Serious Physical Illness or Injury and Relationship Transitions for Cohabiting Couples
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Introduction

- As cohabitation becomes more common across Americans of all ages and across the life course, it is increasingly likely that persons will experience serious health events within cohabiting unions.
- Some research suggests that the onset of serious physical illness or injury would act as a barrier to marriage, highlighting consistent findings of positive health selection into marriage.
- Other research suggests that cohabiting couples may be more likely to marry in order to facilitate resource sharing – like health insurance – to care for the ill partner. Already-cohabiting couples may have shared assets and children, mutual affection, and time invested in the relationship that lead them to choose to pool resources through marriage.
- Prior research suggests important gender and age differences.

Hypotheses

1) Health selection into marriage. Serious physical illness or injury, including chronic conditions and injuries associated with intermediate or adverse consequences for physical functioning and social and emotional wellbeing (Sprangers et al. 2000).

Research Question and Expectations

Is serious physical illness or injury onset a barrier or catalyst to marriage in the event of serious illness or injury?

Dependent Variable. Reported relationship status in each round: married (same partner), cohabiting (same partner), or separated/single.

Key Independent Variable. Serious physical illness or injury, including chronic conditions and injuries associated with intermediate or adverse consequences for physical functioning and social and emotional wellbeing (Sprangers et al. 2000).

Other Independent Variables. Female partner age, male college-educated, male race/ethnicity, region, discordant employer-sponsored health insurance, male-female age difference, dependent child parentage.

Methods

- Data. Linked NHIS-MEPS data, pooled across the 1999-2011 NHIS and the 2000-2012 MEPS via IPUMS NHIS and IPUMS MEPS.
- Sample. Couples cohabiting at time of the NHIS interview with both partners aged 18+ who are also in MEPS: N=3,332 couples.

Measures

- Dependent Variable. Reported relationship status in each round: married (same partner), cohabiting (same partner), or separated/single.

Results

Table 1. Descriptive Weighted Percentages for Analysis Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis Variable</th>
<th>Percentage (95% CI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married to a Partner</td>
<td>53.7 (50.3, 57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married to Partner Cohabiting with anon</td>
<td>35.5 (32.7, 38.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting without Health Insurance</td>
<td>11.0 (9.4, 12.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting with Health Insurance</td>
<td>35.5 (32.7, 38.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting Health Insurance</td>
<td>11.0 (9.4, 12.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting Nonsmokers</td>
<td>35.5 (32.7, 38.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting Smokers</td>
<td>11.0 (9.4, 12.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Is Serious Physical Illness or Injury Associated with the Hazard of Dissolution for Women and Men? (H1)

Figure 1. Is Serious Physical Illness or Injury Associated with Increased Hazard of Dissolution? (H1)

4a. Does the association between serious physical illness or injury and union dissolution hazard vary by age of couple?

4b. Does the gender of who is ill or injured change the association between illness/injury and the hazard of dissolution for older couples but not younger couples?

References


Figure 2. Is Serious Physical Illness or Injury Associated with the Hazard of Dissolution for Women but Not Men? (H2)

No. Certain conditions increase the hazard of dissolution for women, but not men.

3. Is one partner’s Employer-Sponsored Health Insurance associated with an increase in the hazard of marrying their ill or injured, uninsured partner? No.

4a. Does the association between serious physical illness or injury and union dissolution hazard vary by age of couple? No.

4b. Does the gender of who is ill or injured change the association between illness/injury and the hazard of dissolution for older couples but not younger couples? No.