

Cohabitation and Marriage Market Constraints in the United States

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ABSTRACT

Using the 2007–2011 American Community Survey ($N = 4,148,702$ households), this study explores how marriage market conditions are associated with living in cohabiting, married, and single (unpartnered) households among 16–50 year olds. We update earlier work on marriage markets but the main contribution is exploring cohabitation in the context of local housing markets. Cohabiting households tend to be concentrated in counties with fewer single family homes and more expensive housing. Where housing is affordable and male unemployment is low, adults are more likely to be in married than single households. But where housing is less affordable and the male unemployment and female labor force participation rates are high, adults are more likely to be in cohabiting than married households. Cohabitation could be a response to constraints in local housing and job markets. Moreover, cohabitation and marriage are not synonymous responses to marriage market constraints: the economic prerequisites for cohabitation in terms of affordable housing and men's economic security are lower than those for marriage.