 years					
Women less paid work for family					
Men equal responsibility children					
Men more right to job					
Parents should stay together					
Family main priority in life					
Cohabitation rate					
GEM					
GDP					

DISAGREEMENTS OVER MONEY BOTH MEN AND WOMEN (B)

	M1	M 2			
Cohabitation	0.15***	0.12**			
Gender	0	0			
Income		-			
Education		0			
Both Paid job		-			
No paid job		+			
Duration		0			
Experienced divorce		0			
Children < 12 years		+			
Women less paid work for family					
Men equal responsibility children					
Men more right to job					
Parents should stay together					
Family main priority in life					
Cohabitation rate					
GEM					
GDP					

DISAGREEMENTS OVER MONEY BOTH MEN AND WOMEN (B)

	M1	M 2	M3			
Cohabitation	0.15***	0.12**	0.12**			
Gender	0	0	0			
Income		-	-			
Education		0	0			
Both Paid job		-	-			
No paid job		+	+			
Duration		0	0			
Experienced divorce		0	0			
Children < 12 years		+	+			
Women less paid work for family			0			
Men equal responsibility children			0			
Men more right to job			0			
Parents should stay together			-			
Family main priority in life			+			
Cohabitation rate						
GEM						
GDP						

DISAGREEMENTS OVER HOUSEWORK MEN AND WOMEN (B)

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Cohabitation	0.21***					
Gender	0					
Income						
Education						
Both paid job						
No paid job						
Duration						
Experienced divorce						
Children<12						
Women less paid work for family						
Men equal responsibility children						
Men more right to job						
Parents should stay together						
Family main priority in life						
Cohabitation rate						
GEM						
GDP						

DISAGREEMENTS OVER HOUSEWORK MEN AND WOMEN (B)

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Cohabitation	0.21***	0.18***				
Gender	0	0				
Income		0				
Education		+				
Both paid job		+				
No paid job		+				
Duration		-				
Experienced divorce		0				
Children<12		+				
Women less paid work for family						
Men equal responsibility children						
Men more right to job						
Parents should stay together						
Family main priority in life						
Cohabitation rate						
GEM						
GDP						

DISAGREEMENTS OVER HOUSEWORK MEN AND WOMEN (B)

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Cohabitation	0.21***	0.18***	.17***			
Gender	0	0	0			
Income		0	0			
Education		+	+			
Both paid job		+	+			
No paid job		+	+			
Duration		-	-			
Experienced divorce		0	0			
Children<12		+	+			
Women less paid work for family			+			
Men equal responsibility children			0			
Men more right to job			0			
Parents should stay together			0			
Family main priority in life			+			
Cohabitation rate						
GEM						
GDP						

DISAGREEMENTS OVER PAID WORK MEN AND WOMEN

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Cohabitation	-0.14**					
Female	-					
Income						
Education						
Both paid job						
No paid job						
Duration						
Experienced divorce						
Child<12						
Women less paid work for family						
Men equal responsibility children						
Men more right to job						
Parents should stay together						
Family main priority in life						
Cohabitation rate						
GEM						
GDP						

DISAGREEMENTS OVER PAID WORK MEN AND WOMEN

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Cohabitation	-0.14**	-0.12*				
Female	-	-				
Income		+				
Education		+				
Both paid job		0				
No paid job		0				
Duration		0				
Experienced divorce		0				
Child<12		+				
Women less paid work for family						
Men equal responsibility children						
Men more right to job						
Parents should stay together						
Family main priority in life						
Cohabitation rate						
GEM						
GDP						

DISAGREEMENTS OVER PAID WORK MEN AND WOMEN

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Cohabitation	-0.14**	-0.12*	-.12			
Female	-	-	-			
Income		+	+			
Education		+	+			
Both paid job		0	0			
No paid job		0	0			
Duration		0	0			
Experienced divorce		0	0			
Child<12		+	+			
Women less paid work for family			0			
Men equal responsibility children			+			
Men more right to job			0			
Parents should stay together			-			
Family main priority in life			+			
Cohabitation rate						
GEM						
GDP						

Separate analyses for men and women

Disagreement over money:

- More disagreement reported by cohabiting women

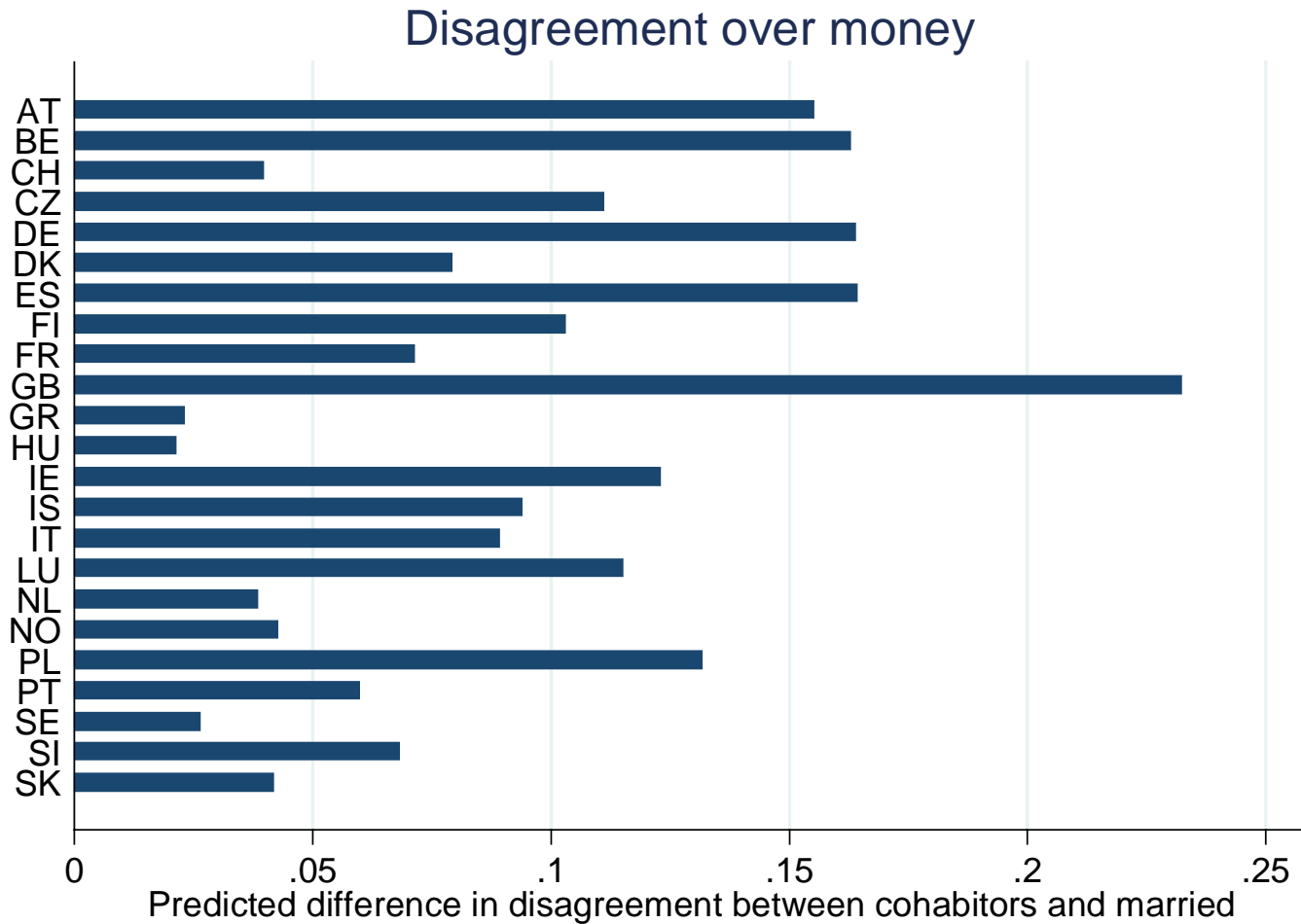
Disagreement over housework:

- More disagreement reported by cohabiting women

Disagreement over paid work:

- Less disagreement reported by cohabiting men

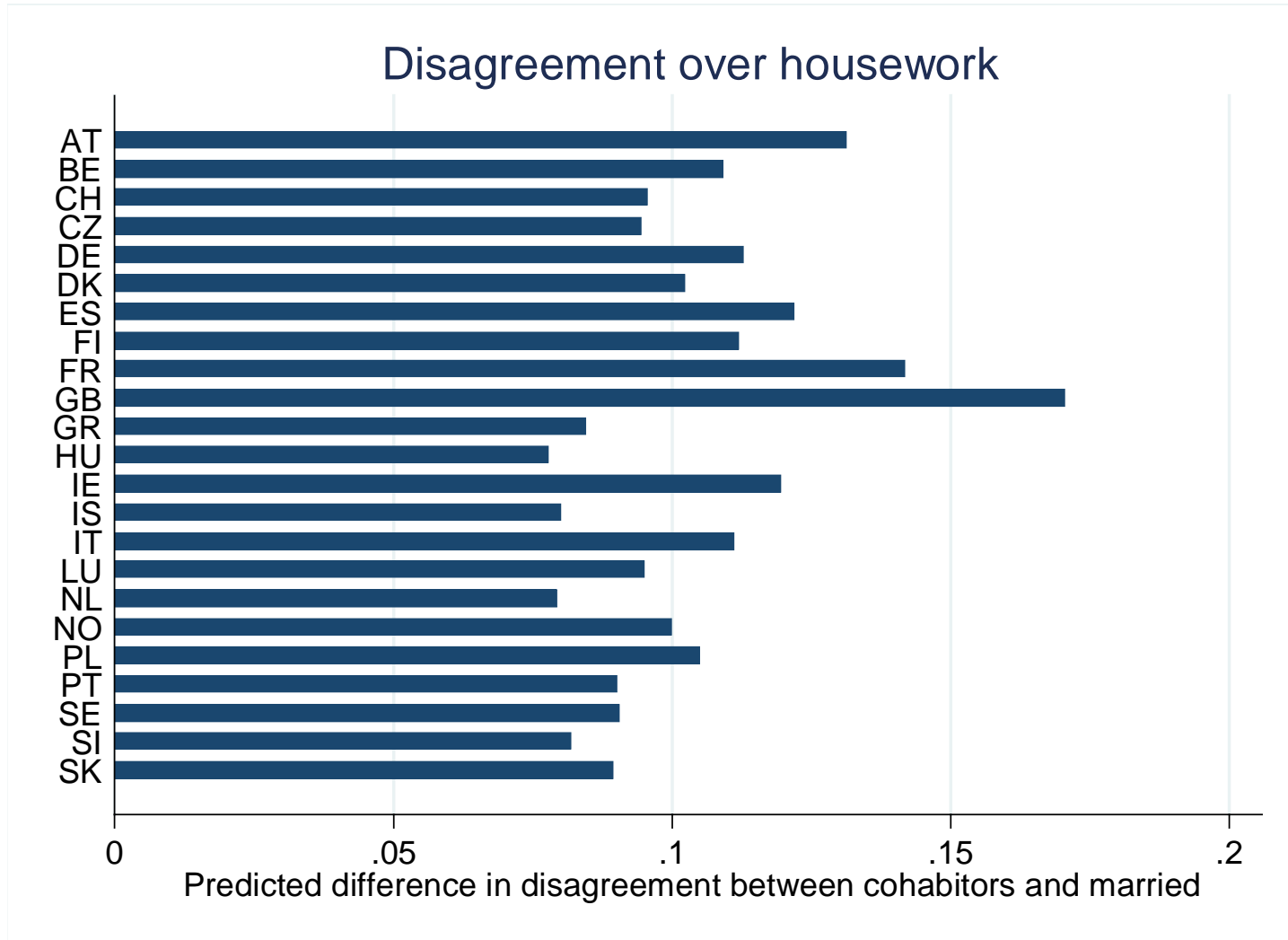
Country-level differences



DISAGREEMENTS OVER MONEY BOTH MEN AND WOMEN (B/SE)

	M1	M 2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Cohabitation	0.15***	0.12**	0.12**	0.12**	0.12*	0.12**
Gender	0	0	0	0	0	0
Income		-	-	-	-	-
Education		0	0	0	0	0
Both Paid job		-	-	-	-	-
No paid job		+	+	+	+	+
Duration		0	0	0	0	-
Experienced divorce		0	0	0	0	0
Children < 12 years		+	+	+	+	+
Women less paid work for family			0	0	0	0
Men equal responsibility children			0	0	0	0
Men more right to job			0	0	0	0
Parents should stay together			-	-	-	-
Family main priority in life			+	+	+	+
Cohabitation rate				0.00		
GEM					0.24	
GDP						-0.00

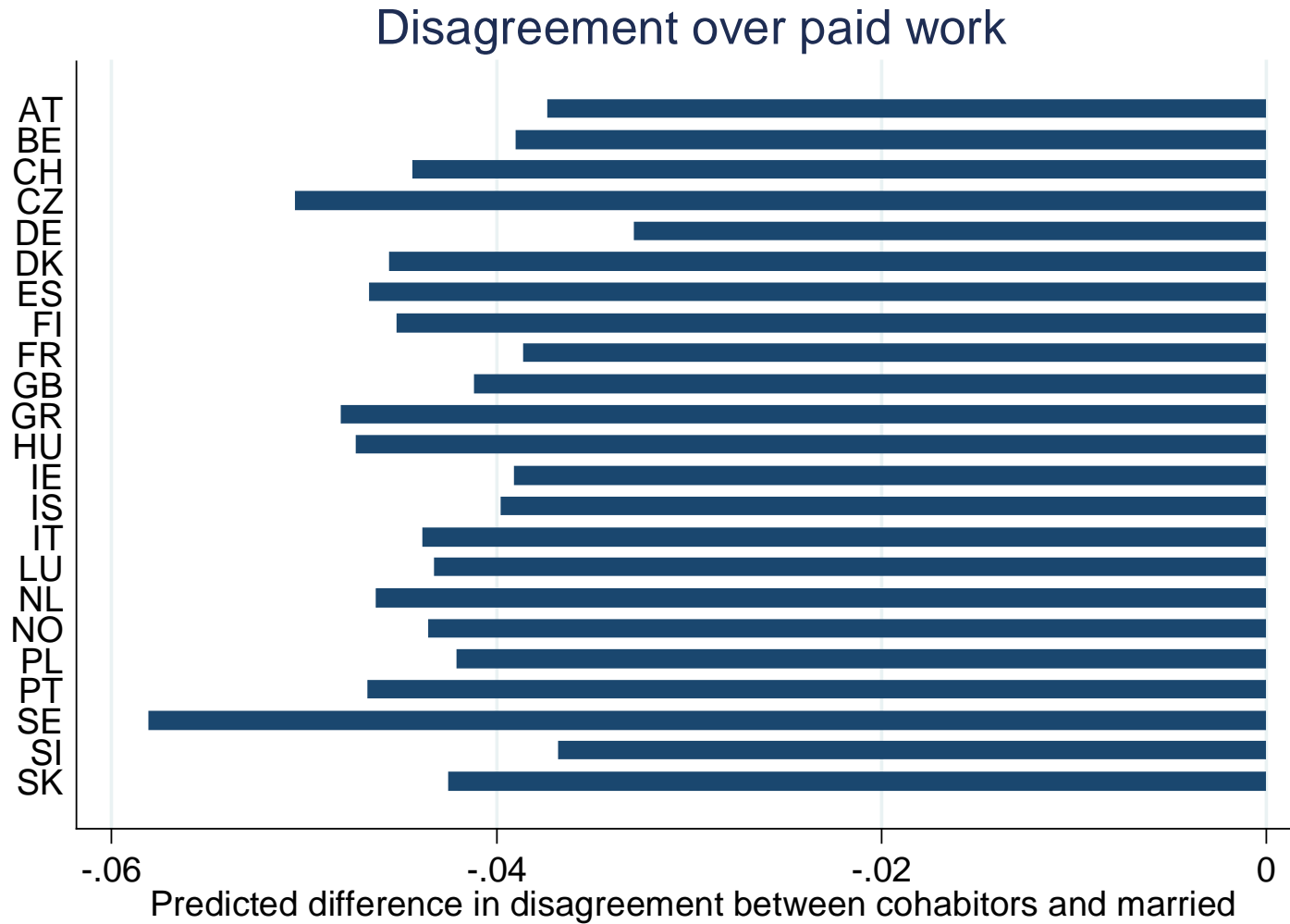
Country-level differences



DISAGREEMENTS OVER HOUSEWORK MEN AND WOMEN (B)

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Cohabitation	0.21***	0.18***	.17***	0.16**	0.16**	0.17***
Gender	0	0	0	0	0	0
Income		0	0	-	-	0
Education		+	+	+	+	+
Both paid job		+	+	+	+	+
No paid job		+	+	+	+	+
Duration		-	-	-	-	-
Experienced divorce		0	0	0	0	0
Children<12		+	+	+	+	+
Women less paid work for family			+	+	+	+
Men equal responsibility children			0	0	0	0
Men more right to job			0	0	0	0
Parents should stay together			0	0	0	0
Family main priority in life			+	+	+	+
Cohabitation rate				0.01*		
GEM					1.44*	
GDP						0.01

Country-level differences



DISAGREEMENTS OVER PAID WORK MEN AND WOMEN

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Cohabitation	-0.14**	-0.12*	-.12	-0.13*	-0.12*	-0.12
Female	-	-	-	-	-	-
Income		+	+	+	+	+
Education		+	+	+	+	+
Both paid job		0	0	0	0	0
No paid job		0	0	0	0	0
Duration		0	0	0	0	0
Experienced divorce		0	0	0	0	0
Child<12		+	+	+	+	+
Women less paid work for family			0	0	0	0
Men equal responsibility children			+	+	+	+
Men more right to job			0	0	0	0
Parents should stay together			-	-	-	-
Family main priority in life			+	+	+	+
Cohabitation rate				0.01		
GEM					0.75	
GDP						-0.01

Summary and Conclusions (1)

- Cohabiting couples differ from married couples in disagreements:
 - More disagreement about money and housework
 - Less disagreement about paid work

- This difference remains after taking into account resources, life course, attitudes and country-level characteristics

- Differences between men and women:
 - Cohabiting women report more disagreement (money, housework)
 - Cohabiting men report less disagreement (paid work)

Summary and Conclusions (2)

- Although most variation is on the individual level, there is significant variation in disagreement on the country level as well,
- which is only marginally explained by differences in GDP, GEM, and cohabitation rate between countries

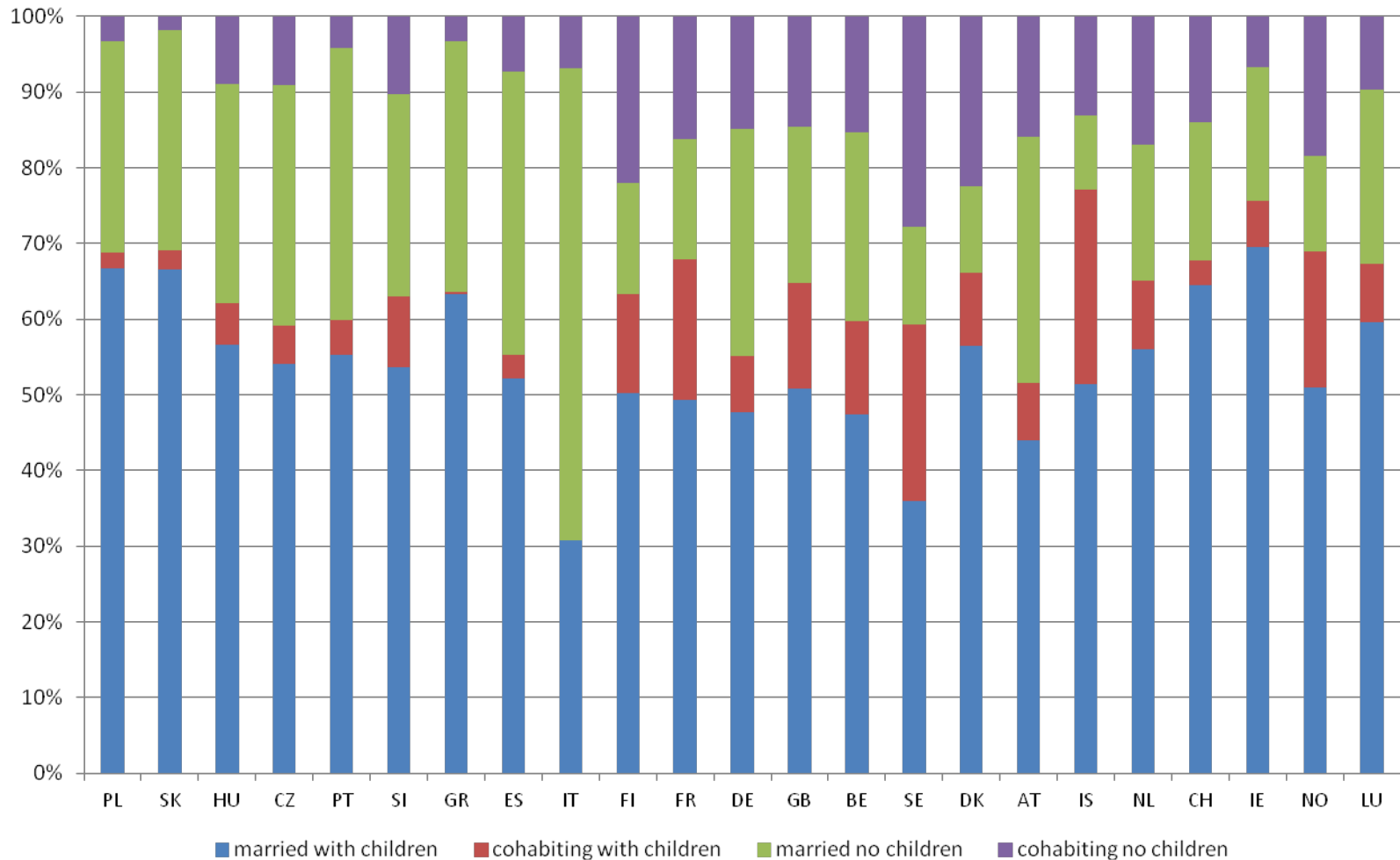
Next steps...

- How to explain remaining differences between relationship types?
- Further examine gender differences and importance of presence of children
- Difficulty investigating causal mechanisms with cross-sectional data, longitudinal approach
- Country differences:
 - Include cross-level interactions
 - Different types of cohabitation in different countries?

Thank you!

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Relative share of cohabiting and married couples with and without children in 23 countries



Interaction marital status and children

Disagreement over money:

Cohabiting with children -> more disagreement than married with children

Disagreements over housework:

Cohabiting or married without children -> more disagreements than married with children

Disagreement over paid work:

Cohabiting without children -> less disagreement than married with children