

# The Effects of Relationship Status on Depression for Men and Women

## Research Questions

- How does relationship status affect depression?
- Are there differences between married, cohabiting, and couples who are in a committed relationship, but living apart?
- Do these differences vary by gender?

## Significance

- Mental and physical health are important; depression is a growing concern in the U.S.
- Relationship status has become diverse including cohabitation and living-apart-together (LAT).

## Background

- The married are less likely to be depressed (Kim et al., 2015).
- Married couples have better physical health and social support, which impacts mental health (Walker & Druss, 2015).
- Cohabiters are more depressed than the married (Brown, Bulanda & Lee 2005).
- Women are more likely than men to have depression (Kim et al., 2015).
- Marital status and marital harmony contribute to better mental health for both men and women (Williams, 2003).

## Hypothesis

- The married is the least depressed group.
- Those who are cohabiting are more depressed than those who are in a LAT relationship, because cohabitation often results from convenience, or financial reasons, which results in feeling trapped in the relationship.
- Relationship status will affect women more than men.

## Data and Sample

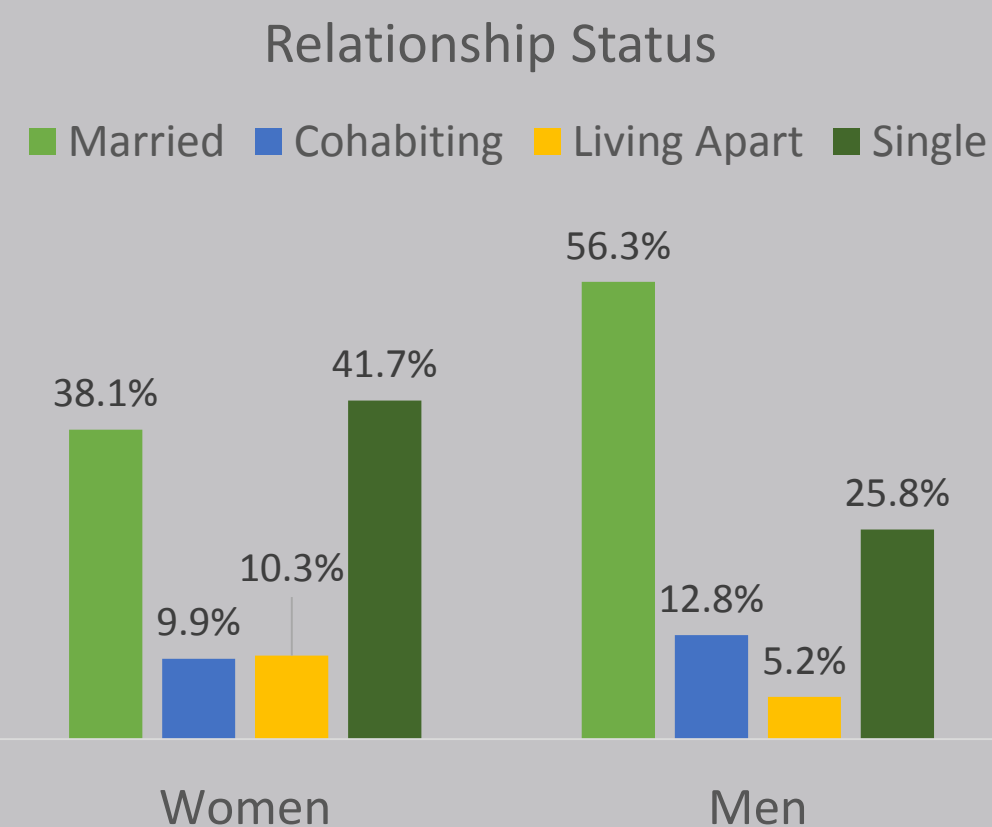
- 2016 General Social Survey (N= 2867).
- A representative sample of U.S. adults 18+.
- Depression and cohabitation status are asked in a subsample (N= 477).

## Dependent Measure

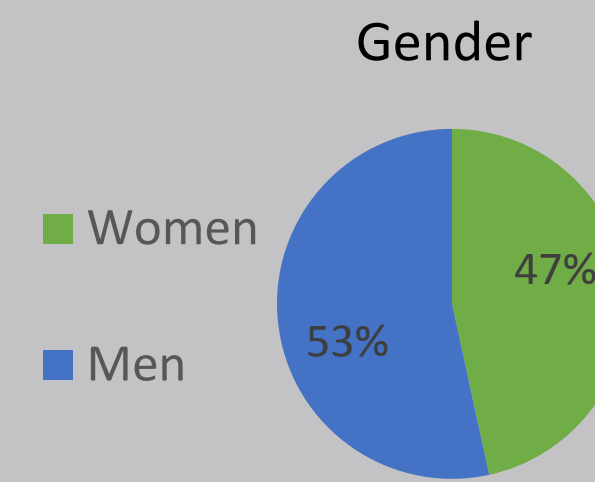
Depression M= 3.43

- The sum of 5 questions: In the past week, how much time (a) did you feel depressed; (b) did you experience restless sleep; (c) did you feel happy; (d) did you feel lonely; (e) did you feel sad? (0 = None or almost none of the time, 1 = some of the time, 2 = most of the time, 3 = all or almost all of the time).
- The scale ranges from 0 - 15 where 15 is most depressed, and 0 is not depressed at all.

## Independent Measures



## Control Measure

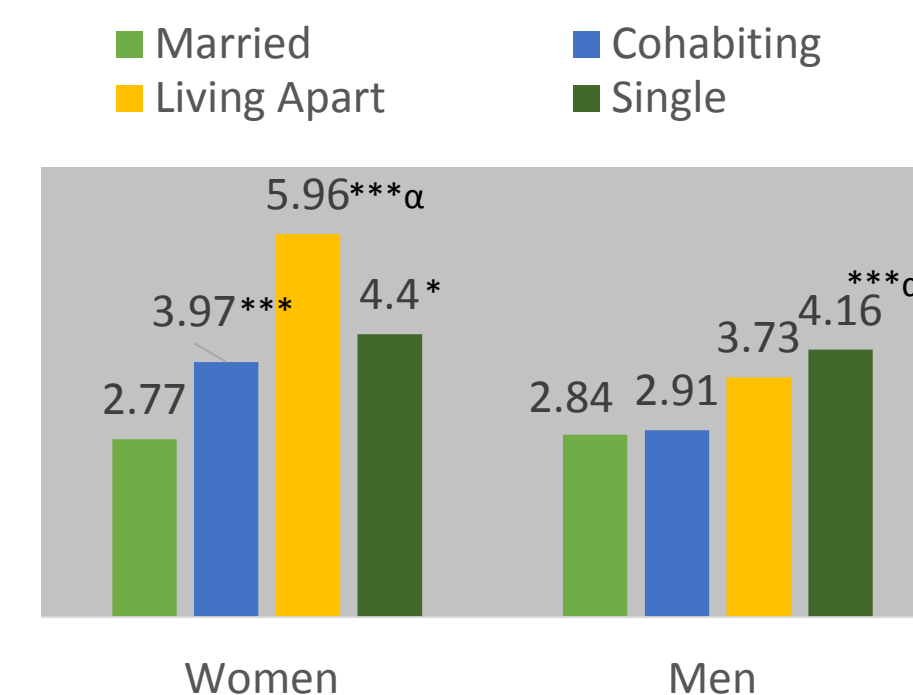


## Analysis

- An independent samples T test for differences in means of depression was conducted separately for men and women across the four relationship status groups.

## Results

Mean Depressive Symptoms (0-15) by Relationship Status



Differences from married group are significant at \* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.001; Differences from cohabiting group are significant at  $\alpha$  p<.05

## Summary and Conclusion

- Married women are the least depressed, and women LAT are the most depressed.
- Married men are the least depressed, and single men are the most depressed.
- Relationship status impacts women's mental health, more than men.
- Women should be aware of the impact relationship status has on her mental well-being. Awareness can help prevent depression and can be helpful in the treatment of depression.
- Single men are the most depressed group. Men who are unwilling to commit to a relationship may benefit knowing that commitment could positively impact his mental health.
- Research is inconsistent for gender and depression

## References

- Brown, S. L., Bulanda, J. R., & Lee, G. R. (2005). The Significance of Nonmarital Cohabitation: Marital Status and Mental Health Benefits Among Middle-Aged and Older Adults. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 60(1), S21-S29.
- Kim, W. K., Shin, D., & Song, W. O. (2015). Depression and Its Comorbid Conditions More Serious in Women than in Men in the United States. *Journal of Women's Health*, 24(12), 978-985.
- Walker, E., & Druss, B. (2015). Rate and Predictors of Persistent Major Depressive Disorder in a Nationally Representative Sample. *Community Mental Health J* 51: 701-707.
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