The Role of Union Dissolution and Repartnering on Health Later in Life

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Background
• The divorce rate among people 50 and older has doubled since 1990, whereas widowhood is on the decline (Brown & Lin, 2012)
• Widowhood is often detrimental for well-being, but we know little about the link between divorce and well-being or whether repartnering can ameliorate the negative consequences of dissolution (Carr & Springer, 2010)
• It is also important to consider gender because men tend to reap more benefits from marriage than women (Simon, 2002)

Prior Research
• Marital loss often increases emotional distress, whereas marital gain decreases emotional distress (Simon, 2002)
• On average, divorced individuals report more depressive symptoms and alcohol problems than those who remain married (Reczek, Pudrovska, Carr, Thomeer, & Umberson, 2016)
• Women tend to manifest poorer well-being through depression, while men often exhibit this through heavier alcohol use (Simon, 2002)
• Alcohol use tends to be strongly associated with remarriage and divorce, although this may vary for men and women (Reczek, et al., 2016)
• Typically, divorced individuals are more likely to repartner than widowed individuals, and men are more likely to repartner than women (Brown, Lin, Hammersmith, & Wright, forthcoming)

Research Questions
• How do gray divorced individuals compare to widowed individuals on depressive symptoms and alcohol use?
• What is the role of repartnering when examining depressive symptoms or alcohol use?
• Is there any variation by gender?

Data and Method
• Health and Retirement Study, 2010
• Older adults who report a divorce or widowhood after the age of 50
• Sample size: 4,884
• 710 divorced men and 755 divorced women
• 859 widowers and 2,560 widows
• Analytic Strategy
  • Weighted means and proportions
  • Bivariate tests

Discussion
• Divorced individuals and widowed individuals who repartner have lower levels of depressive symptoms than divorced individuals and widowed individuals who remain single
• Regardless of repartnering status, divorced women report higher levels of depressive symptoms than divorced men
• Divorced individuals are heavier drinkers than widowed individuals
• Divorced men who remain single report the most alcohol use
• Widowers consume higher levels of alcohol than widows regardless of repartnering status
• Results are consistent when adjusting for age

Limitations
• All measures are captured at a single point in time
• The analyses do not account for cohabitation dissolution

Future Directions
• Future directions for this research include extending the study to incorporate multivariate analyses

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