Marriage & Health, Especially at Older Ages

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Old Story: Marriage Improves Health

• Physical health & mortality, esp. men

• Mental health of both men and women
Old Story: Marriage Improves Health

• Physical health & mortality, esp. men
  – Self-rated health
  – Disease incidence and prevalence

• Mental health of both men and women
  – Depression
  – Alcohol Abuse
Challenges & Controversies

• Expand the way we look at production of health

• Expand our notion of “health”

• Use conceptual framework from NSHAP
Health is Produced in the Dyad

- For most people, dyad is marriage
- Unpartnered may lack some of the inputs to health
- Bio-psychosocial Model of Health
Expanded Definition of “Health”

• Physical health
• Mental health
• Satisfaction with life or “happiness”
• Physiological functioning
• Sexuality
While health alters attitude, opportunity and physical capacity for intimate activities, sexual expression is a key component of healthy aging.
Partnerships

• IF health is produced in the dyad
• IF sexuality is an important component of health
• THEN it is important to look at partnering
• Especially at older ages, when things are in flux
Probability of Having a Partner, by Gender & Health

![Graph showing the probability of having a partner by gender and health status over age. The graph compares men and women, with different lines representing varying health statuses: Very Good/Excellent, Good, and Poor/Fair. The y-axis represents the proportion with a spouse or other romantic relationship, ranging from 0.0 to 1.0. The x-axis represents age, ranging from 55 to 85 years.](image_url)
Prevalence of Sexual Activity (%)
Probability of Sex in Last 12 Months for those with a Partner, by Health

* among those with a spouse or other romantic relationship
Relationship between marriage & health depends

- On marital quality
- On gender
- On race/ethnicity
- On age/stage in the life course
- On dimension of health
- On history of marriage/partnership
- All of these are interrelated
Marital Status and Health

• Benefits of marriage (and costs of marital loss) may differ for blacks than whites
  – The economic well-being of black wives less tied to marriage
  – Networks of black mothers less marriage based
  – Divorce/partner loss more common

Illustrative preliminary findings: Bobby Das
Women’s partnership & health: Odds Ratios

Ref: Stable partner
- Divorced/separated
- Widowed
- Never married
- Informal partner

Odds Ratios for:
- Depression
- Wakes up unrested
- Any smoking

Graph showing the odds ratios for each category compared to the stable partner.
Women’s Odds Ratios (contd.)

- Heart rate high
- Systolic bp ≥ 140 mm Hg
- Waist > 35 inches

Ref: Stable partner

- Divorced/separated
- Widow
- Never married
- Informal partner
Men’s partnership & health: Odds Ratios

Unhappiness

- Divorced/separated
- Widowed
- Never married
- Informal partner

Binge drinking

- Divorced/separated
- Widowed
- Never married
- Informal partner

Any smoking

- Divorced/separated
- Widowed
- Never married
- Informal partner

Ref: Stable partner
Men’s Odds Ratios (contd.)

Ref: Stable partner
- Divorced/separated
- Widowed
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Heart rate high

CRP high
Ethnicity and Partnership: Women’s Odds Ratios (ref: stable partner)

- **Widowed**
  - Black women: [Bar Graph]
  - White women: [Bar Graph]

- **Divorced/separated**
  - Black women: [Bar Graph]
  - White women: [Bar Graph]

**Systolic bp ≥ 140 mm Hg**

- **Smoking/Cotinine**
  - Divorced/separated: [Bar Graph]
  - Widow: [Bar Graph]

- **Unhappiness**
  - Divorced/separated: [Bar Graph]
  - Widow: [Bar Graph]
Marital Quality & Health

• Poor quality marriages may bring few resources
• Poor quality marriages may carry high costs
• Some evidence suggests poor quality marriage worse than none at all
## Relation satisfaction and sexual problems: Odds Ratios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lacked interest in sex</th>
<th>Unable to achieve orgasm</th>
<th>Experienced pain during sex</th>
<th>Sex not pleasurable</th>
<th>Anxious about performance</th>
<th>Trouble lubricating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women's Relationship Satisfaction</strong></td>
<td>0.7* (0.5-0.9)</td>
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<td>0.6** (0.4-0.8)</td>
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<td><strong>Men's Relationship Satisfaction</strong></td>
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<td>0.7* (0.6-0.9)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Challenges & Questions

• Marriage-like relationships
• Other sources of resources
• Other relationships
• Non-relationship sources of intimacy