

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

Elizabeth Kovert (ekovert@bgsu.edu), Matthew R. Wright, Anna M. Hammersmith, Susan L. Brown, I-Fen Lin
Department of Sociology
Bowling Green State University

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

Figure 1. Repartnering by Dissolution Type and Gender

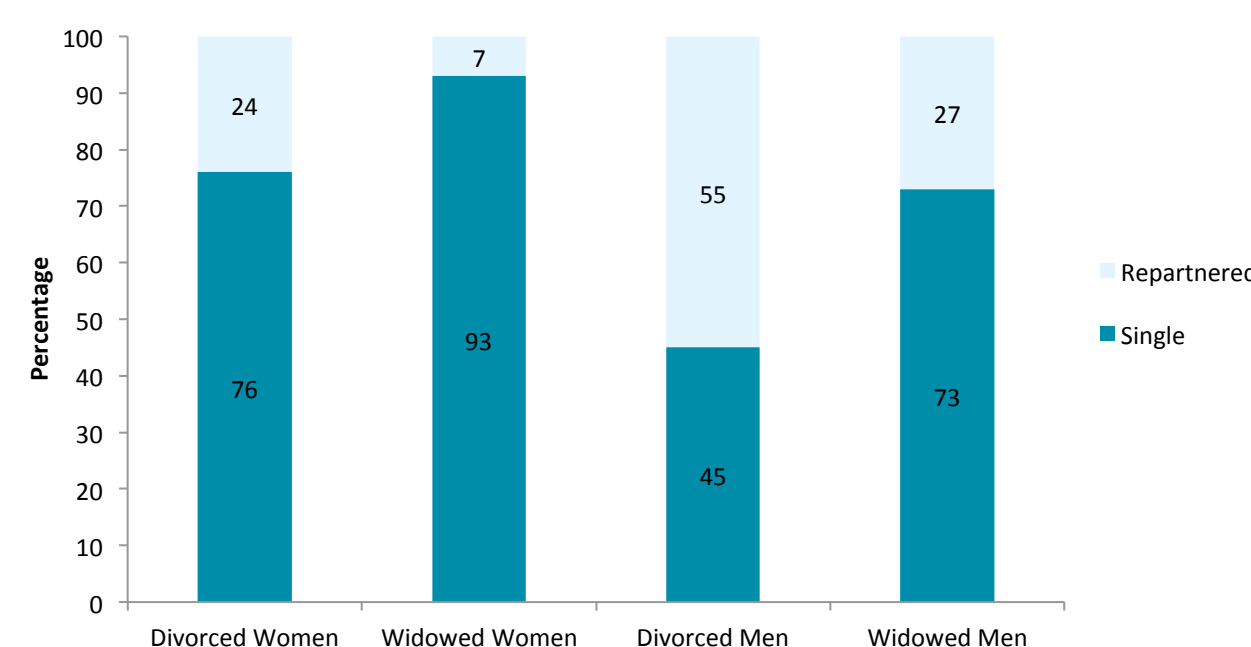


Figure 2. Depressive Symptoms by Dissolution and Repartnering

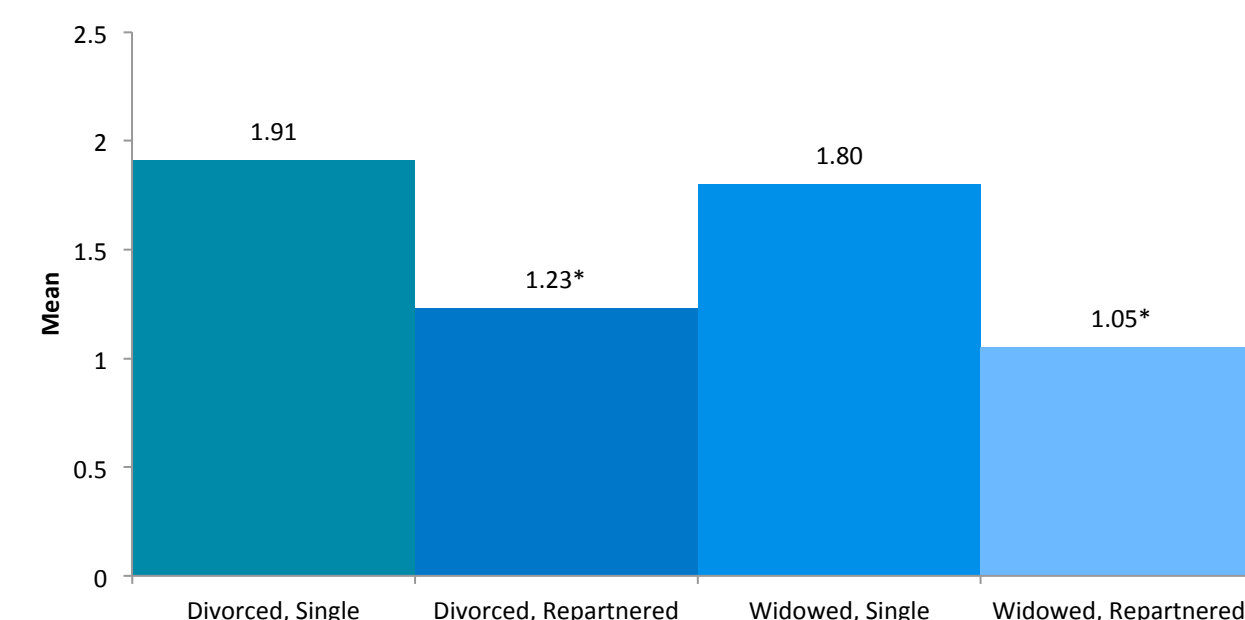


Figure 3. Depressive Symptoms for Dissolution and Repartnering by Gender

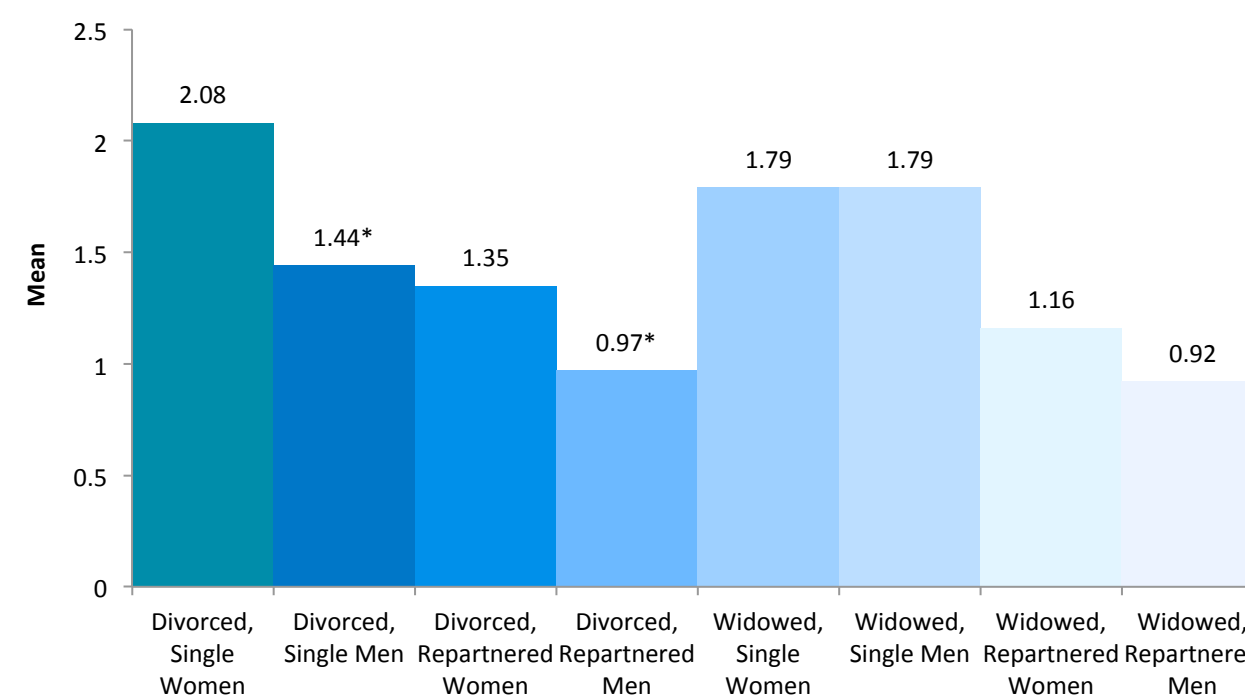
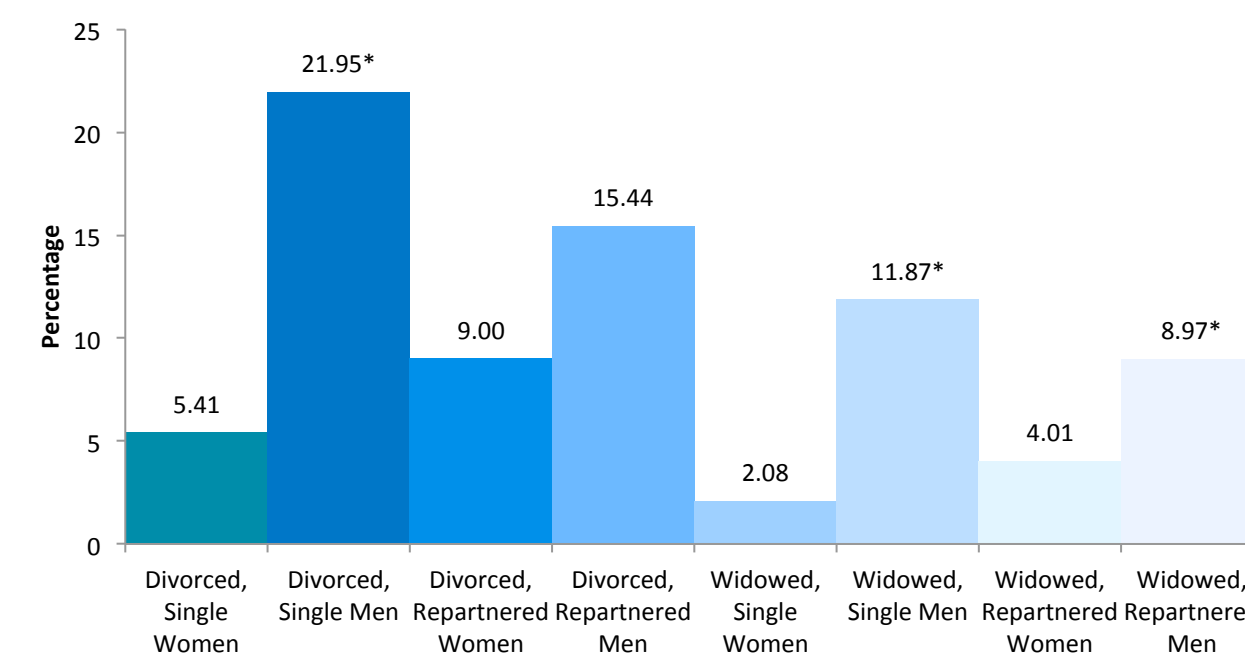


Figure 4. Alcohol Use for Dissolution and Repartnering by Gender



Asterisks signify gender differences within dissolution groups at $p < 0.05$

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

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by a grant to Brown and Lin from the National Institute on Aging (R15AG047588). Support also was provided by the Center for Family and Demographic Research, Bowling Green State University, which has core funding from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (P2CHD050959).