

Later Life Marital Dissolution and Repartnership Status: A National Portrait

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Background

- A growing share of marital dissolutions after age 50 are voluntary
 - The gray divorce rate has doubled since 1990
 - Widowhood is declining
- Our goal is to provide a national portrait of individuals who experience marital dissolution after age 50
 - Compare gray divorce vs. widowhood (accounting for repartnership)

Rationale

- Widowhood is linked to poorer outcomes, but the comparison group is the continuously married
- How does divorce after age 50 compare with widowhood after age 50?
 - H₀: Both are stressful life events, so there could be few differences
 - H_{A1}: Widowhood is involuntary, but there are stronger institutional supports available
 - H_{A2}: Divorce involves decision-making and can be a turning point, but it is costly
- Simple comparisons between the divorced and widowed are misguided
 - Differential selection into subsequent repartnership

The Present Study

- Compare those who experience marital dissolution through divorce versus widowhood after age 50, accounting for repartnership status
- Repartnership should be more common following gray divorce
- Marital dissolution type and repartnership status should play a larger role for women
- These associations should hold net of factors (demographics, economics, and health) linked to later life marital status

Data and Sample

- Health and Retirement Study (HRS), 1992-2010
- The HRS is a longitudinal study of a nationally representative, continuous cohort of individuals born before 1960 in the U.S.
- Analytic sample: 4,886 respondents who experienced marital dissolution through either divorce or widowhood at age 50 or older and were interviewed in 2010
 - 1,465 gray divorce
 - 3,421 widowhood

Analytic Strategy

- Establish the prevalence of divorce versus widowhood separately for women and men across four age groups
- Estimate logistic regression models of the competing risks of being remarried or cohabiting vs. unpartnered (ref) for women and men to test whether repartnership status varies by marital dissolution type, net of other factors
- All analyses were conducted in Stata using svy commands to adjust for complex sample design

Marital Dissolution by Type

Figure 1. Marital Dissolution by Type and Gender

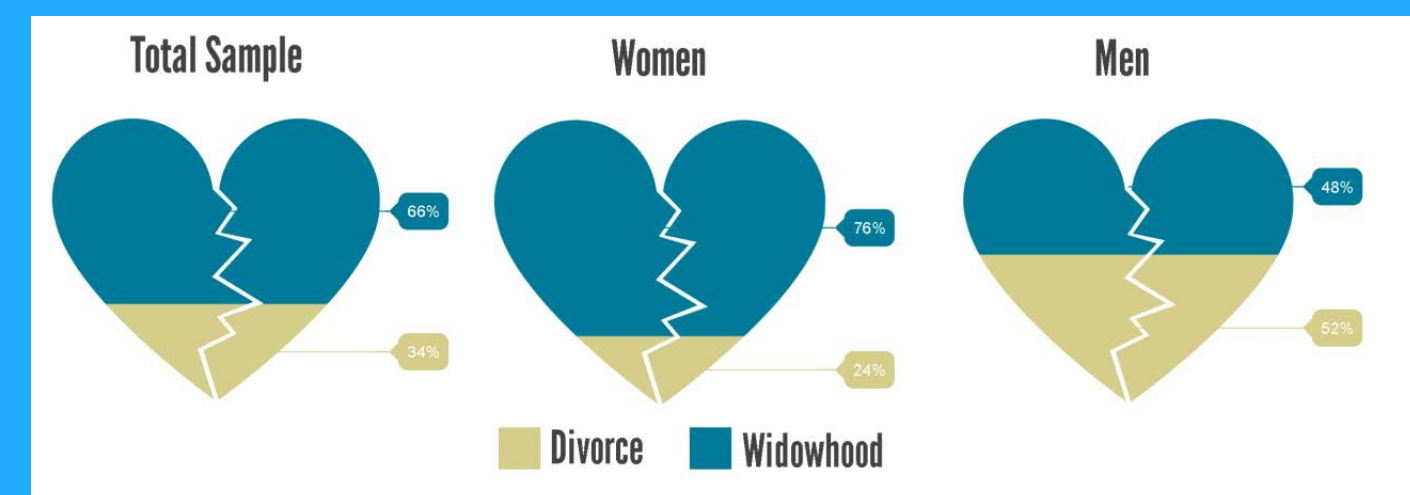


Figure 2. Marital Dissolution Type by Age Group for Women

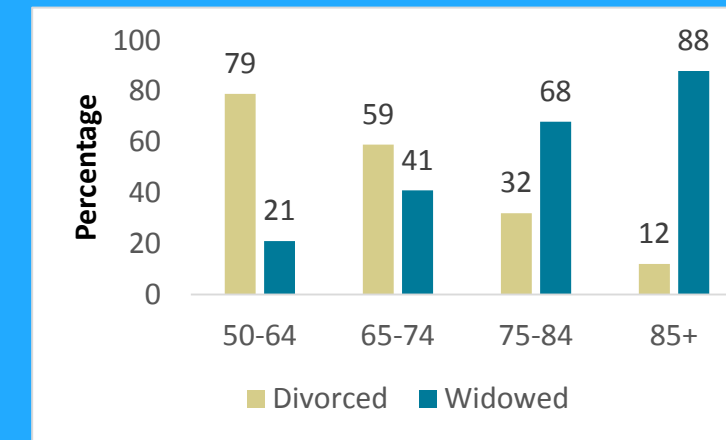


Figure 3. Marital Dissolution Type by Age Group for Men

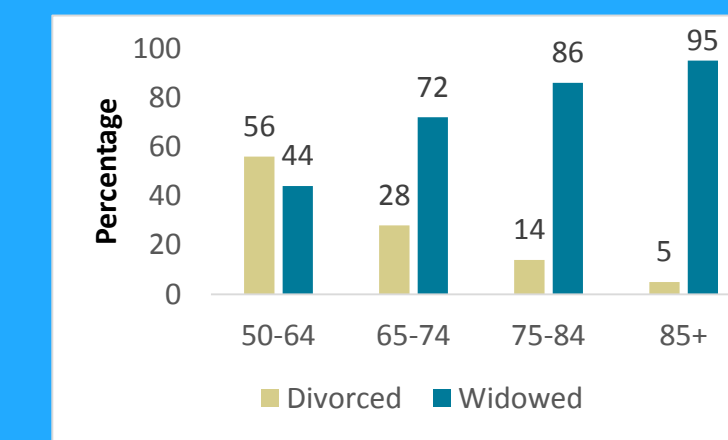


Figure 4. Repartnership Status by Dissolution Type and Gender

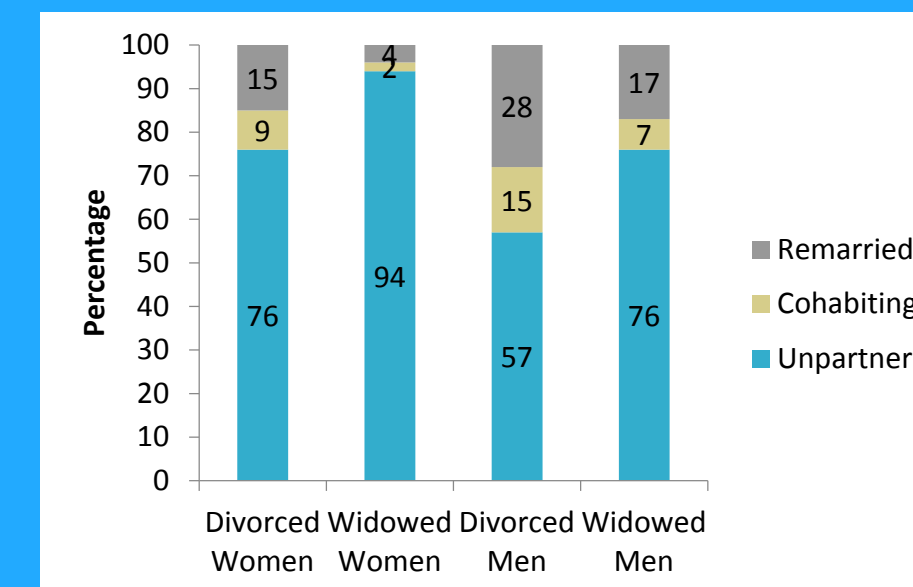


Table 1. Relative Risk Ratios from Multinomial Logistic Regression of Repartnered Status for Women and Men Following Later Life Marital Dissolution

	Women		Men	
	Remarried vs. Unpartnered	Cohabiting vs. Unpartnered	Remarried vs. Unpartnered	Cohabiting vs. Unpartnered
<i>Marital Dissolution Pathway</i>				
Divorced (vs. widowed)	2.70***	2.07*	1.19	1.34
Years since dissolution	1.10***	1.05**	1.13***	1.05*
Dissolved remarriage	1.88**	1.20	1.02	1.26
<i>Demographic Characteristics</i>				
Age (centered)	0.90***	0.90***	0.97*	0.96*
White (ref)				
Black	0.68	0.95	0.98	0.70
Hispanic	0.67	0.47	2.16*	0.51
Other race	1.04	0.55	3.12*	2.77
Any resident child (ref)				
Nonresidential children only	1.70*	6.98***	1.03	3.76***
Childless	0.13*	2.75	0.19**	1.02
<i>Economic Resources</i>				
Less than high school	0.91	0.89	0.88	2.11*
High school (ref)				
Some college	0.77	1.07	0.99	0.91
College	1.31	1.21	1.58*	1.40
Full time employment (ref)				
Part time employment	1.19	1.03	0.83	1.33
Not in the labor force	3.02*	1.38	0.66*	0.50*
Owens home	1.44	0.82	3.42***	1.20
In debt	1.56	0.56	1.29	1.58
\$0 - 50,000 (ref)				
\$50,001 - 100,000	2.25*	0.63	0.79	0.68
\$100,001 - 250,000	1.75*	0.52	0.86	0.83
\$250,001 or more	2.03*	1.33	0.96	1.03
<i>Health</i>				
Has health insurance	3.35*	0.84	1.15	0.55
Self-rated health	1.42***	1.14	1.13	1.14
Constant	0.001***	0.02***	0.05***	0.08*
Unweighted N	3,316	3,316	1,570	1,570

* p < .10, ** p < .05, *** p < .01, **** p < .001

Discussion

- Older adults increasingly experience marital dissolution through gray divorce, not widowhood
 - This shift foretells growth in repartnership
 - Gerontologists should widen their lens to include gray divorce
 - >50% of men's dissolutions are through divorce, not widowhood
 - ~25% of women's dissolutions are through divorce
- Marital dissolution type is linked to subsequent repartnership status
 - Divorced women twice as likely to be repartnered as widowed women
 - Divorced and widowed men exhibit similar levels of repartnership

Limitations

- Repartnered status was captured at a single point in time
- Cohabitation dissolution was not examined
- The HRS does not measure non-coresidential repartnerships (e.g., dating or LAT relationships)

Future Directions

- Examine the role of marital dissolution type and repartnership status for health and well-being
- Investigate the predictors of repartnership after a later life marital dissolution