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Generational change in union formation

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Family formation in Western industrialised nations has seen dramatic change over the past 30 years. Marriage and childbearing are both being delayed. Previous work has suggested that such delays are the result of individualization and human capital accumulation. However, there is debate about the extent to which we are required to build skills to cope with a more complex society, or, capitalizing on increasing wealth and enjoying an early adulthood focused on enriching our life experience.

This paper argues that both of the above scenarios are true but for different sections of the community. For some, lifestyle in early adulthood can be the result of choice, where as others may delay family formation due to constraints around time and money. This paper examines the entry into first relationship in relation to labour market and educational experience using data from a nationally representative longitudinal study. It examines the link between leaving home and relationship formation over time. By comparing across cohorts, the paper discusses the links between global economic movements the family formation behaviour of Australia's young adults.