

ARTICLE/ARTÍCULO

Separate Paths. The Breakup of Couples in Andalusia

Caminos separados. La ruptura de parejas en Andalucía

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ABSTRACT

Relationship breakups have been a recurrent subject of interest, from a sociological perspective, for the scientific community. Until now, however, the focus has been on breakups with legal ties, whether separation or divorce, and it has been studied at the national level in Spain. The aim of this research is to analyse the breakup of all types of couples and the reasons behind it, focusing on Andalusia. A descriptive quantitative method is therefore used by exploiting data from the Spanish General Social Survey (SGSS, 2018). The results show that the majority of breakups in Andalusia do not come under the categories of divorce or separation, with slight differences depending on the age component. As for the motives for ending a relationship, these are linked to subjective factors, with subtle differences according to sex, and the initiative is usually taken by one of the partners.

KEYWORDS: breakup; Andalusia; descriptive; causes; reasons; divorce.

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RESUMEN

Las rupturas de pareja han sido objeto de interés recurrente, desde una perspectiva sociológica, para la comunidad científica. Sin embargo, hasta el momento, el foco de atención se ha situado en las rupturas con vínculos legales, ya sean separación o divorcio, y se ha estudiado a nivel nacional. El objetivo de esta investigación es analizar cómo es la ruptura de todo tipo de parejas y las razones que la motivan, centrándonos en el caso andaluz. Para ello se utiliza metodología cuantitativa descriptiva mediante la explotación de datos procedentes de la Encuesta Social General Española (ESGE, 2018). Los resultados muestran que la mayor parte de las rupturas que se producen en Andalucía no se insertan en las modalidades de divorcio o separación, existiendo ligeras diferencias según el componente etario. En cuanto a las motivaciones para poner fin a una relación, estas se encuentran ligadas a factores de tipo subjetivo, apreciando sutiles diferencias según sexo, y la iniciativa suele tomarla, en general, una parte de la pareja.

PALABRAS CLAVE: ruptura; Andalucía; descriptivo; causas; razones; divorcio.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, there have been a series of social transformations that have disrupted and caused the de-standardisation of the life course (Brückner and Mayer, 2005). These changes have had a profound impact on the family and, in particular, have altered traditional couple pairing and breakup processes. In Spain, these alterations have been characterised by a succession of social changes such as greater secularisation, changes in sexual behaviour patterns, new forms of sociability, the transformation of gender roles that have established and consolidated new family forms, in which union and separation processes have become more common and standardised (González and Requena, 2008; Ayuso, 2019, 2022; Requena, 2022; García Moreno, 2022).

Relationships and breakups are a core social phenomenon, as they play a key role in the life course of individuals (Duvall, 1988; Wells and Gubar, 1966). This explains why, from a sociological perspective, the study of relationship formation processes—marriages, registered partnerships and courtships—has a long history, both internationally and in Spain (Alberdi et al., 1994). In terms of breakups, existing literature in Spain has placed emphasis on studying the dissolution of marriages as well as divorce and legal separation (Alberdi, 1979; Becerril, 1999, 2008), which are also the object of considerable analysis in the international scientific field (Spijker and Solona, 2012). However, recent cultural changes make the study of these phenomena more complex, as they cover an amalgamation of situations that are increasingly difficult to detect.

This article will focus on studying breakups in general, including both those that entail legal separation or divorce and those that do not. The interest in all kinds of breakups lies in the fact that, in the Spanish region of Andalusia, this phenomenon has not been researched; despite there being studies on the divorce/legal separation of heterosexual married couples (Jiménez-Cabello et al., 2021) and even on same-sex couples (Jiménez-Cabello, 2021), there is no empirical precedent that analyses the breakup of couples in general.

This is partly due to the lack of secondary data appropriate for such purpose. While marriages, divorces, registered partnerships and their dissolution are administrative procedures that are recorded, there are no records on courtships and breakups and, therefore, their study is more complex. Furthermore, to study the reasons behind the breakups, survey data asking directly about the matter would be required. However, the complexity increases on defining—and therefore measuring—what constitutes a couple. This is due to their evolution, with greater variability and more social acceptance of different kinds of unions (Jiménez-Cabello and Ayuso, 2022).

Indeed, the complexity involved in the analysis of breakups in general, the greater acceptance of said breakups, the lack of an in-depth analysis in Andalusia and the possibility of obtaining secondary data that enable said analysis are the reasons why the aim of this research is to analyse relationship breakup processes in Andalusia. Thus, firstly, information related to unions and separations is offered. The methodology used to subsequently present the obtained results is then outlined. Finally, the conclusions reached are described.

2. Changes in the Social Perception of Breakups, Reasons for Breakups and Consequences

Although breakups are individual occurrences, paying attention to the context in which they occur is fundamental, as this may or may not be a contributing factor. Sociological theory has outlined how, in the development of modern Western societies, couple relationships have changed. Giddens (1992) affirmed that we are witnessing a change in the social perception of couple relationships, whereby the idea of lifelong romantic love is being abandoned while the idea of confluent love, in which a relationship lasts for as long as both partners are interested in it doing so, is spreading and consolidating. Bauman (2005), on the other hand, used the term “liquid love” to refer, in the context of greater individualisation, to the fact that relationships had become less committed and tended to be more transient and superficial.

These changes are simply a reflection of how, with the passing of time, social norms have progressively become less important in favour of a more central role of the culture of individual decision-making (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2003, 2002). Increased personal freedom in relationships places more weight on individual preferences (Roussel, 1989), so that what may be expected socially is not as decisive as the needs and priorities of the individuals.

Furthermore, in relation to these needs and preferences, the possibility of a breakup implies that relationships are currently under a constant process of individual review: the partners in a relationship continually analyse their relationship (Illouz, 2020). It is precisely this constant review that can, at times, contribute to developing a relationship not being easy (Collins and Gillath, 2012)

and, due to each partner's expectations, to the relationship becoming embroiled in a conflict that may break the affectionate link (Valdez et al., 2011).

This constant re-evaluation may lead, as a direct consequence, to a breakup; the question is, however, why do relationships end? The scientific literature addressing the reasons that may lead to a couple breaking up hints at some of the more or less common reasoning. Thus, González and Espinosa (2004) identified falling out of love as the main factor. Casado et al. (2001), on the other hand, specified the importance of factors such as lack of communication, decreased intimacy, dissatisfaction (Castrillo, 2018) or issues of a financial nature. Other aspects, such as not feeling loved (Ferrand, 1996), monotony or lack of physical attraction (Hill, Rubin and Peplau, 1976), have also been highlighted in the literature.

The set of reasons behind breakups identified in the literature may be categorised in the distinction made by Becerril (1999). This author concluded that the reasons for couples breaking up are different in today's society; previously, couples broke up due to objective factors (for example, financial issues, addictions, partner violence, among others), while today, causes arise that are more subjective in nature (falling out of love or loss of communication, among others). That is, it appears to be that the current reasons are consistent with the new perspective about relationships in advanced societies, with greater social acceptance of confluent relationships and less criticism of separations. This partly explains that the breakup of couples, whether married or not, is a phenomenon that has become increasingly common over time.

As regards the consequences of breakups, the end of a relationship can, undoubtedly, have numerous implications. In this sense, it is important to point out that the effect a couple breaking up has on the individual who experiences it, whether positive or negative, will depend on other aspects, such as the importance given to the relationship, the individual's expectations of said relationship and the reasons for bringing it to an end, among others (Waller, 2008; Lewandowski and Bizzoco, 2007).

The issue with the literature on the consequences is that, generally speaking, the focus has been placed on those breakups that entail divorce. However, the breakup phenomenon is common in young people who are yet to make the decision to get married, even when in serious and stable relationships with their partners. Couple relationships during this stage can be very stable and are not only for personal motivation, but also aid in social integration. However, breakups are quite common during the courtship that is characteristic of this stage of life (Pinto, 2013; Rhoades et al., 2011).

Thus, the focus of the following section is on these processes of change in Spain and, specifically, in Andalusia, which is the framework of this research.

3. The Breakup Phenomenon in Spain and Andalusia

The sociological literature, at a national level in Spain, which delves into the understanding of breakups has traditionally focused on the study of the dissolution of legal ties, specifically, divorce. Marriage, separation and divorce have shaped a pillar of analysis, from a sociological perspective, that has become increasingly prominent and consolidated over time. Thus, there are studies dating back to the 1970s that focus on this social reality, such as those conducted by Alberdi (1979), Iglesias de Ussel (1977) and Lezcano (1979). Subsequently, different research studies were based on the 1991 socio-demographic survey, such as those by Houle et al. (1999) and Becerril (1999).

More recently, and in light of new statistics and more complete data in general, there are studies such as those by Domínguez (2011), Spijker and Solsona (2012), Solsona (2015) and Becerril (2015). In these studies, aspects such as changes in the formation and breakup of couples, comparisons with the European environment and the importance of gender and age, have been analysed and/or highlighted. More recently, the impact of changes at a legal level on marital breakdowns has also been addressed (Becerril and Jiménez-Cabello, 2019).

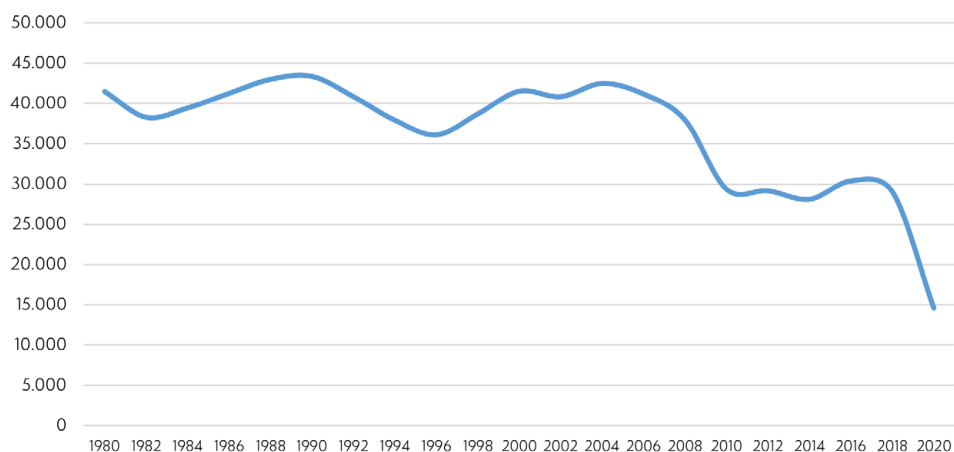
Studies to date have provided a brief snapshot of the situation in Spain, which has passed through several stages in the evolution of the social perception of breakups. Until relatively recently, a breakup was viewed as stigmatising (Jiménez-Cabello and Becerril, 2020). In this sense, the legislative changes and the social transformations brought about in society have led to a greater tolerance of divorce (Ayuso, 2020). Thus, when reference is made to a breakup, this is from the perspective of a solution and not a factor, or fact, that may cause determined negative vestiges (Jiménez-Cabello and Becerril, 2020).

However, there is also greater acceptance of the variety of types of unions. On the one hand, although marriage was the most adopted formula for formalising a couple's union, nowadays other options, such as registering a partnership, have become more prominent. Likewise, same-sex marriage has been institutionalised. In this regard, it is noteworthy that, prior to the regularisation at the national level in 2005, a number of self-governing regions in Spain implemented various protocols for the recognition of these unions, enabling them to be entered in the register as couples (Jiménez-Cabello, 2022). Among these regions was Andalusia, which is also one of the regions where most marriages of this kind have been celebrated since their regulation, according to data from the Spanish National Statistics Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística, INE*).

These two interlinked realities indicate a paradigm shift that is already visualised from a sociological perspective in the forms of union. The marriage rate in Spain has changed; there is a decrease in the number of marriages and couples are also getting married at a later age (Martínez, 2009). In this regard, analysing Andalusia, it can be seen that this region is simply a reflection of the general Spanish trend; Graph 1 shows that there has been a sharp decrease in the marriage rate in the last four decades.

Graph 1

Evolution of the marriage rate in Andalusia



Source: Own research based on data from the Institute of Statistics and Cartography of Andalusia (*Instituto de Estadística y Cartografía de Andalucía, IECA, 1980–2020*).

The number of marriages in Andalusia has gradually decreased over the years, falling from 41,506 in the year 2000 to 14,623 in 2019 (vital statistics, INE), the last year available prior to the COVID-19 health crisis, while other types of unions, such as registered partnerships, have become more prominent. In this regard, it is worth highlighting that in 2021, 8,066 new partnerships were registered, while in 2020, this figure stood at 5,476. However, this decrease may well respond to the context derived from the COVID-19 health crisis. Thus, data from 2019 reflect that the figure was similar to that in 2021 with the registration of 7,651 unions of this kind (statistics on registered partnerships in Andalusia, IECA).

Logically, these figures point to the importance of analysing all kinds of separations, as if marriages are decreasing, it can be expected that divorces/legal separations will decrease over time. This is precisely the reason why it is more than necessary to focus on what happens with breakups in general, as complex situations can arise, such as the awarding of child custody, with all that this entails. In this regard, analysing the reasons, more than the actual number of breakups, is central, as on several occasions separation leads to a process of negotiation that largely depends on the reason behind ending the relationship.

For this reason, the focus is placed on analysing breakups in general, the reasons that lead to them, as well as the perception of their impact on the lives of the individuals, paying attention to basic socio-demographic variables such as sex and age. The analysis will focus on Andalusia due to the lack of studies on this subject and because, in light of the above, it can be considered to have certain dynamics comparable to the national Spanish context that have already been studied.

4. Methodology

A quantitative methodology is used. Thus, in order to respond to the described aim, the Spanish General Social Survey (SGSS; 3201; 2018) by the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research (*Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, CIS*) is used. The reason for selecting this survey is that it contains accurate information about the object of study, as well as enabling data disaggregation by self-governing region.

4.1. Population and Sample

It is a national survey (Spain), and its universe is the resident population of both sexes aged 18 and over. Two-stage stratified cluster sampling was used, with a final sample of 5,365 people. The survey was completed between 20 February 2017 and 12 June 2018.

To obtain the necessary sub-sample, the Andalusian population, cases were selected using the variable “self-governing region”. Thus, a total of 479 individuals was drawn, of which 228 are men and 251 are women. It should be pointed out that all these individuals have gone through some kind of breakup.

The questions chosen were: Q.84e “How did your last relationship end?”; Q.84g “What was the main reason behind the separation or the end of your last relationship?”; Q.84f “Who initiated the breakup process?” and Q.84h “Perception of others after the breakup”.

4.2. Procedure and Analysis

A descriptive analysis was performed on the data. This analysis provides general information, which enables social realities and possible changes that are occurring or have occurred to be understood. Likewise, the results of this kind of analysis make it possible, in general, to obtain information and knowledge about a social reality that has not been analysed (Veiga de Cabo et al., 2008). It is precisely for this reason that this kind of analysis is necessary, since it provides data on breakups in general and the reasons behind them for the first time for this region.

Lastly, its usefulness is perfectly suited to the research aim described, since the purpose is not to conduct more complex analyses such as finding statistical relationships between variables, making possible comparisons between or within groups, or developing models that enable phenomena or behaviours to be predicted.

5. Results and Discussion

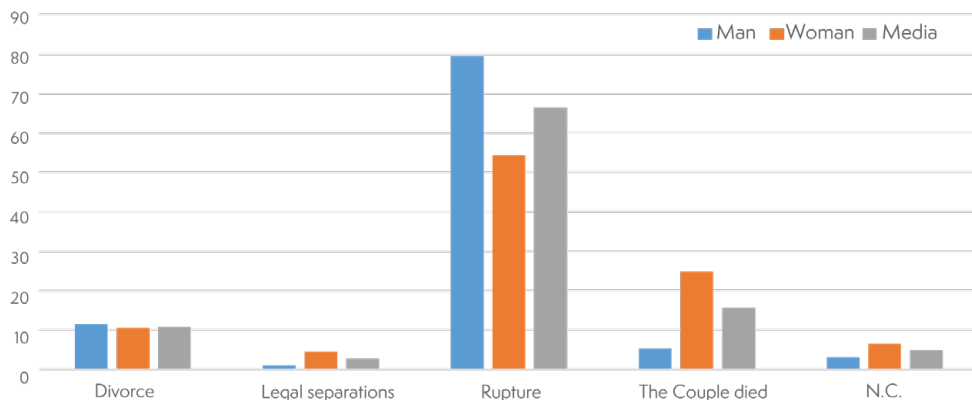
5.1. Ways in which Relationships End

When analysing breakup processes, the first aspect to take into account is to identify how Andalusians ended their last relationship. The first finding is that legal breakups (divorce and/or separations) do not amount to more than 15% of the total. This is not insignificant, as traditionally research on couple breakups has focused on these modalities, resulting in the loss of information on a significant proportion of the breakups that occur. In fact, they can be quantified; therefore, on the other side of the balance, the remaining breakups account for 66.4%.

These results for Andalusia are consistent with those obtained by Jiménez-Cabello and Ayuso (2022) for Spain. These authors found that these kinds of breakups are equally predominant at a national level. Thus, as these authors indicate, despite the robustness provided by the indicators of divorce/legal separation, if the focus were on this alone, only a minimal part of the phenomenon would be observed.

Graph 2

Way in which the last relationship ended (%)



Source: Own research based on the Spanish General Social Survey (SGSS) (CIS, 2018).

It is clear that, in general, the percentage of divorce/legal separation is a relatively low percentage in comparison to a breakup. In terms of sex (Graph 2), the breakup/separation of couples stands out with 79.3% for men and 54.2% for women, following the same pattern described. However, the percentage difference between men and women is noteworthy: said dissimilarity may well be due to another salient aspect, the divergence between men and women when the relationship ended due to the death of their partner (19.4%), with a significant

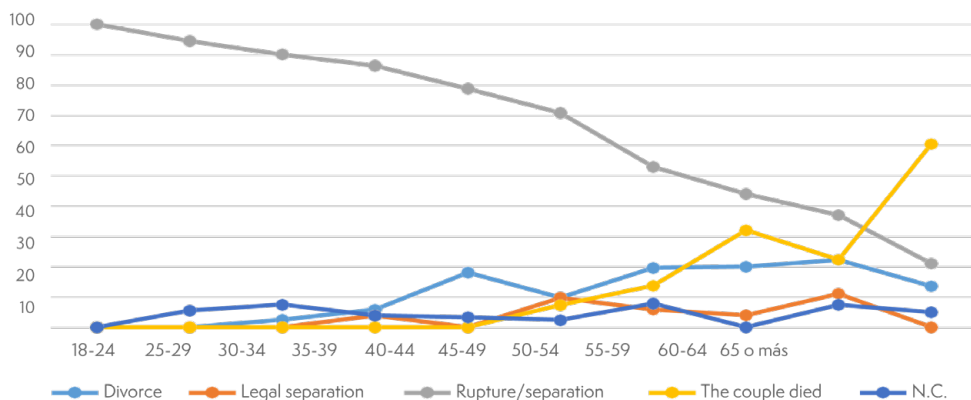
difference between men and women (5.3% compared to 24.7%), due to the longer life expectancy of the latter.

Thus, the results point to there being more couples who end a relationship without breaking a legal tie, either through divorce or separation. Analysing exclusively divorces and legal separations, as has been done generally until now, opens the door to visualising only a part of this social reality, especially considering that there are increasingly more registered partnerships and the fact that they are consolidated over time, that is to say, their duration is longer. This trend is particularly evident in Andalusia: registered partnerships have been gaining prominence, increasing from 6,082 in 2015 to 8,066 in 2021 (statistics on registered partnerships in Andalusia, IECA). Similarly, there are numerous such couples who break up and do so with children, something of which there is hardly any evidence.

On the other hand, it is interesting to observe how the age factor relates to the manner of the breakup (Graph 3). In this vein, it is to be expected that the breaking of a legal tie is more associated with ages over 35 years, taking into account that the average age at marriage, in 2022, was 35 years for men and over 36 and a half years for women, according to data from the Spanish National Statistics Institute. Thus, the data indicate that, generally speaking, those people in younger age groups are more closely linked with breakups (those that do not refer to either divorce or legal separation). On the contrary, individuals in the 45–64 age group are more frequently placed in the area of divorce or legal separation. Thus, the age variable can be seen to present itself as a factor that shows differences related to the way in which a relationship ends.

Graph 3

Way in which the last relationship ended according to age (%)



Source: Own research based on the Spanish General Social Survey (SGSS) (CIS, 2018).

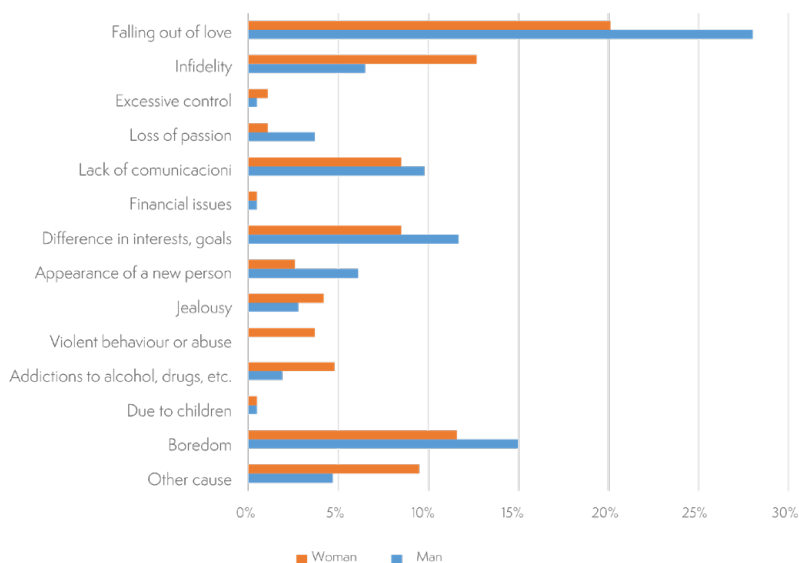
This makes sense for two main reasons: on the one hand, the aforementioned association between average age and marriage. On the other, the average duration of marriages: 16.5 years in 2021. Specifically, in the case of divorce, 16.3 years, and for separations, 20.6 (statistics on annulments, separations and divorce [ENSD]; INE, 2021). Furthermore, the majority of divorces take place after 40 years, reaching its peak in the 60–64 age group with 22%, which is also the case for separations (11%). All this indicates an interrelationship between the couple's breakup, the way in which it occurs and age. Delving deeper into this fact, it is significant that for those people aged 65 and over, the possibility of ending a relationship due to the death of their partner is very likely (60%), with there being differences between men and women (Graph 2) that may largely be explained by the differences in life expectancy according to sex.

5.2. The Breakup Process: Reasons, Decision-Making and Perception of the Consequences

Although the way in which a relationship ends is significant, the reasons that lead to the breakup are key to understanding this social reality. Thus, the classic studies on this subject, which focused on legal separations and divorce, differentiated two main typologies, as seen previously: firstly, those breakups caused by objective factors, related to children, financial issues or addictions, among others. Secondly, the so-called subjective factors, based on aspects such as incompatibility of characters or the existence of infidelity (Becerril, 1999). Thus, Graph 4 shows how aspects linked to boredom or falling out of love are central for understanding the reasons why a relationship ends.

Graph 4

Reasons for ending a relationship according to sex (%)



Source: Own research based on the Spanish General Social Survey (SGSS) (CIS, 2018).

In terms of the first reason, falling out of love is a factor for both men (28%) and women (20%), which is closely linked to previous theoretical contributions such as the work by Illouz (2020) and her interest in the end of love, Bauman's liquid love (2005) or Beck's new forms of love relationships (2001), which make reference to two relevant aspects for this research: risk and love. In terms of the second cause, differences are seen according to sex; while men cite boredom (15%), which can be related to subjective causes, for women it is infidelity (13%), a reason that is more linked to more objective grounds. It is worth highlighting that women, in reference to infidelity, are more inclined than men to consider that it marks the end of the relationship (Ayuso and Faroldi, 2014).

These differences are also seen in the third reason. For men, the difference in goals and interests (12%) occupies the same position, having already been noted in the literature as a significant cause for understanding relationship breakups (Casado et al., 2001). For their part, women indicate boredom (12%) as the third option. As can be seen, this last reason occupies an important place for both men and women, presenting itself as key and which was already highlighted in the study by González and Espinosa (2004), which addressed divorce and its causes in young people.

Lastly, it must be pointed out that reasons such as addictions to alcohol or other substances, and violent behaviour or abuse, are reasons that are given by a greater percentage of women than men.

As can be seen, there are differences in the reasons driving men and women to end a relationship. In this vein, the age variable makes it possible to discern differences and even classify the reasons for ending a relationship (Table 1)

Table 1

Reasons for ending a relationship according to age (%)

	18-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65 and over
Infidelity	17.4	13.0	10.0	5.7	6.6	16.2	2.2	11.1	0.0	3.0
Falling out of love	10.9	29.6	22.5	30.2	27.9	16.2	26.7	33.3	23.8	18.2
Boredom	30.4	9.3	22.5	18.9	6.6	13.5	8.9	5.6	9.5	3.0
Due to children	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.0
Addictions to alcohol, drugs, etc.	0.0	1.9	5.0	1.9	3.3	5.4	0.0	0.0	9.5	9.1
Violent behaviour or abuse	2.2	0.0	2.5	1.9	0.0	0.0	8.9	5.6	0.0	0.0
Jealousy	0.0	9.3	2.5	1.9	6.6	0.0	0.0	5.6	0.0	6.1
Appearance of a new person	6.5	3.7	5.0	7.5	0.0	10.8	2.2	5.6	4.8	3.0
Difference in interests, goals	8.7	9.3	7.5	5.7	9.8	8.1	17.8	5.6	4.8	15.2
Financial issues	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.8	0.0
Lack of communication	6.5	11.1	5.0	3.8	18.0	10.8	8.9	11.1	9.5	3.0
Loss of passion	2.2	3.7	0.0	1.9	3.3	5.4	2.2	0.0	4.8	3.0
Excessive control	0.0	0.0	2.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.1
Other cause	10.9	3.7	7.5	9.4	6.6	5.4	11.1	5.6	4.8	6.1
D/K	2.2	1.9	2.5	5.7	0.0	2.7	4.4	5.6	4.8	0.0
N/R	2.2	3.7	5.0	1.9	11.5	5.4	6.7	5.6	19.0	18.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

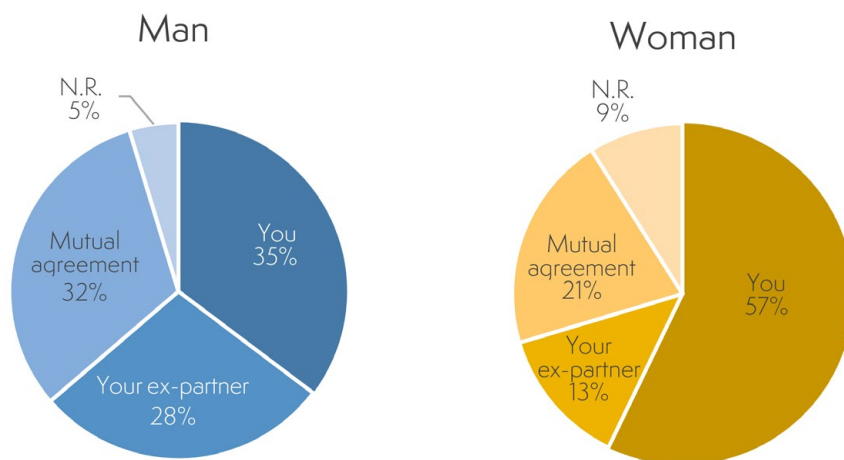
Source: Own research based on the Spanish General Social Survey (SGSS) (CIS, 2018).

In the younger age groups, factors such as falling out of love, infidelity, boredom and jealousy are essential aspects for understanding the end of a relationship. As the focus shifts to older ages, factors such as the appearance of new people or the lack of communication become more relevant, while in the older age groups, addictions or lack of shared interests appear as the main reasons leading to the breakup. These results, following Becerril's (1990) theoretical contributions, indicate that nowadays, subjective aspects, which are more emotional or communicative in nature, are truly key for understanding breakups.

Having covered the ways in which relationships end and the main reasons that lead to it, the interest lies in investigating who initiates the process, whether it is one of the partners or both. The results indicate that, both for men (35.3%) and for women (57.1%), the breakup process is most commonly initiated by one of the partners. In this vein, it is worth highlighting that it is usually the woman who does so more frequently, with a significant difference in comparison to the man (Graph 5). The results obtained are consistent with those provided by the statistics on annulments, separations and divorce [ENSD] (INE), which indicate that it is the woman who tends to initiate the breakup process. However, it could be specified that the fact of who initiates the breakup may have an elevated subjective load that would be interesting to analyse.

Graph 5

Partner who initiates the breakup process according to sex (%)



Source: Own research based on the Spanish General Social Survey (SGSS) (CIS, 2018).

In terms of age (Table 2), the same trend is observed: it is one of the partners who tends to initiate the breakup process, which is particularly evident among the 30–34 age group. Processes of mutual agreement, in which both partners take the initiative, are related to age groups that range from 40 to 54 years. This

may be related to aspects such as child custody and ownership of assets such as jointly owned properties, among others, that may result in the consequences of the breakup being more complex. Nevertheless, the data show a significant fact: there appears to be certain taboo around talking about divorce/breakups in certain population segments (generally those aged over 55 years, as the ‘No Answer’ item response percentages are significantly higher than in the rest of the age groups).

Table 2

Partner who initiates the breakup process according to age (%)

	You	Your ex-partner	Mutual agreement	N/R	Total
18–24	48.9	22.2	26.7	2.2	100
25–29	44.4	25.9	25.9	3.7	100
30–34	65.9	12.2	17.1	4.9	100
35–39	31.4	37.3	27.5	3.9	100
40–44	38.7	16.1	37.1	8.1	100
45–49	47.4	13.2	31.6	7.9	100
50–54	40.9	22.7	34.1	2.3	100
55–60	50.0	22.2	16.7	11.1	100
60–64	38.1	19.0	19.0	23.8	100
65 and over	56.3	12.5	15.6	15.6	100

Source: Own research based on the Spanish General Social Survey (SGSS) (CIS, 2018).

Lastly, in reference to the social perception of relationship breakups, this study addresses the question of whether individuals assume that the way in which others view them is altered and, if so, in what way. Thus, both men and women affirm that after the breakup, the view that is held of them remains the same, with men (28.4%) thinking more commonly than women (23.3%) that this perception has improved (Table 3).

Table 3

How do others perceive us following the breakup? (According to sex, %)

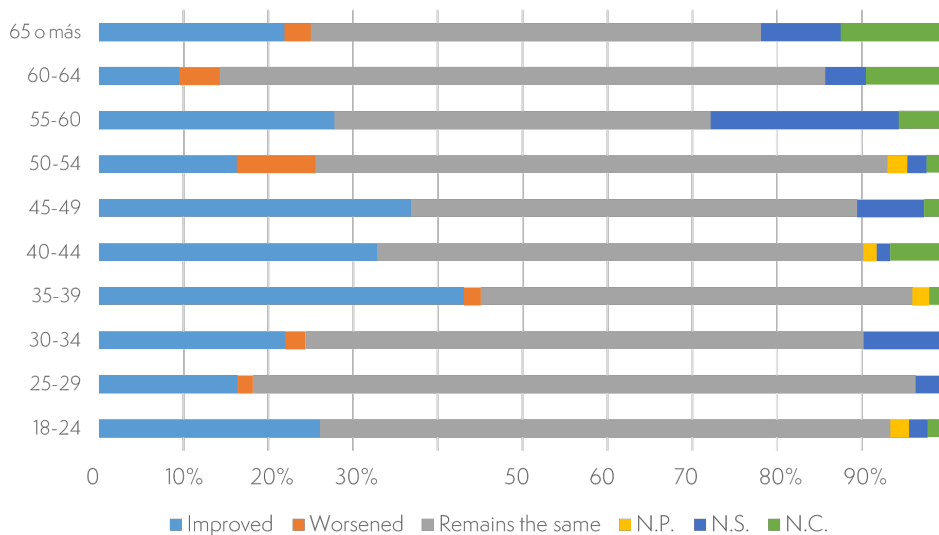
	Better perception	Worse perception	No change	N/A	D/K	N/R	Total
Male	28.4	3.3	60.9	0.9	4.7	1.9	100
Female	23.3	1.6	63.5	1.1	4.8	5.8	100

Source: Own research based on the Spanish General Social Survey (SGSS) (CIS, 2018).

The analysis according to age shows the same trend (Graph 6), with the perception of people after a breakup tending to remain the same. However, there are some insights worth mentioning. The 35–49 age group tends to believe that the perception improves, while those individuals aged 50–54 are, without question, those who believe, to the greatest extent, that it worsens. Likewise, a fact highlighted previously is noted: there appears to be certain taboo around talking about divorce/breakups when observing age groups over 55 years.

Graph 6

Perception after breakup according to age (%)



Source: Own research based on the Spanish General Social Survey (SGSS) (CIS, 2018).

These results show that there has been a transformation in reference to the social perception of the breakup, which does not appear to be a stigma. However, among older population segments, there is a certain tendency to not respond to the question, which undoubtedly opens an avenue for analysis.

6. Conclusions

The aim of this research was to analyse relationship breakup processes and the main reasons in Andalusia. Quantitative methodology was employed using data from the Spanish General Social Survey (SGSS; CIS, 2018).

Firstly, it can be concluded that the profound social transformations in recent decades, in Spain and Andalusia, have led to a greater socialisation of breakups. The main outcome of this is that breakup processes are more normalised and are not a social stigma for those who initiate them. Furthermore, this normalisation is based on emotional aspects that fluctuate in a relatively simple way (Jiménez-Cabello and Ayuso, 2022).

Secondly, divorce and legal separation have occupied the framework of analysis and research in terms of breakups, both at a Spanish national level and in the self-governing region of Andalusia. However, as the results show, in Andalusia the majority of relationship breakups happen outside this sphere: there are more breakups without a legal tie than divorces and/or separations. Undoubtedly, this is part of the result of the profound transformations in society in general, and in the institution of family in particular (Ayuso, 2019; Sánchez and Bote, 2009), which has affected the forms of union between two people. Looking at the data provided by the Institute of Statistics and Cartography of Andalusia (IECA) is enough to prove, for example, the evolution of the number of registered couples in recent years.

To understand this phenomenon, both sex and age become key aspects. Breakups are present in all population segments. If the way in which a couple starts and ends a relationship has changed, so too have the reasons. In Andalusia, aspects such as falling out of love, lack of communication and boredom are central for understanding the reason behind breakups, finding an association with that higher degree of individualism that can be observed in society (Bauman, 2003; Giddens, 1992).

Thirdly, with regard to the person who initiates the breakup, it should be noted that it is predominantly the woman who does so. This aspect is consistent with the results obtained by Jiménez-Cabello and Ayuso (2022) in their study on relationship breakups in Spain. One of the explanations of this phenomenon may lie in the fact that women, in general, believe that the perception of them either remains the same or is more positive following the breakup. Furthermore, as regards social perception, it is worth noting that this appears to be of greater significance for those people in older age groups. Despite it seeming, in general, that ending a relationship does not lead to a worsening of the perception that others have of that person, it is true that older people indicate that it may bring about a negative change, which may stall the person or stop them making the decision. This idea is reinforced with the number of people aged 55 and over who do not respond to the questions related to this topic.

What is really clear is that, in Andalusia, breakups are present across all generations, with this event being experienced with greater normalisation than in the past. The factors for breakups have also changed and today, they are mainly emotional, with all age groups having to work more on managing their emotions.

While truly interesting results have been obtained, this study certainly has some limitations, including the fact that the quantitative data enable inferences to be generalised, but they do not allow for the examination of individuals' beliefs, opinions or attitudes. Furthermore, there are no previous data that enable the analysis of the evolution of the different modalities of breakup, which would give rise to a better understanding of this event. It is precisely these limitations that open the door to future lines of research in the development of statistics that allow for temporal comparisons and comparisons of qualitative work, among others, that give rise to deepening the knowledge of the subject in Andalusia. Likewise, it would be interesting to have more current data that enable the direction of the results in an ever-changing society to be visualised.

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