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Neither single nor living together: Living-Apart-Together in the second half of life

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Key messages

In 2023, just over one in twenty people in the second half of their lives were living in a LAT (Living-Apart-Together) partnership. The abbreviation LAT refers to couples who do not live together, i.e. partnerships with separate households. Almost two thirds of people in the second half of life do share a household with a partner. Slightly fewer than one in three has no partner.

People in middle adulthood are most likely to live in a LAT partnership, and the older the person, the lower the proportion of LAT partnerships in their age group. Comparing partnership arrangements by age group shows that the proportion of people living in an LAT partnership decreases as age increases.

The proportion of people in LAT partnerships does not differ according to income or gender. However, people with a lower income and women are more likely to live without a partner. People with a higher income and men are more likely to live in a partnership with a shared household.

People with a high level of education are more likely to live in a LAT partnership than people with a medium level of education. People with a low level of

education are less likely to live with their partner than people with a medium or high level of education. At the same time, the lower the level of education, the higher the probability of being **single**.

Half of the people in LAT partnerships consider moving in together to be easy or quite possible. The other half believe that moving in together would be difficult or consider the option impossible.

Overall, just over half of people living in LAT partnerships would like to share a household with their partner, whereas just under half do not express such a wish. The younger age group (43–65 years) is more likely to want a shared household than the older age group (66 years and older).

The majority of those who consider moving in together to be easily possible would also like to share a household. However, slightly more than one in three who say that moving in together is possible do not want a shared household. Of those who stated that it would be difficult or even impossible to move into a shared household, just under half still expressed the wish to live together with their partner.

Introduction

In recent decades, more and more people in Germany have been living without a partner in the household. According to official statistics, in 1996, around 17% of the population lived without a partner in the household; by 2022, this proportion had risen to around 23%. This trend can be observed in all age groups, including middle-aged and older adults (Bünning 2022; Lengerer 2016). At the same time, the extent of the increase differs by gender: in the mid-1990s, 20% of women were already living without a partner in the household, and their share grew by around three percentage points overall by 2022. Meanwhile, the share of men without a partner in the household was around 14% in 1996 and rose by seven percentage points in the same period (Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis) 2023a; 2023b; siehe Abbildung A.1 im Anhang).

This increase in the proportion of people without a partner is in many cases based on a definition as used in official statistics. People without a cohabiting partner are referred to as *single people* (german: Alleinstehend) and – in contrast to couples – are defined as people who live without a partner in the household, regardless of their marital status (Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis) 2024). This definition refers to the housing arrangement and thus reflects the *institutional* partnership status (DePaulo & Morris 2005).¹

However, the *institutional* partnership status does not necessarily correspond to the lived reality (Asendorpf 2008). One partnership arrangement that is overlooked in *institutional* partnership status is the partnership with separate households, or LAT (Living-Apart-Together). In this case, those involved and their social environment define them as maintaining a partnership even if there is no joint household. A *social* definition of partnership status is therefore

applied to capture this living arrangement.² In the case of *institutional* partnership status, i.e. in official statistics, those involved in LAT partnerships are considered to be single.

LAT partnerships are therefore a living arrangement that is categorised as either a partnership without a shared household or as singlehood, depending on the definition. For many life contexts, however, it is of great importance whether a person has a partner or not. Research frequently details the protective effect of partnerships; singlehood, on the other hand, is often associated with various risks.

For example, it has been shown that people who live in a partnership feel less lonely and more socially included (Huxhold, Suanet, & Wetzel 2022), while singlehood is often associated with a higher risk of loneliness, especially in older age (Dahlberg, McKee, Frank, & Naseer 2022; Kaspar, Wenner, & Tesch-Römer 2022). In addition, one's partner is often the main source of emotional and social support (Pinquart 2003). In opposite-sex partnerships gender differences are evident here, as men are generally more dependent on their partner for emotional and social support than women are (Liao, McMunn, Mejía, & Brunner 2016). At the same time, people with a partner tend to perceive the process of ageing less as one of social loss than (Jung, Cham, Siedlecki, & Jopp 2021), which in turn can have.

With regard to practical support, it has been found that the partner most frequently provided at-home care (approx. 52%), whereas only a few people cared for (spouses) in another household or a (care) facility (Ehrlich & Kelle 2019). One study on ageing as a single person tested but could not confirm the assumption that singles primarily have to resort to professional care

¹ Some definitions of institutional partnership status take marital status into account as an alternative to the housing arrangement.

² Social partnership status is based on the subjective assessment of respondents (De Paulo & Morris, 2005).

services. It showed that people in need of care without a partner make use of care services provided by professional caregivers as well as family members or friends (Vaskovics, Rost, Engel, Mattstedt, & Smolka 2000).

Similar to singlehood, living alone – not only, but especially in older age – is often seen as a risk: people, especially men, who live alone in older age are more likely to be affected by frailty than people who do not live alone (Kojima, Taniguchi, Kitamura, & Fujiwara 2020). The risk of poverty is also greater among people living alone – exacerbated by the higher housing cost burden – for both women and men (Lozano Alcántara & Vogel 2023). Women's pensions are lower the longer they have been married, and in comparison, women without a partner have a higher pension (Fasang, Aisenbrey, & Schömann 2013).

Living in a partnership therefore has an impact on numerous areas of life. With regard to LAT partnerships, however, it remains unclear to what extent they entail a protective effect of partnerships and to what extent they are similar in terms of risks to the group of singles and people living alone. As LAT partnerships are becoming increasingly widespread, they should be recognised as a separate group by research and policy-makers (Asendorpf 2008; Mauritz & Wagner 2021).

Depending on how the partnership status is queried in the data, people in LAT partnerships are categorised either as couples sharing a household or as people without a partner altogether. It therefore remains unclear how they differ from people in other partnership arrangements. It is known from previous research that the prevalence of partnership arrangements differs according to various characteristics, such as gender or age (Asendorpf 2008; Mauritz & Wagner 2021; Eckhard 2014). Accordingly, as a first step, it would be worthwhile to investigate the distribution of partnership arrangements in the second half of life in Germany, taking into account LAT

partnerships and differentiating between different social groups.

We know from previous studies that older people are more likely to live without a partner than younger people (Nowossadeck & Engstler 2013). For younger age groups in the second half of life, living in a partnership with a shared household is the most common partnership arrangement (Lengerer 2016). The older people get, the more likely divorce and, in particular, widowhood become – and thus singlehood (Klaus & Mahne 2019; Lengerer 2016; Nowossadeck & Engstler 2013). At the same time, a new partnership becomes less likely the older people get (Bischoff 2024; Rapp 2018). Therefore, the probability of being single may increase with age just as that of living in a partnership with a shared household decreases. It has been shown that LAT partnerships are more common among younger people than among those in middle adulthood and least common among older people (Duncan & Phillips 2011; Ermisch & Siedler 2008). However, in older age, partnerships with a previously shared household often become LAT partnerships because one of the partners moves to an assisted living facility (Mauritz & Wagner 2021), or because people in post-marital partnerships often go on to maintain LAT partnerships instead of uniting their households (De Jong Gierveld 2004). It could therefore be that LAT partnerships are more common among older people in the second half of life than among younger people.

It is known from previous studies that women are more likely to be single than men, especially in the second half of life (Nowossadeck & Engstler 2013). One explanation for this is that, in opposite-sex partnerships, women are more likely than men to outlive their partner (Gildemeister 2008; Lengerer 2016). This fact can be explained by the higher life expectancy of women and the persistent age difference in opposite-sex partnerships (Klein & Rapp 2014; Lengerer 2016). In addition, men are more likely to enter into a new partnership

than women (Bischoff 2024; Rapp 2018) and are more likely to live in LAT partnerships than women (Ermisch & Siedler 2008). It can therefore be assumed that women are more likely to be single in the second half of life and that men are more likely to live in partnerships, both in partnerships with a shared household and in LAT partnerships.

Previous research also shows that the risk of poverty increases significantly with the transition to singlehood – especially for women (Gillen & Kim 2009; Leopold 2018). Unemployment is also a major risk factor for singlehood, which in turn is associated with a lower income (Eckhard 2014). It can therefore be assumed that people with lower incomes are more likely to be single than people with higher incomes. At the same time, the cost of living is lower when a couple lives together than when they maintain two separate households. It is therefore possible that people with higher incomes are primarily the ones to live in LAT partnerships.

Regarding education, the second half of life shows that educational differences have different effects, depending on gender. For example, in later adulthood (50 years and older), men with a higher level of education are more likely to be in a relationship. In contrast, women with a higher level of education are more likely to be single (Lengerer 2016). In middle age (18–55 years), on the other hand, there are no systematic differences by education in partnership arrangements (Eckhard 2014). LAT partnerships are more common among people with a higher level of education, both below and above the age of 35 (Ermisch & Siedler 2008; see (Ermisch & Siedler 2008; siehe für ein ähnliches Muster in Großbritannien: Coulter & Hu 2017). Accordingly, it could be that, even in the second half of life, people with a higher level of education are more likely to live in LAT partnerships than people with a lower level of education. On the one hand, this hypothesis is based on the assumption that a higher level of education goes hand in hand with economic independence, which

allows both partners – especially women, who have benefited from the educational expansion – to live in their own household independently. On the other hand, a higher level of education tends to allow for family roles and concepts that defy tradition. These attitudes could influence how people organise their own lives and thus favour the emergence of LAT partnerships (Levin 2004; siehe für Spanien: Castro-Martín, Domínguez-Folgueras, & Martín-García 2008; für Großbritannien: Haskey & Lewis 2006; für die USA: Strohm, Seltzer, Cochran, & Mays 2009).

LAT partnerships – an independent way of life or a partnership phase?

In relation to LAT partnerships, one fundamental question is the extent to which they result from a consciously chosen “independent way of life” (Asendorpf 2008: 761) or a situation to be maintained due to life circumstances or merely an initial or transitional phase in partnerships that sooner or later lead to the formation of a joint household (Duncan & Phillips 2011). The research offers different answers depending on the age of the respondents. For younger adults, LAT partnerships are often categorised as a preliminary stage of moving in together (Asendorpf 2008). From the age of 40, however, the transition to moving in together becomes less likely, which is why middle-age LAT partnerships are assumed to be a conscious choice and therefore represent an independent living arrangement (Asendorpf 2008). Meanwhile, LAT partnerships in late middle and older age often follow separation, divorce or widowhood (Asendorpf 2008; De Jong Gierveld 2004). However, people of all ages who are bound to a particular location due to their jobs or responsibilities for their own children or parents may choose separate households. LAT partnerships in older age also result from not wanting to give up the familiarity and autonomy of one’s home (Koren 2014; Levin & Trost 1999; Levin 2004; Lewin 2018).

Research has found yet further variations and motivations within the LAT group, but what they all have in common is that they want or need to balance the intimacy of a partnership with the autonomy of their own household. Overall, the differences within the LAT group can be positioned along two fundamental dimensions: is it a choice made voluntarily, or a way of life imposed by circumstances, and is it intended to be permanent from the outset or merely a preliminary stage for another phase in the partnership?

The DEAS offers the possibility of determining partnership arrangements both institutionally, i.e. on the basis of marital status or housing arrangement, and socially, i.e. on the basis of the information provided by the respondents. This option allows LAT partnerships to be explicitly taken into account and compared systematically with partnerships with a shared household and with singlehood.

Research questions

Against this background, this DZA Aktuell analyses the following questions:

1. What proportion of people in the second half of life live in different partnership arrangements, especially LAT partnerships?
2. How do the proportions of people living in various partnership arrangements differ according to age, gender, income and education?
3. To what extent do LAT partnerships in older age represent a) a self-chosen independent lifestyle, b) a phase before moving in together or c) a pragmatic way of life adapted to circumstances?

Data and methods

The German Ageing Survey (DEAS)

The German Ageing Survey (DEAS) is a nationally representative, cross-sectional and longitudinal survey of people in the second half of life. For more than two decades, the study has regularly surveyed women and men as they move into old age (1996, 2002, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017, 2020/21 and 2023). This long observation period allows a comprehensive insight into ageing and the living situations of people in the second half of life. In addition, the cohort-sequential design of the study makes it possible to analyse social change in ageing. The DEAS is therefore the central study on age and ageing in Germany. More than 20,000 people have taken part in the study to date. People aged 40 and over at the time of their first participation are surveyed. Participants are selected based on a sample from the residents' registration offices, stratified by age, gender and region. The DEAS data is therefore representative of the German population living in private households in the second half of life.

The most recent wave of data collection took place between December 2022 and June 2023. It focused on questions about the respondents' current living situation, such as social relationships, well-being and employment. In total, 4,992 people aged 43 and over took part in the survey, which was conducted either as a face-to-face or a telephone interview. Following the personal interview, the respondents received an additional self-administered questionnaire, which was answered by 4,211 people in writing or online.

The analyses present weighted proportions and mean values using methods that take into account the complex survey design of the sample. In DEAS 2023, the weights were also post-stratified by education for the first time. Group differences are tested for statistical significance. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ is used. If a finding is statistically significant, it can be assumed with at least a 95 per cent probability that a difference found exists not only in the sample in question, but also in the population as a whole. If a finding is not statistically significant, it is possible that the differences observed in the sample were only due to chance.

DEAS is funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ).

Further information on DEAS can be found at www.deutscher-alterssurvey.de

To answer the research questions, we draw on data from the German Ageing Survey (kurz: DEAS; Klaus et al. 2017) from the year 2023. In 2023, 4,992 people took part in the face-to-face survey, all of whom provided information on their partnership status and type of housing.

Variables

The DEAS asks about partnership status and housing arrangements in several consecutive questions.³ After ascertaining marital status, participants are then asked about their non-marital partnership status. Alongside other partnership characteristics, such as relationship duration, all those living in partnerships are asked whether they share a household with their partner. In this DZA Aktuell, the variable that depicts

³ For panel respondents, the partnership status that they had stated in the previous wave was used again in the current survey in order to avoid asking

for previously collected information again and to reduce the survey burden.

partnership arrangements combines the respondent's lived partnership status – regardless of marital status – and their housing arrangement. The variable thus has three categories: living with a (marital) partner in the household, (marital) partner outside the household – i.e. LAT – or no (marital) partner, neither in- nor outside the household.

Since 2017, the DEAS has also had a LAT module in which people living in a LAT partnership are asked, among other things, whether it would be possible to move in together and whether they wish to do so. Due to the rarity of LAT partnerships, we have summarised response categories. To investigate our third research question, the combination of the possibility and the wish to move in together – as far as possible also along grouping variables – is presented and discussed.

The option of moving in together was assessed with the following question: “If you consider your life circumstances and those of your (spouse) partner on the whole, how easy would it be to organise moving in together within the next three years?” For our analysis, we split the four possible answers (It would be very easy; It would be quite possible; It would be quite difficult; It is almost impossible) into two groups: on the one hand, those for whom moving in together would indeed be an option and those who indicate that it would be difficult or impossible to do so.⁴

Whether the wish for a shared household exists was surveyed with the following question: “And regardless of your circumstances, how much would you like to live in a shared household with your current (marriage) partner?” Here, the four possible answers (I would like it very much; I would like it a little; I would rather not; I would not like it at all) are also summarised in two groups: those who want to move in together

and those for whom there is (rather) no wish to do so.

This DZA Aktuell analyses differences in partnership status according to age, gender, income and education. Age was divided into four groups: 43–55 years (31%), 56–65 (30%), 66–75 years (20%), 76 years and over (19%). Gender was differentiated between men (46%) and women (54%). In terms of financial situation, we distinguished three groups: households at risk of poverty (15%), middle-income households (69%) and higher-income households (16%). Respondents were considered to be at risk of poverty if their needs-weighted net household income was below 60% of the median income for the population on the whole. Middle income here was defined as 60–150% of the median, and higher incomes exceeded 150% of the needs-weighted median income. The reference value for the median income of the total population was based on the EU-SILC at €2,083 per month (€25,000 per year) in 2022. The at-risk-of-poverty threshold was therefore €1,250 per month and the 150% threshold was €3,125 per month. The highest school-leaving qualification served as the basis for the education variable. We differentiated between three categories: low (maximum lower secondary school leaving certificate, 35%), medium (maximum intermediate school leaving certificate, 35%) and high education ((specialised) university degree, 30%).

Respondents who did not provide valid information on individual variables were excluded from the respective analyses. This applied to 179 cases (weighted 5%) without valid information on income and 3 cases without valid information on school-leaving qualifications (weighted 0.1%). In the LAT module, we were able to analyse 216 cases (weighted 5%) regarding the question whether moving in together is an option and

⁴ In this question, it is possible to indicate that the partner lives in a care home. This information is

included in the category “difficult or impossible” and was provided by one respondent in 2023.

218 cases (weighted 6 %) for whom the wish to move in together is present.

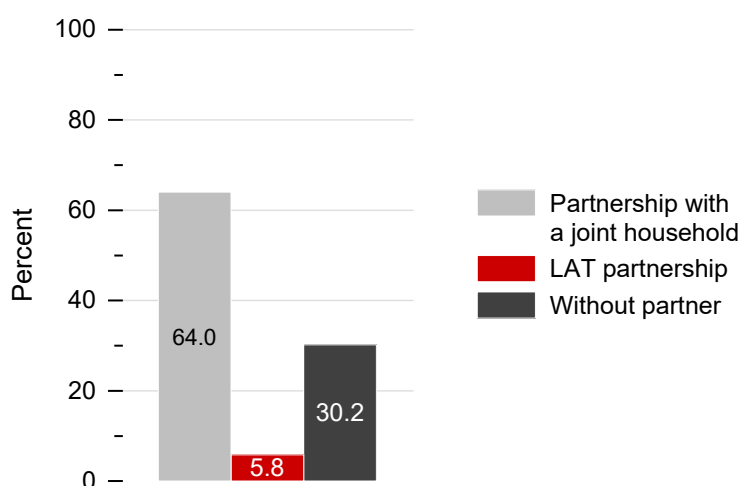
Findings on the distribution of partnership arrangements in the second half of life

Just over one in twenty people in the second half of life live in a LAT partnership.

The distribution of partnership arrangements in the second half of life is as follows. At almost two thirds (64%), a marital or non-marital partnership with a shared household was the most common living arrangement in the second half of life. Slightly less than a third of people in the second half of their

lives were living without a partner (30%), and thus were the second largest group. The partnership arrangements that are the focus of this DZA Aktuell, i.e. marital and non-marital partnerships without a shared household, accounted for 6% of partnership arrangements. This means that slightly more than one in twenty people in the second half of life lived in a LAT partnership (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Distribution of partnership arrangements in the second half of life, shares in per cent



Source: DEAS 2023, unpublished version (n = 4,992), weighted, rounded figures.

People in middle adulthood are most likely to live in a LAT partnership, and the older an age group is, the lower the proportion of LAT partnerships.

A comparison of partnership arrangements by age group shows that the proportion of people living in a LAT partnership decreases as age increases. While the share of this partnership arrangement is still 10% among 43- to 55-year-olds, meaning that one in ten people in this age group lived in a LAT partnership, it drops by half to 5% in the following age group of 56 to 65-year-olds (Figure 2). In the 66 to 75 age group, the proportion of LAT partnerships shrinks to 4% and halves again in the over 75 age group to

2%. This means that in the highest age group, one in fifty people were living in this type of partnership arrangement. The contrast between the youngest age group and the three older age groups is statistically significant. This means that people in the youngest age group are more likely to live in a LAT partnership than people in one of the three older age groups. Similarly, 56- to 65-year-olds are also more likely to be in a LAT partnership than those over 75. The difference between the two middle age groups and between the two highest age groups, however, is not statistically significant.

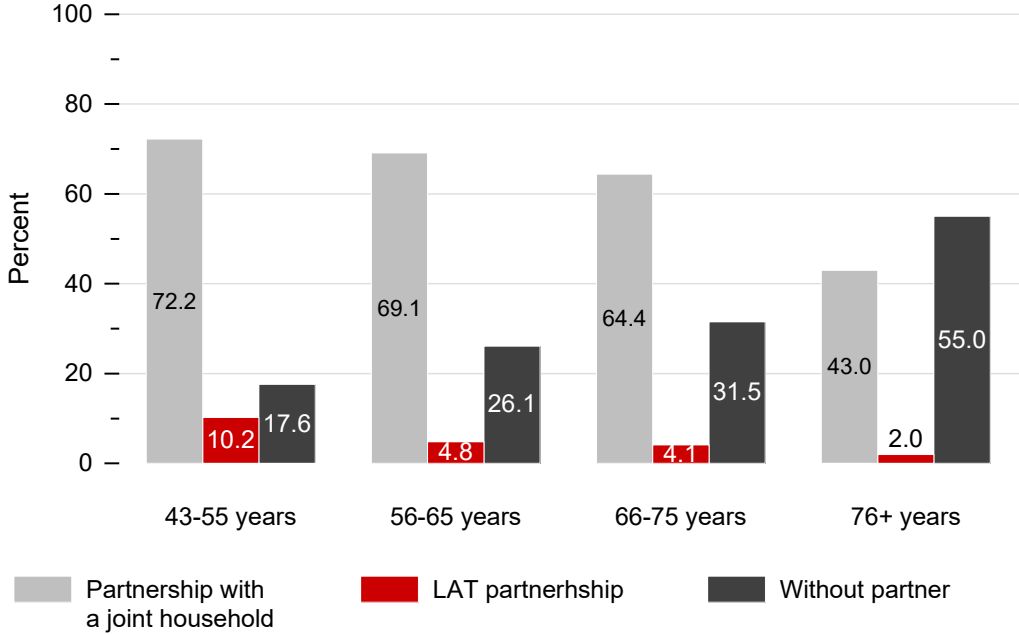
The distribution of partnerships with a shared household by age group shows that the share of people living in this arrangement decreases moderately over the lower three age groups from 72% among 43- to 55-year-olds to 69% among 56- to 65-year-olds and 64% among 66- to 75-year-olds. In the highest age group of over 75-year-olds, the proportion of those living in a partnership with a shared household was significantly lower at 43%. The differences between the youngest age group and the two oldest age groups are statistically significant, with the former being more likely to share a household with their partner than the latter.

At the same time, the differences between the oldest age group, i.e. the over 75s, and the second youngest (56–65 years) and second oldest (66–75 years) groups are also statistically significant, which reveals that people in the oldest group are less likely to live in a partnership with a shared household than people in the two middle age groups. The two youngest and the two middle age groups do not differ systematically in the proportion of partnerships with a shared household.

With regard to people living without a partner (singles), we see their proportion increasing across age groups. It was 18% in the youngest age group, 26% in the middle age group, 32% in the older middle age group and 55% in the oldest age group. While less than one in five of the youngest age group lived without a partner, more than half of the oldest age group lived without a partner. In this living arrangement, all differences between age groups are significant, except for the differences between the two middle age groups. Apart from this disparity, it can be seen that people who belong to an older age group are more likely to be single than people who belong to a comparatively younger age group.

Overall, we find no significant differences between the two middle age groups, meaning that these two groups do not differ systematically in the distribution of partnership arrangements. Hence, as expected, we find the most pronounced differences between the youngest age groups and oldest age groups.

Figure 2: Distribution of partnership arrangements by age, shares in per cent



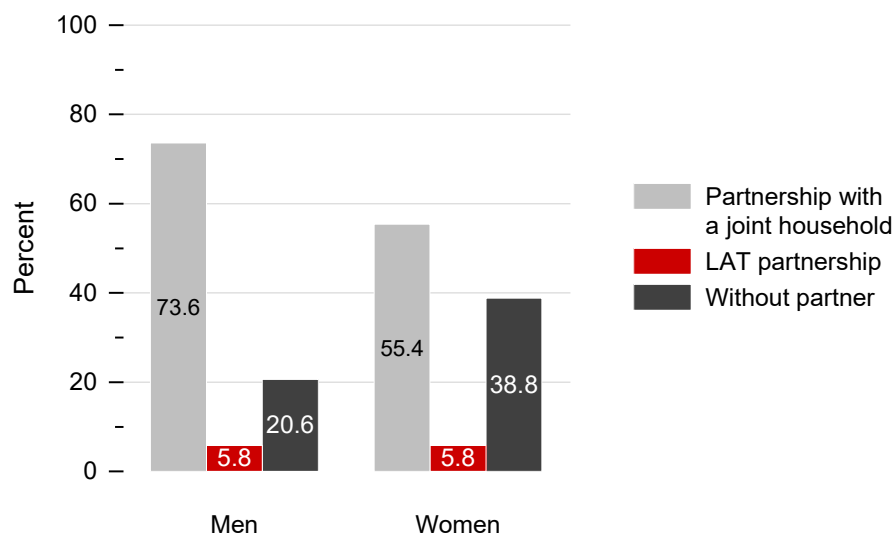
Source: DEAS 2023, unpublished version (n = 4,992), weighted, rounded figures. Statistically significant (p<0.05) are differences in people in LAT partnerships between the groups 43–55 and 56–65, 43–55 and 66–75 and 43–55 and 76+; also between 56–65 and 76+. The differences are statistically significant (p<0.05) for people in partnerships with a shared household between the groups 43–55 and 66–75 as well as 43–55 and 76+; this also holds between 56–65 and 76+ as well as between 66–75 and 76+. Differences are statistically significant (p<0.05) for people without a partner across all age groups except between 56–65 and 66–75.

The proportion of people in LAT partnerships does not differ according to gender or income.

A comparison of partnership arrangements along gender shows no differences between women and men with regard to LAT partnerships; in both groups, 6% lived in a partnership without a shared household (Figure 3).

We also see no differences in the proportion of LAT partnerships across the three income groups. Of those living in a household at risk of poverty and those with a medium or higher income, 6% were in a LAT partnership (see Figure 4). We therefore see no differences in the distribution of LAT partnerships according to gender or income.

Figure 3: Distribution of partnership arrangements by gender, shares in per cent



Source: DEAS 2023, unpublished version (n = 4,992), weighted, rounded figures.

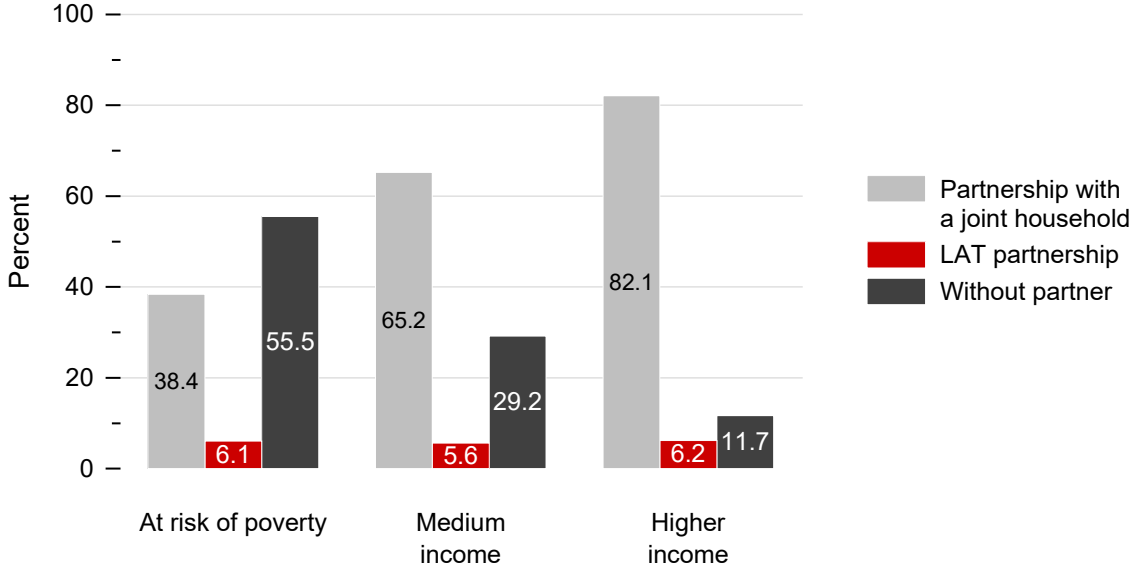
Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$): Difference by gender for people in partnerships with a shared household and people without a partner.

However, we do see gender differences in the other two partnership arrangements: 73% of men lived in a partnership with a shared household, whereas 56% of women were in the same living arrangement. This difference is statistically significant. At the same time, 39% of women and 21% of men in the second half of life were single (Figure 3). This gender difference is also statistically significant and shows that women are more likely to be single than men.

Income differences are equally recognisable in the other two partnership arrangements.

For example, 38% of people in households at risk of poverty lived with their partner. For people with a medium income, 65% and, for people with a higher income, 82% lived in this partnership arrangement (Figure 4). These differences are statistically significant. The opposite pattern can be seen with regard to singlehood: 56% of people at risk of poverty, 29% of people with a medium income and 12% of people with a higher income lived without a partner. These differences are also statistically significant.

Figure 4: Distribution of partnership arrangements by income, shares in per cent



Source: DEAS 2023, unpublished version (n = 4,813), weighted, rounded figures.
 Statistically significant (p<0.05): Difference by income between people in partnerships with a shared household and people without a partner.

People with a high level of education are more likely to live in a LAT partnership than people with a medium level of education.

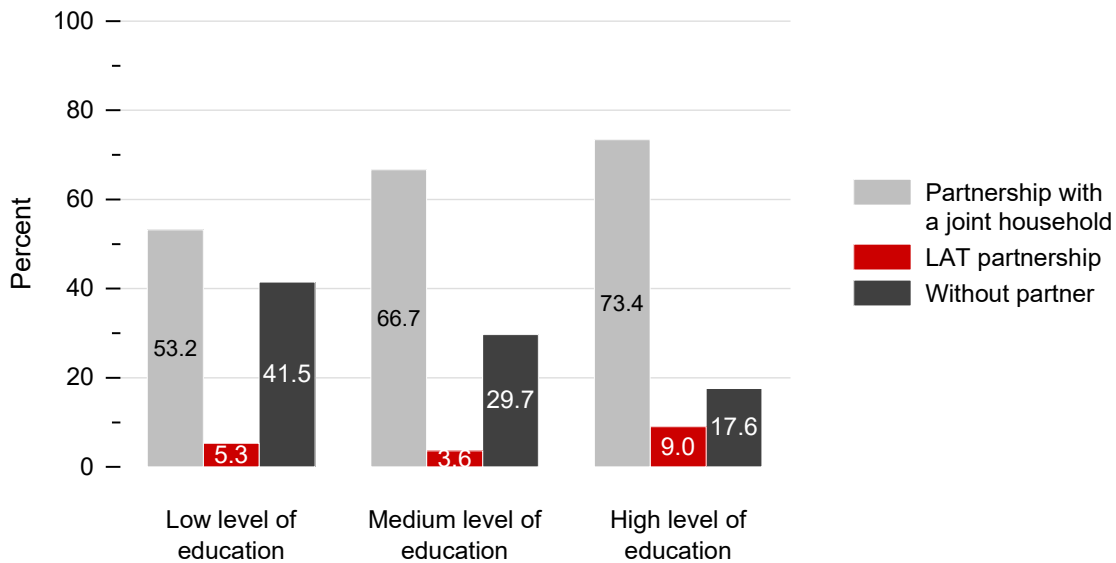
The distribution of partnership arrangements along educational lines shows that 5% of people with a low, 4% of people with a medium and 9% of people with a high level of education lived in a LAT partnership. The difference between those with a medium level of education and those with a high level of education is statistically significant.

In contrast, 53% of people with a low level of education, 67% of people with a medium level of education and 73% of people with a

high level of education live in partnerships with a shared household. The differences between low and medium education and between low and high education are statistically significant.

In the case of singlehood, 42% of people with a low level of education, 30% of people with a medium level of education and 18% of people with a high level of education lived without a partner. This different distribution across education groups is statistically significant for singlehood.

Figure 5: Distribution of partnership arrangements by education, shares in per cent



Source: DEAS 2023, unpublished version (n = 4,989), weighted, rounded figures.

Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$): All differences by education for people without a partner; differences between medium and high education for people in LAT partnerships and differences between low and medium as well as low and higher education for people in partnerships with a shared household.

Findings on the subjective evaluation of LAT partnerships

If people live in a partnership but not in a shared household, their partnership arrangements are categorised as LAT. Those living in a LAT partnership may still wish to live together. Moving in together, however, is not possible for all people living in LAT partnerships, regardless of their wish to do so. The following section describes findings on the self-assessed possibility and wish to live together among people in LAT partnerships.

The possibility of moving in together is rated almost equally as easy or difficult.

51% of people in LAT partnerships thought it would be easy or at least possible to set up a joint household within the next three years. In contrast, 49% stated that moving in together would be difficult or almost impossible (Figure 6).

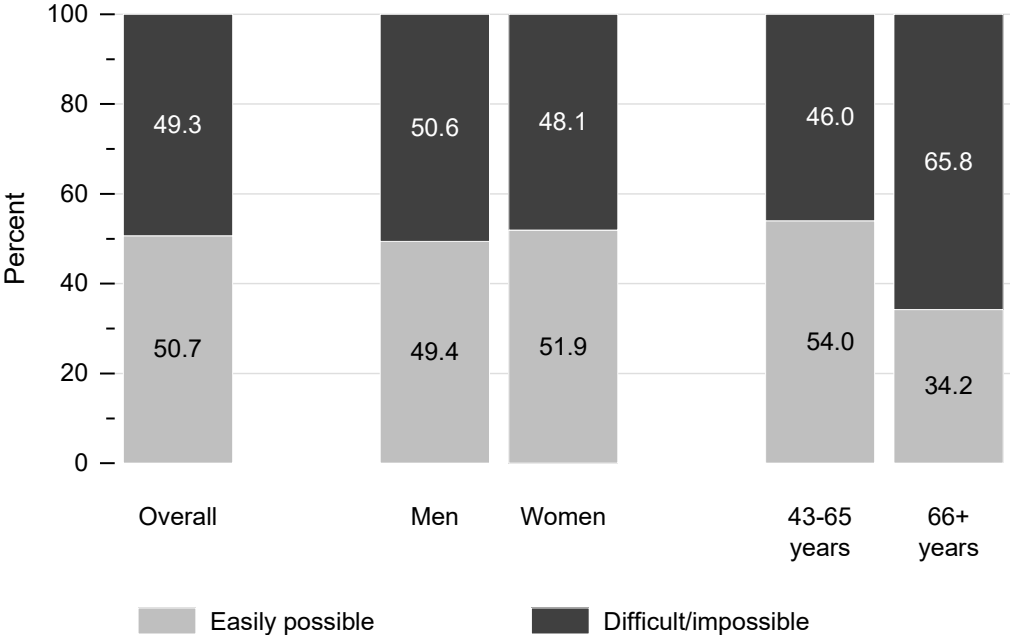
In terms of gender, we see that 52% of women living in LAT partnerships thought it would be easy or possible to move in

together. In contrast, 48% of women considered moving in together to be difficult or impossible. For 49% of men living in LAT partnerships, moving in together was easy or possible in their subjective assessment, but difficult or impossible for 51%.

A comparison by age group shows that 54% of 43- to 65-year-olds stated that it would be easy or possible to move in together within the next three years. In contrast, 46% of this age group said it would be difficult or impossible. Among people over the age of 65 who were living in a LAT partnership, only 35% thought it would be easy or possible to move in with their partner. 65% of those over the age of 65 stated that moving in together was difficult or even impossible.

The differences in the estimated possibility are not statistically significant by gender or age, which is probably due to the small number of cases of LAT partnerships and, with regard to gender, the similar distribution (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Distribution of the perceived possibility of moving in together among people living in LAT partnerships, overall, by gender and age, shares in per cent



Source: DEAS 2023, unpublished version (n = 216), weighted, rounded figures. The differences by gender and age group are not statistically significant (p<0.05).

Just over half of people in LAT partnerships would like to have a shared household.

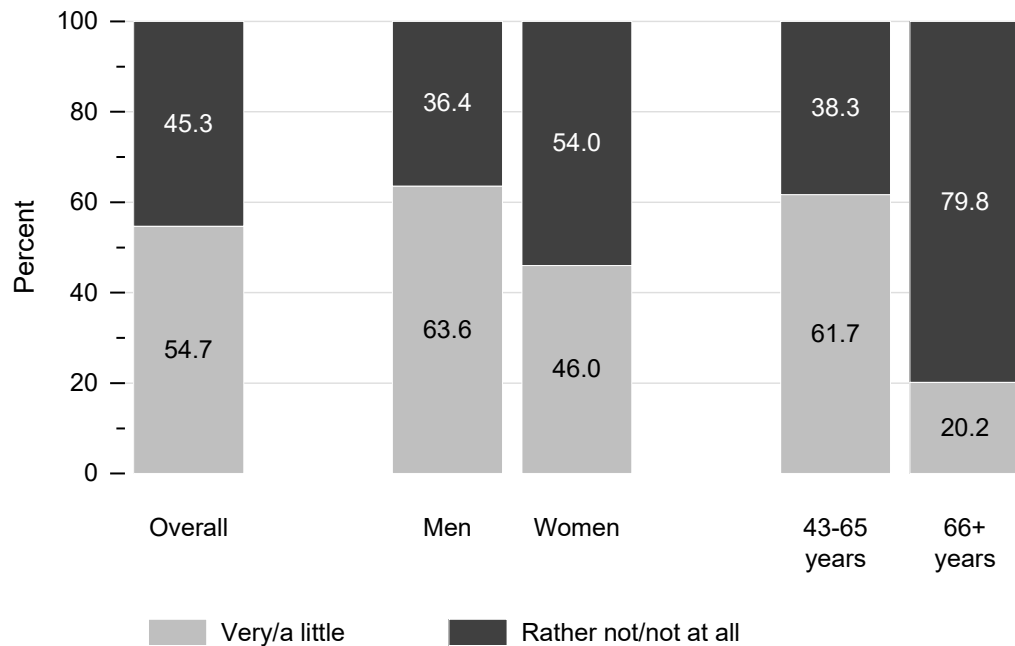
Among those living in LAT partnerships, 55% felt a little or very much inclined to set up a joint household with their partner. In contrast, 45% of people did rather not want to live together or did not want to live together at all (Figure 7).

The wish for a shared household is distributed by gender in such a way that 64% of men would like to live with their partner a little or a lot. 36% would rather not or not at all. In contrast, only 46% of women wished a little or very much to live together with their partner. For 54%, this was not really or not at all a wish. However, these differences are not statistically significant, although the proportions indicate clear differences. The

lack of significance could again be linked to the small number of cases (Figure 7).

Looking at the distribution by age group, there is a clear age difference in the wish to live together. Between the ages of 43 and 65, 62% wanted to live together a little or even a lot. In the same age group, 38% would rather not or not at all like to live with their partner. In contrast, 80% of those aged 65 and over would rather not or not at all like to live with their partner. Only one in five (20%) would like to live with their partner a little or a lot. In the younger age group, people in LAT partnerships are therefore more likely to wish for a shared household, while in the older age group, significantly more people want to continue living in separate households. These differences by age group are statistically significant (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Distribution of the wish for a shared household among people living in LAT partnerships, overall, by gender and age, shares in per cent



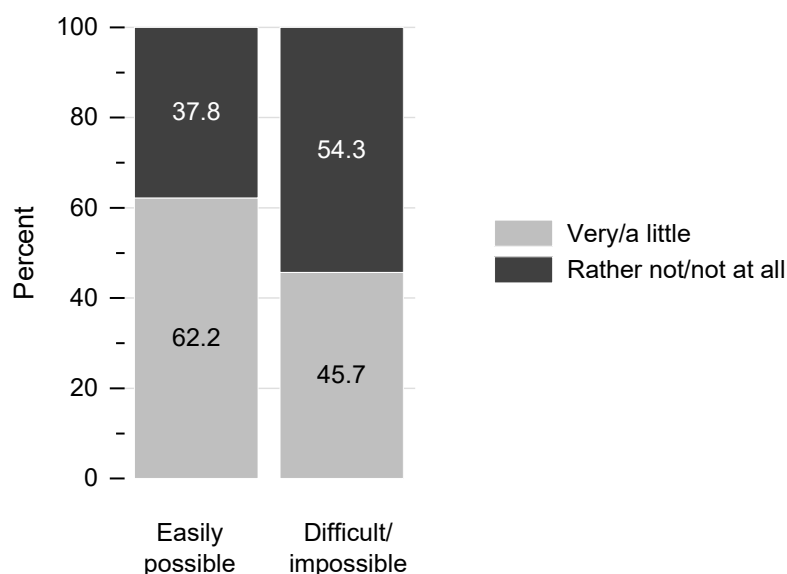
Source: DEAS 2023, unpublished version (n = 218), weighted, rounded figures.
Statistically significant (p<0.05): Differences by age group.

The wish for a shared household is not significantly influenced by the perceived possibility of moving in together.

Among those who rated moving in together within three years as easy or possible, 62% wished for a shared household with their partner, while 38% did not want to share a household. Of those in LAT partnerships

who rated the possibility of moving in together as difficult or impossible, 46% wished for a shared household. For the other 54%, there was no wish for a shared household. These differences in self-assessments of the possibility of moving in together are not statistically significant, which is again probably related to the low number of cases (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Distribution of the wish for a shared household according to the perceived possibility of moving in together among people living in LAT partnerships, shares in per cent



Source: DEAS 2023, unpublished version (n = 214), weighted, rounded figures.

The differences according to the estimated possibility of moving in together are not statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Discussion and conclusion

In this issue of DZA Aktuell, we have looked at the question of how partnership arrangements, and LAT partnerships in particular, are distributed in the second half of life. Our results show that the majority of people in the second half of life live in a partnership. In 2023, almost two thirds of people lived in a shared household with their partner, while one in twenty lived in a LAT partnership. The remaining third did not have a partner. In the discussion about LAT, it is often assumed that they could become more important in later life – similar to early adulthood – for example, due to a partner living in a care home (Mauritz & Wagner 2021). Our analyses can neither confirm nor refute this assumption and a systematic comparison of the proportion of LAT partnerships over the entire life course remains a blank space in research on LAT partnerships.

Compared to the established living arrangements, LAT partnerships continue to represent a rather small group and therefore a less prevalent partnership arrangement. However, in 2023, every 20th person in the

second half of life was living in a partnership without a shared household, yet these partnered people would be officially subsumed under the group of singles – for example, in the institutional definition of partnership status as used in the microcensus. If people in LAT partnerships are defined as single and therefore cannot be distinguished from the group of people who are actually live without a partner, the proportion of singles is significantly overestimated in many official statistics. This distortion of the distribution presumably also has an impact on which factors influencing partnership arrangements, and the effects thereof, become the focus of public and scientific attention.

At the same time, the question of how the spread of LAT partnerships has developed over time remains unanswered. The DEAS data could provide further information on this. Since 1996, non-marital partnerships have been further qualified as to whether there is indeed a joint household, and since 2014 this has also been recorded for marital

partnerships.⁵ At least for non-marital partnerships, DEAS data could therefore be used to analyse the temporal development of the prevalence of LAT partnerships over almost 30 years. This would provide an assessment of how this partnership arrangement has developed over time in the second half of life.

In a second step, we analysed how people in different forms of partnership differ according to age, gender, income and education. Here we see that people in older age groups, women and people with a lower income or a lower level of education are more likely to live without a partner. At the same time, people in middle age groups, men and people with a higher income or a medium or higher level of education are more likely to live in a partnership with a shared household. This is consistent with findings from previous studies (siehe z.B. Eckhard 2014; Lengerer 2016; Nowossadeck & Engstler 2013).

We find no gender or income differences in LAT partnerships. This means that neither an above-average number of either men or women nor certain income groups live in LAT partnerships with any particular regularity. The fact that we find no gender differences in LAT partnerships in the second half of life is rather surprising, as gender plays a central role in the distribution of singlehood and partnerships with a shared household, which is also evident in our results. Following this gender-specific distribution, it would have been expected for men to also be more likely to live in LAT partnerships than women. The lack of gender differences thus represents a new and central finding of this DZA Aktuell. Regarding income, we assumed that people living in LAT partnerships would have to have a higher income, as a couple must be able to afford two households. This too could not be confirmed, calling into question our assumption that income plays a central role

in whether people see LAT as a lifestyle of their own choosing or as a way of life imposed by their circumstances. We cannot answer this question in the context of this DZA Aktuell.

At the same time, we see clear differences between age groups: the youngest age group lives most frequently in LAT partnerships, and fewer and fewer people live in LAT partnerships with increasing age. We had assumed the opposite distribution. However, it remains unclear in our analysis whether these age differences simply reflect the ageing trend, with more and more people living without a partner in older age, or whether LAT partnerships represent an independent living arrangement for the younger age group, in which they continue to live as they grow into older age. Future longitudinal analyses could potentially show whether these are differences in age or rather between cohorts.

We also see in our results that people living in LAT partnerships are more likely to have a high than a medium level of education. This pattern was also evident in previous research, which focused primarily on younger and middle-aged people (Coulter & Hu 2017; Ermisch & Siedler 2008) and is also confirmed by our results for the second half of life. One possible explanation is the observation that people with a higher level of education tend to have less traditional role conceptions and are therefore more likely to engage in LAT (Levin 2004). Based on the differences in education, it could be assumed that LAT partnerships occur more frequently among people who are socio-economically better off. However, our results do not show any systematic differences in income. To date and to our knowledge, there is no clear evidence in research on the socio-economic position of people in LAT partnerships.

In contrast to LAT partnerships, we see significant group differences by gender and

majority of LAT partnerships were therefore non-marital partnerships.

⁵ In 2023, 26 of the 233 LAT partnerships in the DEAS were marriages, accounting for a weighted share of around 11% of LAT partnerships. The clear

income for single and cohabiting people. These two characteristics can in turn have an impact on inequalities in other areas of life in which the effects of partnership arrangements are also evident, such as access to care. As mentioned at the beginning, people are most often cared for by their (marital) partner (Ehrlich & Kelle 2019), and people without a partner receive care from their immediate social environment or from professional care services (Vaskovics et al. 2000). The protective effect of partnerships and the risk of singlehood appears to be evident here. However, our results also show that people in partnerships with a shared household have both a higher income and are more likely to be men, which can facilitate access to care.⁶ In contrast, people with a lower income and women are more likely to be single, which in turn can make access to care more difficult. These gender- and income-specific differences between partnership arrangements and their potential connection to the effects thereof follow a certain logic that can also be transferred to other areas of life. Thus, the clear differences in the distribution and effects of partnership arrangements would be less obvious, depending upon whether LAT partnerships – in which there are no gender and income differences – are grouped in together with singlehood or partnerships with a shared household. It can be assumed here that the different effects of the two partnership arrangements would be weakened either way. Therefore, if LAT partnerships are added to other living arrangements, not only is the categorisation inaccurate, but the effects of singlehood on the one hand and partnerships with a shared household on the other are also distorted by the LAT partnerships. Accordingly, LAT partnerships should be included as a separate category in analyses generally.

Our third question focused on the extent to which LAT partnerships in older age represent a self-chosen independent lifestyle

or a phase before moving in together or a pragmatic way of life or adaptation to inevitable life circumstances. Due to the small number of cases of LAT partnerships, we were only able to analyse tendencies rather than evidence. Half of the people in LAT partnerships consider moving in together to be easy or possible, whereas the other half consider moving in together to be difficult or even impossible. With regard to the wish to share a household, the data shows that slightly more than half of people living in LAT partnerships express this wish, while slightly less than half say they have no wish to do so. If we look at the assessment of the possibility of moving in together and the wish separately, we see a fairly even distribution across the different response categories.

In terms of differences by age, we see that members of the younger age group (43–65 years) are more likely to want a shared household than people in the older age group (66 years and older). This could be related to the fact that older people have lived in their own homes or neighbourhoods for longer and therefore do not want to move or have already become accustomed to living alone (Koren 2014; Lewin 2018). Our analyses do not reveal any statistically significant differences by gender. However, the distributions reflect the finding from previous studies that men want a partner with whom they live in a shared household while women want a partner with whom they can spend their free time, but for whom they do not have to provide in a shared household (Davidson 2002; Koren 2014). However, this would have to be re-examined with a larger LAT sample than the one analysed here.

If we look at the assessment of the possibility of moving in together and the wish combined, we come closer to answering our third question. Of those who categorise moving in together as possible, a majority would like to live in a shared household. For

⁶ Men are more likely to be cared for by their partner than women are to be cared for by their partner.

this group, living in separate households can be seen as a phase before living in a shared household. However, LAT appears to be an independent lifestyle choice by those who consider moving in together to be easy and yet do not express a wish for a shared household. This group is somewhat smaller than the group for whom LAT can be categorised as a phase. The group of people who live in LAT partnerships and consider moving in together to be difficult or even impossible can be categorised as living apart due to their circumstances. There is also a differentiation to be made according to the wish for a shared household. Slightly less than half of the people who consider it difficult or even impossible to move into a shared household nevertheless express the wish to live with their partner. For these people, it can be assumed that they are not satisfied with separate households but that a shared household is not an option. On the other hand, for those who consider moving in together to be difficult or impossible and do not express a wish to do so, it can be assumed that they are satisfied with their separate households or have at least come to terms with their living conditions.

In conclusion, it can be seen that LAT can be either an independent lifestyle or a phase or a way of life due to life circumstances. Our analysis shows that the wish to move in together varies between age groups. These differences could be described in more detail by analysing a larger number of cases in the future or by taking other relevant characteristics into account, such as the duration of the partnership, the type of housing (ownership vs. renting vs. care home), the household composition (especially regarding children) or marital status (siehe z.B. Coulter & Hu 2017; Mauritz & Wagner 2021; Wagner, Mulder, Weiß, & Krapf 2019). Our results follow on from previous discussions in the debate on LAT partnership, as they emphasise their diversity: for some couples, LAT partnerships function as an independent lifestyle (moving in together is possible, but there is no wish to do so), for others,

however, as a phase before moving in together (moving in together is possible and there is a wish to do so), and for others still, as a way of life due to life circumstances with which the participants are either satisfied (moving in together is difficult and there is no wish to do so) or dissatisfied (moving in together is difficult, but there is a wish to do so).

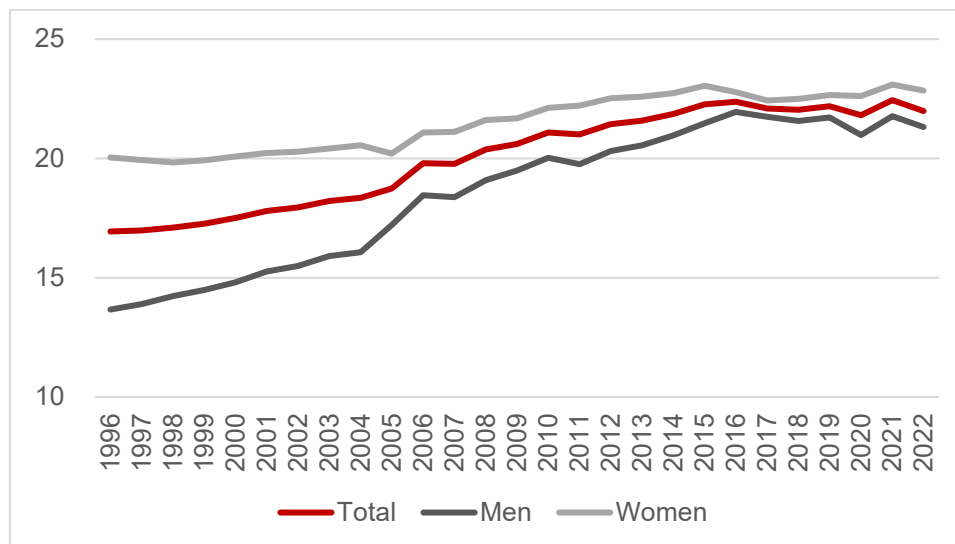
The analysis of LAT-partnership prevalence and configuration also contributes to the socio-political discourse on the pluralisation of lifestyles (Brüderl 2004; Peukert 2019). Our findings emphasise that LAT partnerships also represent a partnership arrangement that is a lived reality in the second half of life, and one that deviates from the traditional nuclear family with a joint household. Political decision-makers are already taking such alternative lifestyles into account and increasingly attempting to introduce and facilitate legal options for mutual protection of living arrangements that deviate from the traditional nuclear family. This can be seen, for example, in the introduction of so-called *communities of responsibility* (german: Verantwortungsgemeinschaften), which is planned for 2025. Shared responsibilities in this context refers to single people who take on responsibility for each other and yet do not live in a partnership, e.g. senior flat shares (tagesschau 2024). However, it remains to be seen whether *communities of responsibility* will also cover people in LAT partnerships. On the one hand, they are categorised as single people in official statistics, as discussed in the introduction, and *communities of responsibility* are aimed at single people. On the other hand, *communities of responsibility* are explicitly not aimed at people who live in a partnership but do not wish to marry (tagesschau 2024). This example makes it clear that the categorisation of partnership arrangements is not merely of academic or theoretical importance; it also has direct relevance to everyday life and can have implications for – in this case legal – participation. It is therefore necessary to also make visible

those living arrangements that deviate from more traditional models, for example by distinguishing LAT partnerships from singlehood and partnerships with a shared

household, and shedding light on how they are organised. This DZA Aktuell contributes to this.

Appendix

Figure A.1: Proportion of single people in the total population over time



Source: (Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis) 2023a; 2023b; eigene Darstellung)

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