



# The impacts of marriage, cohabitation and dating relationships on weekly self-reported physical activity in Germany: A 19-year longitudinal study



Ingmar Rapp\*, Björn Schneider

Max Weber Institute of Sociology, Heidelberg University, Bergheimer Str. 58, 69115 Heidelberg, Germany

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Available online 7 October 2013

### Keywords:

Physical activity  
Marriage  
Cohabitation  
Dating relationship  
Germany  
GSOEP  
Fixed-effects estimation

## ABSTRACT

Despite the increasing number of non-marital romantic relationships in developed countries, little is known about their effects on health-related behaviors. This paper examined the impact of relationship status (single, dating, cohabiting or married) on physical activity. Three possible mechanisms underlying this association were discussed: social control and support by the partner, time restrictions and the release from the marriage market. Data were obtained from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP), a random sample of individuals living in private households in Germany. Both random-effects and fixed-effects logit models were estimated. The random-effects analyses referred to 30,201 individuals and the fixed-effects analyses referred to 11,568 individuals who were observed for up to 19 years. After adjusting for age, measurement period and the presence of children, fixed-effects estimates showed reduced physical activity for each type of relationship for both men and women. The effects were strongest for married couples and weakest for dating couples, and remained similar after controlling for discretionary time. However, the effects found partly depended on age: for men, the negative impacts of cohabitation and marriage on physical activity became weaker with increasing age and shifted to positive impacts. For women, the negative effect of marriage on physical activity also decreased but stayed negative into old age. The results suggest that the release from the marriage market may cause the negative effects of relationships on physical activity. Social support and social control may play a role in older age, whereas the amount of discretionary time seems to be of minor importance for explaining relationship effects on physical activity. If the results will be validated by other studies there will be valuable implications for health promotion programs.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

Higher levels of physical activity are associated with lower risk levels for a wide range of diseases such as coronary heart disease (Lee, Rexrode, Cook, Manson, & Buring, 2001; Sesso, Paffenbarger, & Lee, 2000), diabetes mellitus (Hu et al., 2001; Laaksonen et al., 2005) and certain types of cancer (Friedenreich & Orenstein, 2002). Despite the well-known beneficial effects of physical activity on health, a large percentage of the population does not engage in or engages in an inadequate level of physical activity (World Health Organization, 2013). Thus, increasing physical activity is considered important for promoting individual and public health

(Blair, 2009). To plan effective interventions, better information about the determinants of physical activity is needed.

Previous studies from different countries have shown associations between relationship status and physical activity. Most of these studies have focused on marital status. Cross-sectional studies have frequently reported negative associations between marriage and physical activity for men (Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004; Salmon, Owen, Bauman, Schmitz, & Booth, 2000) and women (Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004; Salmon et al., 2000; Sternfeld, Cauley, Harlow, Liu, & Lee, 2000; Umberson, 1992; Verhoef, Love, & Rose, 1992). Other studies have found no association for men (Umberson, 1992; Van den Hombergh, Schouten, Van Staveren, Van Amelsvoort, & Kok, 1995) or women (Boutelle, Murray, Jefferey, Hennrikus, & Lando, 2000; Sternfeld, Ainsworth, & Quesenberry, 1999) and have even found a positive association between marriage and physical activity among the elderly (Petee et al., 2006). Studies concerning changes in marital status have

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +49 6221 542985; fax: +49 6221 542996.

E-mail addresses: [ingmar.rapp@soziologie.uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:ingmar.rapp@soziologie.uni-heidelberg.de) (I. Rapp), [bjorn.schneider@soziologie.uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:bjorn.schneider@soziologie.uni-heidelberg.de) (B. Schneider).

shown a decrease in physical activity after marriage for men (Eng, Kawachi, Fitzmaurice, & Rimm, 2005), no change for both women and men (Hirvensalo, Lintunen, & Rantanen, 2000; Umberson, 1992), and even a positive change in physical activity relative to those who remain unmarried (King, Kiernan, Ahn, & Wilcox, 1998).

However, due to recent changes in family and relationship situations in developed countries (Adams & Trost, 2004; Van De Kaa, 1987), marital status is an increasingly poor indicator of actual living conditions. In Germany, the proportion of married adults declined from 57.9 to 50.9 percent between 1992 and 2006. In contrast, the proportion of cohabiting adults increased from 6.8 to 11.4 percent, and the proportion of adults in a dating relationship (i.e., a relationship with separate households) increased from 8.5 to 10.9 percent (Asendorpf, 2008: 756). This recent development raises the question of whether cohabitation and dating relationships have different effects on physical activity than marriage does.

Several studies have used indicators other than marital status to classify relationships. Barnekow-Bergkvist, Hedberg, Janlert, and Jansson (1996) and Burke, Beilin, Dunbar, and Kevan (2004) both reported that living with a partner was associated with lower levels of physical activity compared to single living for men but not for women. A study by Hull et al. (2010) that compared changes in physical activity between individuals who got married or began cohabiting with individuals who were neither married nor cohabiting found no significant associations for men or for women. Additionally, Hull et al. (2010) found no differences between individuals who got married and those who began cohabiting. Brown, Heesch, and Miller (2009) reported that starting a dating relationship was associated with increased physical activity in young women.

In sum, previous studies do not allow for clear conclusions to be drawn concerning whether dating relationships and cohabitation have different effects on physical activity than marriage does. Most studies focus on marital status rather than on relationship status, and, to our knowledge, no study has separately examined the effects of dating relationships, cohabitation and marriage on physical activity.

We will discuss three possible explanations for the differing effects of being in a relationship on physical activity. First, it has been observed that individuals who are in a relationship usually have better health and lower mortality rates than those who are not, and this outcome is assumed to be due to social control and social support of healthy behaviors by the partner (Brockmann & Klein, 2004; Umberson, 1987, 1992).

In contrast, there may be mechanisms by which having a partner could lead to a decrease in physical activity. Thus, a second explanation is that having a spouse reduces discretionary time, therefore leading to a decrease in physical activity (Brown et al., 2009: 301). This decrease may be due to the temporal demands of the spousal role (Eng et al., 2005: 60) and to the social and domestic responsibilities of marriage (Hull et al., 2010), such as an increased paid work hours for men and housework hours for women (Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004: 416).

A third possible explanation for the effects of being in a relationship on physical activity is that there is a reduction in physical activity due to being released from the pressure of the marriage market. This explanation has already been discussed to account for differences in body weight between married and non-married people (Averett, Sikora, & Argys, 2008). In this view, individuals exercise to become slim and more attractive to potential partners. Furthermore, physical activity settings are places where a partner might be found. Therefore, singles are incentivized to exercise in order to improve their chances of finding a partner.

At this point, the question arises of whether the effects are the same for different types of relationships. In terms of the expected positive effects of social control and support by the partner on

physical activity, living in a common household increases the possibility and decreases the costs of social control and support (Duncan, Wilkerson, & England, 2006: 692). Therefore, any positive effect of being in a relationship on physical activity should be stronger in cohabitation and marriage situations than in dating relationships.

In contrast, no differing effects on physical activity for partners who are dating, cohabiting or married are expected to be due to the time restrictions resulting from being in a relationship. On the one hand, a common household increases the amount of time spent with the partner because of physical proximity. On the other hand, individuals in a dating relationship spend time meeting up with their partners. Therefore, time spent on a relationship should be quite equal in different types of relationships, and, as a result, having a partner should reduce physical activity regardless whether the partners are dating, cohabiting or married.

Turning to the role of the marriage market, clear differences are expected to be found between dating relationships, cohabiting and marriage in terms of their effects on physical activity. The stability of relationships increases from dating relationships to cohabitation to marriage (Asendorpf, 2008). Therefore, individuals may differ in their level of trust in the longevity of their relationship and in their belief in their permanent release from the marriage market. Being in a dating relationship should lead to reduced physical activity compared to being single. Cohabitation should lead to reduced physical activity compared to being in a dating relationship, and marriage should lead to the largest decrease in physical activity.

Previous results based on cross-sectional data have suggested that the association between relationship status and physical activity depends on age. Among young German adults (ages 25–29), Mensink, Loose, and Oomen (1997) found that those living with a partner had lower levels of physical activity compared to singles but that among older adults (ages 60–69) the opposite was true. There are theoretical considerations that may explain these findings in terms of social control and social support: the topic of healthy behaviors should become increasingly salient with age in relationships because health often declines with age. Therefore, social control and the support of physical activity by the partner should increase with age and, as a consequence, cohabitation and marriage may become a less negative or more positive predictor of physical activity in older age.

## Methods

### Data

The data were drawn from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP), a random sample of individuals aged 17 years or older in private residences in Germany (Wagner, Frick, & Schupp, 2007). The original West German sample from 1984 had approximately 12,000 individuals from 6000 households. In 1990, the sample was extended to East Germany. The current study used data from 10 waves of the GSOEP (from the years 1992, 1994, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011) that contain measures of physical activity and indicators of relationship status as either single, dating, cohabiting or married. Overall, these 10 waves include data from 30,629 individuals who were interviewed at least two times. Observations with missing values for any analyzed variable were excluded. The remaining sample contained 30,201 individuals and 147,884 observations (i.e., person-years).

### Measures

Physical activity was measured by self-report of leisure-time activities. Respondents were asked if they engage in physical

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7336496>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7336496>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)