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# Marital and Parental Roles and Transitions: Effects on Health

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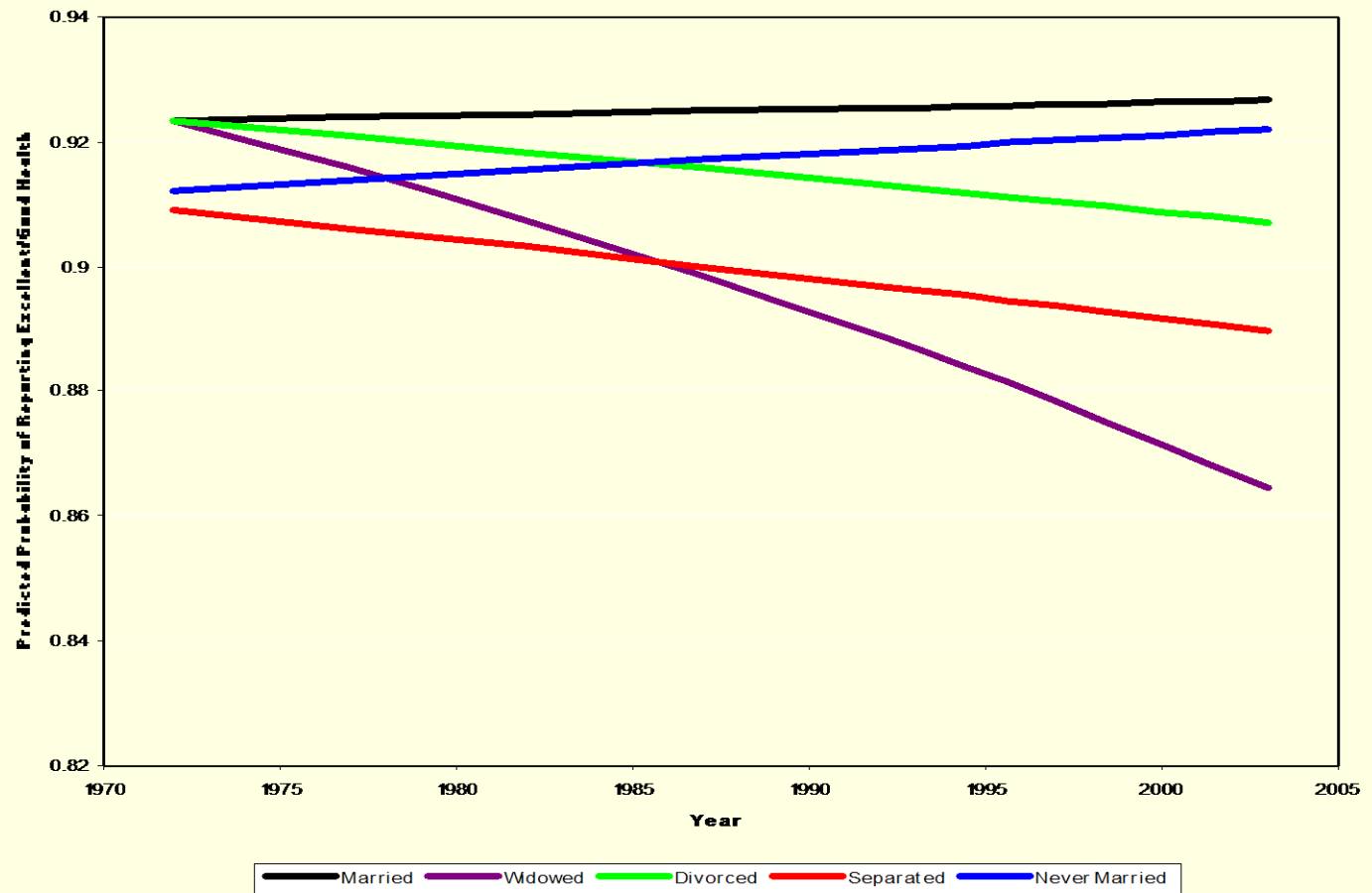
# How Family Relationships Affect Health

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- Psychosocial Mechanisms:
  - Social support
  - Mental Health
  - Mastery
  - Stress
- Behavioral Mechanisms:
  - Social control, time constraints, stress & health behavior
- Socioeconomic mechanisms: financial resources or strains
- Biological mechanisms:
  - Cardiovascular and immune functioning

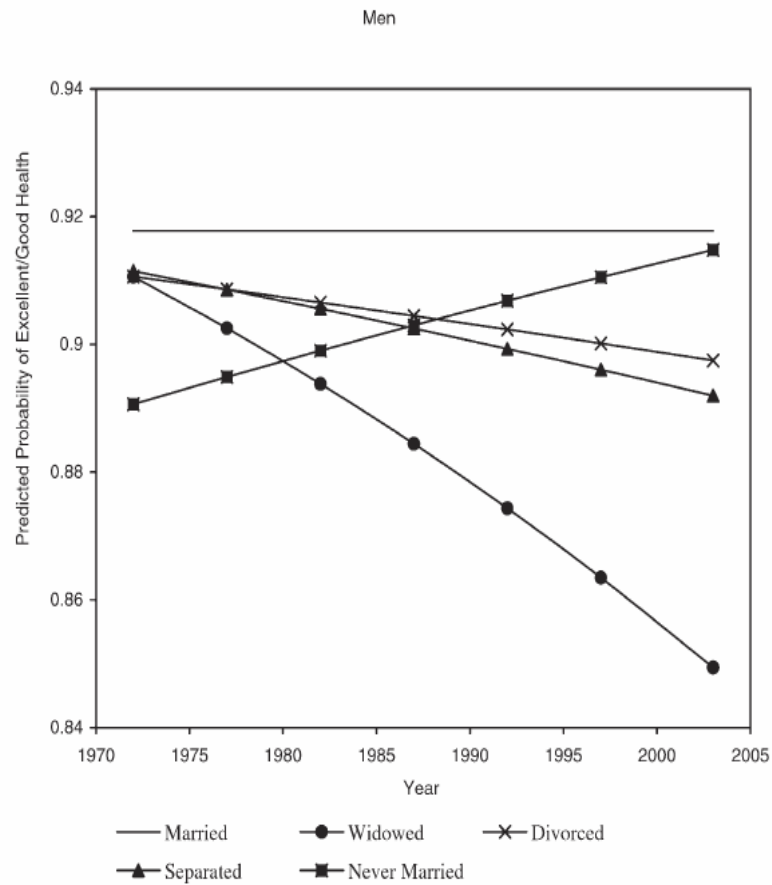
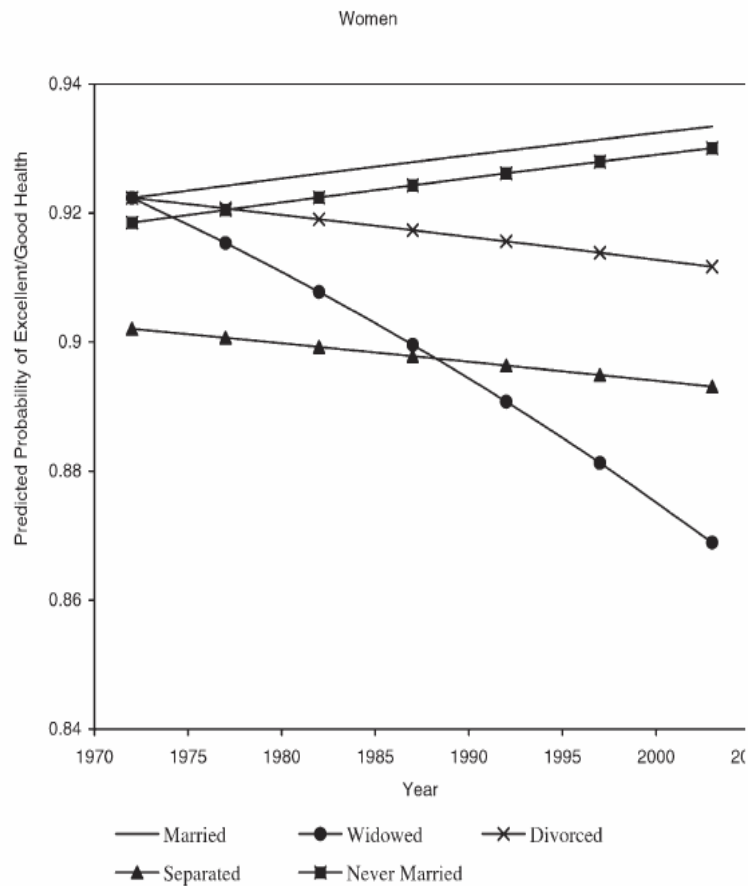
# Marital Status and Health, 1972-2003

## Non-Hispanic Whites



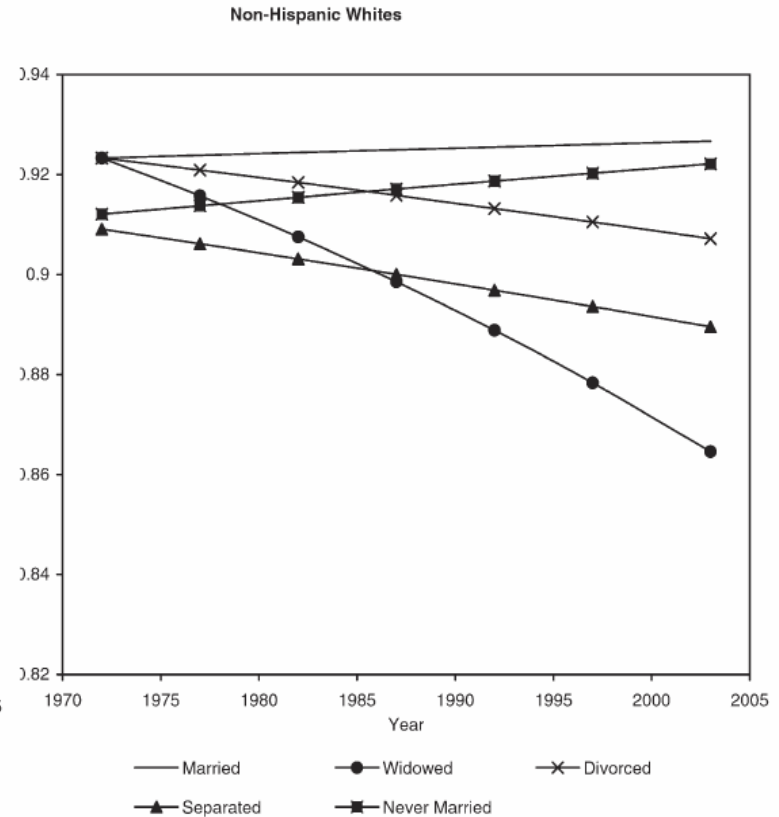
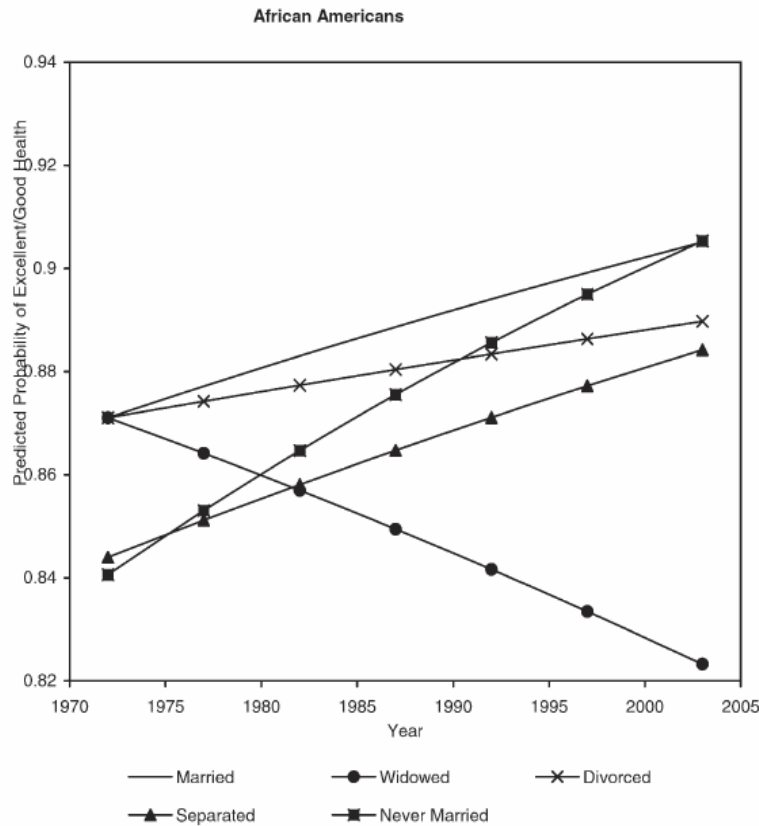
# Trends in Self-Rated Health by Marital Status and Gender, 1972-2003

(Liu & Umberson, JHSB 2008)



# Trends in Self-Rated Health by Marital Status and Race, 1972-2003

(Liu & Umberson)

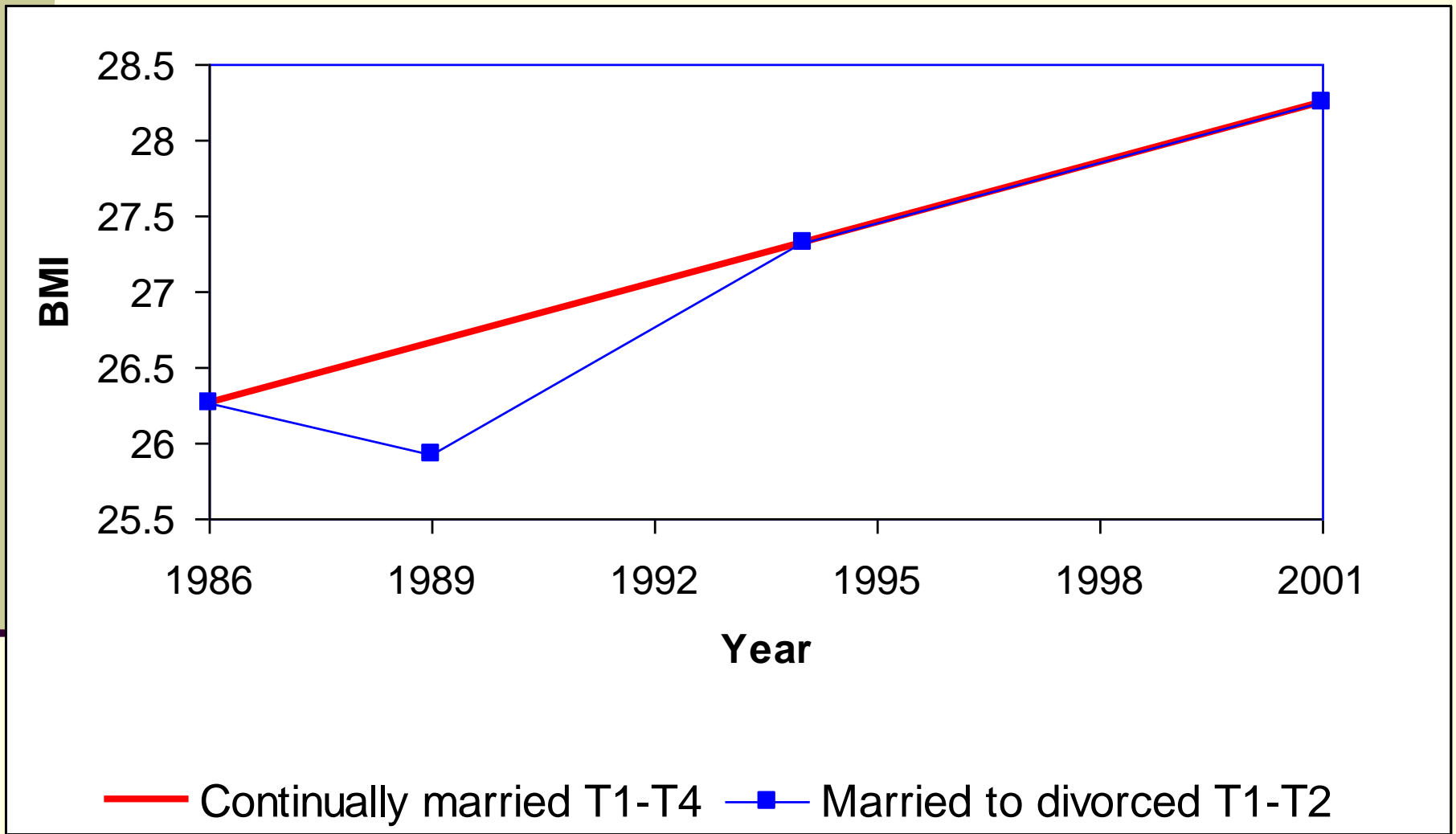


# Marital Status or Marital Transitions?

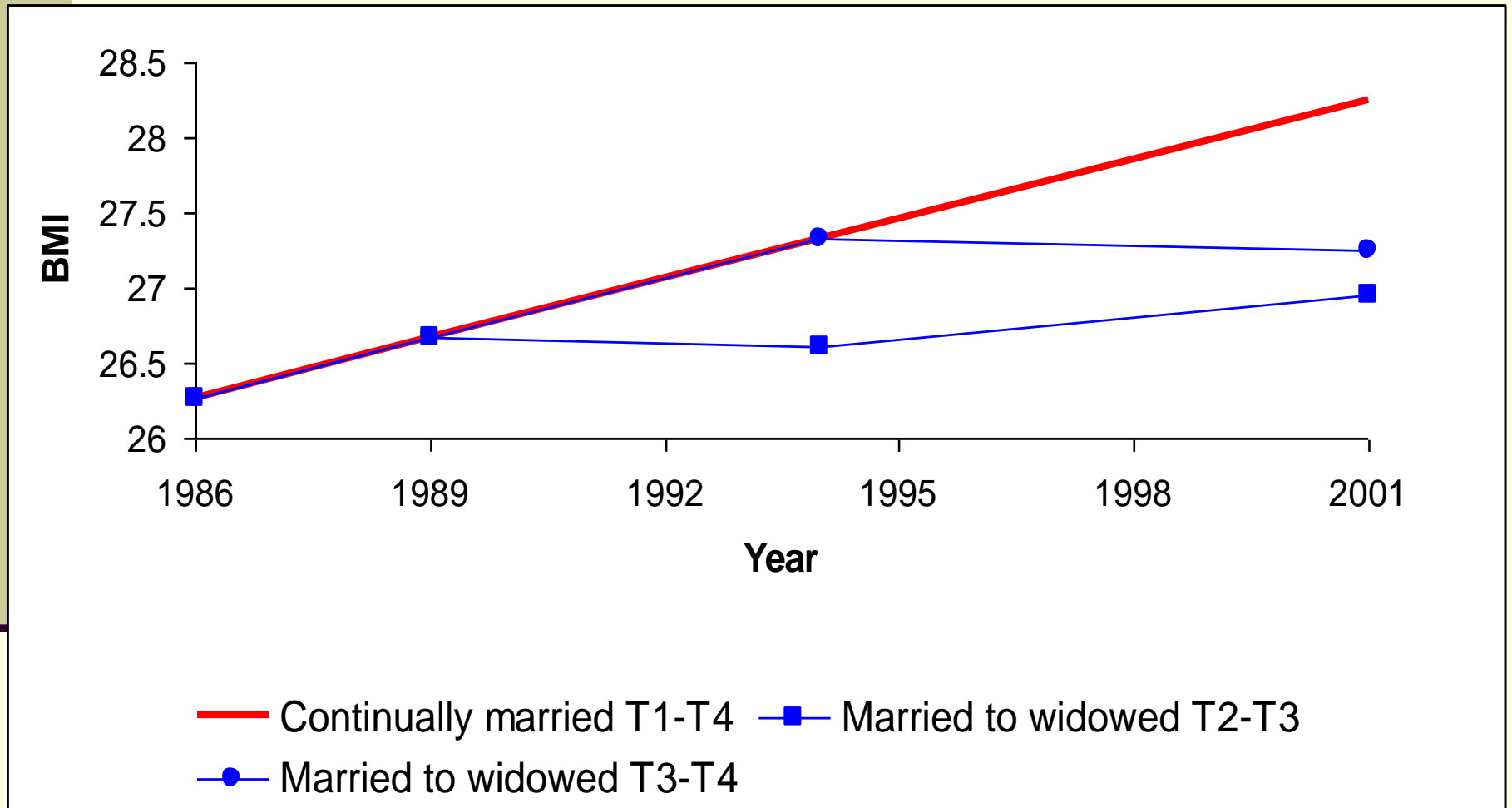
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- Stronger effects of marital transitions than marital status.
- Effects dissipate over time, perhaps especially for the divorced.
- Studies on mental health show a similar pattern.
- Effects on health behavior.

# Weight Change (in BMI units) for Continually Married and Married-to-Divorced/Separated (Umberson et al. JHSB, forthcoming)



## Weight Change (in BMI units) for Continually Married and Married-to-Widowed (Umberson et al. JHSB, forthcoming)





# Crisis Within? Stress Within Marriage Matters

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- Marital strain accelerates decline in health over time.
- These adverse effects are greater at older ages.
- Strained marriage worse for health than divorce.
- Loss of strained relationship, effects on mental health.

# Parental Status and Health

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- Parenthood associated with health behavior, health, and well-being
- Parental roles affect marital/relationship quality and relationship quality affects health
- Parenthood less tied to marriage than in the past
- Parental stress and effects of parenthood on health depend on marital status

# Parent/Child Ties: Effects on Health Over the Life Course

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## YOUNG CHILDREN:

- Literature emphasizes stress and time constraints
- Health behavior: costs and benefits
- Parental stress affects marital quality
- Parental stress higher for unmarried parents

## ADULT CHILDREN:

- Children an important source of social control, social support, caregiving. May alleviate effects of widowhood on health.
- Widowed with adult children lower mortality and better health than childless widowed.

# Family Ties: A Double-Edged Sword

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- Social integration, social support, social control: benefit health
- Stress and conflict: undermine health
- Relationship loss (stress) undermines health
- Some family structures associated with more social support; more stress
- Unmarried parents at particular disadvantage

# Next Steps

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- Marital status in relation to parental status in effects on health.
- Focus on transitions, especially multiple transitions.
- Consider different categories of “unmarried.”
- Life course perspective—marital status and transitions, parental status and transitions over time. Cumulative processes.

# RELATIONSHIPS AND HEALTH

