

The influence of union dissolution on former couples' residential mobility in Germany from 1997 to 2007

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Introduction and research problem

The family structures have changed since the 1970's in Europe. Familial courses are more diverse and marriage relationships are less stable and predictable. Divorce (or union dissolution) is becoming a more frequent event, as well as new couple formation (Prioux, 2006). As many other family events, these changes have consequences on residential mobility - in 1955, Rossi already found a strong relationship between family events and residential mobility -.

As in the other european countries, divorce is a growing phenomenom in Germany - the divorce gross rate had been growing from 1.35 ‰ in 1970 to 2.50 ‰ in 2003 -. In social sciences little attention has been given to residential mobility of separate persons (Feijten and Van Ham, 2007). Actually, few surveys are well-adapted to analyze the interaction between union dissolution and residential mobility. The longitudinal perspective is the only one which can study these phenomena by lifecourse over a long period of time. The panel data are well-conceived to follow households and individuals over their lifecourse and to study links between the end of relationships and the consequences on mobility and new residence.

In this study, we suggest using the German Socio-Economic Panel – we restrict our study at 10 years – to answer these questions :

- Is union dissolution an increasing reason for moving ?
- Are members of the former couple forced to move away from their common surrounding (for financial reasons, etc.) ?
- Do these phenomena involve casualization and impoverishment ?
- What are the characteristics of their new environment (neighborhood, etc.) ?
- Does union dissolution involve several moves and difficulties to find a new spatial stability ?

Data

The German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) is a longitudinal survey (panel data) on households and individuals who are living in Germany. It started in 1984 (new 'Länder' from former-GDR since 1990) and 24 waves were already available (every year from 1984 to 2007) at the beginning of our work. 6 000 households were interviewed in 1984, approximatively 12 000 today (refreshment, innovations, subsamples).

The survey collects representative information about individuals, families and households. It measures stability or change in living conditions with objective and subjective (life satisfaction, etc.) indicators. Economics, sociology, political science or psychology are the main topics of retrospective and biographical data collected by the GSOEP. Specific

modules (time use, social network, etc.) completed the usual questionnaires and the information collected on both households and individuals. Every household member over 16 is interviewed.

The advantages of the GSOEP are diverse : it is a longitudinal survey and information is collected every year, which minimizes memory failure. Moreover, 24 waves are available ; it means we can study the whole migration course of the couples separated at the beginning of the panel – a separated person is followed by the survey after the end of the former relationship –.

The GSOEP provides information on moment of union dissolution and main reason for moving, which make possible the objectives of the study. We can also find a wide range of variables at both household and individual levels : having children, income, residence, dwelling characteristics, etc. (household level) and sex, date of birth, citizenship, marital status, education, employment , etc. (individual level). The variables on dwelling and environment characteristics (even the variables which compare previous to new residence) are very diverse.

Studies based on longitudinal surveys’ analysis are relatively recent and the GSOEP is well-adapted to study separated persons’ new way of life. We can follow them and study their new environment over the years and analyze interactions between union dissolution, mobility and residential consequences.

Results

Cross-sectional preliminary results suggest that the divorced and separated proportions increased more than other categories between 1997 and 2007 (from 8.5 to 10 % respectively) – we must be precautionary because of the cumulative effects but the panel has been refreshed and extended, and the studied events are repeatable –. Furthermore, besides ‘job reasons’, ‘separation’ seems to be an increasing reason for moving :

Main reasons for moving (households’ moves per cent)

	1997	1999	2002	2004	2006
Separation	7.2	7.5	8.7	8.1	9.7
Buy house	8.9	6.4	9.8	7.6	7.9
Job reasons	7.1	9.2	9.3	9.2	9.1
Marriage	3.5	2.1	3.0	1.7	2.2
Left parents house	6.9	7.0	7.3	7.5	7.5
Other family reasons	10.2	12.4	10.2	11.5	10.9
Apartment too small	16.7	16.1	16.5	15.3	13.6
Apartment too big	2.6	2.7	2.7	2.8	3.4

Too expensive	7.8	8.2	5.3	6.9	7.5
Low standard	9.6	7.5	6.5	6.6	5.9
Bad location	5.9	4.9	3.7	3.6	3.1
Bad surroundings	7.5	5.7	4.6	4.7	4.5
Other reasons	6.0	10.4	12.5	14.4	14.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

As survey files are organized cross-sectionally for both households and individuals data, we have built up a longitudinal database by merging the different files (waves from 1997 to 2007), thus we can study over the years, the residential mobility and the new environment (dwelling, neighborhood, etc.) of the separated persons who left the common residence.

Literature cited

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