



Homogamy among the divorced and the never married on marital history in recent decades: Evidence from vital statistics data[☆]

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Abstract

I investigate whether divorced and never married persons tend to marry within their own marital history group. This analysis is a step toward assessing any distinctions that may exist between the never married and the divorced, which informs the distinctions between first marriages and remarriages, across which inequality among coresident children has been observed. Using log-linear models applied to data of marriages formed in a year from the Vital Statistics Marriage Files, I find evidence of a tendency toward marital history homogamy beyond that accounted for by relative group size, education, and age. Specifically, the never married and the divorced are more likely to marry within their marital history group than to intermarry. Results also indicate that, although the tendency toward marital history homogamy unaccounted for by group size, age, and education persisted throughout the period 1970–1988 (i.e., the years for which educational data are available in the Vital Statistics data), it did diminish somewhat.

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1. Introduction

Sociological, economic, and demographic researchers have long sought to specify factors that contribute to inequalities in a population. In recent years, an increasing number of researchers have focused on understanding sources of inequality among children. While many have emphasized the role of parental socioeconomic status, others argue and find evidence that the type of parental marriage, such as first marriage and remarriage, contributes to inequality among children even when accounting for parental socioeconomic status (e.g., Hofferth and Anderson, 2003; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). For example, McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) have shown that children who coreside with remarried parents are academically worse off than children who coreside with parents in their first marriage. More recent data indicate that children living with parents in “mixed” marriage (i.e., one coresident parent is in a first marriage and the other is in a second or higher order marriage) are situated between children living with parents in first marriage and children living with parents in a remarriage, wherein both spouses have been married before. To illustrate, Appendix A contains the mean academic-cognitive test scores (Woodcock-Johnson and digit span tests) of 6–12 year olds from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, Child Development Supplement, 1997. The scores adjust for the child’s age, the child’s race, and the coresident father’s education; they indicate that, on average, children whose coresident parents are in first marriages achieve the highest scores, followed by those whose parents are in mixed marital history marriages (intermarriages), and then by those whose parents are in remarriages.

Although marriage types—first marriage, marital history intermarriage, and remarriage—have been linked to inequality among coresident children, little is known about how these diverse marriage types that structure inequality are formed. One way to gain insight into the formation of these marriage types that structure inequality among children is to assess the processes that may contribute to the tendency toward marital history homogamy (as opposed to intermarriage) among the never married and the divorced. By marrying within their marital history groups, the never married and the divorced form first marriages and remarriages (i.e., the two marriage types across which inequality in child well-being is most notable) rather than mixed marriages.

In this study, two hypotheses about the processes contributing to the tendency toward marital history homogamy are developed and tested. The compositional hypothesis is that little tendency toward marital history homogamy is present beyond that accounted for by the relative group size of the never married and the divorced, and the influences of spousal education and age. This hypothesis is developed from the perspective that marital history homogamy is primarily a by-product of these conditions rather than a direct result of substantive differences between the marital history groups. Specifically, some previous sociological studies suggest that any major observed tendency toward marital history homogamy may be an artifact of the larger group size (Blau et al., 1982; Kalmijn, 1998) of the never married relative to that of the divorced. The relative group size argument is described further in the next section. Also, empirical evidence and previous studies suggest that a

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