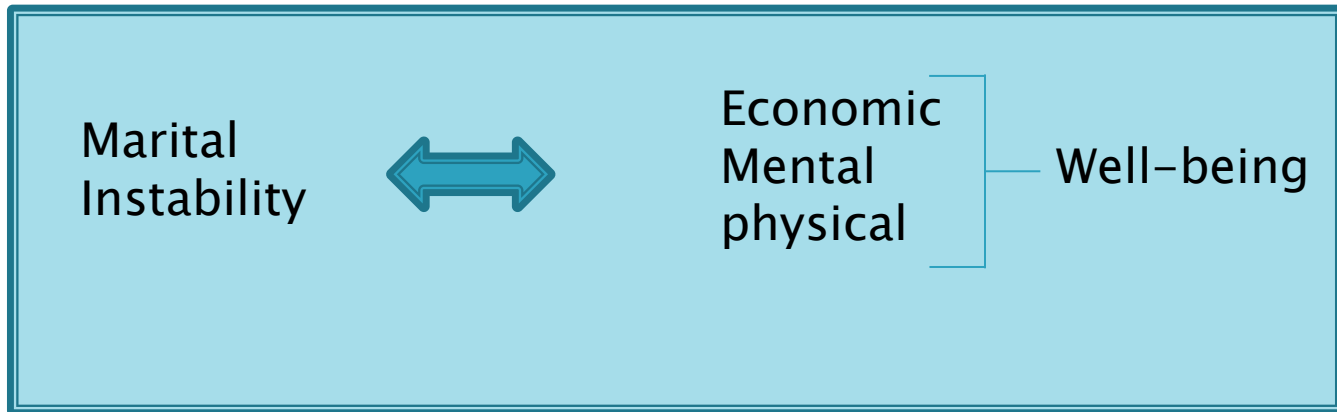


Measuring Marital and Union Dissolution

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Accurate measurement of marital dissolution is important



Social Change & shifting meaning of marriage

Previous Findings

1. Data on marital dissolution produce consistent estimates

Recent versus distant events

Survey context

Vital statistics vs survey estimates

2. Noisy at the individual level

3. Lack of complete data on parental marital dissolution for children

4. Lack of complete data on cohabitation age 45 & for children

Measuring Marital Dissolution

$$\text{Crude Divorce Rate} = \frac{\text{\# divorces}}{\text{\# married people}}$$

Period measure that can fluctuate substantially year-to-year

Doesn't measure marital dissolution.

Describes populations, not marriages

Measuring Marital Dissolution

Cohort estimate = % of marriages that end in 5, 10, or 30 years

Adjusts for marital duration

Based on survey data on dissolution

Need timing of marriage, timing of separation/divorce

Historical



Measuring Marital Dissolution

Period lifetable estimate = % of marriages that end in 5, 10, or 30 years

Synthetic based on duration-specific probability of divorce in a given period

Need data on when marriage occurred and on whether separation/divorce

Measuring Marital Dissolution

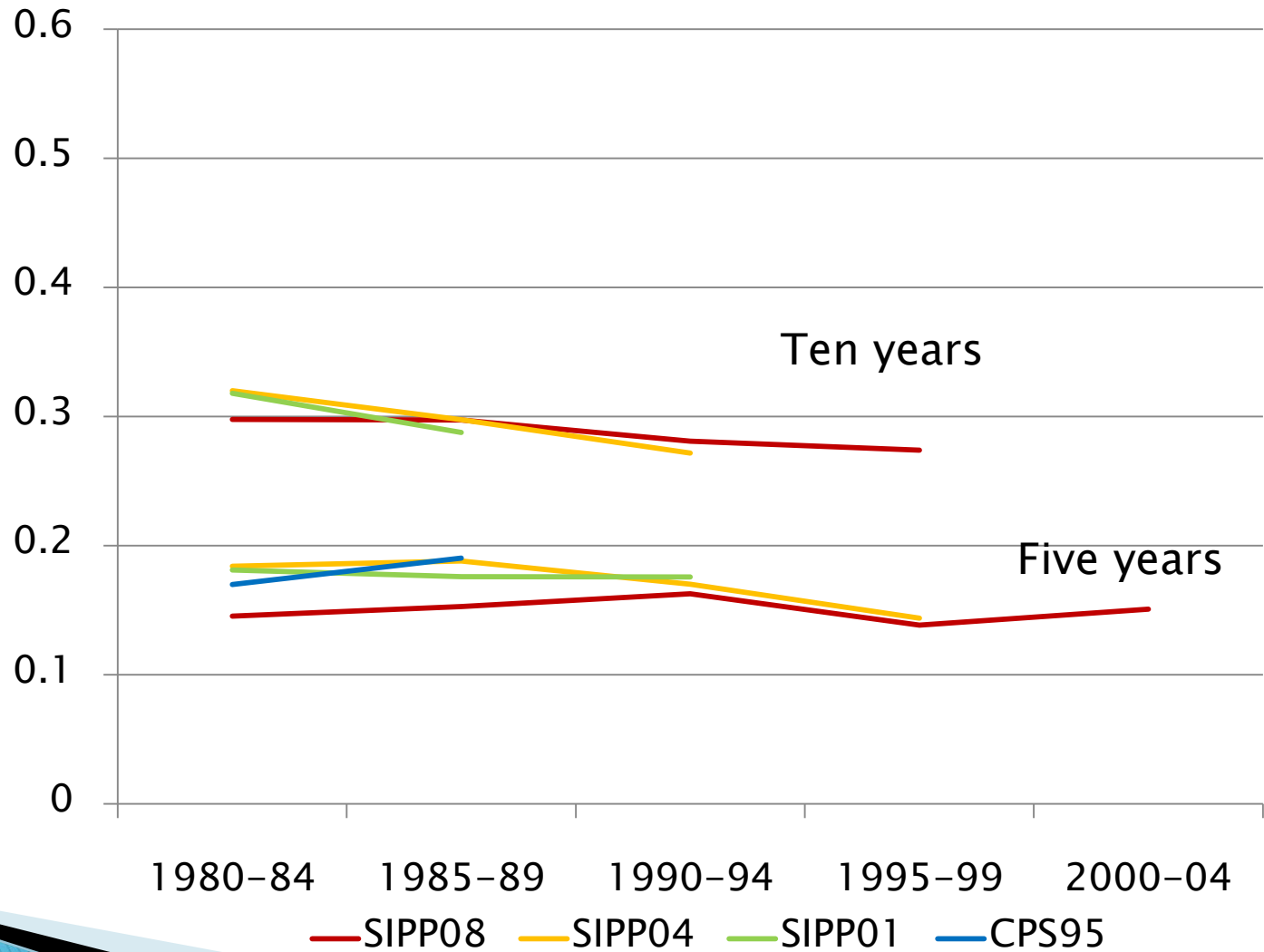
Children's experiences of marital dissolution

1984 estimate – 2 of 5 born to married parents would experience end of that marriage.

Half of all children experience a single-parent family

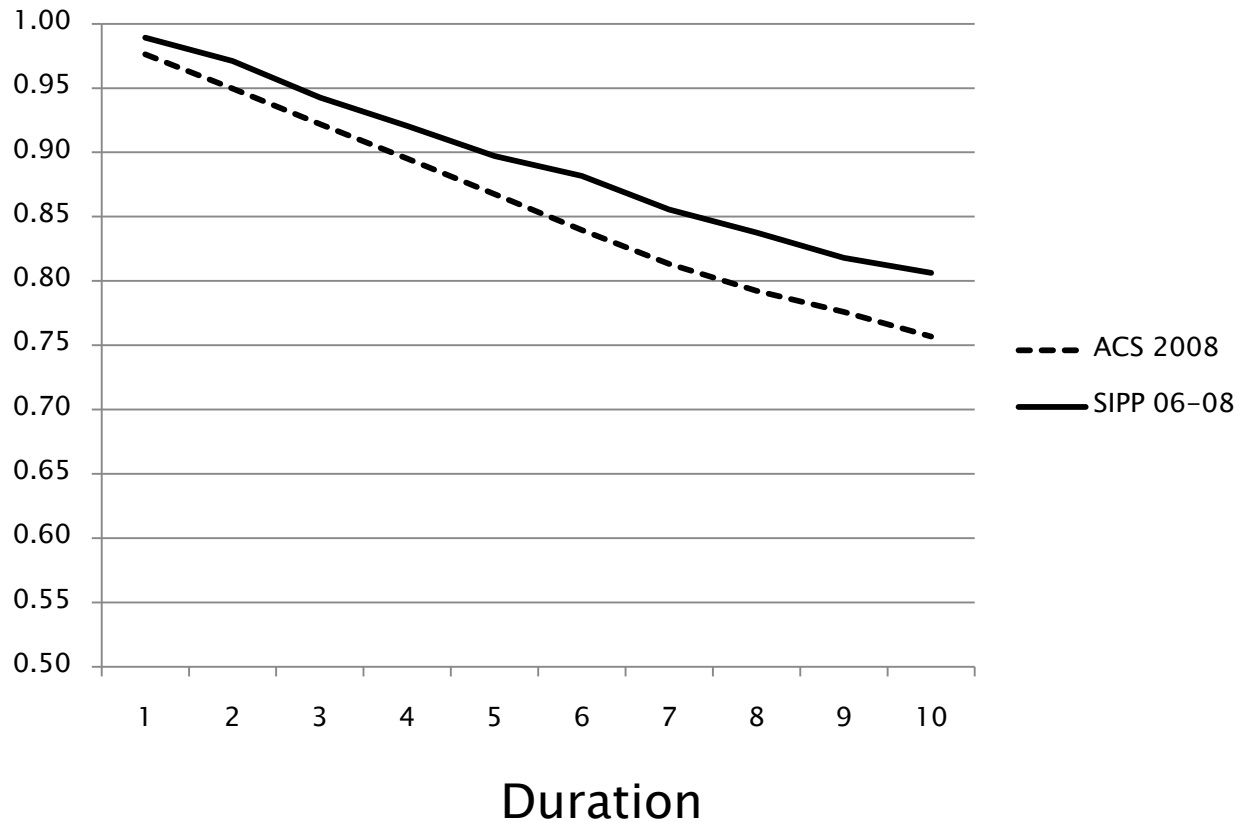
Need data on birth month & year of all children, marriage month & year for all mothers, marital dissolution month & year for all mothers' marriages.

Data Sources CPS/SIPP



Data Sources ACS

Period estimates of % of marriages intact by duration, ACS 08 & SIPP 08



Summary of Sources on marital dissolution

NLSY, Add Health – describe the experiences of a single cohort

SIPP – full marital history, marital dissolution

ACS – large sample good for differentials in past 12–24 months

NSFG – full marital history up to age 45

Relationship instability

NSFG provides only source to describe cohabitation over child-bearing years across periods

Upper age limit of 45 – Doesn't represent experiences of middle adulthood

Doesn't represent experiences of children



Important questions we can't currently answer with available data

- 1. What percentage of children will experience their parents' separation/divorce before reaching adulthood?*
- 2. What percentage of children will live in a unmarried mother household while growing up?*

How to fix?

Add Fertility Histories to SIPP

Provide access to month and year of birth, marriage, & marital dissolution

Important questions we can't currently answer with available data

3. What percentage of children will experience a step-parent family?

4. How much household instability will children experience while growing up?

5. How different are these experiences by maternal education?

How to fix?

Add Fertility Histories to SIPP

Provide access to month and year of birth, marriage, & marital dissolution

Extend age limit of NSFG to 55 or 60

Or, add cohabitation history to SIPP

Summary

Data on marital dissolution are good, if noisy

The ACS is a remarkable new data source

Data on the relevant aspects of children's experiences are severely lacking

Add complete fertility history to SIPP

Provide secure access to data on months of transitions.

Still, need more information on children's experiences of cohabitation.

Increase upper age limit on NSFG to 55 or 60, or add cohabitation histories to SIPP

Thank you!