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Disagreements among cohabiting and married couples in 22 European countries

By [Tanja van der Lippe](#), [Marieke Voorpostel](#), [Belinda Hewitt](#)

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Abstract

Background: Cross-national research suggests that married people have higher levels of well-being than cohabiting people. However, relationship quality has both positive and negative dimensions. Researchers have paid little attention to disagreements within cohabiting and married couples.

Objective: This study aims to improve our understanding of the meaning of cohabitation by examining disagreements within marital and cohabiting relationships. We examine variations in couples' disagreements about housework, paid work and money by country and gender.

Methods: The data come from the 2004 European Social Survey. We selected respondents living in a heterosexual couple relationship and aged between 18 and 45. In total, the study makes use of data from 22 European countries and 9,657 people. Given that our dependent variable was dichotomous, we estimated multilevel logit models, with (1) disagree and (0) never disagree.

Results: We find that cohabitators had more disagreements about housework, the same disagreements about money, but fewer disagreements about paid work than did married people. These findings could not be explained by socio-economic or demographic measures, nor did we find gender or cross-country differences in the association between union status and conflict.

Conclusions: Cohabiting couples have more disagreements about housework but fewer disagreements about paid work than married people. There are no gender or cross-country differences in these associations. The results provide further evidence that the meaning of cohabitation differs from that of marriage, and that this difference remains consistent across nations.

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