

5 Living apart is increasingly common among couples

Approximately one in 10 people in Canada are in an intimate relationship but do not live with their partner, in what is known as a living apart together (LAT) couple.¹ Also known as non-cohabitation, LAT is both a living arrangement and one of the many forms of structural diversity found among families in Canada. Researchers have paid growing attention to LAT couples as couples have become increasingly diverse and this living arrangement becomes more common.

Data from the 2017 General Social Survey (GSS) show that nearly 1.5 million people aged 25 to 64 were in a couple^a with someone living in a different residence.¹ This accounted for 9% of all people in couples, up from 6% in 2006. Living apart together is most common among younger age groups: among those in couples, 20% of 25- to 34-year-olds, 7% of 35- to 54-year-olds, and 5% of 55- to 64-year-olds lived apart in 2017.

Among those in LAT couples in 2017, 15% said that they had never considered living together, while 34% said it was a choice to live apart.¹ Just over half (51%) cited “other circumstances”^b as the reason they did not live together, which included schooling, financial situations, and work.

There are many reasons why couples may choose to continue living apart, though it is often a transitional phase that eventually leads to living together. According to the 2011 GSS, seven in 10 people in LAT couples said that they intended to live together eventually, while 15% were uncertain and 14% said they did not intend to live together (this data is not available for 2017).² The proportion who intended to live together decreased with age, from 83% of 20- to 24-year-olds in LAT relationships to only 28% for those aged 60 and older.^a

In 2011, the most frequently cited reason among this group for choosing to live separately was that they were “not yet ready for living together” (48%), indicating that their LAT status was transitional. Nearly three in 10 people (28%) who chose to live in an LAT couple said they did so to “keep independence.”^a

Why this matters

Couples living apart is by no means a new phenomenon, although it has become more commonplace in recent decades. LAT couples are more frequent among young adults as they navigate school, work, and social life. People who have previously been



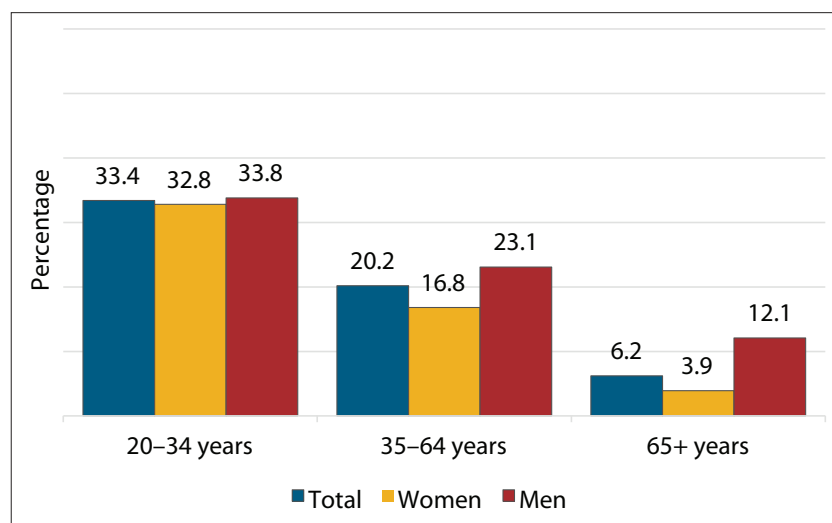
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married may wish to maintain financial autonomy and avoid intertwining their debt or wealth with a new partner, or they may simply not feel any pressure to live together.

Regardless of their age, many people who choose to live apart together do so to

experience the connection and intimacy of being in a couple while maintaining the independence of living apart. There may be important considerations that need to be managed or otherwise addressed by couples living apart, such as how caregiving is provided across households.³

Proportion of the population living alone in a living apart together (LAT) relationship, by age group and gender, Canada, 2017



Source: Tang, J., Galbraith, N., & Truong, J. (2019, March 6). Living alone in Canada. *Insights on Canadian Society*.⁴

^a Includes those in living-apart-together relationships who were married, single (never married), widowed, divorced, or separated.

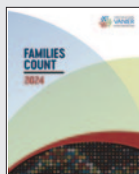
^b A breakdown of the percentage of respondents citing these examples is not available.



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References

- ¹ Statistics Canada. (2019, February 20). Family matters: Couples who live apart. *Infographics*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2019014-eng.htm>
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- ³ De Jong Gierveld, J. (2015, August 24). Intra-couple caregiving of older adults living apart together: Commitment and independence. *Canadian Journal on Aging*, 34(3), 356-365. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0714980815000264>
- ⁴ Tang, J., Galbraith, N., & Truong, J. (2019, March 6). Living alone in Canada. *Insights on Canadian Society*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2019001/article/00003-eng.htm>



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