

Divorce and personal wellbeing of older Australians

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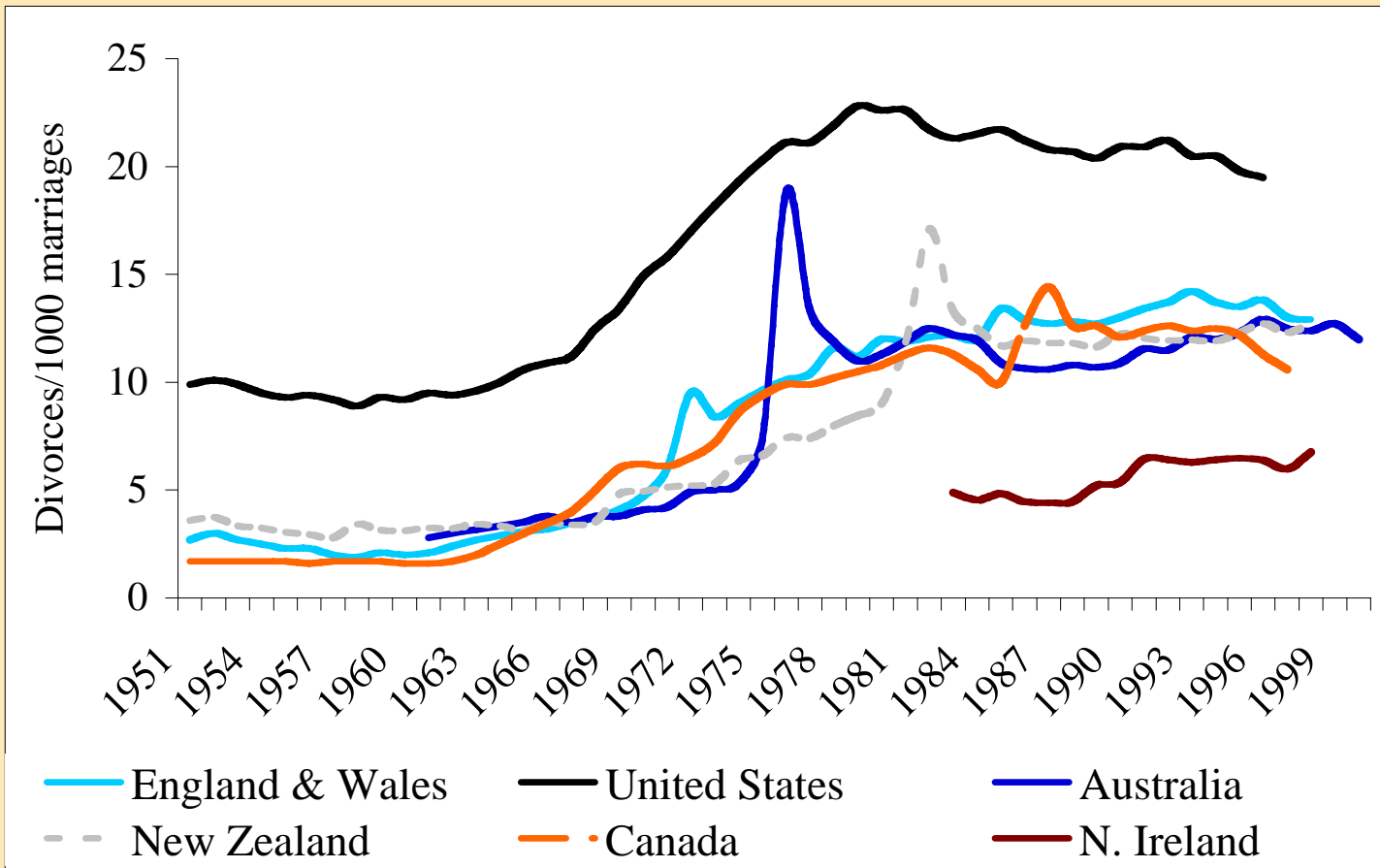
A growing issue

Rise in number of older people who have experienced divorce at some point in life

- ◆ High divorce rate since mid 1970s
- ◆ Population ageing (in absolute & relative terms)



Annual divorce rates for 6 English speaking OECD countries, 1951-1998



Impact of divorce on wellbeing, what we know from previous research

- **Negative impact on financial and emotional wellbeing**
 - ◆ decline in financial living standard, especially mothers and children
 - ◆ negative impacts on emotional wellbeing
 - for women, it could start before the separation
 - for men, separation could come as a shock
 - it also depends on who was leaving (e.g. Weston 1986 & 1993)
- **Less attention**
 - ◆ impact in later life
 - ◆ long-term impact



Previous paper

- Negative financial consequences for older age (55-74 years) for both men and women
 - ◆ Lower rate of home ownership
 - ◆ Lower level of assets
 - ◆ Lower income
 - ◆ Less likely to have superannuation
 - ◆ More likely to experience material hardship
- Impact largely disappeared if remarry
(de Vaus, Gray, Qu & Stanton 2007)



Extension of previous paper

This paper focuses on:
Consequences of divorce on
personal wellbeing in older age



Data

Households, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey

- ◆ Large, nationally representative household panel survey
- ◆ Sample:
 - Wave 1: 7682 households in 2001 & 13696 persons aged 15+
- ◆ Follow-up: annually
- ◆ Key areas for data collection
 - economic and subjective wellbeing
 - labour market & income dynamics
 - family dynamics
 - values & attitudes
- ◆ This paper draws on wave 5 data



Personal wellbeing measures

- **Social connectedness**

- Frequency of getting together socially with friends and relatives living elsewhere
- Whether an active member of sporting, hobby or community-based club or association
- Whether spent any time in a typical week on voluntary or charity work
- Whether spent any time in a typical week on looking after other people's children (unpaid)

(Self-Completion Questionnaire)



Personal wellbeing measures (*continued*)

- Perceived social support (10 items), for example:
 - People don't come to visit me as often as I'd like
 - I often need help from other people but can't get it
 - I have no one to lean on in times of trouble
 - I often feel very lonely
 - When I need someone to help me out, I can usually find someone

(1-7 from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*)
(*Self-Completion Questionnaire*)

 - Perceived social support scale (0-10) (based on the 10 items)



Personal wellbeing measures *(continued)*

- Satisfaction with various aspects of life (7 aspects), for example:
 - Financial situation
 - Being part of local community
 - Health
 - Neighbourhood
- Satisfaction with life as a whole
(0-10 from totally dissatisfied to totally satisfied)
(face-to-face interview)



Personal wellbeing measures (*continued*)

- Health (SF-36)
 - ◆ General health
 - ◆ Vitality
 - ◆ Mental health

(scale transformed to 0-100 index)

(Self-Completion Questionnaire)



Analytical approach

- **Compare wellbeing measures of three groups of older Australians (aged 55-74 years)**
 - ◆ Divorced and single (N=282)
 - ◆ Divorced and remarried (N=399) } on average, divorced for 20 years
 - ◆ Married and never divorced (N=1536)
- **Also compare**
 - ◆ Divorced & single
 - ◆ Widowed & single (N=187, women)



Personal wellbeing: men vs women



Men vs women: personal wellbeing

- Women were better socially connected and had a great sense of social support compared with men
- Satisfaction with life
 - ◆ similar in each aspect of life satisfaction
 - ◆ women were more satisfied with life as a whole
- Health, mixed results:
 - ◆ women – better health in general
 - ◆ men – greater vitality and better mental health



Personal wellbeing:
the divorced vs the married
(multivariate analysis)



Social connectedness

Compared with the married-never-divorced,

- the divorced-single:
 - ◆ get together more often with friends or relatives living elsewhere (both men and women)
 - ◆ slightly less likely to do voluntary work (men only)
 - ◆ overall, not much difference
- the remarried:
 - few differences



Men - marital history (3 groups): *social support (adjusted means)*

	Divorced and single	Divorced and remarried	Married and never divorced
(1-7 scale, the higher ratings the greater sense of support)			
People don't come to visit me as often as I would like	4.04	4.47	4.56
I often need help from other people but can't get it	5.59	5.77	5.84
I seem to have a lot of friends	4.36	4.33	4.42
I don't have anyone that I can confide in	4.99	5.56	5.36
I have no one to lean on in times of trouble	4.69	5.75	5.50
There is someone who can always cheer me up when I'm down	4.96	5.03	5.03
I often feel very lonely	4.82	5.85	5.56
I enjoy the time I spend with the people who are important to me	6.30	6.23	6.30
When something's on my mind, just talking with the people I know can make me feel better	5.24	5.23	5.35
When I need someone to help me out, I can usually find someone	5.12	5.25	5.45
Perceived social support scale (0-10) (summary)	6.69	7.24	7.24



Men - marital history (3 groups): *satisfaction & health (adjusted means)*

	Divorced and single	Divorced and remarried	Married and never divorced
Satisfaction with life (0-10 scale for each item)			
The home in which you live	7.89	8.33	8.44
Your financial situation	6.11	6.47	6.91
How safe you feel	8.11	8.02	8.14
Feeling part of your local community	6.52	6.83	7.18
Your health	6.87	6.89	6.94
The neighbourhood in which in your live	7.87	8.03	8.20
The amount of free time you have	7.70	7.71	7.55
Satisfaction with your life, all things considered	7.90	8.04	8.11
Health (0-100)			
General health	63.95	62.85	62.74
Vitality	61.98	61.50	61.88
Mental health (positive)	77.29	78.02	76.84



Women - marital history (3 groups): *social support (adjusted means)*

	Divorced and single	Divorced and remarried	Married and never divorced
(1-7 scale, the higher ratings the greater sense of support)			
People don't come to visit me as often as I would like	4.66	4.41	4.77
I often need help from other people but can't get it	5.45	5.78	5.84
I seem to have a lot of friends	4.59	4.65	4.80
I don't have anyone that I can confide in	5.38	5.41	5.66
I have no one to lean on in times of trouble	5.18	5.68	5.82
There is someone who can always cheer me up when I'm down	5.09	5.10	5.36
I often feel very lonely	4.99	5.35	5.68
I enjoy the time I spend with the people who are important to me	6.32	6.30	6.36
When something's on my mind, just talking with the people I know can make me feel better	5.80	5.94	5.94
When I need someone to help me out, I can usually find someone	5.53	5.63	5.81
Perceived social support scale (0-10) (summary)	7.19	7.42	7.68



Women - marital history (3 groups): *satisfaction & health (adjusted means)*

	Divorced and single	Divorced and remarried	Married and never divorced
Satisfaction with life (0-10 scale for each item)			
The home in which you live	8.16	8.30	8.47
Your financial situation	5.70	6.60	7.53
How safe you feel	7.98	7.98	8.24
Feeling part of your local community	7.24	7.13	7.54
Your health	6.80	6.97	7.56
The neighbourhood in which in your live	7.99	7.96	8.39
The amount of free time you have	7.08	7.42	7.36
Satisfaction with your life, all things considered	7.65	8.23	8.39
Health (0-100)			
General health	60.07	63.93	65.91
Vitality	53.08	59.68	60.83
Mental health (positive)	72.49	74.36	76.18



Small differences in mean scales, what do they mean?

For example, men:

	Divorced and single	Divorced and remarried	Married and never divorced
People don't come to visit me as often as I'd like			
Mean	3.90	4.44	4.54
Two most positive ratings (sufficient visits)	24%	35%	36%
Two most negative ratings (insufficient visits)	30%	24%	26%
I often feel very lonely			
Mean	4.69	5.87	5.56
Two most positive ratings (not lonely at all)	45%	75%	66%
Two most negative ratings (very lonely)	23%	8%	13%



Men - marital history & personal wellbeing

Compared with the married-never-divorced,

- the divorced-single:
 - ◆ lower sense of social support on three items and overall score
 - ◆ less satisfied with their home, financial situation, & local community belonging
 - ◆ no difference in overall life satisfaction
 - ◆ no differences in three health scales.
- the divorced-remarried:
 - ◆ few differences



Women - marital history & personal wellbeing

Compared with the married-never-divorced,

- **the divorced-single:**

- ◆ lower sense of social support on four items and overall score
- ◆ less satisfied with four issues – home, financial situation, health & neighbourhood
- ◆ less satisfied with life as a whole
- ◆ poorer health in all three areas

- **the divorced and remarried:**

- ◆ lower sense of social support on two items & no difference in score of social support scale
- ◆ less satisfied with three issues – financial situation, health, & neighbourhood,
- ◆ no differences in health measures



Personal wellbeing: the divorced-single women vs widowed-single women



Single women - the divorced vs the widowed:

Social connectedness and support

	Divorced and single	Widowed and single
Social connectedness		
Getting together socially with friends and relatives (more than once a week)	31%	40%
Being a active member of a sporting, hobby or community-based club or association	42%	53%
Spend any time on unpaid voluntary work in a typical week	24%	27%
Spend any time on looking after other people's children unpaid in a typical week	23%	14%
Spend any time caring relatives in a typical week ^b	10%	8%
Perceived social support		
(1-7 scale, the higher ratings the greater sense of support)		
People don't come to visit me as often as I would like	4.66	4.73
I often need help from other people but can't get it	5.42	5.52
I seem to have a lot of friends	4.67	4.77
I don't have anyone that I can confide in	5.52	5.42
I have no one to lean on in times of trouble	5.26	5.34
There is someone who can always cheer me up when I'm down	5.13	5.16
I often feel very lonely	4.97	4.64
I enjoy the time I spend with the people who are important to me	6.36	6.16
When something's on my mind, just talking with the people I know can make me feel better	5.87	5.72
When I need someone to help me out, I can usually find someone	5.57	5.72
Perceived social support scale (0-10) (summary)	7.26	7.25



Single women - the divorced vs the widowed: *satisfaction and health*

	Divorced and single	Widowed and single
Satisfaction with life (0-10) (mean)		
The home in which you live	8.04	8.81
Your financial situation	5.52	6.92
How safe you feel	7.86	8.15
Feeling part of your local community	6.88	7.19
Your health	6.63	7.04
The neighbourhood in which in your live	7.83	8.40
The amount of free time you have	7.23	8.11
Satisfaction with your life, all things considered	7.57	8.25
Self-assessed health (0-100) (mean)		
General health	60.62	62.90
Vitality	53.47	60.60
Mental health (positive)	72.35	75.70



Conclusions

- **Negative impact of divorce on personal wellbeing in older age**
 - ◆ lower sense of social support (especially for men)
 - ◆ lower satisfaction with some aspects of life
 - ◆ lower satisfaction with life as a whole (women only)
 - ◆ poorer health (women only)
 - ◆ combination of being divorced & single made difference on some measures, especially life satisfaction (women)
- **Remarriage seems to return wellbeing to the level similar to those who are married & never divorced**

