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COHABITATION WITHOUT
MARRIAGE IN NORWAY

By Helge Brunborg

SAMLIV UTEN VIGSEL
I NORGE

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PREFACE

This article presents data on cohabitation without marriage in Norway, based on preliminary results from the Norwegian Fertility Survey, 1977. Historical data on non-marital fertility and nuptiality are also included. The article was originally prepared for the session on cohabitation without marriage in the Nordic countries at the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population's Conference on "Economic and Demographic Change: Issues for the 1970s", Helsinki, 28 August - 1 September, 1978.

Central Bureau of Statistics, Oslo, 29 March 1979

Odd Aukrust

FORORD

Denne artikkelen gir tall for samliv uten vigsel i Norge, basert på foreløpige tall fra den norske fruktbarhetsundersøkelsen i 1977. Det blir også presentert noen historiske data om ikke-ekteskapelig fruktbarhet og giftermål. Artikkelen ble opprinnelig skrevet til sesjonen om samliv uten vigsel i de nordiske land ved den Internasjonale Befolkningsunionens konferanse om "Økonomisk og demografisk endring: Problemer for 1980-årene" i Helsinki, 28. august - 1. september 1978.

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Odd Aukrust

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1. INTRODUCTION¹⁾

By cohabitation without marriage, or paperless marriage, or conscientious marriage as it is also called, we mean a situation where a man and a woman live together without being married under "marriage-like conditions". It is difficult to give a more precise and general definition of what it means, as the definition would depend on what aspect of unmarried cohabitation we are interested in.

We have in mind a couple living together as if they were married, i.e. there is some kind of permanency, the partners have sexual relations and may or may not have children together. Cohabitation without marriage may be a prelude to marriage or a kind of test marriage, or it may be a substitute for marriage altogether. It is often hypothesized that non-marital unions are less permanent and also differ from marriages in other ways. We will try to throw some light on this in the present paper.

We believe there has been a substantial increase in the number of couples who live together without being married in the last decade in Norway, as indicated by declining nuptiality, increasing non-marital fertility, as well as by results from recent surveys, and the development in Norway's neighbouring countries Denmark and Sweden.

Accompanying the growth in the custom, there has been a growing interest in the demographic, social, economic and legal aspects of cohabitation without marriage. The government has appointed a committee to suggest changes in the marriage law and has given financial support to two recent sample surveys that include questions about cohabitation without marriage: Norges Markedsdata (1976) and the Norwegian Fertility Survey 1977. The present paper will primarily present results from the last of these surveys.

Before we do that, however, an historical perspective is introduced, and we make a brief survey of recent trends in fertility and nuptiality.

1) I am grateful for comments from John Casterline, Ståle Dyrvik and colleagues in the Sociodemographic Research Unit of the Central Bureau of Statistics.

Legal and economic aspects of cohabitation without marriage are presented in an appendix, where we discuss the most important economic advantages and disadvantages of living in a consensual union vs. being formally married, as a result of legal and institutional factors.

2. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Cohabitation without marriage is not an entirely new phenomenon in Norway, although the frequency and the form of it may have changed. We have no reliable data on consensual unions in Norway before the 1970's. However, certain variables may be interpreted as indicators of cohabitation without marriage, inter alia pre-marital conceptions and non-marital fertility.¹⁾ There is, of course, no direct relationship between such variables and cohabitation without marriage. An increase in non-marital fertility does not necessarily mean that the number of consensual unions have become more common. But data on pre- and non-marital fertility are evidence of non-marital sexual relations, although this does not imply that the partners live together. Sexual relations is one of the aspects of non-marital cohabitation we - as demographers - are particularly interested in, since it means that the woman is exposed to becoming pregnant.

The Norwegian pioneer in sociology and demography, Eilert Sundt, discussed non-marital sexual relations and cohabitation in the middle of last century (Sundt 1855, 1857). Couples would often live together for several years, and have one or more children, before they could afford to marry.

As indicators of non-marital sexual relations, Sundt used the number of children born out of wedlock for every 100 marriages contracted in the same year, and the proportion of all children born outside marriage, i.e. the so-called illegitimacy ratio. The first figure varied between 22 and 38 per cent and the second between 6 and 10 per cent for the period 1801-1860. The two series were remarkably similar for Norway and Sweden (Sundt 1857, II:168).

Sundt, who was educated to become a clergyman, was morally indignant by the high number of children born by unmarried mothers. But he was almost equally disturbed by all the "half-legitimate" children, i.e. births within 9 months of the marriage. He found that this happened for fully 43% of all couples that married in 292 parishes in 1855-56, including 12.5% who had a child before the wedding. Sundt noted the substantial differences between the two social classes he defined: 34% of the couples in class I, the property-owning class, and 50% in class II, the working class. The difference between the two classes was particularly great with regard to the proportion who had children before the wedding: 7% in class I and 16% in class II.

1) Recent data show that cohabitation without marriage and non-marital fertility follow the same geographical pattern, both within Norway and between the Nordic countries, see sections 5 and 6 in the present paper.

The three indicators discussed above show that non-marital sexual relations were quite common in Norway in the last century, at least in certain districts. However, as mentioned above, we should keep in mind that non-marital sexual relations is not the same as cohabitation without marriage. Non-marital sexual relations are often of a less permanent character than what we have in mind when we talk about cohabitation without marriage.

The late age at marriage in Norway may be part of the reason why pre-marital sexual relations were fairly common and socially accepted. There may also be an influence working in the opposite direction: late age at marriage and high levels of celibacy, i.e. the so-called European marriage pattern, may have been more tolerable and sustainable because of the acceptance of pre-marital sexual relations.

It may be of some interest to compare Sundt's data with modern data, see table 1. However, it should be kept in mind that Sundt's (1857), Kiær's (1873), Lettenstrøm's (1965) and Lettenstrøm's (1976) data in column 1 have been estimated by the use of quite different methods. We see that the pre-marital conception rate is somewhat higher to-day than a century ago. The non-marital birth ratio and the general non-marital fertility rate are also a little higher to-day than a century ago but with a trough in between. The data in table 1 indicate that pre-marital sexual relations are at least as common now as one century ago, and that there was somewhat reduced non-marital sexual activity in the first part of this century - or possibly a stronger pressure on expecting couples to marry.

TABLE 1. NON-MARITAL FERTILITY IN NORWAY

	Per cent of newly married couples having a child within 9 months of marriage	Non-marital birth rate (per cent of all births born outside marriage)	General non-marital fertility rate (births outside marriage per 1000 unmarried women 15-44)
	(1)	(2)	(3)
1855-56	31.0*)	9.0	
1870	33.0	9.0	
1889-92		7.9	16.8
1910-11		6.6	13.4
1930-31		7.0	8.2
1946-50	44.4	4.9	10.4 (1946-47)
1951-55	41.8	3.7	8.4 (1950-51)
1956-60	46.0	3.6	8.6 (1955-56)
1961-65		4.0	9.2 (1959-62)
1965	48.7	4.6	
1966	48.2	4.9	
1967	47.8	5.1	
1968	45.8	5.6	
1969	45.3	6.1	15.8 (1969-70)
1970	44.9	6.9	
1971	44.0	7.9	18.9
1972		8.7	20.0
1973		9.1	19.6
1974		9.3	19.2
1975		10.3	19.6
1976		10.9	19.3
1977		11.6	18.9

Sources:

- (1) Premarital conceptions: 1855-56: Sundt (1857,II:82)
1870: Kiær (1873)
1946-60: Lettenstrøm (1965)
1965-71: Lettenstrøm (1976)
- (2) Proportion born outside marriage: 1855-56: CBS (1968)**)
1910-55: Backer (1965)
1956-70: CBS (1972)
1971-75: CBS (1977)
1976-77: Statistisk ukehefte, nr. 29, 1978
- (3) General non-marital fertility rate: 1889-56: Backer (1965)
1959-75: Skiri (1978)
1976-77: Unpublished data.

*) 43% when births before the marriage are included.

**) CBS = Central Bureau of Statistics.

3. RECENT TRENDS IN NUPTIALITY AND FERTILITY

The last 1-2 decades have seen dramatic changes in nuptiality and fertility in Norway. After a steady increase in over-all fertility from 1935 to the mid 1960's, only broken by a short baby-boom immediately after the second world war, the fertility started to decline in the mid 1960's - as in most other industrial countries. The total fertility rate was 2.98 in the peak year 1964 and only 1.75 in 1977, which is the lowest fertility rate ever recorded in Norway (see table 2).

TABLE 2. RECENT FERTILITY DATA FOR NORWAY

Year	Number of births	Crude birth rate	Total fertility rate	General marital fertility rate ¹⁾
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1951-55	62 478	18.6	2.64	147.4 (1949-54)
1961-65	63 989	17.5	2.94	134.7 (1959-62)
1966-70	66 697	17.5	2.73	135.5 (1969-70)
1971	66 550	16.8	2.49	130.7
1972	64 260	16.3	2.39	125.9
1973	61 208	15.5	2.23	118.3
1974	59 603	15.0	2.13	113.9
1975	56 345	14.1	1.98	106.0
1976	53 474	13.3	1.86	99.7
1977	50 877	12.6	1.75	93.8

Sources: 1951-55: Statistical Yearbook 1969 and Brunborg (1975);
1959-75: Skiri (1978); 1976-77: Unpublished data from the Central Bureau
of Statistics.

1) Births within marriage per 1000 married women, 15-44.

The fertility decline is a result of both declining nuptiality and declining marital fertility, and there has even been a small decline in non-marital fertility since 1972 as well.

The decline in marital fertility in the last decade is almost as large as the decline in overall fertility, in addition to a continuous reduction in marital fertility since the second world war. From 1971 to 1977, the general marital fertility rate declined by 28% and the total fertility rate by 30% (table 2).

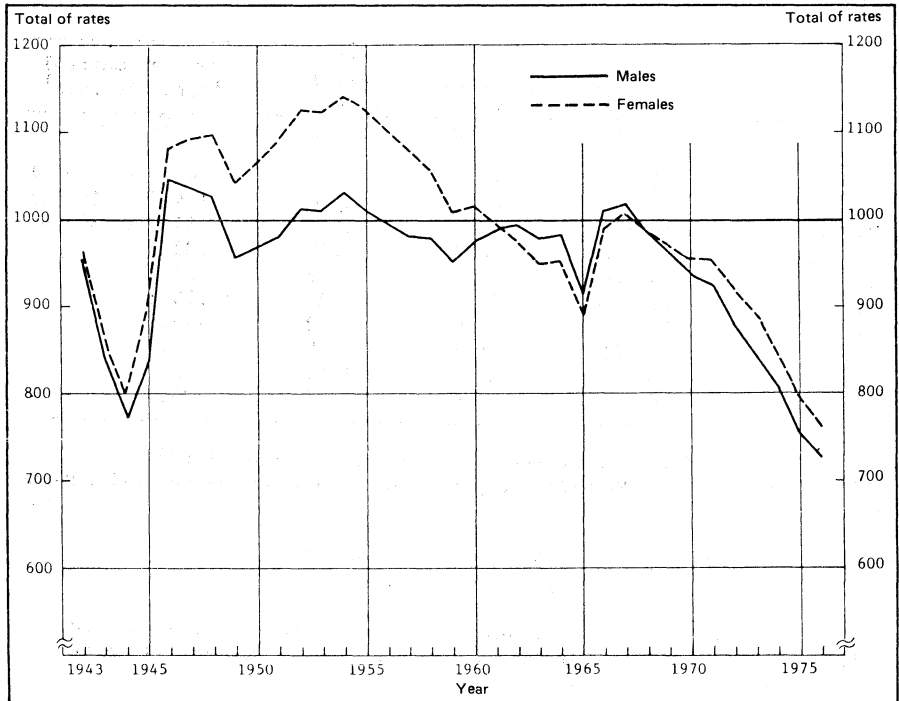
The non-marital birth ratio has increased continuously: from 3.4% in 1955 to 11.7% in 1977. These ratios are the lowest and highest ever recorded in Norway, respectively. However, since the non-marital birth ratio is influenced by both marital and non-marital fertility as well as by the proportion married, the general non-marital fertility rate is a better measure (non-marital births per 1000 unmarried women 15-44). This

rate more than doubled, from 9.2 around 1960 to 20 in 1972, and may later have started a downward trend, see table 1, col. 3. (From 1975 to 1977, the age-specific fertility rates declined for unmarried women below 25 and were stable or increased slightly for older women.)

Last decade's nuptiality development is almost as dramatic as the changes in fertility. The 1950's and the early 1960's were marked by unusually high nuptiality, see figure 1 and table 3.

FIGURE 1. TOTAL NUPTIALITY RATE FOR NORWAY, 1943-1976

(From Dyrvik, 1978)



The total nuptiality rate, which is a synthetic period measure of the proportion of a cohort that will marry (see footnote 3, table 3), was above 1000 (per 1000 persons) for several years. Such a high rate cannot continue for a long time, of course. It was the result of high marriage rates for both young and older persons during the 1950's and 1960's. Couples married earlier and earlier; the mean age at first marriage declined by around 3 years for men and 2 years for women from 1950 to 1970 (Dyrvik, 1978:25).

TABLE 3. RECENT MARRIAGE DATA FOR NORWAY

Year	Number of marriages, yearly average	Crude marriage rate ¹⁾	Mean age at first marriage ²⁾		Proportion unmarried at age 50 ²⁾		Total nuptiality rate ³⁾	
			Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
1951-1955	26 969	8.0	27.9	24.3	9.5	5.5	1 036	1 153
1956-1960	24 091	6.8	27.0	23.6	9.7	4.7	1 012	1 081
1961-1965	24 300	6.5	26.3	23.5	8.9	5.0	995	965
1966-1970	29 055	7.6	25.7	23.3	7.9	5.0	1 004	984
1971	29 510	7.6	25.7	23.2	9.1	5.3	945	966
1972	28 596	7.3	25.7	23.2	10.4	5.8	928	933
1973	28 141	7.1	25.8	23.3	11.4	6.5	888	903
1974	27 344	6.9	26.1	23.6	12.0	7.0	860	857
1975	25 898	6.5	26.3	23.9	13.8	8.1	824	806
1976	25 389	6.3	26.6	24.1	15.3	9.9	737	766
1977	24 022	5.9						

Sources: Col. 1-2: Skiri (1978), "Statistical Yearbook 1978" and "Vital Statistics and Migration Statistics 1977"; Col. 3-6: Dyrvik (1978:25); Col. 7-8: Mønnesland (1978:38).

- 1) Number of marriages per 1000 of the total mean population.
- 2) On the condition that a cohort marries according to observed age-specific marriage rates 15-50 years and there is no mortality before age 50. Age at the end of the year, and not at the event as otherwise in this article.
- 3) The sum of age-specific marriage rates per 1000 of the total mean population, married and unmarried.

Except for an unexplained dip in 1965, the dramatic decline in nuptiality started in 1968-1970 (fig. 1 and table 3)¹⁾. People have started to marry both at an older age and at a decreasing intensity. The mean age at first marriage increased by about one year for both men and women from 1971 to 1976. The total nuptiality rate declined by 23% for men and 21% for women from 1970 to 1976. A similar substantial change is seen in another nuptiality measure, the proportion unmarried at age 50, which doubled for both men and women from 1970 to 1977 (table 3). The decline in nuptiality may to some extent be due to previous high marriage rates.

Finally, not only are people marrying less, they are also divorcing more, see table 4. The divorce rate more than doubled from 1961-65 to 1977. The proportion still married at age 65 also changed substantially, declining by about 11% from 1970-71 to 1977.

1) We have no explanation for the low nuptiality in 1965. It is possibly an artifact of the registration system, although we have no specific knowledge that substantiates this suspicion.

TABLE 4. RECENT DIVORCE DATA FOR NORWAY

Year	Number of divorces, yearly average	Divorce rate (Divorces per 1000 married)	Hypothetical proportion still married at age 65 ¹⁾	
			Males	Females
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1961-65	2 496	2.9		
1966-70	3 036	3.4		
1970	3 429	3.7	} 82.8	84.3
1971	3 731	4.0		
1972	4 022	4.3		
1973	4 664	4.9		
1974	5 156	5.4	} 76.3	77.8
1975	5 577	5.8		
1976	5 825	6.0		
1977	6 099	6.3		

Source: Skiri (1978) and unpublished data from the Central Bureau of Statistics.

- 1) On the condition that a cohort of married persons will get divorced according to the age-specific divorce rates in the period of observation and that remarriage and deaths do not occur before age 65.

To summarize: since around 1970, both married and unmarried women have fewer children, the unmarried marry less and the married get divorced more.

We do not know the reasons for these dramatic changes. They are likely to be associated with changes in lifestyle, including rising consumption aspirations, more equal status of women, a more liberal society etc.

One interesting hypothesis that may explain the changes in marriage rates and marital fertility is the Easterlin-hypothesis (see e.g. Easterlin, 1973). The large post-war cohorts were at a disadvantage in the labour market relative to previous cohorts, and this resulted in postponement of marriage and children. This hypothesis should be analyzed carefully, but this falls beyond the scope of the present paper.

4. COHABITATION WITHOUT MARRIAGE

As mentioned in the introduction, we do not have any data on the changes over time in the number of consensual unions in Norway. The only reliable data we have are from two recent sample surveys: in 1976 by Norges Markedsdata for the Ministry of Justice and the 1977 Fertility Survey by the Central Bureau of Statistics.

The lack of both data and interest until recently probably reflected the relatively small magnitude of cohabitation without marriage in Norway.

The 1977 Fertility Survey is part of the World Fertility Survey. A sample of approximately 5 100 women, 18-44 years old, was selected randomly from the Central Population Register in a two-stage procedure. In addition to questions on fertility and contraception, a detailed cohabitational history was recorded. All respondents were asked to make "a list of the periods when you have lived permanently with a man, either as married or without being formally married".

Of the 4 137 women who were interviewed, 206, or 5% reported that they currently lived with a man without being married to him.¹⁾ In addition, 0.6% answered that they currently lived partly together with their fiancé/friend. Of the 206 women, 81% were never married, 17.5% were separated or divorced, and 1.5% were widows. Most of the 206 cohabiting women were relatively young; 59% were under 25, vs. only 28% of the total sample. However, the age-structures of the never married and the previously married cohabitants were markedly different: fully 69% of the never married and only 15% of the previously married were under 25.

Moreover, fully 24% of the women reported that they had ever lived with a man without being married to him.

Table 5 shows the proportion of unmarried cohabitation in different age groups.

TABLE 5. COHABITATION IN NORWAY, 1977^{*)}

Age	n	Cohabitation without marriage -			Proportion married in % of all women unions
		in % of all women	in % of unmarried women	in % of all marital and non-marital unions	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
18-19	320	5.6 (1.6)	6.1 (1.7)	40.0 (8.9)	8.4 (1.9)
20-24	846	12.2 (1.4)	22.1 (2.4)	21.4 (2.3)	44.8 (2.1)
25-29	931	4.5 (0.8)	24.1 (4.0)	5.3 (1.0)	81.3 (1.6)
30-34	866	2.4 (0.6)	19.2 (4.6)	2.7 (0.7)	87.4 (1.4)
35-39	640	2.3 (0.7)	16.7 (4.8)	2.7 (0.8)	85.9 (1.7)
40-44	534	1.3 (0.6)	10.4 (4.6)	1.5 (0.7)	87.5 (1.8)
18-44	4 137	5.0 (0.4)	17.2 (1.3)	6.6 (0.5)	71.0 (0.9)

*) The standard errors in parentheses are estimated by the formula $\sqrt{1.5p(1-p)/n}$. The factor 1.5 is introduced to account for the two-stage sampling procedure, but may give somewhat too high estimates.

1) The same proportion of unmarried cohabitants, 5%, was reported in the Norges Markedsdata survey in 1976. However, their sample is not quite comparable, since it consists of both men and women over a larger age span, 15-49 years.

We notice, e.g., that almost one quarter of all unmarried women in their 20's live with a man without being married.

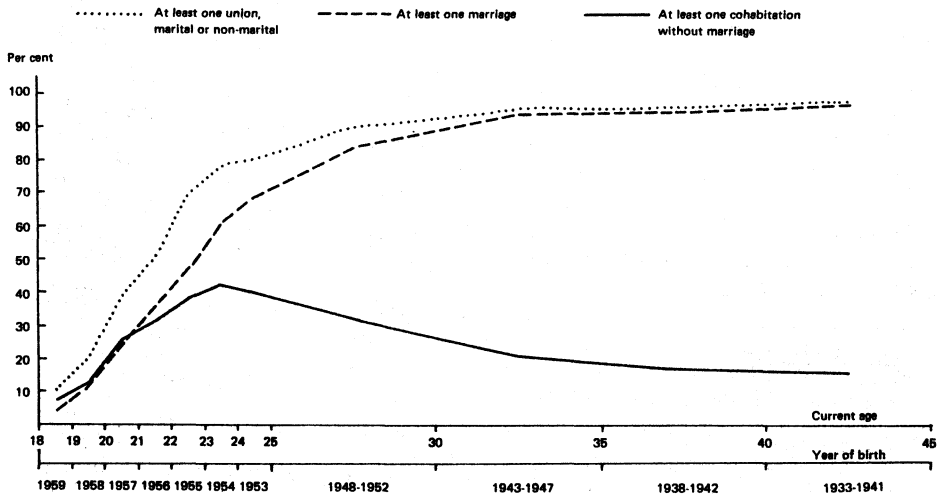
Is cohabitation without marriage a substitute for marriage? If this is the case, it is not a very common custom, at least not among women above 25. We see from table 5, col. 4, that only 6.6% of all unions are non-marital, a proportion that decreases from fully 40% for the youngest to only 1.5% for the oldest women in the sample. (However, we notice from the standard error that the figure given for women aged 18-19 is not very reliable.)

Two different hypotheses can explain the young age-structure of cohabitation without marriage: it is either a prelude to marriage, or it was introduced quite recently, i.e. within the last 5-10 years. We cannot tell to which extent each of these hypotheses is right yet - our preliminary data indicate that some combination of both explanations is valid.

First, of the 1 009 women in the sample who reported that they have ever lived with a man without marriage, 65% later married the same man, whereas 20% of the unions were discontinued for other reasons and 15% still exist. These data seem to support the hypothesis that unmarried cohabitation is to a large extent a prelude to marriage, or a kind of testmarriage.

On the other hand, if we look at the cohabitational experience of different age groups as shown in figure 2, we see that the non-marital cohabitational experience decreases by age after the age of 23, i.e. for women born before 1954. Among women over 30, only 15-20% have ever lived with a man without being married to him, whereas the figure is about 40 per cent for women 23 to 25 years old.

FIGURE 2. PROPORTION OF WOMEN WITH COHABITATIONAL EXPERIENCE



The decrease above the age of 23 is in spite of the fact that the older the women are, the more time they have been exposed to the risk of unmarried cohabitation. Some of the decline in the proportion may be explained by under-reporting. The longer it is since the event took place, the more likely it is that the woman has forgotten or suppressed it. However, I do not believe that faulty memory can explain all of the decline. Since most of the unmarried cohabitation has taken place among women who are 20-29 years old now, it looks like cohabitation without marriage has become more common within the last 5-10 years. In fact, 65% of all women whose first union was non-marital started the cohabitation after 1970. On the other hand, 15-20% of women above age 30 have also lived with a man without being married to him, and most of them before 1970, which shows that cohabitation without marriage was not uncommon before 1970 either.

Our tentative conclusion about the recent growth in cohabitation without marriage is supported by the data in section 3, which show that there was a sharp decline in nuptiality after 1970.

5. REGIONAL VARIATIONS

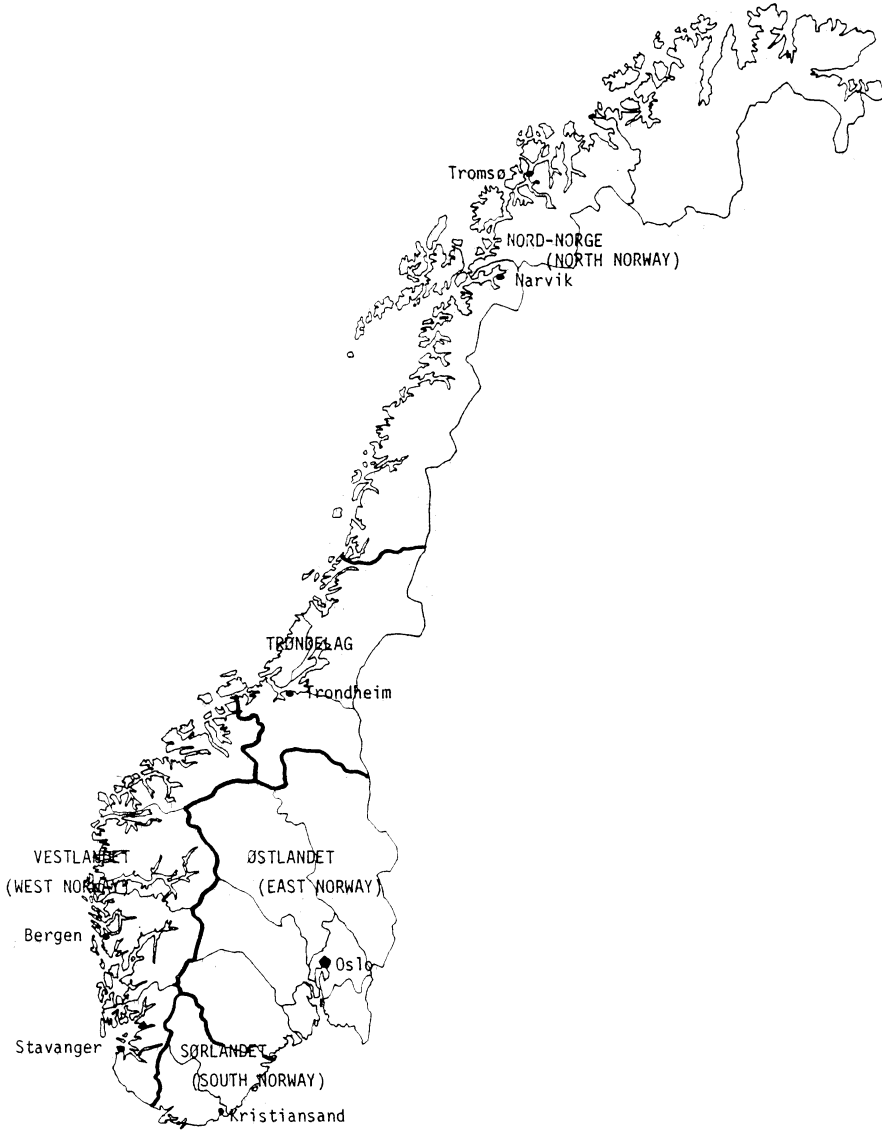
There is considerable regional variation in the frequency of cohabitation without marriage. It is lowest in southern and western Norway and several times higher in North Norway, see table 6, columns 1-3. Figure 3 shows the regions of Norway. Notice also, that these relatively large regions are quite heterogenous and conceal many differences. In the city of Oslo, e.g., 9.9% of the women live in a non-marital union, whereas only 4.2% of the women in the rest of East Norway do it.

TABLE 6. COHABITATION BY REGION IN NORWAY, 1977¹⁾

	Per cent of all women who cohabit without being married	Per cent of all unmarried women who live with a man	Non-marital unions in per cent of all unions	Proportion married in per cent	Proportion of all women living in a union
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)=(1)+(4)
Østlandet	5.5 (0.6)	18.4 (1.9)	7.2 (0.8)	70.3 (1.2)	75.8 (1.2)
Sør- og Vestlandet ...	1.9 (0.5)	7.4 (1.8)	2.5 (0.6)	74.4 (1.5)	76.3 (1.5)
Trøndelag	7.3 (1.6)	23.3 (4.7)	9.7 (2.1)	68.5 (2.9)	75.9 (2.7)
Nord-Norge ...	9.6 (1.7)	28.7 (4.6)	12.6 (2.2)	66.6 (2.8)	76.2 (2.5)
All of Norway	5.0 (0.4)	17.2 (1.3)	6.6 (0.5)	71.0 (0.9)	76.0 (0.8)

1) Standard errors in parentheses.

FIGURE 3. THE REGIONS OF NORWAY



The regional differences remain when we control for age. In age group 18-24, e.g., the proportion of all women who live with a man without being married is only 2% in South- and West Norway and fully 23% in North Norway (not shown in the table).

On the other hand, the proportion married also varies considerably between regions, and in the opposite direction of cohabitation without marriage (table 6, col. 4). If we add the two proportions together, we find that the proportion of women that live in a union, marital or non-marital, is virtually constant (table 6, col. 5). This indicates that non-marital cohabitation may be a substitute for marriage in some parts of the country.

What are the possible explanations for the regional differences in cohabitation without marriage? The degree of urbanization suggests itself as an obvious cause, hypothesizing that it is a modern and urban custom. However, urbanization does not seem to explain much of the variation: cohabitation without marriage is most common in North Norway, which has the lowest degree of urbanization (table 7, col. 2). On the other hand, if we exclude North Norway, urbanization seems to explain a small amount of variation in cohabitation without marriage. However, the differences between the southern regions in the degree of urbanization are very small and not statistically significant. (These conclusions may depend on the definition of urbanization, see footnote 3, table 7.)

If we calculate the proportion of women in urban and rural areas, respectively, who cohabit without being married, we see that the proportion is everywhere several times higher in the urban than in the rural areas, again excluding North Norway where it is the other way around (table 7, col. 3 and 4). This shows that cohabitation without marriage is primarily an urban phenomenon, with the exception of North Norway where there seems to be a special form of cohabitation. (Note however, that the proportion cohabiting in rural areal in North Norway is not significantly higher than in the urban areal in the statistical sense, possibly because of the small number of observations.)

The low proportion of cohabitation without marriage in South- and West Norway is not surprising, although it includes the city of Bergen. South and West Norway also have the lowest level of non-marital fertility in Norway and differ from the rest of the country with respect to many other social phenomena as well, inter alia religious, moral and political attitudes, being generally more traditional and resistant to new ideas. The south and west of Norway have been strongly affected by pietism and other evangelical movements in the last centuries. Conservative political parties and proposals to limit or ban alcohol receive larger shares of the votes than the rest of the country. (See Øidne, 1957.)

TABLE 7. COHABITATION, URBANIZATION AND FERTILITY BY REGION¹⁾²⁾

	Proportion of all women who cohabit	Proportion of women in urban areas (tettsted) ³⁾	Proportion of women who cohabit in		Mean number of live births	Non- marital birth ratio ⁴⁾ 1977
			urban areas	rural areas		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Østlandet ...	5.5	79.7	6.2	2.4	1.52	8.7
		(1.1)	(0.7)	(0.9)		
Sør- og Vestlandet ..	1.9	78.6	2.4	0.0	1.81	7.4
		(1.4)	(0.6)	(0.0)		
Trøndelag ...	7.3	80.6	8.8	1.4	1.78	19.6
		(2.5)	(2.0)	(1.6)		
Nord-Norge ..	9.6	75.2	8.4	12.3	1.91	27.9
		(2.6)	(1.9)	(3.9)		
All of Norway	5.0	79.0	5.5	2.8	1.67	11.6
		(0.8)	(0.5)	(0.7)		

1) The first five columns are based on data from the Norwegian Fertility Survey, 1977. The last column is based on data for the whole population. (Source: unpublished data in the Central Bureau of Statistics.)

2) Standard errors in parentheses.

3) Note that 'urban' (tettsted = densely populated place) is as defined by the women in the sample and includes places as small as 200 people.

4) Births out of wedlock in per cent of all births.

The high prevalence of cohabitation without marriage in North Norway is not surprising either, in view of its long tradition of high non-marital fertility (table 7, col. 6). It is much more common in North Norway than in the rest of the country to have children before marriage, or even without marrying at all. North Norway also has higher fertility than the rest of the country, see table 7, col. 5. The counties of North Norway used to have the highest total fertility rate in Norway, but this position has just been taken over by counties in South-West Norway - which interestingly enough is at the other end of the cohabitation scale. (Skiri, 1978:57.)

Thus, there seems to be two categories of cohabitation without marriage in Norway: The first category seems to be primarily an urban phenomenon, taking place mostly among young people. This is probably a relatively new phenomenon. The other category is a rural type with a long tradition, which is particularly common in North Norway. A substantial proportion of the cohabiting women in North Norway are older (over 25). This is not the place to analyse the reasons for the prevalence of cohabitation without marriage in North Norway. It may be caused by cultural and geographical factors that are unique for North Norway: the decentralized population distribution with long distances between the settlements; and the importance and organization of fishing, with men being absent for long periods of time, to name a few factors. Tomasson (1976) claims that "It is just those areas in the Nordic countries (excepting Finland) most isolated in the past and least touched by moralistic Protestantism where illegitimacy is so extraordinarily high" (p. 268).

6. COMPARISON WITH OTHER NORDIC COUNTRIES

We have seen that cohabitation without marriage is not very common in Norway yet, although it is quite frequent among younger women and in certain parts of the country. Table 8 shows the most recent available data for the Nordic countries. We see that the level of unmarried cohabitation in Norway is about the same as in Finland, but well below the level in Denmark and Sweden. (We notice that the level seems to be slightly higher in Denmark than in Sweden. This may not reflect the real situation correctly, since the Swedish data are older.)

TABLE 8. COHABITATION WITHOUT MARRIAGE IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES¹⁾²⁾

Age	Norway	Denmark	Sweden	Finland
	Per cent of all women 1977	Per cent of all men and women 1976-77	Per cent of all men and women 1975	Per cent of all men and women 1977
18-19	6	7*	16	
20-24	12	31	29	
25-29	5	19	17	
30-34	2	10	8	
35-39	2	} 5**	5	
40-44	1		4	
18-44	5		13	
16-w		8	7	5***
Per cent non-marital births of all live births (1976) ³⁾	10.9	24.0	33.2	10.1 (1975)

*) 16-19 years. **) 35-49 years. ***) 15 years and above.

- 1) No comparable data for Iceland were available, but it is well known that cohabitation without marriage is quite common in Iceland, both historically and presently. This is indicated by the high proportion of children born out of wedlock (34.2% in 1976; Yearbook of Nordic Statistics, 1977). See also Bjørnsson (1971), Trost (1978a), Tomasson (1976) and Rich (1978).
- 2) Periods and sources:
 Norway: Oct.-Dec. 1977. Fertility survey of Norway. Unpublished data.
 Denmark: May 1976, Oct. 1976 and Jan. 1977. Omnibus Surveys. Danmarks Statistik (1977).
 Sweden: 31 Dec. 1975. Population Census 1975. Statistiska Centralbyrån (1978).
 Finland: 1977 (?) Fertility Survey. Lindgren (1978).
- 3) Source: Yearbook of Nordic Statistics 1977.

The large differences in cohabitation without marriage in the Nordic countries are surprising, since they seem to be quite similar in many other respects. However, the Nordic pattern in cohabitation without marriage is about the same as the pattern in non-marital fertility, see the last line in table 8. Norway and Finland have a relatively low level with regard to both consensual unions and non-marital fertility; Denmark and Sweden have a high level, and Iceland is at the top. This pattern in non-marital fertility has persisted throughout this century. Tomasson (1976) views the high level of non-marital cohabitation and fertility in Iceland "... as a manifestation of the greater continuity with Ancient Scandinavian patterns of family structure and relations between the sexes that has existed in Iceland compared with the other Nordic countries" (p. 254).

7. FERTILITY AND COHABITATION

Are women who live with a man without being married similar to married women or are they more similar to single women with respect to fertility, or are they distinctly different from both these groups? If cohabitation without marriage is a substitute for marriage, we expect unmarried couples to be fairly similar to married couples with respect to children, education, labour force participation etc. If cohabitation without marriage is a prelude to marriage, the partners should be more similar to single persons. Since cohabitation without marriage in Norway seems to be a combination of both of these forms, perhaps with an emphasis on the pre-marriage form, we expect the fertility of women in consensual unions to be somewhere in between the fertility of married women and single women, when we control for age. Table 9 shows that this is the case with respect to the proportion of women who have children. For the oldest women, 35-44 years old, the proportions are almost the same for all cohabiting women. However, the majority of the unmarried cohabiting women in this age-group are previously married (77%), and most of the children were probably born in a previous marriage.

TABLE 9. PROPORTION OF THE WOMEN WHO HAVE CHILDREN. PER CENT¹⁾

Age	All women	Married women	Cohabiting unmarried women	Single women
18-24	30 (1.6)	65 (2.9)	27 (5.0)	8 (1.3)
25-34	83 (1.1)	90 (0.9)	52 (7.7)	39 (4.0)
35-44	93 (0.9)	96 (0.8)	91 (7.5)	67 (4.9)
All ages	71 (0.9)	89 (0.7)	42 (4.2)	23 (1.6)

1) Standard errors in parentheses.

The large difference between the fertility of never married and previously married women, both cohabiting and single, is made clear in table 10, panel A. Never married women have very few children, whether they live with a man or not, although the women living with a man have somewhat higher fertility than the single women. The youngest previously married women have about the same number of children, namely one, as married women, whether they currently live with a man or not. But the older previously married women who live with a man have on the average 0.5 children more than both married women and previously married women who currently live alone. This surprising result may be an artifact of the small number of observations. There may be a relationship between divorce and fertility, but this has not been investigated yet.

TABLE 10. AVERAGE ACTUAL AND TOTAL EXPECTED FERTILITY PER WOMAN¹⁾

Age	All women	Married women	Unmarried cohabiting women			Single women	
			All	Never married	Previously married	Never married	Previously married
A. Actual number of live births							
18-24	0.4	0.9	0.3	0.3	1.0	0.1	1.0*
25-44	2.1	2.2	1.5	0.6	2.7	0.2	2.2
All ages ..	1.7	2.1	0.8	0.4	2.5	0.1	2.1
B. Total expected number of children ²⁾							
18-24	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.7*
25-44	2.5	2.5	2.3	1.8	2.9	1.5	2.4
All ages ..	2.4	2.5	2.3	2.2	2.8	2.2	2.4

1) Standard errors were not available for this table. Because of few observations, the numbers should be interpreted with care. Numbers based on less than 20 observations (of women) are marked with an asterisk (*).

2) Actual number of live births (panel A) plus the number of expected additional children.

However, when we look at total expected fertility, i.e. actual plus expected additional children, we see that there is very little difference between women in different cohabitational categories (table 10, panel B). The most interesting deviation from the norm of 2.3-2.5 children is the relatively low number of expected children among never married women, 25-44 years old, whether living in a union or not. This is primarily a reflection of the low number of children the already have.

These fertility data indicate that cohabitation without marriage is not a substitute for marriage for most never married women, but that it may be so for previously married women.

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is likely that the number of consensual unions in Norway have grown rapidly in the last decade, but they are still far less common than in Denmark and Sweden. This growth is probably related to the sharp decline in nuptiality, but we do not know what the causal direction is, if there is any at all. Have consensual unions become more common because fewer people are getting married (and more getting divorced), or is it the other way around? Or are both phenomena caused by the same factors, which could be changes in the lifestyle, emancipation of women, a more liberal society, etc.

The introduction of modern and more effective methods of contraception as well as easier access to legal abortion may have played an independent role by reducing pregnancy as an important cause of marriage. (This is indicated by the decreasing rate of premarital conceptions since 1965, see table 1.)

Our data indicate that cohabitation without marriage is still primarily a kind of test-marriage. This conclusion is supported by results from Norges Markedsdata (1976), where getting to know each other better and housing problems were given as the most important reasons why couples did not marry, see table 11.

There seem to be two forms of consensual unions in Norway: one modern and urban form, and one more traditional and rural form, which is particularly common in North Norway. The modern form may be spreading from Oslo and other cities to the rest of the country.

Unfortunately, we cannot say much yet about the socio-economic characteristics of consensual unions vs. marriages vs. single people. Our preliminary data show, e.g., that the cohabiting women have higher labour force participation rates than the married women, and almost similar rates to those of single women. In every age-group, it is considerably more common to go to school or be a student for cohabiting women than for married women, but somewhat less common than for the single women. Norges Markedsdata's figures show that it is more common to live together without being married for persons with more education.¹⁾

It is likely that cohabitation without marriage is going to become increasingly common in the years to come. This, and the decreasing nuptiality, may have important demographic and social effects.

Consensual unions will increasingly be accepted as practically equivalent to marriages and the legislation may change. Consensual unions may be a step towards a less sharp distinction between living alone and living in a union.

1) Among persons aged 15 and above with only primary school or junior secondary school, 3% currently live in a consensual union and 12% did so before they married; among persons with more education (gymnasium or more), the proportions are 5 and 18, respectively. However, these data are confounded by the rapid increase in education for recent cohorts.

TABLE 11. REASONS FOR WAITING TO MARRY. NORGES MARKEDSDATA, 1976.
PER CENT OF ALL PERSONS IN EACH AGE-GROUP WHO LIVED TOGETHER
BEFORE MARRIAGE

	Age		
	Below 30	30-49	50+
Housing problems	17	23	25
To get to know each other better ..	21	15	13
It just happened that way	17	13	11
No actual reason	12	8	5
Economic reasons	9	9	15
To finish school	9	5	0
Other reasons	21	33	29
Don't know	4	7	11
Total ¹⁾	110	113	109

1) The percentages add up to more than 100, apparently because some respondents reported more than one reason.

ECONOMIC ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF NOT BEING FORMALLY MARRIED¹⁾

The general principle in Norwegian law and tax rules is that two unmarried persons who live together are treated as single individuals and not as a couple, with a few recent exceptions. There are certain economic and other benefits of being married, as there also is of not being married. Whether it is advantageous or not to be married depends on the actual situation of the couple.

If one of the partners in a union has little or no income, total taxes are less if they are taxed together as a married couple. However, two married persons who live together may now request to be taxed together in some municipalities (e.g. in Oslo, but not in neighbouring Bærum).

There is a definite economic advantage for couples over age 67 not to be married, as the old age pension is higher for two individuals than for a married couple. It is a clear economic loss to remarry for a person who is receiving a pension as a widow (or rarely a widower), since a re-marriage would make her lose her pension. On the other hand, she would not have received any widowhood pension at all if she had never been married. Other pensions are lower for unmarried than for married persons (disability, unemployment).

Single mothers receive higher child allowance than married mothers. However, this does not apply if the woman lives together with a man who may be the father of the child. If the man is definitely not the father of the child, she gets child allowance as a single mother. However, if she marries the man, she loses this privilege.

Couples used to have to be married, or at least engaged, to get an apartment together. This has changed recently and it is now apparently not more difficult for unmarried than for married couples to find a place to live.

Some married people have access to fringe benefits through the spouse's job, like free railroad travel. Unmarried couples usually do not enjoy the same privileges, with a few exceptions. (Scandinavian Airlines have started to grant the same travel privileges to unmarried as to married couples, if the couple can prove that they have lived together for at least two years.)

The most serious disadvantages of not being married accrue if the union is dissolved, by "divorce" or death. Currently, only the mother has legal parental rights if she is not married. The mother will automatically keep the child if a consensual union is dissolved. A change in this has recently been suggested: both parents would have parental rights of they live together, regardless of whether they are married or not.

1) Most of the material in this section is based on Bull (1977) and on personal communication with her.

According to Norwegian marriage law the partners share all property and wealth acquired during the marriage equally, unless they have agreed to other arrangements. If a consensual union dissolves, there exist no such rules. The woman has no right to keep the apartment, e.g., if the man dies or leaves her and the apartment is registered in his name. Likewise, she will not inherit him, unless a testament has been written, in which case she would have to pay inheritance tax.¹⁾

The weakest part, who is most often the woman, is usually the loser when consensual unions are dissolved - regardless of how long the cohabitation has lasted. Such concerns is one of the reasons why the government has appointed a committee to suggest changes in the marriage law.

To sum up: there does not generally seem to be clear advantages or disadvantages of living together without being married - economically, legally and otherwise. For some couples, the benefits may outweigh the drawbacks. It is unlikely that many couples choose not to marry for economic reasons.²⁾ Social reasons are probably far more important for the increase in unmarried cohabitation.

The marriage law will probably be changed somewhat, making the consensual unions more similar to marriages in legal and economic respects. But it is politically impossible to give unmarried couples all the economic and legal advantages that married couples now have, without removing some of the advantages of not being married.

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- 1) In a recent ruling by the Norwegian Supreme Court, a woman who lived together with a man for many years until he died, was granted the right to half of the property (house, summer home) they had acquired together during their cohabitation, as if they had been formally married. However, the court ruled that she could not inherit him as if he had been her husband.
 - 2) This conclusion is supported by the Norges Markedsdata survey in 1976. Only five per cent of the respondents who currently lived in consensual unions answered that they did not marry because of economic reasons. Only two per cent had experienced economic problems because they were not formally married.

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